

Committee(s): Port Health and Environmental Services Committee	Dated: 14 November 2023
Subject: Street Cleansing Resources	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	11, 12
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	Yes
If so, how much?	£1.057m
What is the source of Funding?	On-Street Parking Reserve
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	Yes
Report of: Interim Executive Director Environment	For Decision
Report author: Joe Kingston, Assistant Director Gardens and Cleansing	

Summary

In the context of the then Built Environment Department having to identify £4.6m of savings for the 2021/22 financial year, the January 2021 Port Health and Environmental Services Committee agreed service cuts to the value of £1.025m, mainly focused on street cleansing resources and loss-making public conveniences.

These savings were made during Covid and it was anticipated and accepted that some erosion in the levels of service would result from this reduced budget envelope.

Members have raised concerns that without additional resource, the service cannot deliver the quality required to support the City's strong recovery from the pandemic, particularly at evenings and weekends.

In particular, given the reduction in on-street resources available to the City's Cleansing contractor Veolia, it has been challenging to address a noticeable increase in littering and cleansing-related anti-social behaviour around tourist destinations, licensed premises and transport hubs.

This report outlines various options to remediate the impacts of the previous service cuts in the context of the City's recovery, funding for which would have to be subject to separate consideration by other Committees of the City Corporation such as Resource Allocation Sub Committee, Finance Committee and / or Policy & Resources Committee.

Recommendation

Members are recommended to support the need to seek additional funding for enhanced cleansing resources based on the proposals & priorities outlined in Option 2 (paragraph 15) of this report, funded from the On-Street Parking Reserve (subject to the approval of Resource Allocation Sub Committee & Policy & Resources Committee).

Main Report

Background

1. For the 2021/22 financial year, the Built Environment Department (as it was then) was required to identify 12% savings across all its services, totalling £2.4m, in addition to needing to identify £2.2m of efficiency savings to offset rising costs and reductions in income. In January 2021, after considering a number of difficult options, this committee approved budget reductions for the street cleansing service totalling £760k, as well as a further £265k from the closure of two staffed toilets, four automatic public conveniences and four urilifts.
2. At the time, it was appreciated that footfall remained low given the UK was in its third national lockdown and timelines for recovery were uncertain. The reduction in resource levels (including redundancies from our contractor Veolia) were implemented from April 2021, delivering the required savings without a material reduction in the standards of street cleanliness. Service reductions were focussed on night and weekend operations as at this time these were the periods when there was less footfall.
3. Nevertheless, at the January 2021 committee it was also agreed to adjust KPIs relating to acceptable levels of litter and detritus to acknowledge that a reduction in standards of street cleanliness would eventually be likely as more workers and tourists returned to the City.
4. As further background, when the cleansing contract was let, there was no provision for budget increases to meet annual contract uplifts. Instead, an annual review process was embedded in the contract to identify year on year efficiencies to offset any uplift. However, the efficiencies delivered in 2021 effectively drew out all the available opportunities to offset further contractual cost increases, and together with accelerating rates of inflation, by 2023 this led to a further unfunded budget shortfall of £800k. This funding gap has since been closed through a contribution from the On-Street Parking Reserve, agreed by RASC and P&R Committees, effectively removing the need to make further cuts.

Current Position

5. Most legal limits on social contact were removed and closed sectors of the economy reopened in July 2021 for England and Wales. Since then, footfall has gradually increased within the City.
6. Current evidence suggests that the City is now as busy, or busier at certain times than before the pandemic. As shown in the Key Data section, footfall varies across weekdays with Tuesdays to Thursday having returned to 77.5% of pre pandemic levels. Footfall at weekends now exceeds pre pandemic levels.
7. The weekend visitor numbers and the nighttime economy have recovered strongly, and in many places evidence suggests that restaurants, bars and retail premises are performing above pre pandemic levels, especially midweek evenings.

