

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 1A, County Hall, Durham on **Tuesday 20 January 2015 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor B Graham (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors J Armstrong, E Bell, J Clare, J Clark, J Gray, G Holland, K Hopper, I Jewell, P May, P Stradling, L Taylor and S Zair

Co-opted Members:

Mr T Bolton

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E Adam, D Bell, D Freeman, D Hall and Mrs P Spurrell.

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members in attendance.

3 Minutes

The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager advised that an email had been received on behalf of two members of the public who had attended the meeting held on the 25 November 2014 on Underground Coal Gasification. It was agreed that a copy of the minutes from that meeting would be forwarded to the Easington Action Group with the Committee's approval. The email referred to a presentation by J Gluyas, Chair of Geoenergy and Carbon Capture and Storage at Durham University and J McKewon, Spatial Policy Team, and it was claimed that the presentation was biased towards underground coal gasification. In response, the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager confirmed that when seeking an expert on the subject, there had been consideration given to the independence of the advice and as a result, two of the candidates which had been short-listed had been cancelled due to having links with companies who were progressing underground coal gasification. As Chair of Geoenergy and Carbon Capture and Storage at Durham University, Mr Gluyas had admitted that he was in favour of any form of renewable energy which would reduce the reliance on sources produced by other countries, however his professional opinion was not biased towards a particular type of energy and he had discussed all types of renewable energy throughout his presentation.

The minutes of the meetings held on 10th, 17th and 25th November 2014 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Any items from Co-opted Members or interested parties

There were no items from Co-opted Members or interested parties.

6 Media Relations - Updates on Press Coverage

The Committee received a presentation from the Overview and Scrutiny Officer on recent press articles relating to the remit of Environment and Sustainable Communities;

New Report on butterflies published – a book was published which described the status, distribution, habitats and future outlook for butterflies that were regularly found in the region. Members had attended a site visit which was populated by some species of butterfly due to its environment.

Crackdown on County's Environmental Crimes – over 200 people had received fixed penalty notices during October and November 2014 for littering, dog fouling and failing to respond to requests to tidy gardens or yards.

Wear harnessed as huge water turbine kicks into gear – this article related to the Archimedes Screw which was located at the Freemans Reach and which Members had observed at a recent site visit in November.

Work to stop flooding in Chester le Street means town centre restrictions – the second phase of work carried out by Northumbrian Water would see new sewer pipes built between Front Street and Riverside Park, however the work would impact on traffic on Front Street, which was a key bus route.

7 Environment Improvement Campaigns/Projects

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhood Services which provided an update on the development and implementation of environmental improvement campaigns and projects.

Members received a presentation from the Head of Direct Services which provided them with information regarding campaigns or projects which had either been planned or had taken place in the previous 12 months, such as;

Dog Fouling – Green Dog Walkers Scheme, Responsible Dog Ownership Campaign (February 2014), Mini Dog Fouling Campaigns

Open Space Involvement – Big Spring Clean, It's Your Neighbourhood, Northumbria In Bloom, Green Flag

School Activities – Education Sessions, Junior Neighbourhood Watch, Safety Carousels, Tidy Ted Awards (December 2014).

The Chairman referred to the extensive amount of work being carried out to tackle the problems and in reference to fly-tipping, confirmed that Spennymoor AAP would be

investing in CCTV equipment, which would hopefully deter incidents or result in prosecutions. Councillor Armstrong requested that all AAP's were sent information regarding this scheme as some were still unaware. The Head of Direct Services confirmed that Town and Parish Councils were also being invited to invest in this scheme and in addition, there were plans to release the video footage of people fly-tipping to raise awareness and serve as a deterrent in order to reduce the number of incidents.

In response to a question from Mr T Bolton in relation to publicising prosecutions as a result of fly-tipping, the Head of Direct Services confirmed that all successful prosecutions were shared by a press release and on social media, however Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN's) were not a criminal conviction and could therefore not be disclosed. In addition, Crimestoppers had chosen to publicise fly-tipping for the first time and social media would be used to show advertisements, targeting people of a certain age range who lived in hotspot areas and were therefore most likely to commit an offence, or have information relating to offences being committed.

In reference to the power of social media, the Neighbourhood Protection Manager confirmed that a photograph found in some rubbish which had been dumped was shared on social media and within half an hour, information had been received to identify the two people in it.

With regards to the CCTV operations, Councillor Bell queried the installation of the cameras and whether RIPA was applied. The Head of Direct Services confirmed that the cameras were well-hidden however were sometimes discovered - footage sometimes showed people pulling up in vehicles and then looking around for cameras. Wherever cameras were placed, signage was also erected to ensure that the public were aware of the CCTV and therefore as the surveillance was not covert, there was no need for the use of RIPA powers.

