

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Monday 9 November 2015 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor B Graham (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors E Adam, D Bell, E Bell, J Clare, J Clark, D Freeman, D Hall, G Holland, P May, A Liversidge, O Milburn, S Morrison, P Stradling and L Taylor

Co-opted Members:

Mr T Bolton

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Armstrong, J Gray, I Jewell, S Zair and P Spurrell.

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 1 October 2015, 6 October 2015 and 12 October 2015 were confirmed 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

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer referred Members to the recent prominent articles and news stories relating to the remit of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (for copy see file of minutes). The articles were:-

- New Depot Ready as part of Winter Preparations.
- Jon Gluyas: UK is sleepwalking into an energy crisis, says Durham University professor.
- City of Durham leads north east regional success stories in Britain in Bloom – It was confirmed that Durham County Council received a Gold award. The Chairman and Members wished to send their congratulations.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.

(ii) That a letter of congratulations on behalf of the Committee be sent on the success in the regional Britain in Bloom awards.

7 Climate Change Strategy and Delivery Plan Update

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director, Regeneration and Economic Development which provided members with an update on the County Durham Climate Change Strategy and Delivery Plan (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

M Bosanquet, Climate Change Team Leader and S Beresford, Senior Sustainability and Climate Change Officer were in attendance to present the report.

S Beresford advised Members that the climate change strategy and delivery plan were submitted and approved by Cabinet on the 15 July 2015.

2012 was the most up to date data that showed that County Durham emitted 2,951 tonnes of CO₂, this was an increase from 2011 but it was a colder winter in 2012. The Council were on track for the 2020 target.

The information provided for the total renewable energy capacity in County Durham also included planned installations.

Energy from Solar PV had doubled from 12MWe in 2012 to 23MWe in September 2015. This would slow down due to legislative changes. Members were advised that since the report had been written government had changed the legislation to remove the tax relief for investors in community energy schemes.

M Bosanquet advised Members that they were hosting a community energy event for earth hour in March which would be held at Coxhoe Leisure Centre which was an impressive building in terms of energy. The event would be looking at what managers of buildings could do to reduce their energy bills.

She referred to the European bids for funding that had recently been submitted for work on public buildings and in communities which were discussed at the last meeting and advised Members that they would find out next month if they had moved to the next stage.

She referred to the Solar Farm at Tanfield which would have produced £1m to £2m for the Council but due to the change in the Feed in Tariff for solar panels had meant that the land would now be leased to allow a third party to develop the site. The Councils data centre would still be able to use the power from the development.

Members were advised of a new partnership project entitled 'Activating Community Engagement', which was being developed by Northern Powergrid with Weardale AAP. The project was set up to tackle peak hours of electricity which was from 4.30 pm to 7.00 pm and was an alternative to upgrading the grid. The project would ask people to use less energy at peak times by giving a reward. Participants would be given a smart plug which would switch off certain appliances during peak times and participants would be given points which would be given to a community group of your choice as well as a £500 prize for the community group with the most points. The pilot would be running in Weardale area which began on 1 November 2015 and they were currently looking for participants to join. The Chairman was provided with a leaflet in relation to the scheme and a future report would be submitted to the Committee in due course.

Councillor May referred to tumble dryers and how he was advised that if you used a longer programme it would use less energy. If this was true could an article be placed in the councils magazine to advise residents of this. Officers responded that it would depend on the model so it would be difficult to put this message in an article.

Councillor Milburn referred to the Comeleon House project at Tanfield and indicated that she was concerned that at the end of the lease the land would need to be reinstated and asked if this could be included in the lease. Officers responded that solar panels were still efficient after 20 years but they would look into incorporating the reinstatement of land into the lease.

Councillor E Bell referred to the brochure for the Activating Community Engagement and sought clarification if these had been distributed to the community. Officers responded that the leaflets were produced by the Northern Powergrid and they managed to obtain a copy at a meeting on Friday.

Councillor Holland referred to the targets for 2020 which were too low and now the government were scrapping schemes and that planning guidance should state that all new buildings should be energy neutral.

The Chairman enquired about the progress of the European Structural and Investment Fund bids. The Officer advised that the bids were currently in the first stage and not expected to hear if they had been successful until the end of November 2015. If successful at this stage further documentation would be completed and sent by early 2016; and a final decision would be taken March 2016. The Officer advised that the Committee would be kept updated.

Resolved: That the contents of the report be noted.

8 Winter Maintenance Policy

The Committee considered the joint report of the Assistant Chief Executive and Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods which provided members with an update on the Winter Maintenance Policy together with a presentation (for copy of report and presentation, see file of minutes).

J Reed, Head of Technical Services and B Buckley, Strategic Highways Manager were in attendance to provide Members with details of the service changes for 2015/16 and an overview of policy and operational service.

