

Report to: Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee

Date: 14th July 2014

Report of: Director of Environmental Services

Report No: ESSC/04/14

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Report Title: **Departmental Performance Update**

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Non Confidential:**
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(**Non-Confidential**) This report does **not** contain information which warrants its consideration in the absence of the press or members of the public

Purpose:

This report provides the Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee with an update on Q4 performance for the Environmental Services Department. Headlines are that:

- Strategically, the Department has made good progress with the ongoing implementation of the Waste & Recycling, Cleaner & Greener and BSafe Strategies
- The Department's operational services continue to perform well, despite the difficult operating context.
- Strategic preparation of the budget continues to progress against plan and the Department has now delivered all savings for the 13/15 budget round

Recommendations:

The Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the performance update set out in this report

Decision:

Background Doc(s):

Signed:

Leader / Executive Cabinet
Member

Monitoring Officer

Date:

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This report summarises the performance outcome for quarter 4 of 2013/14 for the Environmental Services Department. The report summarises delivery against both qualitative and quantitative indicators, recognising the balance between hard and soft outputs which the Department's workload encompasses. It provides:

- a summary of progress against the major strategic priorities for which the Environmental Services Department is responsible within the Council;
- a summary of progress against the operational priorities which the Department fulfils, as a provider of a number of large front line and support services and
- conclusions and key messages concerning 2013/14.

2.0 Supporting the Council to deliver its strategic priorities

2.1 At a strategic level the Department directly supports and provides leadership to both the Council and the Cleaner and Greener Partnership as part of the wider Bolton Vision and the delivery of the Community Strategy. The Department directly inputs and leads on themes around Recycling, Cleanliness, Greenspace Investment and Behavioural Change in addition to providing a supporting role around the Regeneration of the Town Centre.

2.2 Key progress on our strategic priorities during the last quarter includes:-

Waste & Recycling

2.3 The cost of waste disposal is expected to rise by £7m to £23m per year. The introduction of Managed Weekly collections has helped to stem these rising disposal costs and in 2013/14 we have exceeded the projected savings target. This is primarily due to significantly reducing the amount of residual waste collected by far the most expensive waste stream to deal with. The data also clearly shows that the targeted behaviour change programmes and the high profile promotional programmes are having a positive impact on the amount of Kgs diverted from landfill.

2.4 In 2013/14, there has been a reduction of 16.57% of domestic (grey bin waste) tonnages (including flytipping) this has ensured that the savings targets have been met. The kilogrammes of household waste collected per household reduced from 562.93 kgs in 2012/13 to 479.73 kgs in 2013/14, which surpassed the projection of 517.53 kgs. The recycling rate shows a significant increase from 30.48% in 2012/13 to 37.26% in 2013/14, which is an increase of 6.78%.

2.5 As part of the on-going behaviour change programme, an audit of all waste and recycling containers in flats was undertaken in January. As from the end of March, 51.7% (3,490) of flats and apartments have access to food waste recycling, 86.62% (7,902) of flats and apartments have access to both pulpables and comingled materials and 69.44% (6,028) of flats and apartments receive fortnightly residual collections. In addition, since the introduction of managed weekly collections, 604 waste audits have been undertaken because residents feel they are unable to cope with the newly introduced managed weekly collections. 54% of the audits were approved an additional grey bin and 46% were rejected as resident was not recycling.

- 2.6 Following the introduction of managed weekly collections in May 2013, some difficulties were experienced with the new collection service in some areas of the Borough with residents presenting incorrect bins on collection day or lower numbers of recycling bins presented for collection. Efforts to tackle fly tipping and the presentation of side waste were also made. A number of action days and campaigns took place to tackle these issues and further educate residents.
- 2.7 With significant savings achieved by reducing the waste disposal costs to the Authority it remains imperative to educate and inform our residents on the benefits of recycling, increasingly the service is linking into Greater Manchester communication initiatives in order to spread a Greater Manchester message to residents to reduce our waste levels and increase our recycling commitment. Working in partnership with the Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority on the £1m European LIFE funding initiative we are door knocking low recycling communities to increase uptake, to date this method of campaigning is proving to be effective with significant increases seen when it takes place.
- 2.8 The service has seen considerable redesign in recent years with rounds redesigned and made more efficient, this work continues in order to achieve ongoing effective working practices and to ensure that capacity is created for residents who decide to take up the recycling habit. Whilst the increasing recycling rate is very promising we currently have approximately 20% of residents who still do not recycle anything at all and it remains a challenge to the service to convince these non-recyclers to take part and help reduce the financial impact of waste on the whole Borough.

