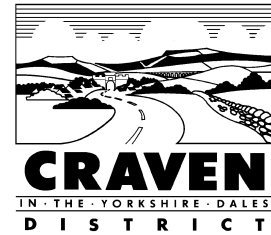


Policy Committee – 3 March 2015

Garden Waste Subscription Service and Belle Vue Square Offices



Select Committee Chairman's Report

Introduction

Members will be aware that Select Committee has recently carried out light touch reviews of the garden waste subscription service and savings generated by the Council's relocation to Belle Vue Square to establish whether the savings predicted at the time of the move had been realised. This report is intended to formally present to Policy Committee the outcome of Select Committee's work on both issues.

a. Garden Waste Subscription Service

In agreeing its work programme for the current year the Committee resolved to conduct a review of the operation of the Garden Waste Service in its first year as a subscription based service. To facilitate that review the Committee was provided with a briefing paper prepared by the Waste and Recycling Manager, Mr Paul Florentine. In summary the key messages were as follows

a. For the first period of operation as a subscription service, 9,277 subscriptions had been taken out, compared to a projected of 6,000, at a rate of £24 per bin. Nationally subscription charges for garden waste schemes ranged from £20 to £70 per annum.

b. Generating income in excess of £200,000 per annum the service was recovering its costs and generating a surplus.

Note : Following the Committee's meeting the Strategic Manager for Financial Services advised that the surplus enables a contribution towards the Council's overheads for the recycling and domestic waste collection service. For 2014/15, the cost of delivering those services will be in the region of £720,000.

c. The tonnage collected had increased resulting in a slight increase in recycling credits paid to the Council by the Waste Disposal Authority for diverting waste away from landfill.

e. The collected garden waste was taken to the waste transfer station at Halton East then transported for composting at Yorkshire Water's site at Esholt in West Yorkshire eventually becoming compost for horticulture and agricultural crops.

f. Renewal of subscriptions for 2015/16 was now in progress; the fee had been held at £24.

g. Two other North Yorkshire Districts, Richmondshire and Ryedale had now also introduced subscription charges, and it was understood other Districts in North Yorkshire were giving serious consideration to the introduction of a subscription service. Both Ryedale and Richmondshire had consulted this Council. It was believed that most if not all local authorities would convert to some form of subscription service for garden waste by 2020.

In questioning the Waste and Recycling Manager the Committee established that

i. The rate of renewal for 2015 was in line with expectation and past experience; renewals currently totalled 3,000, having learned from the experience and volume of calls when the subscription had been first introduced, additional staff resource was being deployed to deal with the expected increase in the number of telephone calls. Problems being experienced by subscribers wishing to renew via online payment were being addressed

ii. There had been a small increase in fly tipping involving garden waste following the change to a subscription based service. The situation was being monitored along with the tipping of other types of material. In recent times the largest percentage increase in fly tipping involved bulky household goods.

iii. There was scope to extend the collection year to reflect mild weather conditions in the autumn/ early winter period. The calendar for 2015 would run to the end of November / early December. Unfortunately the one off collection in January this year had not been particularly successful, the merits of repeating that exercise would need to be examined by the service.

vi. Those households not wishing to renew their subscription would be contacted regarding the collection / recall of their bins.

vii. The collection of garden waste was split between two rounds, one of which covered more remote / rural areas of the District. Overall the service was cost efficient, but on its own the "remote / rural round would not be viable as currently provided, however as a service it was considered important that it was available to all.

viii. If the number of households subscribing to the service increased as a result of new development across the District there was capacity to absorb the increase, means of promoting shared bins on new developments with small gardens, was an option which could be looked into.

On the evidence presented and the Waste and Recycling Manager's response to points raised, the Committee was able to conclude that the introduction of a subscription for the garden waste service appears to have been a success. Much credit is due to the District's residents for having embraced the service.

The Select Committee will revisit the garden waste subscription service after a further two years of operation, but in the meantime has suggested to the Waste and Recycling Manager that the service retain a flexible approach to the end of year collection point, and also retain the option of a one off collection dependent on the impact of seasonal variations in the late autumn / early winter period. Depending on how the service continues to perform, including potential growth, some aspects of it may require careful management.

b. Office Relocation : Savings

In seeking to establish whether savings generated by the move to Belle Vue Square Offices had been in line with savings predicted at the time, the Committee requested and received copies of a value for money appraisal presented to the Council's external auditors in 2012. The appraisal had been presented to the external auditor in seeking to demonstrate value for money in the use of the Council's assets.

The value for money appraisal had been comprised of the following three elements:-

Capital : Options explored for the future provision of the Council's office accommodation.

Revenue : Predicted base budget revenue savings (£120,000) expected to be generated by the move; and

Non-Cashable Efficiencies : Efficiencies generated / expected to be generated by the move, including the potential for future revenue savings / income generation through closer working with the County Council, subletting office space and letting meeting rooms to voluntary and commercial organisations.

From questioning the Director of Services the Committee was able to establish that the move to Belle Vue Square was completed within budget and predicted base budget savings had been delivered. The decision to retain and not transfer Skipton Town Hall had actually generated a greater revenue saving than the level predicted by a proposed transfer. Capital works now underway at the Town Hall were expected to deliver further savings / income potential.

Some sub-letting of the Council's accommodation at Belle Vue had taken place, but on a relatively small scale, and the Council provided and charged the County Council for reception and caretaking provision. The County Council was paid for cleaning services. Opportunities for sub-letting continued to be explored with the voluntary sector, however the ability to sub-let was to some degree being constrained by the nature and size of the reception area. Care would be needed when subletting bearing in mind the confidential nature of some elements of services provided by the Council

In replying to Members queries the Director also informed the Committee that

- the annual service charge fluctuated between £50,000 and £60,000 per annum based on a variable rate charge, negotiations on the amount paid were conducted independently of the other tenants. The lease entered into between Belle Vue Mills Ltd and Craven District Council did not allow for an alteration to the method of calculating service charge from the current actual expenditure method to a fixed sum service charge.
- the open plan nature of the accommodation made it easier for managers with multiple roles,
- a survey had not been conducted to assess whether the move and easier access to public transport had resulted in staff making greater use of public transport; the intention was to carry out a green travel survey of staff in summer 2015. Incentives were offered to encourage green travel;
- steps were taken to address concerns with regard to working conditions in the building, particularly the temperature which presented issues in hot summer months.
- the current tenants of the building, including the Council did not contribute any costs towards the currently vacant east wing and the proportions of shared areas had been calculated based on areas occupied by each tenant. Costs attributable to vacant areas met by the landlord and as such no changes would be made to the service charge proportions on occupation of the east wing.

The Select Committee will consider the results of the employee green travel survey 2015 with a view to establishing whether the move and easier access to public transport has resulted in employees making greater use of public transport, and the Council's position when measured against the travel plan attached as a condition of planning consent for the redevelopment of Belle Vue Mills. Pending that piece of work I am pleased to be able to report that the Committee was satisfied that savings to be generated by the move to Belle Vue Square have been realised as predicted.

On behalf of the Committee I would however draw Policy Committee's attention to the constraints presented by the existing reception arrangements to the Council's ability to sublet office space, and also ask that Policy consider

a. the need to examine the signage and customer experience on entering the building; and

b. this Committee's view that access from the rear of the building should be examined, namely the introduction of the ability to use door passes to gain access to the civic suite via the current fire door to the car park.

Councillor John Roberts
Chairman Select Committee