

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL
ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in the **Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham** on **Monday 28 March 2022** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor B Coult (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors J Elmer, E Adam, P Atkinson, J Charlton, L Fenwick, G Hutchinson, R Manchester, B Kellett (for Councillor D Nicholls), I McLean, R Manchester, L Mavin (for Councillor L Brown), R Potts, J Purvis, J Quinn and S Townsend

Co-opted Members:

Mr T Bolton and Mrs P Holding

Also Present:

Members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee –
Councillor B Moist and Co-opted Member, Mrs R Morris

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors L Brown, C Martin, D Nicholls and T Stubbs.

2 Substitute Members

Councillors B Kellett and L Mavin were in attendance for Councillors D Nicholls and L Brown respectively.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the Special meeting held on 13 December 2021, the meeting of 18 January 2022 and the Special meeting held on 14 February 2022 were confirmed as correct records and signed by the Chair.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Any items from Co-opted Members or Interested parties

There were no declarations of interest.

6 Leisure Transformation

The Committee considered a report and presentation of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which set out the progress of the Leisure Transformation programme (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism attended the meeting to present the report and deliver the presentation. Providing background information, the Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism referred to reports previously considered by Cabinet which outlined the purpose of the plan and the proposals for the new build locations. The Committee noted that a briefing report had been circulated to the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee in March 2021 which detailed the development of the leisure programme within the context of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In October 2021, a further report was circulated setting out the plans for consultation relating to the first leisure conversation phase. The consultation, which took place between October 2021 and November 2021, captured the feedback from the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism referred to the expected benefits of the plan including the added social value and an increased level of physical activity with an emphasis on specific groups. In addition, the programme will support the council's overall plans and strategies including the climate emergency response plan and the carbon reduction target.

The Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism then highlighted plans for cohort 1 which covers Abbey, Peterlee, Spennymoor and Teesdale leisure centres, with the plans at Spennymoor including the relocation of the library into the leisure centre. Proposed refurbishments planned for cohort 2, covering the Louisa Centre, Meadowfield, Newton Aycliffe and the Riverside, include an increased family offer including a Clip and Climb facility and a café at the Louisa Centre. Wellbeing suites planned for the Louisa Centre and Meadowfield will be designed to encourage those who are new to exercise or are recovering from injury. Newton Aycliffe, a relatively new centre, is planned to receive general maintenance improvements to the sauna, steam room and toilet facilities. The Committee heard that the service is working closely with partners including the football association and Park View Academy to develop the Riverside location into a county-wide sporting hub-site.

Plans include the installation of two new 3G pitches, improvements to the athletics track and changes aimed at encouraging increased day-time use.

The Committee also received information on the proposals for refurbishments at Consett, Freemans Quay, Shildon and Wolsingham, which include the reinstatement of the swimming pool at Consett Leisure Centre.

The Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism explained that the roadmap for delivery was subject to external influences and it was therefore a best estimate, with more exact timeframes for individual projects to be finalised later in the design process. In terms of consultation and engagement, the Committee noted the three stage process of consultation aimed to ensure comprehensive engagement. Explaining the activities to be delivered within the consultation and conversation stages, the Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism outlined the engagement process with the public, elected members, sports bodies, and key specialist groups including Durham County Council's Disabilities Forum, young people and older people.

The Committee was informed that the first cohort of conversations received a good response and feedback supported the projects to proceed as planned, with minor points to be considered within the design work. During the first conversation, social distancing measures remained in place and it was confirmed that the reach of the digital engagement had been good. However, it is hoped that going forward, there will be increased workshop attendance in the future.

The Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism explained that the next steps will include the second cohort of leisure conversation and plans for the delivery of subsequent consultation stages. Designs for all schemes will be progressed and an evaluation of the budget position will take place. A further report will be presented to Cabinet setting out the options for Seaham Leisure Centre.

The Chair thanked the officer for the presentation and invited questions and comments.

