

## **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 4 October 2019 at 9.30 am**

### **Present:**

**Councillor E Adam (Chair)**

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

Councillors O Milburn, B Avery, A Batey, D Bell, J Carr, B Coult, R Crute, S Dunn, J Higgins, R Manchester, A Simpson, P Sexton and M Wilson

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

Mr T Bolton and Mrs P Holding

### **Also Present:**

Councillors J Clare and Councillor S Iveson

Mrs R Morris – Co-opted Member on Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting, in particular members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Chairman advised that members of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be invited to attend the Special meeting of the Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be held on Tuesday 17 December 2019, which would be looking at fluoridation in water throughout County Durham.

## **1 Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L Brown, K Hawley, P Howell and I McLean.

## **2 Substitute Members**

No notification of Substitute Members had been received.

### **3 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and were 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 items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties.

### **6 Media Relations**

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer referred to recent press articles that fell within the remit of Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The article were:

- Move to boost recycling by using labels everyone can understand – A clearer labelling system for packaging would be introduced to inform people what could and couldn't be recycled. The current system was confusing and holding back the recycling rate, which had stalled in England at about 45 per cent. The means of delivering increased rates of recycling would ensure that people had a better understanding of what was recyclable and how to do it.
- Plastic bag sales in England down by a third in last year – Sales of single-use bags by all large retailers in 2018/19 slumped by 37% to 1.11bn compared with the previous year. Sales of plastic bags by the seven biggest supermarkets had plummeted by 90% since the levy was introduced in 2015. According to Defra, the average consumer in England now bought just 10 bags a year from the main supermarket retailers down from 140 bags in 2014, before the change came into force.
- Delight as County Durham received 12 Green flags again – Parks, cemeteries and crematoriums across County Durham had once again been awarded a prestigious national status for the third year in a row. A total of 12 sites had received the Green Flag accreditation by the environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy, in recognition of the excellent standards of maintenance and good practice that kept them looking great.
- We are super energy savers – Reducing carbon emission and saving millions of pounds a year had earned the Council the title of super energy savers. The council's low carbon economy team had been praised by Interreg Europe for its use of energy monitoring software. As part of the LOCARBO project, which was funded by Interreg Europe, the council's low carbon economy team was

asked to produce examples of good practice to be shared amongst local authorities in partner countries.

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

## **7 Climate Emergency Update Report - Public Consultation**

The Committee considered the joint report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services and Director of Transformation and Partnerships that provided members with an outline of the approach and a scope of the public consultation that was underway on proposals to achieve a reduction in both the Council's emissions and Countywide emissions (for copy or report, see file of minutes).

The Head of Environment was in attendance to present the report and deliver a presentation that highlighted the following points:

- The Climate Crisis / Climate Emergency
- County Durham Temperatures
- Two Emergency Targets Set
  - Council Emissions
  - Countywide Emissions
- What the Council are Consulting on
- Information was provided that indicated that the effects of climate change was evident in county Durham with temperatures rising and this had led to flooding which impacted on the economy, health and the environment.
- Two targets had been set, the first was to reduce the Council's carbon emissions by 60% by 2030 and the second was to investigate further actions to make county Durham completely carbon neutral by 2050 as set out in the Climate Emergency report that was presented at Council in July 2019.
- However, it was highlighted that the Council's emissions only made up 3% of the county's emissions.
- The Council emissions target was focused on four target areas, heat – refurbish buildings, improve insulation, better boilers and biomass boilers; electricity – the use of solar panels on Durham County Council buildings, transport - the authority's pool car contract was due for renewal soon and there was potential for energy saving options; large HGVs were waiting for the technology to catch up and consideration of other non electric initiatives such as bio gas and the use of electric bin lifts which provided reductions in noise and fuel; and schools using biomass boilers and LED lighting replacement.
- The Countywide emission targets would focus on improvements in energy efficiency of homes, businesses and community buildings; generate more energy from County Durham's natural, renewable energy resources; find greener ways to heat buildings such as district heating schemes; that county Durham was ready for electric vehicles, Durham County Council in

partnership with others had 100 charging points for electric vehicle but more was required. Members were informed that an additional 63 hectares of land had been identified under the urban tree challenge. In terms of recycling and waste reduction county Durham was a leader in the North East but there was a long way to go to be a national leader.

