

Policy & Resources Committee Meeting – 27th September 2023

Agenda Item 13.2 WBC LITTER BIN PROPOSAL - PARISH & TOWN COUNCILS

Wokingham Borough Council has been conducting a consultation on its proposals for cost cutting measures in services including litter bins, grass cutting, road cleansing, bottle bank cleaning and so on. As the consultation took place over the summer holidays, town councillors have been encouraged to submit personal responses. ETC comments, as directed by the A & L Committee, have been submitted by the Town Clerk.

On 7th September 2023, the Town Clerk attended a meeting for clerks, called by Richard Bissett, Lead Specialist, Place Clienting, an event designed to provide town and parish councils with further information on the proposed cuts. All clerks present made it clear that they could only give personal opinions as none of their councils had had opportunity to discuss the proposals. Richard confirmed that we could submit council views by email to him for a period of time after the consultation was due to close.

Key points from the clerks' meeting with Richard Bissett:

- The litter bins identified for removal have been identified by Volker Highways' sub-contractor, ie the company actually emptying the bins. WBC officers have not been involved in the selection process.
- Bins have been chosen for a variety of reasons including access difficulty (example given was the lack of vehicle access directly to the litter bin meant contractors had to carry heavy, smelly bags to their vehicle); nuisance (bins in play areas for example cause a smell nuisance); lack of use; other litter bins in close proximity.
- Concern was expressed over the accuracy of WBC's asset map, the map used to identify its litter bins in the consultation. Some clerks pointed out that when they had checked the position of litter bins as identified on the map in their parish, they had discovered several that weren't even on the map and others that were on the map but no longer existed in reality. The clerks also commented that several weeks prior to the consultation being announced, they had been contacted by a company contracted to empty WBC bins, and asked to provide a list of locations of bins in their parish as the emailer didn't have one.
- Clerks asked when the assessment of litter bin use was carried out, ie was it during school holidays when use may not be typical, but no information on that has been provided by WBC.
- The Town Clerk pointed out that 24% of the bins nominated for removal were in Earley and questioned why that was the case. Richard responded that Earley hadn't been targeted, it was just what the contractor was recommending.

Richard Bissett was asked if there was a plan to ask parish and town councils to pick up the tab for emptying the nominated WBC bins in their parishes as, although there had been no mention of this approach to date, parish and towns would like to have such information before they form an opinion on the entirety of the consultation. He conceded that there was such a plan and therefore much of the remainder of the meeting was spent questioning him on this.

Key points on WBC's plan to ask parish and towns to get involved:

- The request would be for each parish or town council to cover the cost of emptying the bins which have been nominated for removal.
- This would be achieved by local councils making the required financial contribution towards WBC's contract.

- The contract is resource based, 150 bins represent one man and one van. It would not be possible to retain say 10% of the nominated bins as that would not total one man and one van – it has to be 150 bins but the specifics of which bins are to be removed can be tweaked.
- The resource-based contract means that all parishes must agree to fund the total number of nominated bins in their parish for the scheme to work, it's all or nothing.
- The fairest way would be for parishes to pay for only the bins within their parish, ETC would therefore face the highest cost (approx. £16,800 pa).
- The clerks were given a total contract price for the 150 bins of £70k, this works out as £466 per bin per year.
- Richard was asked about the issue of double taxation, residents had already paid council tax for these services and could, in effect, be paying again through their parish council precept. He said this issue was due to be discussed by WBC.

The parish and town clerks later met to discuss the meeting they had had with WBC, the key points from this discussion are as follows:

- A general concern that WBC do not achieve good value for money with its contracts, therefore the cost burden on parish and towns could be excessive for the service provided.
- General feeling that WBC asset maps are not up to date therefore we're dealing with flawed data.
- Parish councils that have their own litter bin contracts with companies (because they do not have staff to carry out the role) pay far less per bin per year than WBC Their contracts are also not resource-based, ie the number of bins they have emptied do not have to equal one man and one van.
- Parish and town councils do not have a statutory duty to provide waste bins or remove waste. Concern that we would be taking over responsibility for such a statutory duty – could be the thin end of the wedge.
- The fact that parish and town councils have already set their budgets and precepts for 2023/24 and these costs were obviously not a part of that.

On 18th September Richard Bissett emailed to all clerks. This email stated that the total cost for maintaining the 150 bins and twice weekly collections is actually £80k (£533 per bin per year). He also mentioned that an option could be for us to use our own staffing resources to empty the nominated bins and that WBC would be looking for a two-year agreement with towns and parishes to be put in place.

With regards timescales, Richard provided the following:

- 26th October – report to go to Executive to seek agreement for all proposed changes to take place, including the removal of litter bins.
- November 2023 – envisaged that changes to the services will be made this month. This will be either the removal of the bins, agreement for the funding by towns and parishes of all 150 bins (£80k), or the emptying of the bins by the town and parishes existing resources (staff/contractors).
- WBC request that towns and parishes notify WBC of their support, or not, and the form any support would take, by 10th November 2023 at the latest.

Jo Friend
Town Clerk
18th September 2023