

Community Services Committee – 17th March 2022**Agenda Item 4 – Questions submitted under Standing Order 30****1. Question from Councillor O’Driscoll**

Residents have expressed concern at some taxi drivers driving in an unsafe manner on Tandridge roads. I was out lately and I witnessed a Tandridge licensed taxi driver driving incredibly recklessly through Kenley and Whyteleafe, with them driving through a red temporary traffic light without stopping and going well above the speed limit.

As a Council, the message from licensing drivers that drive recklessly is that the Council condones it.

Residents should not tolerate dangerous driving from our taxi drivers in our District when vulnerable members of our community rely on taxi drivers to get them home safely. What steps can this Council take to ensure that our taxi drivers are safe drivers and is there material available to help our taxi drivers with continual development?

Response from the Executive Head of Communities:

We have a good community of taxi drivers in Tandridge who have struggled during recent times due to a fall in demand for their business, especially fewer airport runs and regular school run contracts.

This incident which Cllr O Driscoll highlights is very rare. I would advise that reckless driving by any Licensed Hackney Carriage or Private Hire Driver is certainly not condoned by the Council. However, we do need to be made aware when these instances occur. There is a good reporting function on our website.

All applicants for either licence are subjected to a Driving Assessment that they must complete prior to being issued with their licence.

Once they become licensed drivers, they are expected to drive and behave in an appropriate manner at all times. When instances of reckless and/or dangerous driving occur they need to be reported to the Licensing Department for any action to be taken against the offending drivers. So, if we are not made aware of these issues we cannot take any further action against any individual driver. Details such as the Registration Number and/or the Hackney Carriage or Private Hire Plate Number should be provided as we will then be able to follow-up the report and call the driver in and put the allegation towards him/her.

For the traffic violations stated in the Councillor’s question, these would be a matter for the Police to pursue as the Council has no authority to deal with traffic offences such as these. If further action is taken by the Police then a review of the licence issued to the driver by the Council can occur.

A note will be included within the regular update email to all our licensed drivers reminding them of their responsibilities in relation to their driving standards and behaviour and the possible repercussions should they be found to be offending.

2. Questions from Councillor Crane

Despite taking many positives from the Community Services Quarter3 Performance Report, I am concerned over one aspect of the report which is clearly lagging behind other areas.

I refer to that area which deals directly with the cleaning of roads, footpaths and public open spaces which come under the responsibility of TDC (CS4, Appendix A). The cleaning performance index for these areas seems to have been in steady decline since June 2021. Not surprisingly, this decline is now starting to reflect itself in complaints made to Councillors both directly and on social media. The only comment offered in the report to explain this decline is “the continuation of staff absence”. The use of the word “absence” concerns me. Please can I receive a more detailed explanation of this?

I also think there is potential for TDC to communicate more regularly and effectively with residents over the role they themselves can play in assisting the Council to effect an improvement. I refer specifically to issues such as sweeping or blowing leaves and other garden debris into kerbside gutters or sometimes just off of their property. This can lead to drains becoming blocked and in extreme cases, contribute toward flooding.

Please can Councillors be issued with a scheduled programme of litter collecting and street cleaning for those areas they represent such that they can assist in getting the message out to residents which may in turn assist operatives in matters such as less vehicles blocking their routes?

Response from the Executive Head of Communities:

I must commend the streets team for all their hard work and commitment to provide a clean and safe environment for the residents of Tandridge District Council. Considering the area we cover I feel complaints are minimal and complaints we do receive, we try to address quickly. The drop in performance is only 2% over the quarters from April 2021.

In 2020 two members of staff were off and have subsequently left TDC employment on medical grounds. We haven't filled those positions and the work was distributed amongst the remaining teams without a change in scheduling.

Absence does play a part on this small team whether it be sickness or annual leave and to try and resolve issues we are now in the process of rescheduling and re-routing schedules as part of our service review. The eight weekly schedules are difficult to achieve and we are looking to schedule the work over an extra four weeks. This was discussed at the setting of the 2022/23 budget. In addition, we are changing the methodology and spreadsheets regarding the way we report street cleaning KPIs to give a more comprehensive balance of the work that will see all areas are checked fairly over a period of time. Once all this preparation work is completed it will be explained to Councillors in more detail.

On your second point, we have a standard letter we put through letterboxes regarding members of the public who are seen sweeping and blowing leaf fall off their properties onto the highway, which we will be adding to our webpages for next autumn.

We ask residents not to clear any part of their property of leaves by sweeping or blowing them into the street. The leaves will build up in the gutter and are likely to block drains, the leaves will disguise the edge of the footpath and road and so may cause trips or falls or damage to vehicles. They also compress to create a slippery surface.

To deliberately blow and therefore deposit leaf matter or debris onto the highway is an offence – an offender risks prosecution and possibly a civil action for damages should an accident occur due to their actions. Prosecution would be a matter for police but we will support in every single way we can.

We are unable to alter the cleaning schedule to deal with accumulation of leaves created in this way and a road would not be visited until the next scheduled visit, so it is important residents comply.

We have taken advantage of the Welcome Back Funding and funded additional activities to help keep our district clean and tidy. We have carried out extra cleaning and purchase supplies for litter angels who have been busy picking up litter in the District. We have ordered new bins for Hurst Green and Smallfield. We have organised the removal of Graffiti in Oakley Road and Waller Lane. We have been doing as much as we can and take advantage of any funding that we can.

Councillors can request a copy of the current schedules for those areas they represent please contact me for a copy. We put up signage a week prior to cleansing on roads we deem heavy with parked vehicles. Some owners take notice, but the clear majority just ignore the signs making mechanical sweeping very difficult and in turn the teams must sweep by hand making it very time-consuming. This can have an effect on the rest of a day's schedule.

3. Question from Councillor O'Driscoll

Residents in Westway and wider Caterham on the Hill have been in touch about the condition of the Town End Recreation Ground playground. The trampoline and big bucket swing have been broken for several weeks and the playground needs some TLC. Similar concerns have been raised about the playground at Whyteleafe Recreation Ground.

There are also concerns in other areas, such as Dormansland, where the gate into the play area is broken, often allowing dogs in around young children.

Will the Council take steps to fix the playground equipment at Town End and Whyteleafe and address the gate defect in Dormansland? And can the playground equipment in the rest of Tandridge be inspected to search for potential defects that could cause injury or harm?

Response from the Executive Head of Communities:

Playgrounds are regularly inspected to ensure their safety. An external contractor carries out weekly checks on all playgrounds and a different, independent, contractor carries out an annual formal review of all sites. In addition, ad hoc visits are made by our Officers.

We are aware of the specific issues highlighted by Councillor O'Driscoll, all of which are on our repair programme. In most cases we are waiting for spare parts before the equipment can be fixed. The trampoline in Town End has had a number of problems and so we are looking to replace it with another piece of equipment.

A playground capital replacement programme is included in the Community Services budget. We are currently tendering for the replacement of 4 different sites across the district and plan to go out to tender for the replacement or improvement of up to another 6 more sites later in the year. There will be consultation processes in each case and advice passed to residents on the detailed timings.

Supplementary question from Councillor O'Driscoll:

Please could we have more detail circulated to Members of the Committee about where the sights that are being tendered for are?

Response from the Executive Head of Communities:

Yes, that will be passed on separately.