

## COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY, 18 NOVEMBER 2021

**PRESENT:** Councillors John Bowden (Chairman), Greg Jones (Vice-Chairman), Gurpreet Bhangra, Helen Price, Catherine Del Campo and Parish Councillor Margaret Lenton

Also in attendance: Councillors Clive Baskerville, Jon Davey, Donna Stimson, John Baldwin, Simon Bond, Mandy Brar, David Coppinger, Karen Davies, Phil Haseler, Geoffrey Hill, Ewan Larcombe, Helen Taylor, Amy Tisi and Parish Councillor Jane Dawson and Stephen Hedges

Officers: Alysse Strachan, Shilpa Manek, Andrew Durrant and Duncan Sharkey

### WELCOME FROM THE CHAIRMAN

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting. All Panel Members and Officers introduced themselves. The Chairman informed all that the meeting was virtual due to some Panel Members awaiting PCR test results.

### APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

### DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Del Campo informed all, for transparency, that Oaken Grove Park backed onto her home in case it was discussed.

Councillor Price informed all, for transparency, that she was a member of Maidenhead Golf Course.

### MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Councillor Del Campo requested an amendment. The Panel agreed.

**RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY subject to amendment, that the minutes of 25<sup>th</sup> October were a true and accurate record.**

This was proposed by Councillor Price and seconded by Councillor G Jones.

### REVIEW OF THE PERFORMANCE OF TIVOLI CONTRACT FOR GROUNDS MAINTENANCE

Alysse Strachan, Head of Neighbourhoods introduced the item. Naomi Markham, Environmental Services Manager, gave a presentation to the Panel and all present. Spencer Rock and Ian McIlroy, from Tivoli gave a presentation to the Panel and all present. The Lead Member, Councillor Coppinger addressed the Panel and all present.

The floor was then open to all residents, parish councils and members that had registered to speak. The comments and questions were as follows:

Mr Ed Wilson commented that the services were disgraceful, especially in cemeteries. The grass had not been cut so grave stones could not be seen, there was graffiti on the gravestones which had been reported four times, the litter was increasing, the bushes had not been cut back and the hedges were overgrown. The Report It function could not be used specifically for cemeteries. Mr Ed Wilson suggested that there be a specific lead member for cemeteries, a specific contact number for cemeteries, to publish the charter for cemeteries, if anything reported, it should be cleared in 24 hours and grass cut within 21 days and hedges trimmed.

Mr John Webb commented that he wanted to mention a specific issue which was the public litter bins outside Dedworth library, not being emptied. This had been reported five times and many emails had been sent too but nothing had been done. The bins had not been emptied since June. Staff of the library were having to empty so that they could be used. The Report It tool had not actioned anything. This had been reported since August, but they had not been emptied.

Stephen Hedges, Cox Green Parish Council, commented that this year had been particularly bad, with operational tasks having been really bad. Stephen Hedges commented that there was a crossover between Tivoli and Volkner Highways and that caused confusion for residents. The footpaths were all getting narrower and the grass cutting year had changed. Stephen Hedges commented that climate change should have been factored in and excuses about broken equipment shouldn't be made.

Valerie Pike, resident, commented that litter was not being picked, there was overhanging vegetation everywhere, signage was being covered by overgrown hedges and that the Report It function did not work and there was no feedback. If the service contract was functioning, there would be no need to complain but when not functioning, the Report It function would have be vital. There was possibly also a duplication of cost.

Councillor Bond commented on a number of incidents in Belmont Ward with one specific area being really bad and not safe for seven months, but this had still not been sorted. It was now the residents doing the work, but the mature trees could not be cut by the residents. The borough was encouraging walking and cycling so it was essential to keep the pavements clear. Councillor Bond took the opportunity to thank the residents.

Councillor Stimson commented that Oaken Grove and the sports field were in a very bad way especially at the beginning of the season. Cemeteries had not been maintained. Councillor Stimson asked about expected response time if dangerous situations were reported.

Councillor Taylor was specific and talked about Braywick Cemetery which was a core part of the Tivoli contract. Councillor Taylor asked if extra training was required to be given to staff dealing with maintenance works at cemeteries. There had been a lot of disrespectful behaviour which was unacceptable.

Councillor Hill commented that many residents had complained about the way Tivoli staff had been treating graves, very disrespectfully. It was easy to blame the contractors, but the management of the contractors was also very important and the Lead Member management was also important. Councillor Hill asked how the process would be changed to get the best out of the contractors and the best for residents.

Councillor Baldwin asked Officers, what lessons could be learnt and how they would inform the Commissioning Policy which was valid until 2023. What work would be done?

Councillor Davies commented that she had reported and re reported many issues over the summer and autumn, especially with respect to the Windsor Cemetery known as Spittle Cemetery. Many residents had contacted her about the untidy area around the graves. This was a big issue for less mobile residents and it was not safe as it became slippery. When the grass was cut, large clumps of grass cuttings were left around and graves were not tidied,

leaving grass cuttings all over them. This was very upsetting to residents. The feedback loop was very important.

