

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF NEIGHBOURHOODS AND COMMUNITIES SELECT
COMMITTEE
HELD ON THURSDAY, 17 DECEMBER 2015
IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 7.00 - 9.45 PM**

Members Present:	M Sartin (Chairman), H Brady (Vice-Chairman), N Avey, L Hughes, R Jennings, S Neville and B Surtees
Other members present:	K Angold-Stephens, W Breare-Hall, R Morgan, G Waller, C Whitbread, J M Whitehouse and D Wixley
Apologies for Absence:	R Gadsby, L Mead and A Patel
Officers Present	D Macnab (Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Neighbourhoods), J Barnard (Office Manager), T Carne (Public Relations and Marketing Officer), K Durrani (Assistant Director (Technical Services)), D Marsh (Waste and Recycling Manager), A Hendry (Senior Democratic Services Officer) and S Mitchell (PR Website Editor)

35. WEBCAST ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chairman reminded everyone present that the meeting would be broadcast live to the Internet, and that the Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of its meetings.

36. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

It was noted that there were no substitute members for this meeting.

37. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made pursuant to the Member's Code of Conduct.

38. REVIEW OF WASTE AND RECYCLING COLLECTION ARRANGEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed the members of the public, officers, councillors and invited guests to this special meeting of the Neighbourhoods and Communities Select Committee. The meeting was to review the new domestic waste and recycling contract and following the switch to the four day collection schedule and the introduction of new vehicles and technology. This resulted in an unacceptably high level of missed collections. The Council's Environment Portfolio Holder noting that this was an important service, formally requested that the Overview and Scrutiny undertake a review on his behalf and that the outcome to be formally reported back to the Cabinet. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that this request should be determined by the Neighbourhoods and Communities Select Committee. Given this, a single, one off meeting of the Select Committee be dedicated to this single subject.

In addition to the Environment Portfolio Holder and the Council's lead officers on Waste and Recycling, senior representatives from Biffa municipal were present; they

were: Mr Dickson, Biffa's Commercial Director, Mr Smith, the contractor supervisor, Mr Crook the Operations Director and Mr Edwards their Managing Director. Also in attendance was Mr Attrill, the Consultant from White Young and Green, who supported the Council through the procurement process. They were invited to give evidence and answer questions.

Mr Macnab, the Committee's lead officer and the Director of Neighbourhoods outlined the procedure for the night and the history behind the awarding of the Council's waste contract. He noted that due to uncertain variables the Council had elected for competitive dialogue. The council was unsure as to whether it wished to keep Grounds Maintenance Services and/or Fleet Management in-house or whether it wished to include these services within the contract for Waste Collection and Street Cleansing Services. The Council also wished to consider alternative means of collecting waste, including the use of wheeled bins for dry-recyclables plus the option of including glass in the co-mingled mix. They also wished to discuss ICT solutions which would give better management information so as to better inform customers. Finally it was necessary for the contractor to provide their own depot, as the Council would be redeveloping Langston Road. The variables meant that using the traditional procurement procedure was inappropriate as the Council could not, at the outset, identify the precise requirements of the contract. The Competitive Dialogue procedure had given good results on other authorities waste procurements exercises.

It was noted that the 4 day collection model was offered by several bidders. It was a model used by a number of authorities to (a) improve productivity and thereby reduce costs; and (b) to avoid 'catch up' or 'slipped day' collections following Bank Holidays and in particular, because the new depots were outside or at the edge of the District's boundary, the longer working day associated with the four-day week allows for the longer travelling times at the start and end of each day. Allowing for the four day collection reduced collection costs to the Council.

Mr Macnab noted that the most advantageous tender in terms of price and quality was submitted by Biffa Municipal Ltd. who were appointed by the Council in May 2014.

Mr Macnab advised that the meeting would be broken down into three parts as indicated on the report attached to the agenda. The first part would look at the initial procurement process, while the second part would consider the mobilisation and the first six months of the contract. The third part would concentrate on the problems encountered. The fourth part indicated on the report, conclusions and recommendations, was a bit too ambitious to tackle tonight and reach conclusions. Officers would take away all the information gained this evening and write it up into a formal report to go to the select committee's next meeting and from there to the parent Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting and onwards from there back to the Cabinet.

