

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the **Scrutiny Sub-Committee for Looking After the Environment** held at the County Hall, Durham on **Monday 17 December 2007** at **10.00 a.m.**

COUNCILLOR Tennant in the Chair

Members:

Councillors Armstrong, R Carr, Douthwaite, N Foster, Gray, Holroyd, Knox, Stradling and Wright.

Co-opted:

D Easton and M Jones

Other Members:

Councillor Pendlebury

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Young

A1 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2007 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

With reference to Minute Number A5 Waste Strategy, confirmation was sought on whether the Waste Strategy had been submitted to Council for approval and whether a decision had been made on the LAWDC. The Sub Committee were informed that the Strategy was expected to be submitted to Council for approval in February 2008. It was confirmed that there was no requirement to make a decision on the LAWDC.

The Head of Overview and Scrutiny informed the Sub Committee that following the last meeting a letter had been sent to the portfolio holder Councillor Cox seeking comments on the timing issues and process. A reply had been received explaining the timing and other issues.

A2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

A3 Items from Co-opted Members

There were no items from Co-opted Members.

A4 2nd Quarter Performance 2007/08

The Sub Committee considered a report of the Head of Corporate Policy providing information on performance for the 2nd quarter of 2007/08 relevant to Looking After the Environment (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Head of Corporate Policy explained that of the 19 indicators being reported this quarter, 10 had improved since the end of year 2006/07. Six indicators were better than target by more than 10% and six were better than target by up to 10%. Seven indicators are worse than target performance. It is predicted that 15 out of 22 indicators will achieve target by the end of the year.

In relation to BV82a, Household Waste Recycled, performance is better than the target achieving 17.31% against the target of 17%. In relation to BV82b Household Waste Composted, performance has improved slightly at the end of the second quarter. The indicator is not on target as a result of unseasonable weather. 14.7% of household waste was composted in the first six months of the year and the year end target is expected to be met.

In relation to BV82d Waste Landfilled, performance is not on target but is expected to meet the target by the year end. In relation to BV84a Kgs of Household Waste Collected per Head, performance is better than target and the County Council are 4th best within its benchmarking group.

Concern was expressed that the digester was unlikely to help the County Council to achieve its target. It was suggested that energy from waste may be a better solution. In relation to the new waste contract it was explained that the County Council was unable to identify a solution and that the market and the successful contractor would be required to offer the technological solutions to help the County Council meets its future targets. The role of the digester will last the length of the current contract and help the Council to meet its LATS targets. In terms of carbon footprint energy from waste might not be the most effective solution and that there may be other technological solutions.

The Head of Overview and Scrutiny informed the Sub Committee that it was hoped that arrangements could be made for a target setting workshop to allow members the opportunity to contribute to target setting.

Resolved:

That the report be noted and that further quarterly reports be submitted.

A5 NERC and Habitat Regulations

The Sub Committee received a presentation from Terry Coult, Ecologist, Environment Service providing an update on the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (for copy see file).

Guidance on how to deliver the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act was published by DEFRA in May 2007. A local authority that is actively implementing the Act will be able to show that biodiversity, conservation and enhancement is appropriately integrated throughout all departmental policies and activities and that all staff, managers and elected members understand how biodiversity issues relate to their own decisions and actions. A

local authority will need to show that it provides sustained support to local biodiversity initiatives, such as Local Biodiversity Action Plans, Biological Records Centres and Local Site Systems. They will need to demonstrate that biodiversity, in particular species and habitats of principle importance, is properly protected and enhanced in line with statutory nature conservation obligations and that it has access to professional ecological expertise and up to date biodiversity information. They will also need to report on progress towards national and local biodiversity targets.

Retaining biodiversity is a measure of sustainability. The County Council will need to decide how policies and strategies can be developed and implemented to have regard to biodiversity. This will require a systematic approach which seeks to avoid negative effects on biodiversity in the first place, then seeks to reduce or mitigate impacts, then to incorporate opportunities for biodiversity enhancement into public policy wherever possible.

The County Council is a large land owner. Therefore management of all Durham County Council land for providing habitats for wildlife and reducing environmental impacts on biodiversity will be necessary. Biodiversity conservation measures need to have regard to both designated sites and priority species and to wider species and habitats. This will include a wide variety of sites that are important including designated sites and nature reserves, green infrastructure, buildings, school grounds, wetland and coastal sites, highways and rights of way, farms and tenanted land.