Councillor Brar complained about the verges not being cut, the litter bins overflowing, leaves on the footpaths making it very dangerous for residents to walk. It had been very frustrating for her and for residents as the Report It function had not worked and nothing happened, with no acknowledgement or feedback.

Councillor Davey thanked Tivoli for owning up to accepting that there were issues and problems that needed resolving. As a council, we needed to adjust to the impacts of climate change and it was all changing very fast. Councillor Davey continued that many complaints had been received and it was great to see the issues being resolved. The regular meetings between Tivoli and RBWM would help in problems being accepted and solutions being found. Even though the Head of Neighbourhoods had just joined the borough, it was good to see that Tivoli were being kept to the KPIs and were being challenged. Councillor Davey was interested in how the complaints were being measured, how a complaint was defined and to better understand the process when a complaint was logged.

Naomi Markham made some initial comments including that Tivoli were responsible for litter bins and dog bins within the park's infrastructure and open spaces, not on high streets or litter that fell on the roads and pavements including leaves that fell. This was within another contract. Naomi Markham confirmed that the issues raised by Councillor Bond about vegetation were in the process of being resolved. This was taking time as it was on some land that was no mans' land, but the council were looking to taking this on board. In terms of the Report It function, Naomi Markham had been in touch with the Head of Transformation to look at putting additional mapping layers so that areas could be selected within green spaces as well as main roads and also integrating the systems better with the systems that the contractors were using so more detailed feedback was given.

The Head of Neighbourhoods, Alysse Strachan, commented that all were individual cases and would be looked at. Alysse Strachan apologised for the falling standards and in particular around cemeteries and the standards of work and behaviour by Tivoli, this was not acceptable. Cemeteries and Parks had been the focus of trying to keep the standards good. Alysse Strachan commented that all issues were in the process of being resolved and it would be great to bring a further update on the performance to the Panel and the improvement that would follow.

Tivoli commented that they were not perfect and they were making best endeavours to get the situation back on track. Apologies were given from Spencer Rock and on behalf of the company to everyone that had been affected at cemeteries. Tivoli do look after the military dead and the graves and this was the highest priority. The specifics would be actioned within the next two weeks. The feedback loop was very important. Tivoli were at the meeting to listen and then improve a better service to the residents.

Parish Councillor Margaret Lenton commented that every attempt must be made to get Old Windsor Parish Council comments and asked if the brochure could be distributed to all parish councils.

### **ACTION: Distribute brochure to Parish Councils**

PC Lenton asked how residents would be made aware of the meeting discussion and the actions. PC Lenton commented that the rural villages had no man's land areas that needed tackling and finally if people had indulged in self-help, which many had, their work was not wasted.

Councillor Bhangra thanked Officers and Tivoli for addressing the Panel. There had been many problems with the Tivoli contract and the performance had been very bad and embarrassing for the borough. Councillor Bhangra continued to say that the service had

improved but there was still a long way to go to bring back up to standards that residents expect. Councillor Bhangra asked what was in place to ensure a smooth operation going forward and what lessons had been learnt. Were Tivoli confident that they would be able to deliver on the contract with the borough?

Tivoli confirmed that they were absolutely confident. There had been some issues but these were now being managed. They would be ready by the next summer's growing season and would continue to still cut. The correct kit was also in place and things were improving.

Councillor G Jones commented on the state of Ray Mill Island as it was in his ward and that it had gone downhill over the last 18 months. Councillor G Jones had reported the issues many times and wanted to congratulate Jacqui Wheeler and Anthony Hurst in the countryside team for all their efforts. Things had improved but still not up to standard. Councillor G Jones suggested having an area manager in place to monitor the areas and the work being carried out. Tivoli were on the right route but still a long way to go.

Tivoli thanked Councillor G Jones for the confidence that the corner had been turned. There were area and regional managers in place that visited sites. The work recently had been very reactive and the regional manager visited one to twice a week and was very proactive so things would continue to get better. The plan for next year was to start a month earlier so they could catch up.

Councillor Del Campo touched on a few points. Firstly the process of dealing with overhanging vegetation and the first step was to complete a Report It form. Naomi Markham cleared up the confusion and informed the Panel that inspectors visited all areas of the borough on a certain schedule and would start the process with a calling card if needed or would proactively contact the residents who were the owners. Secondly, a lot of the problems had begun before covid, Brexit and supply issues and the contract had been under bid and therefore a renegotiation was now taking place and this would be a concern for residents in terms of the outcomes of the renegotiations and the level of services agreed. Alysse Strachan commented that there were commercially sensitive things as part of the dispute but it was the entire piece that was being looked at. Councillor Del Campo asked if the birds and animals were in a good place at present and it was confirmed that they were health-wise and foodwise. Councillor Del Campo asked about play areas and if they were routinely inspected, especially since there had been a recent accident at Oaken Grove. As a result of the accident, some of the North Maidenhead Councillors surveyed a number of parks in wards around Maidenhead and found faults in all of them. If the parks were being surveyed routinely, how were there so many faults? Naomi Markham responded and informed the Panel that the parks were part of daily inspections of basic things, done by Tivoli. There was also another company who were accredited play inspectors and they came in monthly to do a regular inspection of all the parks and they picked up issues that needed to be kept an eye on, improvements that needed to be made and more dangerous issues. Councillor Del Campo continued to comment on page 21 of the report where it read that the parks had been maintained to a high standard, many residents had already mentioned that this had not been the case. Councillor Del Campo asked that if this was high standard, what would anything below that be like. Tivoli and Officers, both agreed that standards had been fallen short of but also the usage had been high too.

