

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Thursday 8 March 2018 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor E Adam (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors B Avery, D Bell, L Brown, J Clare, R Crute, A Gardner, P Howell, P Jopling, C Kay, R Manchester, O Milburn, A Patterson, A Simpson, P Sexton and M Wilson

Co-opted Members:

Mr T Bolton and Mr D Kinch

Also Present:

Councillor L Maddison

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence has been received from Councillors J Clark, C Martin and L Taylor.

2 Substitute Members

No notification of Substitute Members had been received.

3 Minutes

The Minutes of the meetings held on 23 January 2018, 2 February 2018 and 12 February 2018 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the amendments below:-

23 January 2018

Councillor Howell referred to data that would be 'updated in due course' at the bottom of page 5 and commented that this was not good enough firstly the timing of information to members but more importantly if officers are making decision on data that is nearly 2 years out of date. He had noted that the same data was referred to cabinet members during MTFP discussions which questions their data provision and asked if they could put more pressure for a better follow up.

The Chairman commented that scrutiny needed accurate data and how could they scrutinise data that was 2 years old and indicated that they would go back to officers to ask for an update in a reasonable time.

Councillor Howell also noted on page 21 of the minutes the phrase 'in due course' was used again but he was pleased to report that this had been dealt with promptly, although it would have been better practice to have had a commitment at the time.

2 February 2018

Councillor Clare referred to page 14 of the minutes and asked that 'nature reserve' be replaced with 'landscape feature'.

12 February 2018

Mr Bolton referred to page 20 of the minutes and his reference to Lord Byron and advised Members that it was in fact 3 years ago and not 2 years which he stated at the meeting.

4 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Howell declared a personal Interest in agenda item 8 'Culture and Sport Services', as his brother is the Head of Culture and Sport Services and would be presenting the report.

5 Any Items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties

There were no items from Co-opted Members of 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:

- Durham Leads the way in new national drinking water scheme – people will be able to refill water bottles for free in tens of thousands of places in England in future following the announcement of a new national scheme by the water industry.
- Public asked to join streets clean up operation in Spennymoor – residents asked to join a community litter pick which will be held as part of a multi-agency clean up operation. The scheme is in an area covering 540 homes in terraced streets near Spennymoor town centre which aims to tackle issues like empty properties and flytipping to improve health and wellbeing which is linked to Agenda Item No.9.
- Volunteers sought to safeguard County Durham's Woodland – Volunteers to receive expert training to help them identify diseases that are attacking trees in the county as part of the Woodland Trust's Observatree project of which Durham County Council is a leading partner. Durham Woodland Revival has received initial support for National Lottery funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The links to a previous scrutiny on woodland estates.

- We win national award for 'Operation Spruce Up' – Durham County Council has clinched a prestigious national 'green' award for the second year in a row thanks to 'Operation Spruce Up'.

The Chairman commented that there had been a lot of good work on 'Operation Spruce Up' which was a good report and excellent feedback from the community.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

7 County Durham Environment Awards

Members considered the Joint report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships and the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services that provided an overview of the current County Durham Environment Awards and the continued strengthening of the community, partner and Member engagement in the delivery of the programme (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Committee received a presentation from Mr Bhowmick, Environment and Design Manager that highlighted the following points:-

- Aim
- The Awards, reward: great design; environmental guardianship and community spirit in County Durham
- Objectives
 - Deliver a cleaner, more attractive and sustainable environment
 - Maximise the value and benefits of Durham's natural environment
 - Reduce carbon emissions and adapt to the impact of climate change
 - Promote sustainable design and protect Durham's heritage
 - History and Development
 - Day to day management and delivery of the Awards lies with Durham County Council and until 2016 was a combination of staff from Environment and Design, Pride and Neighbourhoods communications teams
 - Following the creation of Real Service Groups these working relationships have been maintained and strengthened with support from the corporate communications and marketing team
 - Established in 1989
 - Considered nearly 1300 applications
 - More than 12,000 people involved in scheme
 - Originally focussed on the built and natural environment
 - Developed to reflect the changing environment agenda with the introduction of a climate change category and greener business award
 - Developed a stronger community focus with partnership and volunteer categories
 - Outstanding awards introduced 2006
- 12 Categories 2017 – Built Environment, Community Partnership, Greener Business, Places and Spaces, Volunteer Group, Volunteer Over 18, Climate Change, Craftsmanship, Natural Environment, Schools and Colleges, Volunteer Under 18 and Waste Management
- Funding and Budget
 - DCC - £5000 (varied budgets), Sponsorship £5000 (varies year on year)

