

CABINET PORTFOLIO SUMMARY REPORT

REPORT OF	Councillor Bernadette Mooney
CABINET PORTFOLIO FOR	Environment & Sustainability
CO-ORDINATING CHIEF OFFICER	Kevin Adderley, Strategic Director- Regeneration And Environment

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is an update from the Cabinet Portfolio Holder to Members of the Council on matters relevant to her portfolio.

1. LITTER ENFORCEMENT

Ensuring an attractive local environment for local people is a key Pledge in our 2020 Plan. In a focussed effort to reduce litter, the Council's Litter Enforcement Contract commenced on 1st July 2015 and in just over 2 months of operation have issued over 2500 fixed penalty notices (FPNs) for littering offences across the Borough. The Council's litter enforcement contractor deploys their uniformed officers through a shift system to operate across a programme of locations 7 days a week.

Prior to the commencement of enforcement operations the Council ran a high profile anti-littering campaign warning that such activity will not be tolerated with appropriate action taken. This campaign was followed up by further promotion updating on action taken since commencement of operations and to inform that income generated through enforcement action has been reinvested in facilities such as additional cigarette litter bins.

The payment rate from the FPNs issued so far is over 70% with an extended payment period provided to those who request it. The Council is now preparing cases against non-payers for referral to the courts, with the first due to be heard this autumn. Early indications from recent environmental monitoring are that litter enforcement is having a positive effect on environmental conditions through reduced littering.

2. RECYCLING PERFORMANCE

A number of initiatives and operations have been established this summer to improve recycling performance and target residents who are not recycling. Officers have been working with colleagues at Biffa to deliver 'tool box talks' to refuse crews clarifying bin contamination arrangements, identifying locations of low level participation and non-presented grey bins and to update additional green bin allocations. Such actions have given the Council an accurate base to inform future promotion and areas to target. However the overall view that has emerged is that recycling participation levels could be improved in all areas of the borough.

The Council will shortly embark on a recycling participation promotion campaign to underline key messages about recycling, using the baseline understanding to target areas as well as individuals. The campaign will involve a door stepping exercise, social media and the use of new technology that targets smartphones and tablets as well as a high profile press and media campaign.

3. GARDEN WASTE SUBSCRIPTIONS

The Garden Waste Collection Subscription Service is now in its third year, attracting over 38,000 annual subscribers. By this autumn subscriptions are due to reach 40,000, which was the target set for the third year of operations following a successful promotion campaign and renewal reminders this summer.

The service is popular and regarded as highly reliable and this is borne out by the high level of repeat subscribers. This year the Council has offered residents additional brown bins at a reduced subscription, this initiative has proven popular with over 1000 additional collections.

4. ALLEYWAY DUMPING INVESTIGATIONS

The alleyway dumping investigation exercise, now in its second year, involves the deployment of an investigation team, employed by Biffa, to search through dumped refuse within the authorities' alleyways looking for evidence. To date the investigation team have referred over 1500 cases to the Council for action and offenders have been prosecuted as a result. The Council is currently determining the way ahead for the initiative and considering various options. The investigations and action taken against the perpetrators of alleyway dumping does appear to have had a significant effect on reducing dumping levels and tonnages since being introduced in April 2014.

5. TRADING STANDARDS ENFORCEMENT

In June 2015 after a complex investigation by Trading Standards four defendants were sentenced at Liverpool Crown Court in relation to Fraud and Consumer Protection offences. Trading Standards secured refunds to Wirral consumers totalling £39,495.

6. OUT OF HOURS ON CALL SERVICE TO DEAL WITH ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR LINKED TO NOISE FROM MUSIC AND PARTIES

Since May 2015 the Environmental Health Service has been operating an on-call 'out of hours' service for noise complaints related to anti-social behaviour in domestic properties. The service has operated successfully using a team of volunteers from within Environmental Health who deliver the service in addition to their existing duties. The service is co-ordinated from the Council Control Room and receives support from the Community Patrol Service to enable officers to be able to operate safely.

The service has increased the opportunities for Council Officers to witness and assess the severity of noise. Where necessary this service has enabled Officers to try

and resolve noise problems while in attendance to the reported incident. In some cases the noise is indicative of wider problems and in such cases officers have liaised with colleagues in the Anti-Social Behaviour team and Merseyside Police to find a longer term solution to the problems witnessed.

Prior to this service out of hours witnessing of noise could only be arranged by prior appointment. Whilst pre-arranged visits are helpful in some cases, they are not effective where the noise is unpredictable or intermittent in nature. Residents distressed by domestic noise previously could not access the Environmental Health service outside office hours. Whilst the service cannot resolve all noise complaints immediately on the ground and has limited capacity, the service is managing to bring complaints to a conclusion more quickly due to officers witnessing complaints.

Over the period May to August 2015 the pilot on-call service responded to fifty eight calls that related to noise complaints associated with anti-social behaviour in domestic properties. While attending incidences, where offences have been observed Officers have given advice or issued verbal or written warnings to secure compliance. It has only been necessary to serve two formal abatement notices for non-compliance. This work is in addition to action which continues to be taken by Environmental Health as part of its normal service functions.

The calls received vary in nature but mainly relate to parties and loud music being played. Whilst some of these incidents are one-off events some addresses have received multiple visits and have therefore required more formal action. Many calls are referred to the Control Room from Merseyside Police.

The service is reliant on close working links between Community Patrol, the Council Control Room and ongoing management of complaint cases by Environmental Health and the Anti-Social Behaviour team. In some cases the service is also reliant on the support of Merseyside Police where risks to public order and Council staff require a police presence.

7. 'REDUCING THE STRENGTH' CAMPAIGN

There are 23 independently trading off sales premises in the "7 beats" area of Birkenhead which have been visited as part of the Reducing the Strength Campaign. Intelligence gathered during the delivery of this campaign concerning serious criminal activities linked to alcohol enabled a multi-agency operation to be planned with Officers from Environmental Health, Trading Standards, HMRC and the Police. The operation focused on a premise at the centre of a known hotspot for alcohol related crime, anti-social behaviour and begging.

During the operation HMRC seized approximately 10,000 cans of duty avoidance beers, 100 bottles of "Italian" wine and significant quantities of illicit cigarettes and tobacco. Initial estimates (final figures to be confirmed) were that over £4,150 and £1,800 of duty has been avoided on the alcohol and tobacco respectively. A Police Officer present noticed numerous licensing breaches and during the operation one man was arrested for immigration offences.

Responsible Authorities have submitted applications to seek and support the revocation of this premises licence as the Premises Licence Holder is considered to be failing to promote the Licensing Objectives. This application is being heard by the Licensing sub-committee in October.