

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a Meeting of **Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Friday 18 November 2016 at 9.30 am**

### **Present:**

**Councillor B Graham (Chairman)**

### **Members of the Committee:**

Councillors E Adam, D Bell, J Clare, J Clark, D Freeman, I Jewell, B Kellett, A Liversidge, P May, O Milburn, S Morrison, J Shuttleworth and L Taylor

### **Co-opted Members:**

Mr T Bolton

### **Also Present:**

Councillors M Davinson, H Nicholson and Mr T Batson (Co-optee)

### **1 Apologies**

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors N Foster, J Gray and L Hovvels.

### **2 Substitute Members**

There were no substitute Members in attendance.

### **3 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2016 were agreed as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

The Chairman advised Members that Councillor Kay had received responses following the meeting to his questions in relation to Minute 6 Media Slide and Minute 8 Quarter 1 2016/17 Performance Management Report.

### **4 Declarations of Interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

### **5 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 recent press articles relating to the remit of Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The articles were:

- Butterfly numbers in North East plummet but there was good news - A nationwide butterfly count had revealed that the numbers of butterfly's had reduced but due to climate change a wider variety of species were now being seen in the North East.
- Durham wins third gold in Britain in Bloom finals - Durham City was nominated to represent Northumbria region in the Champion of Champions category of the Britain in Bloom competition and won gold.
- European energy efficiency experts flock to Durham - County Durham had hosted a conference, kick starting a five year Europe-wide project to save money and the environment. Due to previous successful work on energy efficiency schemes, £340,000 of funding was awarded to County Durham to take part in two European schemes over the coming years as part of the Interreg programme.

**Resolved:** That the presentation be noted.

## 7 Warm Up North and Fuel Poverty within County Durham - Update

The Committee considered the Joint Report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships and the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services that provided Members with an update on Warm up North and Fuel Poverty within the County (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Members received a presentation from the Housing Regeneration Project Manager and Local Services that focused on the following:-

- Regional and Local Overview of Fuel Poverty
- Delivering and Monitoring
- County Durham Warm Homes Campaign
- Warm Up North
- Central Heating Fund
- Warm and Healthy Homes Project
- Energy Company Obligation (ECO3 Go Early)

Councillor May sought clarification as to whether the free central heating referenced during the presentation was in fact free or whether there was a contribution to the installation cost.

The Officer responded that in relation to the Central Heating Fund Scheme, if the income of the household was less than £26,000 and there was no central heating in the property then it would be totally free. The only cost would be maintenance of the system after the 12 month warranty had expired.

He also advised Members that under the new ECO process the authority could be given a golden ticket scheme which would be allocated to households who require central heating, were not eligible for a grant and were unable to pay for the installation of a central heating

system. This would ensure that these households would receive central heating installation free of cost when the new fuel poverty schemes are rolled out in 2017.

Councillor Milburn referred to the pay as you go tariffs which are higher and asked if there was any work being undertaken to reduce the current tariff.

The Officer responded that the tariff for pay as you go had been brought down but there was still a difference between the pay as you go tariff and the standard tariff. Currently Durham County Council refers households to a partner 'Managing Money Better' which provide advice to help residents manage their money better and make savings on their energy bills. The advice provided recently to a resident by 'Managing Money Better' had resulted in a saving of £452 per annum on their energy bill. It was recognised that Durham County Council needs to continue to promote the availability of the 'Managing Money Better' service.

The Chairman sought clarification on how long the process took from referral to the installation of central heating. The Officer responded that the length of the process depends on the extent of the work required. If the case was health related and fell under the Warm and Healthy Homes Project then it could be days but in relation to the Central Heating Fund Scheme this could take up to 3 months as a detailed survey is undertaken to identify the work required on a case by case basis.

Mr T Batson asked if Officers could contact the County Durham Association of Local Authorities to share the information about the various schemes and projects with Town and Parish councils in County Durham. He also referred to the 38 Degrees scheme and commented that this was an excellent scheme, with good tariff rates and all profits go back into helping local communities.

The Officer responded that they currently interact with the County Durham Association of Local Authorities to circulate details of the various scheme and projects to the Town and Parish councils. The County Durham Warm Homes Campaign has 900 partners in the county who raise awareness of the various schemes and projects available.