Part one – the Procurement Process

The Committee went on to review the procurement process. Len Attrill, the consultant from White Young and Green, who supported the council through the procurement process gave a brief description of why the council chose to go for Competitive Dialogue, the procurement process, any key considerations and service improvements identified. Mr Attrill noted that this process enabled the bidders to take into consideration:

- the grounds maintenance service;

- establish synergies between grounds maintenance and street cleansing services;
- to market test the in-house service for fleet management and maintenance;
- to seek a solution in relation to depot provision;
- an innovative approach to the provision of trade waste collection and recycling;
- achieve a minimum average recycling rate in excess of 60%;
- the provision of up to date ICT; and
- where affordable to endeavour to go for innovation and added value.

The council had expressed a wish to move from their current depot and explore alternative type of fleet contract and would also examine the contract term, which should be longer than the former 7 years.

They wanted to explore if grounds maintenance or if the contract for arboriculture services was to be included. The Council wanted, through this contract to help Small or Medium Size Enterprise (SME's) in the district by having their trade waste collected and to see how this could work.

They were also looking at how recycling, composting etc. could be improved; the procurement process was wholly designed to see how contractors would tackle this.

The procurement process allowed for 3 levels of dialogue and 3 stages for tender consideration which was felt was entirely necessary.

It was asked if during the process, any consideration was given to any problems that could occur and how to deal with them. Mr Attrill said it was set out how to handle such things in a "Model of Performance Management". There was always the possibility that things could go wrong so this mechanism was there to deal with that.

In the end the council was able to maintain the quality of the service, vacate the depot and achieved a service lower in cost than the previous contractor; in addition to the service improvement identified.

Councillor Jennings commented that given all the other things going on, was the saving of money on this contract from the previous contract too good to be true, or was there something that was specific to EFDC? Mr Attrill said that he did not think it was entirely unique to Epping Forest; other councils were procuring roughly the same services. There were a number of reasons why costs were lower than they used to be, such as the cost of fuel which was lower than it has been for nine years, interest rates were low and low wage inflation for a couple of years. Things that have not helped was that the value of recyclables had fallen, part of the world collapse in commodity prices. Generally the trend was where councils that had decided to radically change services had seen significant cost increases.

Mr Attrill noted that a 4 day collection period was not innovative; other authorities have been operating this system for years. This usually happened in rural areas when the population was a long way from the waste depot and this came about for EFDC as they were considering moving their depot. Most of the contenders bidding for the contract had depots outside the District boundary and options for a 4 day week were put on the table as this had operated successfully for other authorities. This also avoided the 'catch up' or 'slip day' collections following bank holidays, although there may be some need for catch up over the Christmas and Easter holidays. However it was noted that the introduction of a four day collection model

would incur costs to the Council. These additional costs were estimated at £50,000 and with the benefit of hindsight perhaps the figure should have been higher. This figure was then added to the contract and £5,000 was added per year over a 10 year period.

Councillor Neville noted that when other Councils moved to a 4 day week, did they start with a pilot scheme? Mr Attrill replied that he knew of no Council that ran a pilot scheme. That did not mean that none were run, just that he did not know of any. The Chairman asked the Biffa officers if they knew of any pilot schemes, they replied that they did not.

Councillor Surtees commented that he was not critical of the whole system just interested in the journeys to the depot. The depot was quite away from Epping; were there other journeys that had to be undertaken to take waste material to other sites or was it just to and from the depot. Mr Attrill said it depended entirely on the waste stream. Some of the waste streams go to a transfer station in Harlow. The key point was that we have identified the waste disposal facilities for residual, garden and food waste. Those were fixed. Where the contractor had their depots was their choice, but we did scrutinise that at the evaluation. But at looking at the distances involved and the travelling time we felt they were entirely achievable. Councillor Surtees asked if the variables he had identified were taken into account and was there some wiggle room if more stuff had to go to one place rather than another. Mr Attrill agreed that there was, the waste industry was highly competitive and simply making decisions on how finely tuned you made your model would be what makes these lower cost tenders. But the more fine tuned you make them the greater the risk that it would not bed down as it should. This was partly why we took the view of having the £50,000 buffer, and with hindsight we may have undercooked that.

The Chairman asked the Portfolio Holder if he had any comments on the adoption of the 4 day collections. Councillor Breare-Hall the Environment Portfolio Holder said that he supported the rational behind the process and confirmed that all the options were considered. Ultimately it came down to a cost/benefit analysis and a judgement call to what was better for our residents.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse asked what was the difference between the number of staff and vehicles required for the 4 day system to the 5 day system. Mr Attrill replied that he could not answer that question without doing some research on the different bids made. Councillor Whitehouse asked him to go for the tender adopted rather than the various options considered. Mr Attrill replied that you had to remember that each bidder was tailoring their services on the basis of where their depot would be. One contractor had theirs next to the Harlow Transfer Station and for them a 4 day week did not add much so they chose the 5 day option. But they were not the winner of the tender. There was no general principal that the 4 day week delivers better results everywhere. There were a lot of variables and this would establish a model for the most advantageous tender. Councillor Whitehouse then asked what was the difference between a 4 day and a 5 day service under Biffa. A Biffa representative said that there was a saving in overtime and fuel.