Councillor Townsend referred to concerns raised by residents of Shildon that the scale of the work required to refurbish the leisure centre at Shildon may lead to a decision to close the centre and she asked whether a timescale was available for the plans for Woodhouse Close Leisure Centre. The Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism responded that the position at Shildon will be clarified on completion of the site survey and an update will be provided on this together with an update in relation to the timeline for Woodhouse Close Leisure Centre to be provided as further information becomes available.

Councillor Moist spoke of the planned refurbishment of the Riverside and commented that whilst the residents of Chester-le-Street were aware of the conversations that had taken place with Park View Academy and the football association, they had raised concerns regarding the lack of conversation with the community and views had been expressed that the plans include little community use. Residents had also commented that the tennis courts had been neglected and the athletics track, if it was to remain as six-lanes rather than eight-lanes, would be unsuitable to host competitions.

Councillor Moist requested that public consultation be carried out and further consideration be given to the plans for the tennis courts and athletics track. The Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism replied that the consultation in respect of the Riverside was imminent and will include consultation with elected members and the public. The plan to retain the athletics track as a six-lane track had been considered alongside the regional facilities and a six-lane track is considered by the athletics club as being sufficient for the level of racing which will take place at the Riverside. The plan for the tennis courts will be considered in phase two of the refurbishment, provided more funding is available and this will form part of the sports hub site, with an emphasis on improving community health and participation.

Councillor Moist expressed concerned at the lack of progress with the plans which were initially proposed in 2019 and he questioned whether the initial budget was achievable. The Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism spoke of the high level of cost confidence as the council had undertaken a highly comprehensive cost plan and applied contingency and risk to the schemes. In addition, she explained that the plans include a basic design for all facilities, however, the exact nature of each of the facilities will be subject to review as plans progress. The Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism acknowledged timescales were difficult to determine at this stage, with external factors such as supply chain and sub-contractor availability impacting on timescales.

Councillor Atkinson gave the view that smaller towns are often overlooked and added that those centres which had been transferred and are managed by communities such as the leisure centre at Ferryhill would very much welcome additional provision from Durham County Council. In response, the Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism stressed that provision in smaller communities is a vital part of the draft Physical Activity Strategic Delivery Framework ie the next report, which aims to be inclusive and takes a holistic approach.

In response to a question from Councillor Purvis as to whether further detail was available on the plans for the leisure centre at Seaham, the Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism informed the Committee that Cabinet will receive a report in the near future which will provide updated information on the Seaham site locations and the options available.

Mrs P Holding asked if the proposed refurbishment work at Abbey Leisure Centre would lead to a temporary closure of the facilities whilst the work is carried out. The Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism confirmed that closure periods will be minimised during refurbishment works.

Councillor Fenwick referred to the initiative to provide free swimming for children and asked whether there were any plans to extend this to other physical activities. The Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism stated that the free swimming initiative would continue, however, there were no plans, at this stage, to extend this to other activities.

Councillor Adam commented that the report outlined the council's prudent financial approach to the project and he expressed his concern with regard to the ongoing increasing costs. Councillor Adam also pointed out the further additional cost considerations of delivering a path to Net Zero and he questioned whether there was a risk that there will be no scope to fund the Net Zero improvements, should costs continue to increase. He commented that he hoped that the forthcoming Cabinet report will include information on the timescales for the delivery of the project and how the increasing costs will be funded. The Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism referred to public sector grants available which provided a level of confidence with regard to the cost of the work leading to Net Zero and she added that cost planning had been ongoing and the forthcoming Cabinet report will provide more detailed analysis of the budget.

Due to time constraints, Councillor Quinn agreed to submit a question by email.

Resolved:

- a) That the report be noted.
- b) That a further update on the progress of the programme is provided at a future meeting of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

7 Draft Physical Activity Strategic Delivery Framework

The Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism presented a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth on the draft Physical Activity Strategic Delivery Framework (PASDF) for Durham County Council's Culture Sport and Tourism Service (for copy of report see file of minutes).

In presenting the report, the Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism referred to the health outcomes following the COVID-19 pandemic which had underlined the important role for a physical activity strategy to enable the people of County Durham to live long, healthy and independent lives.