8. The issues that arise from the increased nighttime economy are particularly challenging for street cleaning. Patrons often discard bottles, cans, and takeaway packaging, alongside an even less pleasant increase in public urination and vomit. This can be seen by the increased number of reported incidents dealt with by our street cleansing contractor, Veolia, and Fixed Penalty Notices issued by City Officers.
9. There are additional issues which are increasing demand on the cleansing service such as higher levels of rough sleeping, more public seating, planting and footway space to sweep as well as a higher volume of on street events. There has also been a significant increase in the level of graffiti in the City.
10. Alongside this, in May 2022 the City launched its key “Destination City” policy with the aim of celebrating and promoting the Square Mile’s world-class arts and culture, and encouraging UK and global visitors to its outstanding restaurants, cafes, hotels, pubs, and bars.
11. In the context of this substantial increase in service demand and the cut in resources, a reduction in the standard of on street cleanliness has been identified. This has been particularly prevalent in the areas where resources were removed, namely weekday evenings and weekends.
12. To this point, service changes have been made within the new budget envelope to respond to this challenge, including moving available resources to hotspot areas based on increased use of data and analysis. Independent surveys by Keep Britain Tidy still show the City outperforming most or all London boroughs in terms of overall cleanliness but nevertheless, our street cleansing contractor Veolia, have found it challenging to meet some of their performance KPIs, partly due to staff performance and availability but also due to an increased footfall and a reduction in resources.

Options

13. Following a year of concerted efforts by the Cleansing operation to respond to the challenges represented by the City’s post-pandemic return, it remains challenging to deliver the level of service quality desired by Members within the current funding envelope. As a result, officers were requested by this Committee to consider options to address this position, including potential funding options (see Funding Implications below).

14. Option 1

- Continue with current levels of cleansing resources and continue to react to issues on an ad-hoc basis. This would lead to continued decline in cleansing standards if footfall continues to increase

This option is NOT recommended.

15. Option 2

- Seek additional funding up to a current maximum of £1.057m pa to support enhanced cleansing resources based on the following priorities (in order):
 - i. Additional on-street cleansing resources with Veolia to directly address levels of littering and anti-social behaviour-related cleanliness, particularly focused on weekends & evenings but also bolstering daytime hotspot areas (£950k pa)
 - ii. A dedicated officer role for coordinating the public interface on littering & ASB including publicity & enforcement campaigns, data analysis, public communications and resource tasking (£62k pa)
 - iii. Reopening the uri-lifts to help address nighttime anti-social behaviour in those locations (£45k pa)
 - iv. Re-evaluation of the requirement for additional on-street 'Big Belly' litter bins at high footfall locations. The total number of units and cost of additional resources to service them would be evaluated and considered based on the impact of the other changes to resources above and would be subject to an additional funding request.

This option is recommended

16. Option 3

- Re-opening staffed public toilets at Royal Exchange and Eastcheap (£200k pa for daytime opening).

This option is NOT recommended

Proposals

Street Cleansing

17. If additional funding is secured, the proposed reintroduction of resources would continue to be targeted and more closely aligned with the way in which the City has returned post pandemic. For the past six weeks Officers have undertaken extensive work to ascertain where a reintroduction of staffing levels would have the greatest impact in achieving improved standards of street cleanliness and deliver the best value for money.

18. Most resources would be reintroduced at nights and weekends i.e. the areas which saw the biggest reduction in services and are now under the most significant pressure.

19. Shift patterns have also been reviewed and some of the additional resources could be reintroduced on entirely new shifts. This could involve, for example moving away from traditional Monday to Friday night shifts to Tuesday to Saturday shifts which start later at night and overlap with weekday shifts, as well

as daytime shifts being realigned to provide better cover during busy lunchtime periods.

Communications, campaigns, liaison and tasking

20. Given the priority for this issue, it is thought appropriate to seek the establishment of a dedicated staff resource within the Cleansing team to enable an increased emphasis on proactive communications, publicity campaigns, resource tasking and enforcement around littering and anti-social behaviour. This would include data capture, analysis and promoting on-line reporting tools, as well as building on existing relationships with the Clean Streets Partnership, Safer City Partnership and City Business Improvement Districts, and would work in close cooperation with the corporate communications team.
21. In the longer term, officers will also liaise with colleagues in Planning to investigate the possibility of requiring businesses to provide publicly accessible toilet facilities as part of their planning obligations.

Urilifts

22. Urination is a commonly reported issue and is often a result of the increasing nighttime economy. The City currently has four pop-up urinals which can be activated in the evening and returned underground in the morning. These address this specific issue and are located close to late night licensed premises. A trial re-opening of these over Christmas 2022, funded by City of London Police and Licensing was successful and well received.