- Support from the Northern Echo as media partner and prizes for specific categories
- Since 2006 sponsorship has increased and a variety of levels are offered which are Gold £2000+, Silver £1000+ and Bronze £500+
- Process
 - Feb/March Call for Sponsors; June Launch to coincide with World Environment Day; July/August Closing Date; September Specialist Judging; October Final Judging; November Awards Ceremony
- Moving Forward Development and Engagement
 - Continue development of new means of communication – social media – video
 - Continue to pursue sponsorship opportunities with new businesses and developers in County Durham
 - Review ‘sustainability’ categories and refocus to current objectives
 - Refresh judging process to reinvigorate engagement
 - Continue to promote the Awards at grassroots level through AAP’s, Local Members and established Community Partnerships
 - Plan for 30th anniversary 2019

The Chairman thanked the Officer for his presentation and commented on the engagement that they have with business and the voluntary sector.

Mr Kinch commented that he had been approached by the parish council about turning the grass verges into a wild meadow and asked if they could receive support to start off the project.

The Officer responded that they did have a scheme running to support more meadows and would be happy to look at the scheme and suggested that the Clerk of the Parish Council seek advice from the Ecology Team and Clean and Green Team to change mowing schedules.

Resolved: That the information contained in the report and presentation be noted.

8 Culture and Sport Services

Members considered the Joint Report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services and Director of Transformation and Partnerships that provided Members with supporting information in advance of a presentation on the Culture and Sport Service (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Mr S Howell, the Head of Culture and Sport Services was in attendance to deliver a presentation to Members that gave an overview of the service and specifically looked at the Service Vision; Nature and Scope of Services; Key Projects and Improvement Boards; Challenges and Opportunities (for copy of slides, see file of minutes).

Members were advised there were three key delivery elements to provide residents, students and visitors with access to a balanced culture and sport offer – resources, service inputs and capability.

The Head of Culture and Sports informed members that the service offer includes leisure centres, libraries, theatres, collections and museums, countryside estate, festivals and events, outdoor sports playing pitches and pavilions and culture and sport development. The service has expenditure of £34.7 and income of £14.1 million with a net operating cost of £20.6 million. The service employs circa 2000 although these are mostly on a casual and part time basis. The service has achieved £9.9 million in savings since 2009.

Members were advised that the service deliver outcomes through strategic partnership working. It has a very strong reputation with national, regional and local sector partners. The vision and strategic business case of the authority is realised via project boards and business improvement boards. The Head of Culture and Sport gave the following example of tier one projects: - leisure facility transformation, library transformation and general staff restructuring. Examples of tier one improvement areas given were prevent agenda, quality standards, countryside and parks. Challenges to the service include tired building stock; time limited contracts and capacity. However, there are opportunities for the service with invest to save initiatives; cross service working; partnerships and digitisation. The future direction of the service includes modernising, delivery and reshaping.

Following the presentation the Chairman commented that there was a broad range of services which were not all in the remit of this committee but the main features were the countryside, parks and leisure centres.

Mr Kinch referred to the countryside estates and the railway route from Barnard Castle to Bishop Auckland that was to be adapted as a cycle route and sought clarification if the service were still looking into improving this route.

The Head of Culture and Sport advised that this was 180 kilometres of railway path linking up between Barnard Castle and Bishop Auckland areas. However, there was a section that Durham County Council did not own the land and were looking for the landowner, but cannot do anything until Durham County Council owns the land.

Councillor Jopling referred to her area which had small nature parks and facilities for children, which were costly to install but had been achieved via community fundraising efforts, but were not maintained.

The Officer advised the Member that the Clean and Green team are responsible for maintenance and commented that communities fund the parks but do not have an agreement for the maintenance and the councils funds are shrinking.

Councillor Kay referred to the cycle route from Bishop Auckland to Barnard Castle, which is a national cycle coastal route number 715. In places the route was not up to standard and some parts were impossible to pass. He asked the Officer if this was the area that the Council were proposing to purchase. The Officer responded that the area of land the Council were hoping to purchase was not accessible and you needed to physically lift your bike over the area.

Councillor Kay then referred to Woodhouse Close Leisure Complex, which has just been refreshed and asked how much subsidy per annum had been put into the swimming pool.

The Officer advised Members that it cost approximately £500,000 net subsidy per year to run the site. It suffered both from the perspective of being an old building with higher maintenance costs and was not attractive to customers therefore generated less income. The gymnasium is in a part of the building that was not originally planned for this purpose and suffered comparatively with newer facilities with purpose built gyms. The Head of Service gave comparisons with other leisure centres and advised that Spennymoor and Newton Aycliffe cost the same amount but the offer at these leisure centres is excellent. A leisure centre similar to Meadowfield which was basically a sports hall was about £200,000 per annum.