J Reed advised Members that the service changes and improvements were as follows:-

- New Depot – Wolsingham salt barn which were better facilities and would improve resilience.
- 14 new replacement Gritting vehicles.
- 1 new Snow blower which was a multi-hog and could be used for patching and digging in finer months.
- Renewed weather forecasting service.
- Annual review of routes.
- Extended season for High/Low Pennines.
- Tracking system on all vehicles.
- ICT/GIS potential 'Go Live' for public access to tracking/gritting service.

The weather stations could be viewed on the Council's website and had live updates every 10 minutes.

B Buckley circulated a leaflet on the winter maintenance service to Members and advised that the winter maintenance policy was aligned with the national code of practice 'Well-Maintained Highways'. He went on to advise members that it was not practical to treat all parts of the adopted highway and the policy prioritised adopted routes and details were provided of Carriageways Priority 1 (precautionary salting and post treatment), Carriageways Priority 2 (post treatment), Carriageways (snow Clearance), Carriageways (minimum winter network), Footways (snow clearance) and Cycleways (snow clearance).

The Council provided salt and grit bins for the public to use themselves based on a criteria, details of which were provided. Members of the public could request a salt bin assessment via Customer Services.

Members were provided with the following key facts and figures:-

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| • Total length of carriageway | 3,780 Kms |
| • Percentage of Carriageway treated (priority 1) | 45% |
| • Total winter maintenance budget | £5.4 m |
| • Total salt stocks at start of winter
(this would cover best part of a severe winter) | 42,000 tonnes |
| • Power Gritters (including contractors) | 37 |
| • Trailer Gritters (including contractors) | 33 |
| • Snowblowers | 6 |
| • Salt Bins | 2,310 |
| • Priority 1 Pre-salting routes | 38 |
| • Average cost per turn-out (Countywide) | £28,000 |
| • Average salt usage per turn-out | 250 tonnes |
| • Average salt costs | £27 per tonne |

The Council worked in partnership with several town and parish councils. The public could help by clearing snow and ice from the pavement outside their homes. There had been some concern expressed that clearing snow/ice could lead to frontagers being prosecuted in the event of an accident.

Officers confirmed that legal advice was that this was unlikely provided that their actions were reasonable and did not make the situation worse from their actions.

Following the presentation, the Chairman thanked Officers for their very informative presentation and asked Members for questions.

Councillor E Bell sought clarification if salt was degradable. Officers responded that they needed to keep salt dry but it was not degradable.

Members referred to the salt bins in particular how the salt was being taken from the bins for commercial purposes.

Officers responded to say that any activity that was observed regarding the misuse/theft of salt for commercial gain should be reported to the Police or HAL. The public should not endanger themselves by confrontation but noting vehicle registrations would be helpful.

Officers also stated that the public demand for salt bins exceeded ability. The salt bins themselves were not expensive but the costs to maintain were high. They responded to service requests and used the council's criteria to assess if a salt bin was required. They did offer a service to Members and parish councils of providing a dumpy bag of grit and salt at a cost of approximately £100 which included delivery to a location of their choice.

Councillor Holland sought clarification of the new weather forecaster and if they serviced other local authorities. He also sought clarification if there was a budget to repair damaged roads as a result of the bad weather.

Officers responded that the contract for the weather forecaster was Meteo Group which was an external service which went through the Council's tendering process which was based on 70% quality and 30% price. Other local authorities also used the Meteo Group and the Council had used them for the past six years.

In relation to the damage to roads the Council had a budget for resurfacing and reserves were available for unexpected events. In 2012 when it was severe weather they received additional funding through reserves.

Councillor Clare referred to the circulated leaflet and sought clarification on his understanding of Priority 1 and Priority 2 roads on Newton Aycliffe Industrial estate as it was important that the roads on the estate were cleared.

Officers responded that it was not realistic to treat 100% of the adopted highway but the blue roads shown on the map were priority 1 and the orange roads were priority 2. 45% of the adopted highway was treated at priority 1 which was high so they were unable to have Newton Aycliffe estate cleared as they concentrated on strategic routes.

Councillor Clark referred to the partnership working arrangements and if these were reviewed on an annual basis. Officers responded that they weren't reviewed last year but they would be reviewed to see if there were any changes.

The Council are the responsible highway authority and the Town/Parishes help deliver the policy and the Council provided the salt.

Councillor Stradling added that the Town and Parish Councils provide valuable assistance in delivering the winter service and an enhanced service where we would ordinarily be unable to provide with our own resources.

Officers recognised and acknowledged this valuable assistance.

Councillor Milburn requested that when the partnership working arrangements review had been carried out could this information be relayed to all members of the Council.

Members were advised that the Council provided salt/grit, equipment and training to parish councils who help to deliver Durham County Council Winter Maintenance Policies.

Officers advised that this information would be presented to the next Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.

(ii) That an update on the delivery of winter maintenance for 2015/16 and detail of winter maintenance plans for 2016/17 be provided to the committee at the July 2016 meeting.