In summarising the final tender evaluation and award, Mr Macnab noted that the procurement exercise had started in March 2013. 8 bidders started and were reduced to 4 who proceeded to the final stage of the Competitive Dialogue. There were two bids for each 4 and 5 day tenders, with two days of tender dialogue set aside for each bidder. The final tender process went for a 50/50 split (quality and price). There was also a member interview that accounted for 10% of the score.

Once completed the Council considered the bids and Biffa was considered the most advantageous bid (giving a saving of £416k per year on the previous contract) and Cabinet took the decision in May 2014, which was also considered by full council.

Councillor Surtees asked that with hind sight was there anything that could have been done differently? Mr Attrill replied that the procurement process was seen to be thorough; the only thing they would have done differently would have been to ask for more than the £50k. The council had a new depot, a new fleet and recycling compliant with the waste framework directive. Councillor Surtees said that whatever problems that happened after, was not due to the procurement process. Mr Attrill agreed that it was not the fault of that process.

The Chairman asked if the officers from Biffa thought that there was anything we could have done differently. The officers from Biffa concurred with Mr Attrill that the procurement process was well handled and ran to time. Mr Attrill added that the three companies that lost the contract were also very happy with the process they went through.

The Chairman noted that as part of the member interview panel their 10% did not seem to have any influence on the final outcome. Mr Macnab said that this was not by design. In the end the 10% did not have any effect on the outcome, but may have done on a closer fought exercise. Mr Attrill added that it was mathematically possible for the member's marks to make a difference in a tighter competition.

The Portfolio Holder, Councillor Will Breare-Hall noted that he was ably assisted by a cross party advisory group, giving member involvement throughout the process.

Part two – Mobilisation and the first 6 months of Contract

The meeting then went on to consider the second part of the review, the mobilisation and the first 6 months of the contract.

Mr Durrani, the Assistant Director (Technical Services) advised the meeting that the decision to award the contract was made by the Cabinet in May 2014. After that there was a handover period from Sita to Biffa. The first thing was to get Biffa set up at the Langston Road depot; TUPE staff transfer over to Biffa; transfer assets like vehicles and the stock of wheelie bins and other containers etc. This was carried out successfully and Biffa operated the 5 day collection service from 4 November 2014. Mr Marsh, the Waste and Recycling Manager added that the council acted as a buffer between the outgoing and incoming contractors.

Councillor Jennings asked what was the reaction of the staff to the change from a 5 day to a 4 day collection. Mr Durrani said that they knew it would be a 4 day service. Biffa was preparing the staff for this change and also the need to move to a new depot and the change of vehicles. A member of Biffa added that it was fair to say that a lot of questions came out of this opportunity to work one day less. There were a few cases of concern, but generally they got on with it. Councillor Jennings was pleased that they held one to ones with the staff concerned as it would have impacted everyone. Biffa did a good job. The Chairman noted that the TUPE had also raised some concerns.

Councillor Surtees noted that the transfer went well, but he had heard stories that some residents were dissatisfied with the service, what sort of percentage would that be? A representative from Biffa said that only 1 or 2 residents had expressed any concerns.

Councillor Whitehouse said it had been mentioned how critical it was to get the geography of the services right. Were collection points missed at first, and how was this list maintained and how accurate was it. Mr Durrani said that the first six months of the Biffa contract was run as if they were Sita, doing everything that Sita did for the last seven years. The crews had paper based list, the change to the new IT system came in under the 4 day system. For the first six months nothing changed; only when they went to the 4 day service did it change.

Mr Marsh noted that it was a smooth transfer, the use of the Sita schedule meant no initial change and a seamless transition; the crews knew the routes, although there were some problems with some narrow access systems.

Members of Biffa noted that they had inherited the Sita fleet, purchased from this Council, but they could not run them for the whole 10 year period of the contract. They used this fleet at their Stratford upon Avon contract, which was shorter, and at EFDC tendered for a new fleet of vehicles. The drivers took time to get familiar with the operation of new vehicles. There was also change in the depot location to add to the mix. The changes caused an unsettling period, but they were planning for the next 9½ years.