The Chairman asked if this was something that the improvement board would look at. The Officer responded that there was 14 sites across the County and confirmed that this was something the improvement board would look at.

Councillor Avery referred to the Leisure Centre in his area which was now run by volunteers and was doing well.

The Officer advised that following Local Government Review in 2009 leisure centres in Coxhoe and Ferryhill had been taken over by the community and the service had learned lessons from what had happened at this time and was pleased to report all leisure centres ran by communities were doing well.

Councillor Clare thanked the Head of Service for a stimulating talk and had two comments first was that he was particularly interested in the difference between commercial opportunities and health aims. Secondly, that Members put money in to parks and then the maintenance is left, sustainability is particularly important to councillors especially when using neighbourhood budgets and suggested that councillors should pay more thought sustainability features.

The Head of Service advised the commercial vs. social was kept in mind and advised if the leisure centres just wanted to make money they could do this by hiring sports halls for money. They programme sports halls to ensure there are slots for all in the community e.g. badminton clubs, exercise classes, children's clubs this costs DCC and adds to the pressure but is better for communities. An example was given in relation to sustainable projects such as Wharton Park where funds had been placed on revenue account because of future costs expected such as repairs.

The Chairman commented that capital was difficult for communities to raise and was up to communities to maintain but was also fraught with danger.

Councillor Manchester sought clarification on the income generated and how it had changed over the last 3 years.

The Officer gave Members details of the income and advised Members that they looked at the market when determining the fees and charges. He gave an example of a new gym that opened in Newton Aycliffe so in response the leisure centre reduced its fees so that they were competitive and resulted in more customers for the leisure centre and 2-3% growth. The Officer advised that cinema usage in Durham City was dropping and was expected to drop more following the opening of two new cinemas in the City.

Mr Bolton asked if they had a scheme to bring young people into leisure centres.

The Officer responded that the leisure centres were predominantly used by adults but they had other programmes that they delivered in schools and some schools did PE in the leisure centres. The service works with colleagues in Education and there had been work schools around sports club development this had been done at Consett. The Officer advised that they also work with colleagues on obesity programmes.

Councillor Wilson referred to pavilions and asked if there was a programme for maintenance.

The Officer responded that they carried out maintenance to pavilions to ensure they were safe, the problem was that they deteriorated quickly. They used to get grants for pavilions but Sports England do not fund anymore and some pavilions had been replaced by porta cabins.

Councillor Wilson commented that the pavilion in her ward at Bearpark was lovely but it was not maintained.

The Officer responded that football pitches had not generated much income and those using the pavilions as changing rooms had not criticised the state of them, so it was difficult to argue the cost of keeping the pavilions up to standard as the pressure on the capital programme were vast.

Councillor Sexton referred to the cost of parking at leisure centres and asked the officer if he had any data that people used alternative gyms due to the parking charges and limited spaces.

The Officer responded that it was mixed positions at leisure centres throughout the County. At Consett parking was free but at Freemans Quay there was no free parking. Parking charges had recently been introduced at Hardwick Park this generated income which went back into the park. The Officer did not think there was a pattern on usage of leisure centres due to parking charges but he could look at this.

The Chairman asked Members to agree the recommendations.

Councillor Clare referred to the recommendations and commented that there was nothing to look at any future work and asked that a further recommendation be included that the committee look at the topic in a future work programme.

The Chairman advised Members that the future work programme would be considered at the next meeting of the Committee.

Resolved: (i) That the information contained in the report and presentation be noted.

(ii) That Members consider including the topic in the future work programme.

9 Community Action Team

Members considered the Joint Report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships and the Corporate Director of Adult and Health Services that provided Members with an update on the work of the Council's Community Action Team (CAT) and the use of targeted interventions (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Ms J Jones, the Senior Environmental Health Officer was in attendance to deliver a presentation that highlighted the following points:-

- Background
 - Small ambitious team working with key partners and local communities
 - Proactively tackle local housing and environmental issues
 - 8-10 week projects
 - 3 phases: Engagement, Intelligence gathering, Priority setting, Action, Review, Exit and Feedback
- 2015 – 18 Programme
 - Core Casework: rubbish accumulations; defective drainage; fly-tipping; dog fouling and open to access
 - Total casework: 20148 pieces of casework tackled; 205 legal notices serves and 93 works in default
 - Comparison; workload and output continues to increase each year
- New Approaches to Improve Community Involvement 2017-18
 - Distribution of 'action' letter; trying different drop-in event formats; bin marking; rat surveys in yards and dampness surveys of private homes
- Review Findings 2017-18
 - Housing and environmental issues found were lower than the original walkabouts
 - Indicate a sustained environment
 - There remains a need for monitoring following exit
 - Some areas continue to have complex issues
- Future Work 2018-19
 - 4 new projects planned
 - Project locations based on greatest need
- Map shown of Community Action Project Locations 2018-19
- Photographs shown of partnership working; working with the local community; before and after rubbish cleaned; before and after land cleared and secured; before and after open to access and before and after drainage/pest control.