In addition, Mr Bolton commented that award schemes for youngsters were commendable, however he referred to a scheme which was ran by the former Sedgefield Borough Council, pre LGR, which gave youngsters the opportunity to earn free sessions in leisure centres. The Head of Direct Services agreed that this suggestion could be considered as it could be an incentive for more young people to take part in the scheme.

In response to a query from Councillor Stradling regarding the recycling centre at Horden, the Head of Direct Services confirmed that although Horden was for household waste only, the vehicle in the film was not a van, pickup, or minibus and would therefore not have been turned away from the site. Further still, commercial waste could be disposed of nearby in Thornley, however, services continued to be reviewed to see if there was an opportunity to dispose of other types of waste. With regards to opening hours, it was highlighted that a review of the service had found that certain sites were not required as frequently on Fridays and were therefore closed, however this would continue to be reviewed.

Councillor Hopper referred to dog fouling which was particularly bad in her area and queried the working hours of wardens and the probability of people taking their dogs for a walk outside of those working hours. The Neighbourhood Protection Manager confirmed that all wardens were expected to start work at 7am one morning per week and there were also late shifts finishing at 10pm on weekends, dealing with anti-social behaviour. The wardens relied on intelligence to identify hotspot areas, however sometimes residents were

not confident in coming forward. He confirmed that should Councillor Hopper report the details of the area, they would send somebody there outside of normal working hours, to investigate.

Councillor May queried the cost of waste disposal for traders and queried whether the Council were distributing their campaign leaflets in trader warehouses in order to warn people of the consequences of fly-tipping. The Head of Direct Services confirmed that Corporate Communications had plans to promote the cards and a wide range of premises had been selected for distribution. The Neighbourhood Protection Manager confirmed that in addition, anyone who used the services at building control was supplied with a card.

Councillor Clark referred to the Community Group, Horden in Bloom, which was serviced entirely by volunteers. She expressed her disappointment that the Group had never received any support from the Council for the various campaigns it had been involved in. The Head of Direct Services replied that he was aware of the Group, apologised on behalf of the service and offered the Group support in the future, should it be required.

In response to a further query from Councillor Clark, the Head of Direct Services confirmed that Waste Recycling Centre's carried out automatic clean-up operations when waste was dumped outside of the site and incidents were reported.

Councillor Clare queried the agreement with Parish and Town Councils who funded CCTV as he was under the impression that the cameras may not be used for the areas which had funded them and this was a possible reason for them not to sign up to the scheme. The Head of Direct Services confirmed that cameras were located in areas of identified need and not dependent on the source of funding for the camera and there were occasions when they would be moved between communities. While a CCTV camera which had been funded by a Parish or Town Council could be moved to another area, the opposite could also arise whereby multiple cameras from other Parish or Town Councils could be brought into an area when needs were identified.

Councillor Clare also queried why Primary School children were targeted with regards to the various campaigns as older children may be more likely to commit these types of offences. The Head of Direct Services confirmed that Primary Schools were more accessible, however there were programmes which were also tailored for teenagers.

In response to a comment from Councillor Jewell regarding the possible use of signage to dissuade dog walkers from walking on football pitches or playgrounds, the Head of Direct Services replied that this was a consideration. The Neighbourhood Protection Manager referred to the former Newcastle United Football Club player, Olivier Bernard, who had been involved in publicising the campaign last year after becoming the new owner of Durham City Football Club, which had helped the public to recognise the extent of the problem.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted and the Committee would receive a further update in six months.

The Committee considered a report of the Neighbourhood Services Management Team which set out details of the forecast outturn as at Quarter 2 for 2014/15 and highlighted variances against revenue and capital budgets for Neighbourhood Services and the Finance Manager, Neighbourhoods, gave a presentation (for copies see file of minutes).

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

9 Quarter 2 2014/2015 Performance Management Report

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Management Team which presented progress against the Councils corporate basket of performance indicators for the Altogether Greener theme and report other significant performance issues for the second quarter of 2014/15 covering the period July to September 2014 (for copies see file of minutes).

The Customer Relations, Policy & Performance Manager gave a presentation (for copy see file of minutes) which gave an update of the performance indicators relating to;

- Achievements
- Performance Challenges
- Carbon Emissions
- Domestic Energy Efficiency
- Fuel Poverty
- Fuel Poverty Actions
- Natural Environment
- Reuse, Recycling and Composting
- Fly-tipping incidents/variance between Q1 and Q2/Task Force
- Focus on Highways and current major schemes
- Environment Awards 2014
- Altogether Greener Performance Indicators 2015/16

Councillor Holland was concerned that only 143 referrals had been received by Warm Up North, yet many people in County Durham were unable to afford to heat their homes. The Customer Relations, Policy & Performance Manager responded that Warm Up North had recently been liaising with Public Health to ensure that Community Health Workers and housing providers were referring vulnerable people to the scheme.