Councillor Neville asked Biffa if they had considered the size of the new vehicles, as it was difficult for the bigger vehicles to get around our small rural roads. Why did they choose bigger vehicles and not smaller ones and, how much experience did they have in the software in other situations as it seemed it had glitches. He was told that the new vehicles were no longer or wider than the other vehicles, it may be that they put larger vehicles on other routes. Councillor Surtees asked if the correct number of vehicles were obtained at first. He was told that they had the right amount of vehicles but they did lay on extra vehicles and crews to help them settle in.

Mr Durrani noted that preparation for the commencement of the four day collection service started soon after the award of the contract. An Innovation Forum consisting of Biffa and Council officers was formed by the Waste Partnership Board to oversee the changes to a 4 day service. There were a number of key changes – the purchase and introduction of a completely new fleet of vehicles and the movement of the workforce from the operational base from the Langston Road depot to the Biffa depot in Waltham Cross. The Partnership Board also looked at a number of other issues such as any problems with the staff and TUPE and the change of the depot location. A lot of work was put in by our IT department in conjunction with Biffa on their new system such as putting in information onto their live feed systems etc. Mr Marsh added that they had carried out projects like this before and had used their experience to facilitate this move.

The Chairman noted that the original date for this move was originally scheduled to be earlier; would there have been adequate time for this earlier date? Mr Durrani said that in terms of the information available at the time, it seemed that it would have been the right time carry out this change. But we were not as ready as we thought we were.

Councillor Surtees asked how robust were their contingency arrangements to handle the situation that arose? Biffa said that they had their contingency plan that covered their IT and vehicles etc. and on how they should react. They had put in a lot of hard work and good will to recover their position.

Councillor Whitehouse noted that the transfer from a paper database to an IT one had its problems. Was this picked up at the transfer stage? Mr Durrani said that they believed that everything was covered on the IT systems. Ms Barnard, the Admin and Customer Services Manager, noted that all the information held on the Council's database was transferred over to the Biffa system. Mr Attrill noted that there were also some informal arrangements between householders and crews that no one else would know about and may not have been passed on.

Mr Durrani noted that every household received a letter about the change over, with a calendar showing the collection dates, information was also put on our website with a search tool to enable householders to check the date and type of waste and recycling collection, and this proved very successful. We have had criticism for not having enough publicity, but the problem was not that but that collections were missed.

Councillor Surtees noted the informative letter had been sent out, but what about people with learning disabilities who may have encountered problems, could an easier way be found to communicate. Mr Macnab said that was a learning point to take on board and if they did something like this again they would run pilot schemes etc.

The Portfolio Holder, Councillor Breare-Hall added that with hindsight the letters were not as clear as they could have been. But more broadly, we had done a good job communicating by using the website and other means.

Part three – Revised Arrangements, Problems, Operational Issues & Remedial Actions

Mr Durrani noted that the 4 day collection consisted of Tuesday to Friday collections, a one pass collection for dry recycling and glass and new ICT and Customer relationship Management systems for the management of customer contact and also the new collections for small electrical equipment, textiles and batteries. A lot of things have come together and a lot of things have changed and this was where things could go wrong. We needed to check these services now and to explore how we could improve things.

Mr Marsh commented that with change, inevitably problems cropped up, especially with big changes in the schedules. At the start we had feedback that the collections were not happening as effectively as they should have been. Some houses were missed and this was coupled with a lack of knowledge of some of the areas being covered. Staff did not necessarily know the location of some of the bins as there were some unusual places they were being kept. This ended in missed collections and staff had to do some relearning of the 'ins' and 'outs' of an area. Some rural areas had consistent problems at this time.

The Chairman said that this went back to the question asked by Councillor Whitehouse about information being passed over. A Biffa officer noted that the information being passed over was OK but they lacked the local knowledge of the old crew members.

Ms Barnard said that the volume of calls were about missed collections and repeated missed collections. At its peak the contact centre was getting about 750 calls a day and they handled this by drafting in staff from other areas to answer calls and emails. An additional problem was that officers had to learn new ways of processing the new systems, at the start the lines of communication were not that clear, but this had

changed now. For some numbers on missed collections; in May 2015 we took 3616 reports on missed collections and 291 missed assisted collections. In June it dropped slightly to 2999 missed collections and 363 missed assisted collections. In October 2015 it had dropped down to 636 missed collections and 86 missed assisted collections and in November it was 468 missed collections and 36 missed assisted collections. In context the number of missed collections overall was less than 1%.