Councillor Price highlighted that communication had been a big problem, communication from the borough and Tivoli to residents and Councillors. Councillor Price was pleased to hear that the system was going to be looked at as currently Report It was like a black hole where no information was given back. There had also been a lack of communication telling residents what was going on over the last few months. This Panel had asked for more information in June as it was obvious that there was a problem. Was there any quality control in place for the contract by the borough to have known sooner that things were going wrong. Councillor Price suggested a separate tool for Councillors to report issues. In some cases, where things were not done by Tivoli, residents were cutting hedges and Officers inspecting would think Tivoli had done so things were not getting picked up. Councillor Price thanked and commended Chris and all the staff at Tinkers Lane who had been very helpful. Councillor Price had

requested more bins in her ward but had received no response. Councillor Price was concerned about the process as there were many residents that had been concerned about Tivoli's performance but only two had registered to speak at the meeting. The two main points that Councillor Price ended on were Quality Control and Communication. Alysse Strachan commented that now that all streams of this work had been brought under one manager, Naomi, there would be more quality control.

This would ensure more quality control. The move only took place on 1 October 2021 so this will start showing moving forward. As part of the review and the dispute, all the measures would be looked at again to ensure that the right measures were in place. Many common themes had come out of the discussions at the meeting about communication. Naomi Markham added that the team were reviewing the litter bins issue and a capital bid had been considered for next year for the provision of additional bins. Naomi Markham also mentioned that there would be a Friends of the Website group in place which would include resident representation. This group would be looking at the Report It function as part of their remit.

Councillor Price commented that she felt the suggested review date was too far off, which was after March 2022 as it was before the next growing season. Alysse Strachan informed the Panel that date had been suggested as the team were working with Tivoli to better their performance and bring cutting forward potentially into March and having developed plans in place for next year. Councillor Price asked for a regular update, not via a meeting but a short update note for the Panel. Tivoli confirmed that this would be possible. Tivoli requested that if any staff had been disrespectful to any grave, please could this be escalated as this kind of behaviour would not be tolerated by Tivoli.

The Chairman commented that plans for next year must include the preparation for the golden jubilee which would take place next summer. Tree maintenance must be maintained too, especially along the river.

Andrew Durrant, Executive Director of PLACE, thanked his team, they were working tremendously hard. Andrew Durrant also thanked Tivoli and all residents for attending.

Councillor Coppinger thanked all Councillors for their comments and for being critical but also supportive with the work that both officers and Tivoli were trying to achieve. There was a lot to be done but everyone was on the correct track.

Councillor Price asked for a summary of the discussion. The clerk summarised the main points of the meeting. They were that all questions asked would be responded to individually, to check with Old Windsor parish Council for their points, the brochure to be sent to all parishes, Councillors and residents, communication and Report It function and the changes that need to be made, the quality control issue, lessons learnt to be considered and the review date for an update and that Tivoli were to provide the Panel with regular update reports.

## WORK PROGRAMME

The clerk then asked whether to carry on or not and requested that we carry on for a further five to ten minutes to look at the work programme very quickly. The Panel agreed.

The Clerk asked the Panel if the meeting to be held on 6 December was still required. This would have been a virtual meeting. There would be no briefing notes for items. The clerk commented that the overview side of the Panel would be looking at Norden Farm and The Old Court and what they were doing, how the future was looking and hear what the organisations had to say. The clerk suggested that these items could be taken later in the third quarter in February. The climate strategy was also on the work programme for the 6<sup>th</sup> December. Councillor Del Campo had completed an amazing scoping document which was with the Scrutiny Officer. The clerk continued that after the Scrutiny Officer had commented on the scoping document, it would be sent to Panel Members for comments. The clerk was not sure if the item would be ready for discussion by 6 December. And the final item on the work

programme for that date was the Maidenhead Golf Course and the clerk would send the written update to the Panel the following day so that item could then come off the agenda. Councillors Del Campo and Price felt that the 6 December meeting should continue. Councillor Jones was concerned about receiving reports in time for meetings and felt the meeting was not necessary. Councillor Jones asked if the two organisations were truly past covid and if December was the right time for them. The clerk offered to check with officers and report back to the Panel.

The clerk asked for comments from the Panel on the Community Facilities Review scoping document by Wednesday 24 November.

The clerk went through items that had been requested for the work programme. The items suggested included information on food banks and Councillor Price would provide more detail. Another item suggested by the Infrastructure O & S Panel was air quality, the process against the national air quality resources and our air quality management areas. The clerk asked for comments on the air quality item.

The meeting, which began at 7.00 pm, finished at 9.57 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....