

Environment and Climate Change Meeting	
Meeting Date	15 January 2025
Report Title	Swale Waste and Street Cleansing Scrutiny Review Report
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Martyn Cassell, Head of Environment & Leisure Phil Sutcliffe, Communications & Policy Manager
Lead Officer	Janet Dart, Policy & Engagement Officer
Classification	Open
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To note the content of the Waste and Street Cleansing Scrutiny Review Report. 2. To agree the conclusions and recommendations proposed by the Waste and Street Cleansing Scrutiny Review Member Panel as set out in Appendix I.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report summarises the scrutiny review of the mobilisation of the new waste and street cleansing service for Swale. It describes the process taken in carrying out the review and sets out the conclusions and recommendations proposed by the member panel going forward.

2 Background

- 2.1 The previous waste and street cleansing contract expired on 23 March 2024. The Mid Kent Waste Partnership (MKWP) (Swale, Ashford and Maidstone Borough Councils) undertook a joint tender process to find a supplier for an 8-year contract.
- 2.2 There had been very little change in the service over the course of the 10-year contract between 2013 and 2023 (the first time the council entered the MKWP). As we had the same contractor prior to that, little had changed in 15 years.
- 2.3 In June 2021 Cabinet agreed the following recommendations and strategic objectives:
 - To remain within the Mid Kent Waste Partnership.
 - To retain an alternate weekly collection (AWC) for co-mingled kerbside recycling and residual waste. To collect food waste weekly, and to provide separate chargeable garden waste and bulk waste collection services.

- To keep the collection services contracted out as the preferred service delivery model, and develop a waste collection specification to meet council priorities on climate emergency and recycling rates.
 - To keep street cleansing contracted out but to adapt the future contract specification to improve flexibility of resource and improve service.
- 2.4 In December 2022, following an extensive tender process, the Environment Committee agreed to award the contract to SUEZ Recycling and Recovery UK Ltd for 8 years.
- 2.5 The new contract commenced 24 March 2024. Disruption was expected and it is common with any new contract for problems to occur.
- 2.6 A recovery plan was developed to focus on action and improvement, which was agreed and monitored by the member waste working group.
- 2.7 However, it is best practice for any major project to review what went well, what went wrong and lessons are captured for future work.
- 2.8 It was proposed at the Environment & Climate Change meeting on 16 July 2024 that a formal Scrutiny Panel be formed to undertake a scrutiny review, reporting back to an Extraordinary Environment & Climate Change Committee meeting in November 2024. Due to the large amount of data and information for the Scrutiny Panel to review, it was agreed to extend the review until January 2025, to give the Panel adequate time to carry out the review thoroughly.
- 2.9 The Panel was made up of the following Members:
- Cllr Rich Lehmann (Chair)
 - Cllr Chris Palmer
 - Cllr Hannah Perkin
 - Cllr Julien Speed
 - Cllr Dolley Wooster
- 2.10 The policy team provided support to members to enable the process.
- 2.11 The Scrutiny Review Panel Members were tasked by the Environment & Climate Change Committee to include the following within the scope of the review:
- a) The time period should cover from the start of the project (June 2020) up to September 2024.
 - b) The themes of the scope were resources/staffing, data and rounds, contract and project management, and internal and external communications. More detail about the scope and the terms of reference are set out in Appendix III. The scope gave the key areas of focus but left flexibility for the Panel to weave in other areas as they arose during the process.

c) The scope included waste collections and street cleansing.

2.12 As part of the scrutiny process, Panel Members looked at key information on:

- Staffing numbers
- Deployment sheets
- Project timelines
- Tender documents
- Performance data
- Risk registers
- Mobilisation plans
- Recovery plans
- Officer and member group notes
- Resident communication examples

2.13 It is worth noting for context some of the local and national influencing factors during the tender development stage. Whilst the new service changed from the previous provider to Suez on 24 March 2024, this was only one step in a process that began four years earlier.

2.14 Changes in senior management at the council from late 2020 onwards, and the significant turnover of councillors in the 2019 and 2023 elections, meant continuity was impacted for certain periods of the project.

