

Merton Council

Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

3 September 2019

Supplementary agenda

5 Waste, recycling and street cleaning: Performance update

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Statement on rubbish collection, street sweeping and fly-tipping

I welcome the opportunity to present my concerns about the rubbish collection, street sweeping and fly tipping services provided by the London Borough of Merton since their transfer to Veolia in October 2018.

Since the waste service transferred in 2018, I have written approximately 650 letters on behalf of my constituents to Merton Council's Director of Environment and Regeneration concerning problems with the service. I also routinely write about concerns relating to litter and fly-tipping that I witness on journeys around the constituency. In cases where my letters do not lead to an improvement in the services, or where large numbers of residents contact me about a concern, I hold street corner site meetings with representatives from the Council's waste department. I have held almost a dozen such site meetings since October 2018.

My major concerns about the quality of service are as follows:

Communication

In order to imbed such radical changes as a fortnightly wheelie bin collection service, the Council needs to have a comprehensive communication strategy to constantly explain and repeat what rubbish goes in which bins and on what day they will be emptied. There does appear a view that residents only needed to be informed at the start of the contract. The need to repeat the information is particularly important where there is a high turnover of population and where there are large numbers of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO).

In addition, some households will need the support of an enforcement officer visiting their home to explain how the system works. Where there are many households in a street having difficulties with the service, it would be worth while holding a community morning where every door is knocked on.

Better Reporting System

Residents frequently raise how difficult it is to report problems on the Council's website, particularly when it includes fly-tipping close to or in public rights of way. These difficulties create a disincentive to residents reporting problems, thereby preventing the Council from understanding the full extent of the problem with the service.

In addition, many residents, particularly those who are older, prefer to contact the council by telephone. My office receives many complaints about the difficulty in knowing who to contact in addition to the length of time they are required to wait to get through.

Street Sweeping

The need for a reconsideration to the street sweeping element of the waste contract is clear. It is my understanding that streets are only swept if they are below a certain standard. It is completely unclear, however, what this standard is and how this standard is determined. It must be made clear to all residents when their street should be swept.

The system seems to be reliant on the active engagement of residents reporting the levels of litter on their street or for the Council enforcement officers to check each street to see if it requires sweeping. For such a system to work effectively, it would require huge armies of Council enforcement officers checking every street in the borough every week and for every street to be swept on an individual basis.

Disputes - public rights of way

Since the beginning of the contract with Veolia, there has been an ongoing dispute between Merton Council and the contractor over the refuse clearance of public rights of way. Ten months on, the lack of resolution means that these areas are covered in litter and fly tipping leading to a degradation of many neighbourhoods

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) and flats above shops

There are several wards in my constituency, particularly in Mitcham, with high levels of unregistered HMO where there can be a family living in every room. A significant number of families in these households are unable to store rubbish and so put it out every day. The same issue occurs with households in flats above shops who may also have nowhere to store their rubbish. These households need a far more efficient waste collection service and they may also benefit from a visit from one of the Council's enforcement team.

Working with social landlords

I am concerned at the lack of work done with social landlords on the changes to the refuse collection service and believe this has led to many residents living on a Clarion and Moat Housing Association estate to live with inadequate refuse collection services.

The Eastfields Estate, for example, was left in a completely insanitary condition for the last 10 months with flats sharing one wheelie bin between two properties, which is placed under windows making it impossible for residents to open windows during the hot summer weeks. A fortnightly refuse collection service was clearly inadequate that despite constant efforts by the Figges Marsh councillors, Cllr Akyingyina, Cllr Brunt and Cllr Stanford, and the Chair of the Residents Association, Ms Ann Baldwin, it took until July for Merton to acknowledge these problems and offer a weekly refuse collection service. I understand from Ms Baldwin that even now these problems are not fully resolved.

Similarly, at 263-265 London Road, Mitcham, above the British Heart Foundation shop in Mitcham town centre, there is a block of 10 flats with a small bin cupboard at street level. On a daily basis, black rubbish sacks cascade onto the pavement. Despite numerous letters to both Merton and to Clarion, and despite the Director of Environment and Regeneration himself witnessing the situation during the Remembrance Sunday Parade, this problem is ongoing.

On the Moat Housing Association-owned Pollards Hill estate many wheelie bins were delivered in September 2018, which were not meant for use but were not removed until a site meeting this June. Moat are currently applying for planning permission to construct 31 communal bin stores in return for a weekly collection service. There are many estates across the borough where the current collection service does not meet the needs of residents.

Mitcham Town Centre

There has been a significant problem with refuse collections and street sweeping services in Mitcham Town Centre, which predates the transfer of service to Veolia. There are large numbers of sites which are fly tipped on a regular basis and there appears to be little management of the street sweeping service. Given that town centres are currently under great pressure, how can it make sense for one of the borough's three town centres be left in such a poor condition. I would be welcome an opportunity to walk through Mitcham town centre with a representative from the Committee to highlight this problem.

Once again, I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to identify my concerns about the services and I would be happy to attend any future meetings.

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