National planning policy on biodiversity conservation is the primary reference point for those developing or appraising development plans or projects. Public bodies should engage with local authorities prior to submitting a planning application in order to avoid delays. Effective monitoring is the key to ensuring measures put in place to conserve biodiversity are successful.

Public authorities have an important role in promoting understanding and awareness of biodiversity, which underpins a wide range of biodiversity conservation activities. Having regard to the conservation of biodiversity involves examining the scope to incorporate biodiversity messages into a wide variety of interactions with land managers, businesses, other organisations and the general public. Relevant activities include the operation of the education system, provision of advisory services, promotion of community engagement in biodiversity and raising awareness of biodiversity through communications with the public.

DEFRA will review the duty in 2009 and it is expected that targets will be set.

It was suggested that the Sub Committee should write to the Corporate Director, Environment and the appropriate Cabinet Portfolio holder to ask how the Environment Strategy reflects the new biodiversity duty and what measures are being put in place to meet the new biodiversity target.

Resolved:

1. That the presentation be noted.
2. That the Sub Committee write to the Corporate Director, Environment and the appropriate Cabinet Portfolio holder to ask how the Environment

Strategy reflects the new biodiversity duty and what measures are being put in place to meet the new biodiversity target.

A6 Climate Change

The Sub Committee considered a presentation from Steve Bhowmick, Business Manager and Maggie Bosanquet, Sustainability Section Manager of the Design, Landscape and Environment Unit providing an update on the issues around climate change.

The resources being used are too great for the planet to be able to feed and sustain the population. In the UK it is estimated that we are using the resources which are the equivalent of two and half planets. We need to live within the means of the planet.

The key issues around climate change are:

- Adaptation – we need to be prepared for inevitable adverse effects of climate change on our infrastructure and communities
- Mitigation – mitigate the effects of climate change by reducing our carbon footprint. There is a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 60% by 2050.
- Economic diversification – there will be economic opportunities to adapt technology.

There have been international events (Kyoto and Bali) as well as European, National and Local legislation which are driving change. Legislation going through Parliament (the Climate Change Bill) will set legally binding targets from 2008. This will require a 20% reduction below 1990 levels by 2010 and a 60% reduction by 2050. The Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change is a UN body who have made it clear that we should not exceed a 2 degree tipping point increase on current temperatures which could have uncontrollable effects. The LGA have established a Climate Change Committee to provide advice to local government on how to respond.

All corporate bodies will be set a carbon ceiling. Carbon trading is to commence in 2009 and could cost the County Council up to £400,000.

New national performance indicators will come into operation in 2008 and these will measure the Council's performance in carbon management. In addition the Regional Spatial Strategy will include strong climate policy drivers requiring increased energy efficiency from our buildings. From 2016 all new homes being built will be required to be carbon neutral.

The County Council has achieved a great deal in setting out its commitment to reduce its impact on climate change. It has committed to achieve a 10% reduction of CO₂ on a 2003 baseline. The County Council has set out its commitment in a range of plans and policies.

The County Council has undertaken energy performance audits on all of its buildings and needs to respond as two thirds of the buildings are below category C. This will require investment from the capital budget. In addition

further examination of the extensive street lighting stock will need to be examined if the Council is to reduce its impact.

It was suggested that it would be helpful to support investment in new posts to be able to undertake the requirements of the new legislation. Presentations will be made to each Service Management Team to explain the legislative changes. It was also proposed that a Corporate Carbon Champions Group be established to share ideas and good practice. Progress will continue to be monitored.

A number of key actions need to be put in place and these include:

- Complete Carbon Management Plan to deliver CO2 savings across all DCC areas of responsibility
- Challenge and audit progress
- Develop Carbon Accounting across key work streams;
- BSF, Waste Contract, Transport, Street lighting, Buildings Action Plan & Annual Work Programmes
- Complete County Durham Climate Change Plan to raise performance among partners
- Carbon Offsetting, Corridors & Fuel Poverty

Members of the Sub Committee suggested that it would be helpful to establish a working group to examine some of these issues. In addition it was proposed that work should be undertaken ahead of the establishment of the new authority to ensure that climate change is established as a priority for the new Council.

Resolved:

That the presentation be noted.