2.15 Nationally, changes in legislation by the Government meant the process of setting the contract specification was challenging as frequent changes needed to be made and at the point of tender there were still many unknowns about what direction the new legislation would go in. The pandemic also brought a number of challenges and complications for the service.

2.16 During the period of disruption, the General Election was announced which meant plans to publicly discuss the issues had to be postponed, to avoid breaking strict rules about what meetings can be held during the pre-election period.

3 Proposals

3.1 To note the content of the Waste & Street Cleansing Scrutiny Review Report.

3.2 To agree the conclusions and recommendations proposed by the Waste & Street Cleansing Scrutiny Review Member Panel as set out in Appendix I.

4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

4.1 To not accept the conclusions and recommendations – this is not recommended as it is important, given the issues the council has experienced, that lessons are learnt for the future.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 Ahead of the tender process significant consultation was undertaken with residents, councillors and staff. Residents were asked to respond to a waste survey in 2021, where more than 1,400 responses were received, with an excellent return with themes that fed into the specification for all three partners (highlighted in more detail in the June 2021 Cabinet report).
- 5.2 An online public survey was launched on 3 September 2024, closing on 2 October 2024. The intention of which was to capture the experiences of residents both before and after the start of the new waste contract on 24 March 2024. The survey was widely publicised via social media, press releases, direct email with parish/town councils and promotion at area committees. As members acknowledged not everyone has online access, hard copies were made available. More than 2,100 responses to the survey were received, and a summary of the responses are set out in Appendix IV and V.
- 5.3 Members of the Waste & Street Cleansing Scrutiny Review Panel attended the September 2024 round of area committee meetings to seek feedback from residents, parish/town councils and community groups. The Chair of the Waste & Street Cleansing Scrutiny Review Panel also attended the Local Councils' Liaison Forum on 25 September 2024. A summary of responses from these meetings are set out in Appendix VII.
- 5.4 A survey of SBC Councillors was carried out to seek feedback on how their individual wards were affected. A summary of responses from this survey are set out in Appendix VI.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Environment – to provide a cleaner, healthier, more sustainable and enjoyable environment, and to prepare our borough for the challenges ahead.
Financial, Resource and Property	There were no financial implications in holding a Scrutiny Review, however considerable officer resources were required to support and feed into the review.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	The review scrutinised the procurement process which was completed in line with our Commissioning and Procurement Strategy and national legislation.
Crime and Disorder	Despite an understandable frustration from residents who have received disrupted collections, physical and verbal abuse to staff at SBC and the contractor has been unacceptable.

Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	One of the key benefits of the contract and a strategic objective agreed at the start of the tender process was the environmental gains we will make on the service's carbon footprint. Despite the disruption many of these benefits are already being achieved.
Health and Wellbeing	The delivery of a successful waste contract is imperative for public health reasons. It is acknowledged that through the mobilisation period there have been reports of vermin and detritus in the streets.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	Some residents require additional services such as clinical and assisted collections. The Panel considered whether the disruption impacted those residents.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	Major contract failure risk is one of our corporate risks and has clear mitigating actions set against it. This action has been reviewed throughout the mobilisation period and reported to Audit committee.
Equality and Diversity	The disruption will have impacted some of our more vulnerable residents – assisted and clinical collections. An Equality Impact Assessment was not carried out as it was felt that it was not necessary for a continuation of service.
Privacy and Data Protection	No personal data was collected as part of this Scrutiny Review. All surveys were anonymous with just postcodes being collected for the public survey. No personal information was included in any of the documentation the Member Panel reviewed as part of the Scrutiny Review.

7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Conclusions and Recommendations
- Appendix II: Summary of Recommendations
- Appendix III: Scope of the Scrutiny Review
- Appendix IV: Summary of online public survey– text responses
- Appendix V: Summary of online public survey
- Appendix VI: Summary of responses to SBC Member questionnaire
- Appendix VII: Summary of feedback from Area Committees
- Appendix VIII: Timeline of tender preparation and mobilization

8 Background Papers

[Cabinet 2021](#)

[Environment Committee Dec 2022](#)

[P+R January 2023](#)