Councillor Holland was interested in the number of people who were applying and benefiting from the scheme and the Customer Relations, Policy & Performance Manager suggested that the Senior Housing Development & Delivery Officer could provide more information at a future meeting, should it be required.

Councillor May referred to the discussions which took place before any reduction in waste services were agreed and in particular when Members were assured that there would not be an increase in fly-tipping due to the proposals. In response, the Head of Direct Services confirmed that there were a number of factors which could not be identified as a result of the reduction in services and there had been an increase nationally. As previously mentioned, all incidents were reported, however the system recorded incidents of

household rubbish as fly-tipping, therefore it had been identified that the figures were being misrepresented. There was now a system for reporting incidents which was more robust and gave an accurate representation of the number, location, and type of incidents.

In response to a question from Councillor Stradling, the Head of Direct Services reiterated that there was no evidence that there had been a direct impact from the reduction in services.

Councillor Armstrong requested that Members had information regarding the volume of waste which was processed in County Durham.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

10 Review of the Council Plan and Service Plans

The Committee considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive which updated Members with progress on the development of the Altogether Greener section of the Council Plan 2015-18.

Councillor Clare referred to the proposed performance indicator set for 2015/16 and identified that some of the indicators were not appropriate when considering the success of the most recent performance indicators and therefore could possibly not be set high enough, or set too high. The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager confirmed that the targets set out in the table were current targets which the council were operating to and had not been modified following the recent performance indicators, however the Council Plan was refreshed annually and was currently being revised to cover 2015-18.

The Customer Relations Policy and Performance Manager confirmed that the recent proposal to remove indicators relating to kerbside waste, may have an impact on other indicators and the Council Plan would be adjusted accordingly.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

11 Verbal Update on EU Funding Programme 2014-2020

The Sustainability and Climate Team Leader gave a verbal update on EU Funding Programme 2014-20.

The national EU Programme was not yet operational, and still in a preparatory phase, as the UK Government remained in negotiation with the EU Commission over the content of the English Operational Programmes for both ERDF and ESF.

The Operational Programmes contained the rules and parameters of spending that the EU Commission would agree to in the UK and until they were agreed, it was not possible to

give certainty over the eligibility of specific projects, and this meant that programmes of activity were still in a preparatory phase.

Timescales were still unclear, however since the funding programme was from 2014, there was a clear delay which meant that access to money was still not possible.

The North East LEP had appointed a consultant who had pulled together a wide pipeline of projects from across the NELEP area. The consultant had suggested that the Low Carbon funding could be oversubscribed, however was fairly confident that a clear programme of activities had been prioritised for County Durham.

There were currently schemes under consideration such as a geothermal project in Eastgate, District Heating opportunities for Durham City and elsewhere, third generation photovoltaics at Net Park and the biomass supply chain. There was also the potential for green infrastructure and flooding, however the guidance was still unclear. There was potential for a Council led energy efficiency programme, however this could not be used in conjunction with Green Deal or ECO, which seemingly ruled out most domestic energy efficiency measures. In addition, guidance referred to public buildings with a non-statutory function, which also excluded schools, however, there were energy efficiency schemes which could be offered to businesses (which had been highlighted as a high priority), community and public buildings, with a view to reduce energy costs. In addition, it was highlighted that the Oakenshaw Community Wind Turbine which was fully operational and now generating income for the community.

The Sustainability and Climate Team Leader confirmed that a report would be proved for the meeting on 17 April 2015 which would hopefully be able to give Members a clearer picture of the timescales and confirmation of some guidance.

RESOLVED

That the update be noted.

12 Verbal Update on Woodlands Project

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer gave a verbal update with regards to the Woodlands Project.

Members of the Woodlands Scrutiny Review Group had attended a site visit on 4 December 2014 at Croxdale Wood. The Senior Forestry and Landscape Delivery Officer had provided Members with an overview of how felling contracts were carried out and the Group was able to see work in progress on site.

The Group had met again on 5 January 2015 and received a brief introduction to the team from the Landscape Delivery Officer who focused upon community woodlands. In addition the Group received a presentation from the Head Ranger on how the Countryside Service carried out woodland management. Members had heard how Durham Wildlife Trust promoted volunteering opportunities via funding received from trustees.

Members were informed that the next meeting would be held on 2 February 2015.

RESOLVED

That the update be noted.

13 Minutes of the County Durham Environment Partnership Board

The minutes of the County Durham Environment Partnership Board held on 25 September 2014 were noted by Members.

Signed.....

Date.....