Litter Bins

23. The City currently has 65 'Big Belly' litter bins which are self-compacting units and send alerts when they are full. Notifications for emptying these have increased by 20% between 2019/20 and 2022/23. The resourcing levels proposed would be enough to service the existing network of bins. Increasing the number of on street bins is a potential option, but would require significant additional capital investment and resources.
24. It should be noted that bins are currently located in areas of high demand, but increasing the total number of bins does not necessarily resolve littering issues. Experience within the City has shown that often a realignment of sweeping resources and the repositioning of existing bins better resolves the issue. As a result, we consider bin locations on a case-by-case basis and will closely monitor their impact on the local environment.
25. It is proposed that an evaluation of the number of on-street 'Big Belly' litter bins is conducted following the introduction of additional resources levels and any requirement for additional bins would be the subject of a separate funding request.

Public Toilets and Automated Public Conveniences

26. In terms of the above options, the two facilities closed in 2021 (Royal Exchange and Eastcheap) were running at a significant loss prior to Covid due to their very low level of usage compared to the remaining facilities at Tower Hill and Paternoster Square.
27. By comparison, Tower Hill and Paternoster Square are well used, however they are still operating at a projected local risk deficit of £290k this year. They remain the right facilities to maintain for the City's two most significant tourist attractions (the Tower of London/Tower Bridge and St Paul's Cathedral)
28. It should be noted that none of the City's public toilet facilities are open (or were open) at night, because there was no evidence to suggest reopening or extending opening hours into the evening would address issues of public urination. Equally there is no evidence that a urination issue is caused by charging for their use. By contrast some of the most significant issue areas are near the Liverpool Street station toilets which are free to use.
29. Regarding the Automated Public Conveniences, these facilities were also costly to operate and maintain prior to 2021 with very little usage, meaning their reintroduction would appear to be of little benefit. Due to their nature and isolated locations, they even attracted increased instances of anti-social behaviour and were often vandalised.

Timescales

30. In order to ensure the proposed funding is having the required impact it will be important for client officers to work closely with Veolia to monitor standards and quality of work. In addition to this we would propose additional independent surveys from Keep Britain Tidy focussing specifically at evenings and weekends. The first of which would be implemented prior to additional resources being deployed to establish a baseline performance level. We would then commission twice yearly surveys which would be reported back to this committee via its business plan reports.
31. Any reintroduction of resources would take time to implement as they would involve some changes to shift patterns as well as recruitment and training of new staff, which is challenging in the current labour market. From approval of funding, it is anticipated changes would take up to six months to fully implement, albeit some aspects could be addressed more quickly by utilising agency staff and overtime.

Key Data

32. As discussed above, there are several sources of external and operational data that indicate that demands on the cleansing service have significantly increased, and standards have decreased since the reduction in resources in 2021:

- Compared to 2019, footfall in 2023 is at 102% at the weekends, 77.5% Tuesday to Thursdays, and 60% Mondays and Fridays.
- Compared to 2021 when the resources were taken out, footfall in 2023 is at 181.5% at the weekends, 236% Tuesday to Thursdays, and 191% Mondays and Fridays.
- There are now 947 licenced premisses in the City as of August 2023 indicating this sector has fully recovered to 2019 pre pandemic levels.
- Baseline Insights report prepared by Colliers for the Destination City programme identified that visitor spend in the City has surpassed 2019 levels and has recovered quicker than visit volumes.
- The number of on street special events (for example the London Landmarks Half Marathon in April or Ride London in May) has increased from seven per month in 2019 to 14 per month in 2022.
- There has been an additional 240 trees planted within the last five years causing more leaf fall in autumn and bird fouling throughout the year.
- The current transport strategy has six major projects underway in 2022/23 (such as Bank Junction, St Pauls Gyratory and the Healthy Street Areas) all of which include widened footways and/or increased pedestrianisation. The work at Bank Junction alone is adding 2,335m² of pavement that requires additional manual sweeping every day.
- A 20% increase in the number of notifications from bins requiring emptying.
 - 2019 – 2020 = 1,542.6 average per month.
 - 2020 – 2021 = 614 average per month.
 - 2022 – 2023 = 1,855.9 average per month.
- A 72% increase in the number of fly tips (predominantly commercial waste).
 - 2019 – 2020 = 142.8 average per month.
 - 2020 – 2021 = 87.8 average per month.
 - 2022 – 2023 = 245.9 average per month.
- Independent local environmental quality surveys (NI 195 score) show a 73% increase in unacceptable combined levels of litter, detritus, graffiti, and flyposting compared to pre pandemic levels (2019 = 1.21% average, 2023 = 2.09% average).
- The most recent NI 195 score, which indicates 2.38% of areas being unacceptable, is the highest since March 2011.
- Reported incidents of graffiti have increased by 277% between 2019 and 2023.
- Reported incidents of anti-social behaviour have increased by 7% from 2019/20 to 2022/3 (502 incidents to 536 incidents).
- Reported incidents of fly tipping have increased 73% in 2022/23 compared to 2019/20.