Councillor Jewell asked if training was provided on how to use the new central heating system once installation had taken place, as some households will not have had central heating previously and will be unsure of how the system operates and may be concerned about high utility bills.

The Officer responded that there are two visits, the first following installation to set up the system and to show clients how the system works after installation, programming it for them according to their requirements. They would then do a follow up visit 8 weeks after installation. There was a limit on the number of visits made but there was also an instruction manual provided and Durham County Council Housing solutions staff would give further advice if required.

Councillor Davison indicated that he lived in a colliery village where the properties were a Band E and what were the plans to get these properties up to a Band C or D by 2030. The properties were single wall properties, although some properties had external wall insulation fitted. He also referred to the fees for Warm up North and asked if these could be reduced or if another supplier could be used to get a better deal.

The Officer responded that it was going to be a challenge to get properties to a Band C by 2030 but points were allocated for each installation for example a brand new boiler would be 47 points, wall insulation 10 points and loft insulation 11 points. He referred to many colliery properties having solid fuel but many households still receive a fuel allowance from the NCB. Durham County Council is currently targeting these properties via the County Durham Warm Homes Campaign and by sending a letter from Durham County Council to relevant householders. There were currently 317 households on the waiting list for the Central Heating Fund Scheme. There is currently an options appraisal taking place of the Warm up North Scheme by the Head of Planning and Assets. There is an option for a three year extension for the Warm up North project and discussions will take place first with British Gas and then other providers in relation to the extension of the scheme and future fees.

Councillor Clare praised the team and commented that some people were owner/occupiers and had partial central heating and sought clarification if they would be eligible under the Central Heating Fund Scheme. He also asked if he could be provided with the details of eligible properties in his local community so that he could go and knock on doors and advise residents that they are eligible for the scheme.

The Officer responded that they preferred not to do cold calling and instead they worked with the Revenues and Benefits Service who knew which household in the county were on low incomes and would do a mail-out. This had resulted in 24,000 households in the county receiving information on the Central Heating Fund Scheme. As part of the ECO2 transition year Government is looking at making changes to ensure that organisations share data which will result in better targeting of households with information of the various schemes.

However, any referral made to any of the schemes is followed up. He also advised members that some schemes such as Central Heating Fund Scheme were suitable for private landlords and that no landlords can withhold approval for a free scheme and that by 2018 private landlords had to have their properties up to a Band E.

He confirmed that in relation to the Central Heating Fund Scheme properties fit the eligibility criteria if they had no central heating at all, two or three rooms with no radiators or storage heaters.

Councillor May sought clarification if help was provided with the cost of installing double glazing and new insulated external doors as heat would be lost with old or poorly fitted windows and doors.

The Officer explained that double glazing was considered as part of the Eco Schemes however it only provides 4 points in the banding scheme where a boiler was 47 points and that double glazing was considered a "comfort measure" rather than an energy saving measure and double glazing is expensive with the focus of many of the schemes ensuring the 'biggest bang for the buck'. There were not many properties that still had single glazing however local regeneration projects often included funding for double glazing.

Mr T Bolton sought clarification on the viability of people in rural areas being connected to main line gas as previously Community Energy Solutions had discussed extending main line gas in Teesdale and he wondered whether further discussion were taking place.

The Officer responded that discussions were still ongoing with the provider looking at the possibility of extending the current main line gas network to include those communities currently near to the edge of the existing gas network. Any properties that were not close to the existing network would require a sub-station to be built due to low pressure.

The Chairman thanked the Housing Regeneration Project Manager and Local Services for their very informative presentation and thanked Members from the Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their attendance.

**Resolved:** (i) That the contents of the report be noted.

(ii) That Members receive an update at a future meeting of the Committee.