Cleaner & Greener

- 2.8 A cleaner, greener, more attractive Bolton is key to making our communities more sustainable as well as ensuring they are attractive places that people are proud of want to visit, live and work in. The Department and Partners have been striving towards delivering this agenda since outlining our ambitions in the Bolton Plan of 2007. Key progress on matters relating to the Community Strategy over the last quarter includes:

Cleanliness

- 2.9 As a result of the national and ongoing austerity agenda the ability of the Department to deliver on the full extent of our **cleanliness** aspirations has to some extent been compromised with £2.4m having been removed from the budget since 2010. This in turn has resulted in a 35% reduction in the cleansing resource. However, despite these challenges the department has been able to mitigate the impact of these reductions, through a range of service redesigns resulting, in our performance remaining relatively strong. However we are mindful that over the longer term and against the backdrop of further reductions our ability to continue to arrest this decline will become increasingly challenging.
- 2.10 The tables below show the **Local Environmental Quality Survey** results, both for the borough and the neighbourhood renewal areas, in 2012/13 and 2013/14. The results cannot be compared to data prior to 2012, due to the introduction of a new scoring formula by ENCAMS.

Borough Results

Year	Litter % passed	Detritus % passed	Weed Growth	Grass Cutting	Shrub Pruning
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			% passed	% passed	% passed
2012/2013	92	89	92	94	92
2013/2014	90	91	89	92	90

Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy Areas (NRS) Results

Year	Litter % passed	Detritus % passed	Weed Growth % passed	Grass Cutting % passed	Shrub Pruning % passed
2012/2013	85	88	88	94	90
2013/2014	81	91	85	89	89

- 2.11 The data shows a small deterioration in standards across the Borough, however, the litter score, which is a target identified in the Community Strategy, is still within the 90% or above pass rate due to focused service attention in this area.
- 2.12 During the next financial year, the Department will focus on new approaches to address:
- behaviour change initiatives to reduce littering
 - tackling the increasing amounts of back street litter in the inner areas
 - reacting to localised fly tipping within the limited resources
 - accessing hard to reach communities, where litter is an on-going problem

Greenspace Investment

- 2.13 The investment in good quality and accessible open spaces is pivotal in making Bolton a great place to live and work as well as a destination for visitors. As such the Department has embarked on ambitious project aimed at regenerating **Queens Park** supporting by Heritage Lottery funding with the project due to complete during 2014. Most of the physical elements have progressed well and without delays, with the park having been physically and culturally transformed since the project began. The numbers and diversity of users, encouraged by the physical improvements, gives the park a positive atmosphere at the heart of some of our most deprived communities. The park has also been the focal point of several high profile recent community events such as Sky Ride and Bolton by the Sea which have ensured footfall is brisk.
- 2.14 A pre-feasibility study for the **Animal World** Site in Moss Bank Park has been completed by Lancashire Wildlife Trust & Green Estates. This has also offered encouragement to look at future management options for the whole park. This will be progressed further and will complement the new café building which is due to open in Q2.
- 2.15 Project development and implementation of the **Greenspace Investment** Programme has progressed well during the quarter despite a very wet period, with the completion of a number of tennis court refurbishments and Multi-use Games areas. The preferred main contractor for the flagship playing field project at **Hulton Lane** has now been appointed. The scheme is due to start on site at the beginning of the next quarter when a number of other projects are also scheduled to commence for delivery over the course of 2014/15.
- 2.16 The review of the **Allotments Service** was in the implementation phase during Q4. The self- management of allotments has been gathering momentum and Corporate Property Services is currently developing the lease for Harpers Lane Allotment Society. The waiting list has been refreshed and is now down to a manageable number (200) 60 unused plots were taken back and will be reallocated to people on the waiting list in time for the growing season.