Corporate and Strategic Implications

33. The proposals set out in this report support actions 11 and 12 of the Corporate Plan, helping ensure we have clean air, land and water and a thriving and sustainable natural environment and that our spaces are secure, resilient and well maintained. They also support the delivery of the Climate Action Strategy, Single Use Plastic Policy, the Air Quality Strategy, and the Local Plan.

Financial implications

34. A number of options may be possible in terms of additional funding sources, each requiring a particular approval process. However, to increase the funding envelope available to Environment to deliver additional cleansing services, the approval of Resource Allocation Sub Committee, Finance Committee and/or Policy and Resources Committee may be necessary. To support all the initiatives set out in Option 2 above, funding up to a current maximum of £1.057m pa would be required. Additional funding of £200k pa would be required for option 3. Further funding would be required should additional 'Big Belly' litter bins be required on street. The source for this funding could include:

- A centrally funded uplift to Environment's existing baseline budgets from City Fund reserves.
- A further year on year contribution from the On-Street Parking Reserve (OSPR) in addition to the recently agreed annual contribution of £800k.
- A contribution to shorter term initiatives related to ASB from the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) and the Nighttime Levy.

35. After consultation with the Chamberlain, it is proposed that should Members of this Committee agree Option 2, the additional requirement of £1.057m pa would be resourced from the OSPR as the most suitable option. Approval for this commitment would typically be subject to Chief Officer Priorities Board governance and scrutiny before recommendations are made to RASC and P&R Committees. It's necessary to ensure sufficient time is allowed for Chamberlain's to conclude the Parking Service estimates 2024/25 which lie within the remit of Planning & Transportation Committee in order to provide an updated position on the available medium-term financial forecasts for the OSPR account and affordability of further financial commitments from new bids.

36. It also is important to note that any decision to allocate additional funds for these services will inevitably mean they will not be available for an alternative use elsewhere, and therefore any decision to allocate funds will need to consider the wider implications of prioritising these resources to Cleansing over other services.

Resource implications

37. This will require significant additional resources from the City's cleaning contractor, Veolia. However, no additional contract supervision resources will be needed for the City Corporation over & above the option for recruiting a dedicated officer for coordinating our campaigns and ASB response (Option 2(ii) above).

Legal implications

38. Even at current levels of street cleanliness, the City remains in compliance with its statutory obligations under the Environmental Protection Act.

Risk implications

39. Although issues of public health are not at risk as a result of the current levels of service, reputational risks are apparent if the current situation is not addressed.

Equalities implications

40. Officers have conducted a test of relevance with regards to the City's duties under the equalities act which concludes a full equalities impact assessment is not required.

Climate implications

41. Whilst officers believe that the City will continue to meet its statutory obligations under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 with current resources, any increase in litter has environmental implications, particularly as the City is a riverside authority and items, especially plastics, dropped on land can result in marine litter. Increases in detritus and reduction in carriageway cleansing can also contribute to poor air quality, particularly in enclosed and built-up areas.

Security implications

42. Although the City has made use of 'Big Belly' litter bins for several years, at times of heightened security there have been periods when security concerns have limited or prevented the use of on-street refuse bins in general. This remains a matter under review between the City of London and the City Police Counter Terrorism Security Advisors and the current deployment takes into account the potential security threat level to the Square Mile.

Conclusion

43. It has been a considerable challenge to deliver the desired set of cleansing services with the resources now available in the face of the City's strong recovery from Covid and the ambitions of Destination City. Options are available which would help address these concerns if funding is made available, collectively focusing on the shift in footfall towards evenings & weekends.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

PHES, 06 May 2021, Temporary alterations to street cleansing activities in response to the Covid-19 outbreak

PHES, 20 January 2021, DBE Service Changes & Budget Proposals

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