9 Waste Programme Update

The committee considered the joint report of the Assistant Chief Executive and Corporate Director Neighbourhoods which provided members with supporting information in advance of the update on the waste programme (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

A Patrickson, Head of Projects and Business Services provided members with a presentation which provided details of the garden waste review, waste transfer stations and the campaigns update (for copy of slides, see file of minutes).

Members were advised in relation to garden waste collections that the assumptions were that they would have a take up of 40% and 60% tonnage of previous. The outcome was that they had a 35% take up and tonnage of 71% of previous. The financial model estimated a balance of £976k but the current outturn estimates was £1.120k. Details of the major variances were provided together with a SWOT analysis.

Customer feedback indicated that 358 complaints had been received about the service since it was launched, the majority related to missed bins. 5 of the complaints were referred to the ombudsman and 155 requests had been received to extend or review the collection dates.

In conclusion, the scheme had been successful financially, the objectives had been met and negative feedback had been limited. Moving forward in 2016 they were going to

increase marketing of the 240 litre bin option, consider charities churches etc. where criteria was met, more visibility of summary of terms and conditions on letter and increase the collections to 17.

Members were provided with photographs of the waste transfer stations which were transferred back to Durham County Council following Premier Waste Management being wound up. The stations were located at Station Grove in Barnard Castle, Heighington Lane in Newton Aycliffe, Annfield Plaine and Thornley. All were in poor condition but capital money had been secured to refurbish the sites and replace the majority of the Thornley facility.

Members were updated on the Bin it right campaign, Durham City University Student Campaign and Green Move Out Campaign. The Bin it Right Campaign had been so successful engaging with over 19,000 members of the public and delivering 2,813 recycling boxes and bags. Durham City University Student Campaign and the Green Move Out had been extremely successful and had extended a reuse scheme for small appliances used by the university for student who live out. The Committee was advised that the County Council had secured £30,906 funding from the increasing recycling through local communication fund that is run in conjunction with Sainsburys Supermarkets. Durham County Council was one of eight local authorities to receive funding which aims to compliment the Bin it Right campaign and is for residents who are good recyclers.

The Chairman thanked the Officer for a very informative presentation and asked members for questions.

Councillor Holland referred to the Durham City University Student Campaign and complimented the team on their work which was outstanding. He asked if the garden waste could be taken to SETA to be used as energy.

The Officer responded that it was more financially viable to treat separately as it was £20-£22 a ton to compost or £78 a ton plus transport to send to a plant.

Councillor Stradling commented that it was good that there was going to be an extra collection but more checks of the contents of the bins needed to be carried out. He also commented that not everyone who was using the service had paid.

The Officer responded that they encouraged people to share bins but it was not an offence to put green waste into your refuse bin.

Councillor Adam referred to the complaints received and sought clarification if action had been taken. The Officer responded that the majority of complaints were in relation to missed bins, which in comparison to the number of bins was small but each complaint had been investigated.

Councillor Clare praised the service but sought clarification on the tonnage for waste which was 70% and 30% for garden waste at a cost of £70 for a bin and £20 for a green bin and was this hidden cost shown in the savings.

The Officer responded that they couldn't measure how much green waste was placed in refuse bins but this had been taken into consideration into the model but was an estimate as

they did not measure it. They had tracked where the garden waste was going, which was the recycling centres but they had not seen an increase in fly tipping or an increase in waste. It was thought that people were composting and a few were placing green waste into the refuse bin.

Councillor Clark referred to the bins which were no longer used and indicated that she had made a request for some bins to be collected but this had not been done. Some of the bins were full with rubbish from previous tenants.

The Officer responded that he would chase this up but they only removed bins when requested as there was a cost implication and as there was a cost for the service the bins needed to be in good condition.

Councillor E Bell sought clarification on the average life span of a bin and if they would replace a bin and if there was a cost.

The Officer responded that if a bin was well looked after it would last decades but if it was at the end of its life they would replace at no cost.

Resolved: That the contents of the report be noted.

10 Light Touch Review of Parking on Council Land

The Committee considered the report of the Assistant Chief Executive which set out the findings, conclusion and recommendation of the light touch review which looked at parking on council land (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Resolved: That the committee make four recommendations to the Portfolio Holder and ask that he provide a response to the committee in relation to the committee's findings, conclusion and recommendations:

- a) That Neighbourhood Services with assistance from Legal Services, investigate, monitor and review new legislation such as The Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 for any future options to address parking on council land issues.
- b) To increase education/ awareness to highlight to drivers the need to park considerately for the safety of pedestrians and other road users using cost effective measures such as Durham County News; DCC website and through social media
- c) That members of the Council use Customer Services as first point of contact to ensure the enquiry is allocated to the right team and members receive a unique reference number from the Customer Relationship Management system should they need to follow up their query.
- d) That each case of parking on council owned land is looked at on an individual basis.