The Chairman referred to the clear link with 'spruce up'. The Officer responded that they work with the spruce up team but they don't work the same areas at the same time. Spruce Up was more about tidying up the infrastructure such as benches, street signs where as the CAT team had enforcement powers.

Councillor Crute referred to the CAT scheme and sought clarification on the approach after exit.

The Officer responded that they tasked partners and asked neighbourhood wardens to do extra patrols and they try to sustain the work that they have carried out.

Mr Bolton asked what power they and partners had with absent landlords in relation to issues such as poor quality of properties or flytipping. The Officer responded that they have enforcement powers and can give a legal notice if know the whereabouts of the landlord. The landlord would be charged an administration fee, most landlords don't want enforcement action and therefore carryout the requested work. However it is more difficult with absent landlords, other partners have other enforcement options that can be used.

The Public Health and Housing Manager commented that long term empty properties the council tax was increased to 150% and they can issue empty management orders.

Councillor Clare referred to the need to maintain the work done of the team but commented that the enforcement powers were inadequate and more enforcement powers were needed and asked if they needed permission to mark the bins.

The Officer responded that they did require permission to mark the bins but they used this as engagement to get more information and build up confidence of the residents.

The Public Health and Housing Manager commented that they go into areas to support communities and they encouraged communities to report any issues so that they could sustain the work carried out.

The Chairman commented on the exit strategy and that work had to be repeated but he understood that enforcement powers were not strong enough.

The Officer responded that new tenants were not reporting issues and that the barriers such as high turnover of tenants and others listed at paragraph 17 of the report.

Councillor Avery referred to the work the CAT team had carried out in Ferryhill Station which was marvellous and he undertook a walkabout with the neighbourhood wardens every 2 weeks.

Councillor Kay referred to the work the CAT team had done in Coundon in 2016 and how they had done a lot of work with private landlords to encourage them to populate homes as this deters flytipping. Taking part in Britain in Bloom commenced when the CAT team had left and encouraged the residents.

Councillor Maddison referred to the problems with fly-tipping in her ward and asked if they analyse the rubbish to see who was responsible. The Officer responded that they do work with the wardens and they do look through the rubbish but it was difficult to obtain evidence as it was usually old pieces of carpet or furniture and not letters. If there was any evidence then they would issue penalties. The Public Health and Housing Manager advised that most of the landlords in the Spennymoor area had cleared their yards themselves but to prosecute evidence was needed and the court decides the punishment.

Councillor Jopling asked about the drainage cover shown in the presentation slides that had been replaced to address pest control and sought clarification as to which budget this came from.

The Officer responded that the photo shown in the presentation was a private property and the owner of the property was responsible for the cost. If there was an issue with rats they

would ask Northumbrian Water to have a look at the area. Members were also advised that a paving slab was used to deter scrap metal dealers.

Mr Kinch referred to his area which was a small village and that they had two absent landlords who refuse to sell the properties and this was an issue not just in deprived areas.

The Officer responded that they have incentives to bring back empty homes into use.

Councillor Howell referred to the success in Coundon and the exit strategy and asked about the next steps of the initiative.

The Officer advised that Ground Works continues to work in the area, there was also liaison with schools but their actions depended upon the time of year. Consideration is given to what is done and how this links with the community.

The Chairman thanked Officers for their very informative presentation and asked Members to agree the recommendations.

Resolved: (i) That the information contained in the report and presentation be noted.

(ii) That the Committee receive a further update on the work of the Community Action Team at a future meeting.

10 Verbal Update on Review Activity

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer advised Members that the working group had met three times since the last meeting.

The working group had looked at transition arrangements and the future management options. At the last meeting representatives from Town and Parish Councils were in attendance, some of which already ran allotments and some that currently had no allotments.

The next meeting was scheduled to be held on 20 March 2018 and would look at the consultation arrangements.

The Chairman commented that the scrutiny review was a long process and there was a lot more work for the working group to carry out which would take them into the new work programme.

Resolved: That the report be noted.