Councillor Angold-Stephens wanted to know how much the switchover to the 4 day collection period was dependant on the software, was that a cause of the problem. An officer from Biffa replied that the change over was not reliant on the IT systems.

Councillor Avey noted that Biffa had the ability to pick up small electrical items and textiles, how did this work, how has it been addressed and was it successful? Mr Durrani said that initially it had caused delays but it has since got better. Initially a lot had been put out and Biffa could not handle that quantity and needed to have extra collections. Councillor Brady said that she had tried putting batteries and textiles out but they had not been collected and she had to put in a complaint.

The Chairman noted that assisted collections had a lot of problems. Mr Marsh noted that this was due partly to not having the information of where they stored their bins. All assisted collections need to be logged to aid the management tool. Biffa noted that a lot of effort had been put in to address this as quickly as they could. Partnership working with officers and IT systems helped.

Councillor Waller commented that most organisations depended on the tacit knowledge of workforce, not recorded anywhere. Were attempts made to assign teams to areas that they knew? An officer from Biffa said they were where they could do so, but they did organise it in a different way once they were familiar with the routes.

Councillor Surtees noted the number of missed collections and asked if officers had comparative figures for what it was like before the contract was entered into. Could you give us any information to say what it was like in November and what it was like in May? Ms Barnard said she did not have the exact figures but in April 2015 we were taking 2788 calls and in May 2014 we took 2735 calls. So very similar to where we were before.

Councillor Whitehouse said that he tried to use the internet to report any problems, but it seemed that the internet was not as automated as he thought it would be. Do the reports go directly into the Biffa system? Ms Barnard replied that any forms completed on the internet went directly to her team to be manually inputted into the Biffa database. They were looking to improve this process.

Councillor Surtees said that as they were looking at the problems that the residents had experienced. We have heard about missed bin collections but there were other things such as kerbs being damaged by freighters and vehicles being damaged by refuse freighters and I wondered if that was something that needed to be taken into account when assessing the size of the problem being faced. Also, it seems that not everybody was reporting every incident, so there must be an element of under reporting. So the figures given would not be the whole picture. Mr Marsh agreed that there was an element of under reporting happening.

The Chairman noted that the refuse vehicles had 360 degree cameras mounted on them. Were they in operation and being used to pick up any problems? She was told that they were and were being used to solve some reported problems and to show

that they had not hit someone's car. The Chairman then asked if there were instances where it showed that it did hit a car. She was told that yes, it had.

The Chairman asked if the attending member of the public would like to put her question now.

The member of the public said that she had received her recycling calendar for May to October for which she thanked the officers. But, right from the beginning her general waste was collected but her recycling waste wasn't. On numerous occasions during May and July when she reported it she were told that Biffa would be informed of this. She has since found out that that her bin was in the wrong place. Up until May her recycling was always collected correctly, but now they seemed just to be going to the other block of flats. She did not report this in September and October, but by the end of November it had become a really big problem and she sent an email reporting it. An officer came out and said it was because they had contaminated the bin with black waste sacks. But living in flats she had never received the clear sacks. She generally collected hers from the local council offices. If they had been delivered to the flats then probably people would not have used the black sacks. But, she thought that they had not seen the bins as the glass had not been collected and that had not been contaminated. When they did come they took away the black sacks and put the warning stickers on the bins to say no black sacks. Since then unfortunately some black sacks did go in and were taken out and the bins photographed by the Biffa staff to show it had been emptied. Unfortunately, these sacks were just dumped outside the bin store, where they will stay.

Officers from Biffa apologised for this and said they would take her relevant details, investigate and rectify it.

The three written questions sent in before the meeting were then considered. Mr Macnab gave an undertaking to write to them individually giving them an answer.

The first question along with the third were considered together as they were similar as they were both about the returning of the emptied bins to their original location. Biffa officers said that they should have been returned to the point from where they were collected from and that should have been monitored by our camera system. If they have the address then we can check up on this. Councillor Waller noted that in rural areas bins have been left in the middle of the driveway and people have to stop their car on the road to move them; which is dangerous on rural roads. The Chairman added that almost all councillors have experienced this problem.

The second question asked if the separation of waste requirements had been relaxed. Officers from Biffa noted that they did not set the policy so there was no change. But there were occasion where they would be catching up on missed collections and would take everything regardless.

The Chairman noted that there had been recycling sacks piled up in one place, were operators encouraged to do this? She was told that that should not be happening; they were currently working through these issues. Mr Marsh added that they should not be there for more than an hour. But this was also a national problem.