Cleaner and Greener Behaviour Change Programme

- 2.17 With the increasing costs associated with proactive community clean ups and the ongoing pressures being placed on the Department's available revenue budgets, the sustainability of repeatedly cleaning up after our residents is no longer a tenable approach. As such the Council and its key Partners took the decision to fundamentally shift away from just cleaning up after communities to introducing a **behaviour change package** aimed at altering residents' behaviours over the long term. The extent of this package ranges from supported community action to campaigns aimed at educating and informing.
- 2.18 Over the last year we have been able to increase the number of volunteers who regularly help to tidy their local community from 45 in 2010/11 to 1091 in 2013/14. Although a range of factors could influence this decision to volunteer, we are confident of a linear correlation back to a number high profile campaigns delivered by the Department such as the Love Bolton Hate Litter Campaign. This number has far exceeded the Community Strategy target of 840 volunteers by 2015. The Department will continue to deliver the Love Bolton Hate Litter Campaign throughout 2014/15 and will strive to increase media coverage of environmental offences.

Supporting the Regeneration of the Town Centre

- 2.19 The Council remains committed to securing investment, growth and jobs for local people and is particularly focused on ensuring that Bolton town centre remains a great asset through supported economic regeneration. Although the Department does not directly lead on the **Regeneration of the Town Centre**, it plays a key supporting role through the development and delivery of a sustainable transport strategy as well as several discreet development projects aimed at both modernising and animating public spaces.
- 2.20 **The Town Centre Transport Strategy** is a key element in the Council's town centre regeneration plans and attempts to strike a balance between a range of transport modal solutions and the need to create the appropriate environment for continued physical developments. During the last quarter the **Southern Link** road was completed and is now fully operational in both directions and has been a pivotal in providing additional highways capacity following the expansion and developments around the Innovation Zone. The expansion of the highway in this area has also made it possible to put the building blocks in place for the quality bus corridors linking the new Interchange development with the rest of the network when that development is completed.
- 2.21 Good progress is also being made on the **Skate Park** expansion development off Great Moor Street with the agreed development looking at further improving the existing facility whilst also ensuring improvements to the wider public realm in that area. The increased capacity and innovative design are also aimed at encouraging skateboarders and bike riders to use this facility as opposed to the wider town centre thus further enhancing the town centre shopping offer.

3.0 Departmental Strategic Priorities

- 3.1 The Department provides a wide range of front line operational and trading services which contribute to a number of the Council's priorities including highways and parking, waste and transport, green space and cleansing as well as a range of trading businesses. The Department is also home to a number of additional support services such as licencing and regulation, community safety and business development. An update on some of the major operational priorities and achievements for the Department are set out below:

Bolton Market Refurbishment

- 3.2 A well-managed and supported local market has the potential to encourage entrepreneurship and can be the nurturing ground for small businesses to start up and grow. They also provide employment opportunities for a wide range of local people as well as adding to the economic, social and cultural fabric of the town centre shopping offer.
- 3.3 The £4.5 million refurbishment scheme for Bolton Market is now nearing completion. The main contractor is leaving the site on 9th May 2014, with the programme looking likely to be delivered within budget. Initial feedback from the public via the Market's twitter page and initial consultation is encouraging with many positive comments on the layout, design & choice of produce within the new Lifestyle Hall. Feedback from the stallholders has been mixed and is mainly focussed on reduced footfall from the bus station, which is mainly attributed to the ongoing external improvement works. In response to these concerns the Department has put a number of measures in place in advance of the completion of the physical works to try and improve footfall which include increased advertising during 2014 and continued promotion of the loyalty card scheme.
- 3.4 In addition the completion of the surrounding public realm works remain on track and are due to be completed in July 2014, which will increase car parking spaces, install a coach and taxi drop off and pick up points. It does remain encouraging however that despite the current challenges the occupancy levels remain robust at an encouraging 96%. The Department aims to increase this to close to 100% by March 2015.