The Committee heard that the strategy is aligned to the public health led physical activity strategy and aims to work with internal and external partners to take a whole life approach to physical activity. She continued that input from the Committee was welcomed.

Mrs R Morris said it was pleasing to see that the strategy supports the wider council policies, however, she raised concerns that walkers, runners and cyclists are exposed to traffic related air pollution and she questioned how the different strategies would work together. The Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism explained that the work will link with highways and public rights of way teams and that whilst it was difficult to ensure strategies are aligned and joined up work is ongoing to address this.

Mr T Bolton referred to those living in rural areas who are not served well by public transport and rely on cars to access sports facilities and he asked if there were plans in place to improve transport links and encourage more use of public transport and cycle routes.

Mr T Bolton continued by explaining that as a member of the Local Access Forum which advises the council on recreation, he was aware of many small areas of land owned by the council which have public access. He suggested that, if the council dedicated those areas of land under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, this would improve public access and he requested that this be taken into consideration. The Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism responded that public transport issues were being considered and she confirmed that access to footpaths, cycle shelters and public transport links were included in plans for the new build leisure centres. In addition, the strategy makes provision for physical activity closer to home and promotes all activities which contribute to a healthy life, including encouraging movement and activity in general, as well as sports and exercise within formal settings such as leisure centres.

Councillor Elmer expressed his support for the strategy which, he highlighted, is very much a cross-cutting council strategy with functions such as planning, rights of way, the provision of safe active transport and the prevention of anti-social behaviour all contributing to the health and wellbeing of residents in County Durham. He questioned whether one department can exert influence on all the services that are required to be engaged and contribute to such a strategy. The Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism replied that the service was leading the changes through the Leisure Transformation programme and will strive to engage with all services to promote the successful delivery of the strategy, which had been designed to link into the wider council policies including Net Zero, the climate emergency response plan and the low carbon strategy.

Councillor Moist referred to small local sports clubs, observing they are often reluctant to apply for funding from other organisations and asked if this could be taken into consideration.

The Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism commented that these issues were being built into the framework in order that the strategy maximises the benefits for all. In response to a question from Councillor Moist regarding Chester-le-Street Cross Fit lease, the Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism confirmed that the service was aware of the issue.

Resolved:

- a) That the report be noted.
- b) That a further update report on the development of the framework is provided at a future meeting of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

8 Neighbourhoods and Climate Change - Quarter 3: Forecast of Revenue and Capital Outturn 2021/22

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided details of the forecast outturn budget for Neighbourhoods and Climate Change, highlighting major variances in comparison with the budget based on the position to the end of the third quarter of 2021/22 (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Presenting the report, the Finance Manager for Neighbourhoods and Climate Change reported a forecast cash limit underspend of £1.006 million against the revised budget of £109.255 million, with the outturn taking account of £5.6 million of COVID-19 related costs treated as outside of the cash limit. These include waste disposal costs, increased agency fees relating to staff absences and increased costs related to social distancing.

The Finance Manager highlighted the forecast cash limit reserve position was £1.9 million which will provide the service with some flexibility to deal with unbudgeted expenditure in the future. The outturn also took account of a contribution to and from reserves of £407,000 which will be used to fund future initiatives. The Committee noted the revised capital budget of £45.405 million, with expenditure during the first nine months amounting to £29.636 million. Key areas of spend during the period included highways and bridges and environmental and crematoria schemes.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

9 Quarter Three 2021/22, Performance Management Report

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which presented an overview of progress, in and to the end of quarter three, (October to December 2021), towards achieving the key outcomes of the Council's corporate performance framework and highlighted key messages to inform strategic priorities and work programmes (for copy of report see file of minutes).

The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager highlighted three key areas of performance within the quarter, namely tourism and the visitor economy, waste and highways.

Referring to tourism and the visitor economy, the Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager explained the key performance indicators used for benchmarking, ie the number of visitors, the number of jobs in the visitor economy and the amount of revenue generated from the visitor economy had all reduced compared with previous years. The most recent survey by Visit County Durham reported an increase in enquiries and bookings, however future bookings remain below average. It is hoped this will improve as confidence grows following the pandemic. The Committee heard that recruitment and supply chain issues were being reported and some businesses were suffering from a lack of demand. One of the highlights during the quarter was the Lumiere event and a detailed analysis of its impact will be available for the year end performance report. The Committee noted that unforeseen issues related to the listed building had led to delays with the History Centre which will extend the completion date of October 2022.