Councillor Brady said that she believed that the size of the bins had got smaller, was this the Council's idea or Biffa's. She was told that the overall size had not changed but the design had, it just looked smaller.

Officers from Biffa noted that that the new ways of working required change. They should have been using local crews; and once they started operating they were not achieving what they should. They then had to run three 'mop-up' crews to deal with the problems that arose. A combination of various issues caused a perfect storm. They also lost some employees and with them local knowledge. The new vehicles were different and needed some time for familiarisation; they were also slower which impacted on the length of the rounds. They were also relying on the new IT system which had teething problems and the longer working days meant that they got caught up in traffic as well. They noted that they did not have enough resources and introduced four new rounds and also had to bring in new people.

They had lost 20% of their workforce and had to train up the new replacements, and they were just coming to grips with this now. They were now delivering the service that was expected. There were more improvements to come to bring the service up to a much higher level.

Mr Macnab noted that the scale of the problem was not appreciated at first by Biffa. Once the full scale of the problem was realised it was accepted that the only way was to work in partnership. There were weekly meetings with top management which produced a recovery plan. They also engaged another contractor for a weekend to clear up the backlog. EFDC and Biffa worked together to turn this around.

Councillor Surtees noted that over the summer some of the crews looked very tired working their new 10 hour shift instead of 8 hours. Has there been any increase in accidents, Health and Safety matters or a rise in the sickness levels. He was told that Health and Safety was high on their list. However, sometimes they had a number of agency and new staff not in a settled state, and they could take months to settle down. In the short term they would experience more accidents with new staff.

Councillor Surtees then asked if they could provide regular figures to this Committee on absenteeism, sickness etc.? Mr Macnab said that they had a Partnership Board that looked at the management information; they would look at this and share the information with members.

Mr Durrani in summation of the recent events and their current prospects noted that EFDC and Biffa had learnt a lot over the past months and have made a significant improvement in the service provided. The challenge was to continue to improve standards, achieve the recycling target and improve the work on the cleansing side; especially as the crews were now gaining experience and knowledge of our roads.

Officers from Biffa commented that they had employed more resources than they initially thought they would, but were now getting back to their tendered model, by addressing the challenges they faced. They had a problem with the street vehicles they used for street cleansing, which were not fit for purpose, but their new vehicles would bring this up to standard.

Councillor Neville noted that street cleansing consisted not just of the small vehicles but of people going out litter picking. How many missed areas had been reported? Mr Marsh replied that he did not have those statistics with him. He agreed that they had taken their eye off the ball for street cleansing as they were concentrating on the collection problems, but they were now getting to grips with it.

Councillor Surtees said that he was appreciative of all that had been done so far. He wanted to know how long before all freighters were as stated in the contract and we would no longer need agency staff; and would they have need of more vehicles?

Officers from Biffa said that they would not give a time scale but were working as quickly as possible to normalise things. As for freighters they were looking to normalise this and were taking a long term view of this contract and were looking to build up that trust and confidence with the residence. They were working in partnership with EFDC to develop their services.

Councillor Whitehouse asked if they still used the extra staff. He was told that nowadays they did not use extra mop-up crews, just the normal crews to put things right so that they could learn the problems on their routes.

Councillor Brady commented that they had made tremendous improvements over the last seven months and thanked them for that. However, with Christmas coming was it all under control? She was assured that it was and they were prepared for it and foresaw no problems.

Councillor Surtees asked what he should say to his residents when they asked why their recyclables had not been collected. Biffa officers said that at the start there had been some confusion with the workforce and who collected what, also there was more recyclables than they had anticipated. Now, if the cage was full, the crews would call the supervisor to arrange for their collection. They hardly got any missed collections now.

The Chairman asked what the future prospects for our recycling figures were. Mr Attrill said that this was a national problem. A plastic bottle of the same size weighed less now than it did some years ago, that same went for glass bottles. Less paper was recycled as we as a society used less paper. The percentages and kilos would drop nationally because of this. But, they were starting to see new set of indicators coming through.

The Chairman asked the Biffa representatives if they were happy to attend a meeting of the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Select Committee in a few months time to update them on this matter. They agreed that they be happy to attend.

The Chairman noted that the next meeting of the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Select Committee would receive an interim report in January about tonight's meeting and a fuller report would go to the February Overview and Scrutiny Committee and onward to a future Cabinet meeting.

She thanked everyone present, the staff, Mr Attrill, the Biffa representatives and members of the public for participating in this interesting and informative meeting.