School Meals

- 3.5 School meals provide important health benefits and contribute to educational attainment they also play a valuable role in teaching healthy eating habits which can decrease health inequalities amongst the children who receive them. The current £1.25 a meal promotion being run by the council represents the lowest price in the UK which when combined with award winning menus and innovations such as Food Dudes has enabled the service to achieve a top position in our primary meal uptake in recent national benchmarking figures with Bolton performing at 19% above the national average take up figure.
- 3.6 The implementation of universal free School Meals in September will see the single biggest change in school meals provision since the 1940s. The Department is projecting that this will further increase our primary school meals uptake to 70%. The challenge for the service and the schools is significant with regard to capacity, operational and funding issues. The Council has allocated £709,000 from the 2014/15 capital programme to fund and facilitate the anticipated increase in demand. With this investment, the service is working closely with schools to deliver timely kitchen capital refurbishment schemes over the 6 week summer break, enabling a smooth transition into the new academic year.

Community Safety

- 3.7 An effective Community Safety partnership is essential in enabling local communities to feel safe and strong and free from crime and the fear of crime all of which directly supports the development of a more cohesive, confident and thriving community.
- 3.8 2013/14 was a largely successful year for the Be Safe Partnership with overall instances of recorded crime continuing to fall year on year and the gap between high crime and low crime areas continue to narrow. However, challenges still exist, particularly around further

reducing certain acquisitive crimes (non-domestic burglaries, robberies & vehicle crime), anti-social behaviour and secondary fires (grass fires and litter & domestic bin fires). An increased number of reporting levels around historic sexual offences has also continued to be observed although the partnership remains confident this is more linked to a number of high profile media and celebrity cases than any underlying trend with the expectation being that over time the reporting levels will return to a more normative level.

- 3.9 There is also a renewed specific focus on offender management through the IOM (integrated offender management) spotlight programme linked to low level acquisitive and street crimes (robbery, theft from vehicles and businesses and shed break ins.) There was a “spike” in ASB & deliberate fires between April & August 2013 linked to school holidays and the prolonged warm weather. This led to an increase in reported ASB & grass and waste bin fires meaning that Bolton was the second highest area within GM for this type of fire. In the final quarter of 2013/14, Bolton’s performance was more in line with the GM profile. Reported ASB had reduced massively from the summer spike, with a consequent reduction in the number of residents who say, when surveyed, that it is a problem (down from 5% to 3%).
- 3.10 In response to the issues highlighted above, the partnership has refocused their operational strategy in areas such as arson reduction through the Reduction Steering Group led by GM Fire & Rescue and anti-social behaviour management through the neighbourhood policing and other partners and are now more robustly enforced the ASB pathway alongside diversionary activities for young people in targeted “hot spot” localities.

Bereavement Services

- 3.11 The management of end of life care and bereavement support is one of the most emotively challenging services offered by the department. In February 2014, after a period of sensitively managed consultation, the Council agreed a package of measures aimed at modernising the service, to begin in April 2014.
- 3.12 The online genealogy scheme has seen an increase in uptake over the past year, resulting in a reduction in staff hours. The East Chapel in Overdale Crematorium has been refurbished and paths in the Crematorium grounds have been improved. The Department has also established a new cremated remains sanctum memorial area in the old lay-by area at Overdale. The extension at Heaton Cemetery is now fully operational and consultation with Bolton Council of Mosques on further works has also commenced at officer level with a view to building on site. In addition, the department has carried out extensive wall repairs at Farnworth Cemetery & Horwich (Ridgmont) Cemetery and extended customer parking & provided new water outlet off the parking area at Horwich Cemetery. Heaton Cemetery extension is now fully operational.