## **8 Flooding Review - Update on Recommendations**

The Committee considered the Joint Report of the Director Transformation and Partnerships and the Corporate Director, Regeneration and Local Services that provided Members with an update on the recommendations contained within the Flooding Scrutiny Review published in September 2014 (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Members received a presentation from the Head of Technical Services and the Drainage and Coastal Protection Manager that focused on the following:-

- Schemes for 2016/17
- Review for 2015/16
- Going Forward
- Medium Term Investment Plan 2015-2021
- Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)
- Going Forward
- Schemes Completed, Witton Gilbert, 'O' Cobblers Hall and A167 Honest Lawyer

The Chairman congratulated Su Jordan on the shortlisting of the Civil Contingencies Unit Team for a Local Government Chronicle award in the Community Involvement Category for 'An altogether community approach to flooding'.

Members were advised by the Senior Policy Officer, Spatial Policy that the County Durham Plan would be discussed at Cabinet on 14 December 2016. The plan covers a number of policies which are evidence based including the Water Management Policy which had been informed by the updated Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and Water Cycle Study.

In relation to the work of the Civil Contingencies Unit Members were advised that they continue to visit schools, held drop in sessions in rapid response flood areas and worked with youth groups including the RainWorks project with Shildon Youth Group and have ran the Duke of Cornwall Community Safety Award with a number of youth organisations. They had done some practical work with students which included visiting a fire station and a caravan site which had been flooded. They were looking to go into schools to use art as media and flooding as the subject; they had good engagement with schools and were pleased that they had been shortlisted for the award.

Northumbrian Water commented that they had an excellent working relationship with the risk management team and with spatial policy and they were pleased to provide support to both teams. In relation to the Water Management Policy (formerly Policy 46) this is seen as an example of best practice and is being used by other authorities within the region.

Mr T Batson commented that the preventative measures in the presentation were excellent and asked what was happening in relation to preventative measures in Tow Law.

Officers responded that planning had been strengthened, where new homes are to be built in areas which had recognised flood risk, with robust processes in place for developers as part of the planning process. The emerging Water Management Policy is clearer in its requirements than the national guidance. The Drainage Team are also consulted on planning applications and where flooding does occur flood prevention work is undertaken to mitigate flood risk. In addition, Durham County Council, Northumbrian Water and the Environment Agency work in partnership to develop schemes that mitigate and reduce flood risk as well as look at catchment wide solutions to alleviate flood risk from a number of sources.

Councillor May referred to the 11 comments received on the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy consultation and sought clarification if these were from partners. Officers responded that they had received some comments from Northumbrian Water but the majority were from members of the public.

**Resolved:** That the contents of the report be noted.

## **9 Carbon Management Plan Update**

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director, Regeneration and Local Services that provided Members with an update on the Carbon Management Plan (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Members received a presentation from the Senior Carbon Management Officer that focused on the following:-

- Progress to Date
- Key Projects
- Challenges and Opportunities
- Future Developments

Councillor Clare sought clarification on the savings which were £3m in the presentation and £750,000 in the report

The Officer responded that the £3 million figure included schools and increases with inflation and predicted energy costs increases. It also assumed an increase in consumption over time if the Council did not engage with energy management.

Mr T Batson referred to community energy schemes and commented that Tow Law had previously had its own energy plant, what was the future for small rural communities.

The Officer responded that government had changed legislation which had resulted in a lot of incentives being taken away and people are therefore reluctant to invest.

**Resolved:** (i) That the contents of the report be noted.

(ii) That the committee receive a further update to a future meeting.

## **10 European and Structural Investment Funding Update**

The Committee considered the Report of the Corporate Director, Regeneration and Local Services that informed Members about the progress on European and Structural Investment (ESIF) Low Carbon Economy funding programmes (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Team Leader, Low Carbon Economy Team and Business Energy Efficiency Project Manager were in attendance to present the report and advised Members that European funding had stopped for three months following the BREXIT result but that the Department for Communities and Local Government is now accepting applications.

Members were provided with details of the Business Energy Efficiency Project; LOCARBO and Rebus together with details of outline bids which were currently being developed and an update on the progress of the bids was expected early in January 2017.

Councillor Jewell referred to Germany in the 1960's and 1970's and how community housing and roads were heated from industrial processes and could this be an opportunity that we consider.

The Officer responded that Teesside were looking into this potential use but there was not as much industry in Durham and that a company in Meadowfield were looking into putting pipes into the road, but this was in the very early stages.

The Chairman thanked the Officers for their very informative report.

**Resolved:** That the contents of the report be noted.