Referring to performance relating to waste, it was noted that the volume of waste had increased, with the pandemic and the increase in housing stock being contributing factors. In addition, a smaller percentage of waste was being recycled and a larger percentage of contaminated recycling was reported. Members were previously advised of the costs of the penalties for the removal of contamination which was £188,000 for the ten months up to January 2022. The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager explained that, if the situation remained constant, this would equate to approximately £226,000 to the end of the current financial year. Contamination continues to be tackled through enforcement action. The Committee noted that fly tipping had increased on pre-COVID levels however the council's rate of incidents of fly tipping was low compared with statistical neighbours. There was however a larger proportion of incidents which had required enforcement action.

Referring to highways, the Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager informed the Committee that County Durham has a high percentage of unclassified roads requiring maintenance compared regionally and nationally. In February, the Council agreed to supplement the Local Transport Plan government grant with additional capital investment in the unclassified road network to bring this element of the network up to national average standards.

The Chair thanked the officer for the report and invited questions and comments.

Responding to a question from Councillor Potts regarding the cost of separating contaminated waste and the possibility of recycling that waste, the Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager undertook to make enquiries with the waste team to confirm that waste is recycled when appropriate and he emphasised the importance of tackling the problem of contaminated waste at source, through education and enforcement.

Councillor Quinn thanked officers for the information relating to costs associated with contaminated recycling and he asked whether there had been a response to his question raised at the last meeting as to the level of contamination required for a full load of recycling to be classed as contaminated. The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager responded that he would refer Councillor Quinn's question to the service for a response to be supplied.

Mr T Bolton referred to the council's Find and Fix programme and asked whether the programme could be extended, for example to Parish Councils. The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager confirmed that the programme applied to council owned property however the service may wish to consider this opportunity to generate further income and he agreed to pass Mr Bolton's comments to the service.

Councillor Elmer referred to the increasing cost of living and asked the Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager for his view as to how this was likely to impact on the tourism economy.

The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager replied that this may be beneficial, for example if people choose staycations instead of foreign holidays. He also highlighted the potential benefits to the tourism economy should Durham's City of Culture Bid be successful.

Council Elmer then spoke of the council's strategy of economic growth and referred to the costs associated with it, including the increased costs relating to housing, waste and roads. He raised a question as to whether council tax revenue generated would cover the additional costs of the growth strategy and suggested that the aim should be for economic stability rather than economic growth. The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager respondent that it was incumbent upon the council to take these factors into account, for example through measures to reduce vehicular traffic on highways. The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager spoke of the importance of tackling the reasons for the increase in the amount of waste per household, which is a national issue.

Councillor Charlton asked whether contamination occurs in garden waste bins and referring to the green waste collected and it being sent to the Joint Stocks composting site, she asked what the compost is used for. The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager clarified that no contamination of green waste had been identified in the performance indicators. He explained that compost is increasing in quality and the service is currently exploring whether compost can be recycled back to householders who are part of the garden waste collection service. Councillor Potts praised the Clean and Green service and commented that recycled compost had been used at Hamsterley.

Councillor Adam referred to paragraph 4 of the Performance Management report which noted the unforeseen works delay to the plans for the new History Centre and asked when further information will be available on the additional costs. The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager responded that further information will be provided in due course.

Mrs P Holding raised concerns at the quantity of packaging being used by companies and whilst she acknowledged that some packaging may be recycled there is often confusion as to which plastics are recyclable. The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager replied that in the future, it is expected that the Waste and Resources Strategy will impose standardisation and that all authorities will adopt a uniform approach.

The Chair referred to the proposal for stickers to be placed on recycling bins to clarify what can and cannot be placed in rubbish and recycling bins and reminded members to email comments to Victoria Burrell, Waste Strategy Team Manager by 1 April.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.