Highways

- 3.13 The fundamental purpose of a well-managed highways network is to enable sustainable economic and social activity, it enables people to become and remain economically active, to access services and to see friends and visit places; it allows businesses, suppliers and customers to come together and it is fundamental to ensuring Bolton achieves its longer term strategic priorities.
- 3.14 At a sub-regional level the service continues to play a key role in supporting and shaping GMs transport and economic aspirations and linking these into local need. Over the previous year the service has delivered a range of cycle schemes as part of the wider cycle city innovation as well as begun conversations about large scales transport improvements

aimed at supporting future development in the town such as Cutacre. The service is also heavily involved in a range of GM wide debates aimed at examining if further efficiency or service improvements can be delivered through great cross region collaborative working.

- 3.15 At a local level Investment into a Highway network which is fast deteriorating remains a real challenge for the Department, which has seen its Highways maintenance budget reduce from £11,942,637 in 2010/11 at the beginning of the austerity measures to £9,310,647 in 2014/15. This considerable reduction in investment has resulted in a more targeted approach to Highways maintenance, where priority is given to strategic routes in the borough because of their importance around supporting the wider economic agenda of the town. Whilst the approach adopted in conjunction to more effective working and procurement processes has enabled the service to slow the deterioration of the asset the strategy has been the cause of some tensions with the service continuing to work with Members, key user groups and the media to manage customer expectations.
- 3.16 As a direct result of the increasing levels of deterioration across Bolton's highway network there has been a 50% increase in the number of highways defects being recorded, either through the highway safety inspection process, or via customer complaints, rising from 15,426 in 2012/13 to 23,191 in 2013/14. This has had a knock on effect of increasing the number of highway related claims being submitted in terms of vehicular damage up by 16% and personal injury claims up by 14%.
- 3.17 In order to minimise the risk to Bolton Council the percentage of maintenance funding re-directed into proactive repairs (Urgent Repairs / potholes) has increased by 24%. This increase in reactive maintenance further impacts on the reducing highway maintenance funding, thus reduces our ability to deliver a more proactive targeted highway maintenance approach.
- 3.18 As part of the £6m two year Highways and Interchange Investment Programme, planning of the public realm project has commenced across the town centre, with a view to ensuring that schemes can be completed before the town centre events programme begins. At the moment, consideration is being given to the street furniture, trees and associated engineering requirements. The current plans indicate the work in the area around Hotel Street will be completed during the summer with the strip out of the charity canopy, two trees and a small section of street furniture along Newport Street being undertaken after the food and drink festival. The plan is then to strip out all the street furniture along Newport Street from January 2015 so that this area is ready for a new public realm design linking into the new interchange project. In addition to the main town centre schemes, the service is also delivering the work that will link the new interchange site to the market. Most of this has now been completed and is just waiting for the interchange build to be completed before the public realm can also be completed.

4.0 Supporting the Council to deliver its operational priorities

Managing the Department's Budget

- 4.1 Environmental Services adopted a financial strategy in 2009. This set out the broad principles around financial management for the department. Each year the strategy is refreshed to take into account the priorities and pressures facing the Department. For 2013/14 there were a number of priorities.
- 4.2 The Department was tasked with finding £1.795m of savings and efficiencies. 100% of this target was achieved.

- 4.3 A review of reserves has been undertaken, challenging the use of specific reserves. As part of this exercise a pot of money was identified to fund essential asset management schemes. There was a clear rationale around identifying schemes such as risk, Health and Safety, issues raised by independent advisors. At the end of the financial year 63% of the available asset management funding was spent. The balance will be spent in 2014/15.
- 4.4 Within Environmental Services are a number of trading accounts. A significant amount of work has been carried out in these areas to ensure they either balance their budget or make the budgeted return. For 2013/14 two areas did not balance their budget, Albert Halls and the Market Service. It was anticipated that the Market Service would have financial pressures due to the refurbishment project. A specific reserve was created for this purpose. In depth analysis of the Albert Halls financial position has been carried out. There are two main areas of financial pressure, the entertainments programme and Civic Catering. Civic catering is feeling the impact of the accommodation project.
- 4.5 To ensure that the Department is best placed to meet the financial pressures going forward it has repaid all its borrowing. This has taken a number of years. However a business case has been prepared, tested, externally validated that identified a scheme to replace all street lighting with energy efficient LED street lighting. The scheme is based on prudential borrowing. In 2013/14, a financial saving from this scheme has been realised.

Health & Safety

- 4.6 Good Health and Safety practices are not just about being socially responsible but they are also important in the wider financial sense. This is particularly true in the basket of services provided by Environmental Services, which by their very nature are front line operational services which carry with them a high risk threshold.
- 4.7 Although the Department has always been accurately aware of this risk over the last 12 months an increased focus has been placed on our health and safety practices including: -
- Internal review of the highways, waste, fleet and neighbourhood services health and safety practices;
 - An external review of the operation practices in our two depot facilities;
 - A review of training requirements across the Department with bespoke training programmes being delivered in areas of identified need;
 - A programme of senior management refresher training delivered to all senior managers in the department;
- 4.8 This has resulted in a 27.5% decrease in the number of accidents reported between 1st April 2013 and 31st March 2014.

Managing Sickness

- 4.9 Staff attendance within the Department decreased in quarter 2, but increased in quarters 3 & 4. Sickness increased from 2.98 days in quarter 2 to 3.78 days in quarter 3 with a further increase to 3.89 days in quarter 4, which brings the overall outturn this year to 13.82 days absence per FTE compared with 12.01 last year.

Average Days Sickness Per Person in 2013/14				
Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	2013/14
3.19 days per FTE	2.98 days per FTE	3.78 days per FTE	3.89 days per FTE	13.82 days per FTE

- 4.10 The increase has been largely seen in Neighbourhood and Regulatory Services with a number of staff absent with stress related issues. However attendance is being monitored closely by the management team. It is also worth noting that some staff have now left the service at the end of the financial year following voluntary redundancy approvals.
- 4.11 Throughout the year the Department has continued to experience issues with long term absence, the principal causes of which are stress / depression, muscular skeletal and neck/back problems. At present there are 30 ongoing long term absence cases most of which are within the front line operational services within neighbourhoods plus waste, cleaning, catering services. Throughout the year the Department has continued to undertake significant management action on attendance:
- 294 informal counselling meeting have been held
 - There has been an increase in referrals to OHU
 - 6 warnings were issued compared with 2 the year before and
 - 3 dismissals have been made and 2 ill health retirements approved. In the previous year we did not terminate any employment on the grounds of health.
- 4.12 All current cases, both long and short term are being managed in line with this framework.

Departmental Complaints

- 4.13 The number of complaints for the department has significantly decreased by 72% since 2010, despite the austerity measures. In 2010/11, the Department received 1,584 complaints and in 2013/14 it received 430. The Departmental Management Team has been successful in introducing a variety of measures to address the volume of complaints. These include:
- identifying staff within each service to lead on complaints
 - delivering annual staff training on Council complaints procedures
 - recognising complaints as opportunities for growth
 - finding solutions and implementing areas of learning
 - understanding what potential problems the customer may have
 - managing customer expectations
- 4.14 During quarter 4, 87 formal complaints were received by the department, 81 (93%) of which were responded to within standard (14 calendar days). 9 of these progressed to appeal during the quarter and there were a further 2 appeal cases on-going from the previous quarter.

Division & Service Area	Number of complaints received	Number answered in standard	Number progressed to appeal
Community Services			
Bereavement Services	3	3	1
Markets	2	1	0
Highways and Business Development			
Highways and Engineering Delivery	12	10	0
Highways and Engineering Development	2	2	1
Parking Services	5	5	0
Neighbourhood and Regulatory Services			
Neighbourhood Services	15	12	3
Regulatory Services	5	5	2
Waste and Fleet Management			
Fleet Management	1	1	0
Refuse	41	41	2
No Division Identified			
No Service Area Identified	1	1	0
	87	81	9

4.15 Approximately half (47%) of the complaints received in quarter 4 (41 complaints) were attributed to Waste and Recycling.

20 of these related to policy, which it was found had been correctly applied in each case:

- 9 related to the policy to charge for replacement grey bins
- 10 related to the policy for missed collections
- 1 related to the policy not to take side waste

4.16 Of the remainder, 7 of the complaints were upheld (i.e.: the investigating officer found in favour of the customer) and 6 were partially upheld.

4.17 Learning from these included ensuring that Customer Services Officers in Access Bolton were providing accurate information to customers, the provision of clearer information to crews and updates required to the Bartec system.

4.18 The majority of the remaining complaints were attributed to Neighbourhood and Regulatory Services (23%), and Highways and Business Development (22%), respectively.

4.19 8 of the 15 complaints received by Neighbourhood Services related to dissatisfaction with the level of service provided; most of these were not upheld as the work had been carried out according to the approved schedule. However, on 3 occasions the complaints were partially upheld; this was due to incorrect information being provided by Access Bolton, land within Corporate Property's remit not having been cleaned as stated and risk assessments.

4.20 2 further complaints were upheld, one resulting in a change to the business rules provided to Access Bolton and one resulting in disciplinary action.

- 4.21 Regulatory Services received 5 complaints, 1 of which was partially upheld and resulted in a change to the wording of correspondence when refusing a premises license. The remainder related to policy, or to Government legislation, which was found to have been correctly applied in each instance.
- 4.22 The complaints received by Highways and Business Development related in the main to dissatisfaction with the condition of the highway and the outcome of inspections, and challenges to Penalty Charge Notices. 3 complaints were upheld, and 3 more were partially upheld, resulting a refresher for staff on customer care and resurfacing work being scheduled; one complaint was referred to NSL as it related to a member of their staff.
- 4.23 A small number of complaints were received by Community Services, relating to Bereavement Services and Markets, 1 of which was upheld and a customer care reminder issued to staff.
- 4.24 In total, 9 of the complaints received in quarter 4 progressed to appeal during the period; in 7 of these cases the decision made in the original complaint investigation was upheld and 2 cases are still on-going due to their complexity.

Freedom of Information Requests

- 4.25 The Department received 125 freedom of information requests during quarter 4. 96 of these were for the department alone and 29 were cross cutting across the Council. This is an increase of 43 requests since quarter 1. During quarter 4, there were two services in particular which received the highest number of requests. These were Regulatory Services who received 33 requests and Highways and Engineering Services who received 19 requests. 95% of requests received were answered on time. Of the requests which were overdue, 3 were logged incorrectly and therefore did not show on our list of requests, this has since been resolved, 1 was a delayed response from another service within the Council and 1 has intentionally not been responded to as yet because it is with the Borough Solicitor for a legal opinion.
- 4.26 A significant amount of officer time is spent responding to requests. It is estimated that each request takes around 4.3 hours to complete meaning that, in total 1,793 hours within the Department were spent fulfilling information requests so far this year. The growing number and complexity of requests is recognised as an area of concern and the department meets regularly with the Chief Executive's Department to share learning and devise methods aimed at reducing the number of requests.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 The Environmental Services Department remains on track to deliver its strategic and operational priorities for the Council. Highlights of the report include:
- Reduced domestic (grey bin) waste by 16%
 - Increased recycling by 6.8% over the past 2 years
 - Completed the Bolton Town Centre Southern Link Road
 - Initiated the Greenspace/Parks Investment Programme
 - Continue to deliver the Queens Park Re-development Programme

- Refurbished the Lifestyle Hall and Outdoor Market at Bolton Market
- Upgraded Overdale Crematorium East and West Chapels
- Completed the Heaton Cemetery Extension
- Increased the School Meals take up to 66%
- Made £1.795m of in year savings and efficiencies

5.2 While the difficult economic climate has continued to present challenges to the Department and in particular around our public interface, continued re-engineering of service provision and challenging of procurement approaches has enabled us to stabilise and mitigate the full impact. We will however continue to closely monitor this situation against the backdrop of emerging government policy and guidance.

6. Recommendations

6.1 The Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the performance update set out in this report.