- The County Council's emissions target is currently 42% with a target of 45% by 2020 and 55% by 2025.
- The consultation asked a series of questions asking for ideas in relation to the focus of climate change in county Durham and raise awareness of a Climate Pledge. Within the consultation documentation was a link to the full climate emergency report that respondents are encouraged to read if they are completing the full consultation. An option was available for recipients to complete a shorter survey. The survey had involvement from children and young people and to date there had been a good response to the consultation.

The Chair thanked the Head of Environment for his presentation and indicated that the authority needed as much information as they could from the public. The role of the committee was to view and review the recommendations, but they also had an opportunity to feed into the consultation.

Councillor Avery referred to the insulation projects that had taken place in the Dean Bank area that had added insulation to the outside of the homes and had tidied them up. He added that the project was EU funded.

The Head of Environment responded that Durham University were involved in assessing these schemes and the benefits of the project were pointed out to central Government to support local authorities and social housing associations.

The Chair asked how they planned to measure the difference.

The Head of Environment responded that the overall consumption across the county was calculated by government. The county figures were based on all energy providers which was split into sectors and the results of the scheme were shown in the government figures. Occupiers of the scheme also shared before and after energy consumption with the university to show the success of the scheme, which was part of the overall project evidence of benefits.

Councillor Dunn referred to the carbon emissions targets set by the council that received some criticism as it was not too ambitious, but it needed to be realistic and that government support was needed. He indicated that it was absolutely right that the council consult with the people in County Durham and listen to them as the council did not have all the answers or solutions. They needed everyone on board as the council's emissions only accounted for 3% of the county's total emissions. The council declared the climate emergency nearly a year ago and that Durham County Council had come a long way, schools and the Durham County Council

estate should reduce their carbon footprint as soon as possible with the use of solar panels and LED lighting. Areas such as transport may take longer and require further research and development. Councillor Dunn advised he was looking forward to hearing what people thought.

The Head of Environment indicated that the climate emergency was declared in February 2019 and they were not going to wait for the consultation before doing any work. They had an action plan that recognised that resources were needed and the items with the lowest cost, but higher impact would be picked for those early wins.

Mrs R Morris indicated that she welcomed the consultation and asked what were their priorities and if Area Action Partnerships around the county could be asked what their priorities were. In rural areas there were particular issues about carbon emissions and transport needs. She went on to suggest that raising awareness was critical.

The Head of Environment responded that the consultation was to glean what people felt were priorities. There was no particular theme and they would pick out the sorts of things that were low in cost but delivered high returns. Greta Thunberg stated that the most important priority was people informing themselves of the problem, but the council's action plan highlighted education and awareness as important and would help to inform people and this was a significant area of work.

Mrs R Morris indicated that she was concerned that communities should articulate their concerns and gave an example of in her area the local school were posting notices to ask people waiting for children to switch off their engines and that more children could walk to school. She went on to suggest that this was something Durham County Council could do with all local authority maintained schools in county Durham as this was a low or no cost solution that would provide a benefit.

The Head of Environment stated that this would come through in the consultation and that it was a good idea to get schools involved. This would be a low cost with a reward and underlined why they welcomed consultation and feedback.

Councillor Carr indicated that communities should receive education via the Area Action Partnerships in relation to how to become more energy efficient. Meetings could be held about what could do done and who were the affordable energy suppliers and the grants available.

The Head of Environment referred to the BEEP project which had helped lots of small to medium enterprises (SMEs) and BEEP2 had now been established using European funding doing tremendous work. Grants were available and they had helped a lot of organisations and they hoped to build on that and extend further.

The Chair asked if academies were included in the 3% figure for Durham County Council.

The Head of Environment responded that this did not include academies, but they could offer them support.

The Chair then referred to the emissions targets and asked about the position regarding academies. He also asked about the role of woodland and peatland and whether we were exploring the use of hydrogen powered vehicles.

The Head of Environment responded that carbon emissions of academies would not be included within the Durham County Council measure but obviously would form part of the countywide measure. The council did work with some academies in identifying carbon emission reductions that they could make. His team had also identified areas of Durham County Council land next to ancient woodland that could have a win through natural colonisation and explained that the service was looking at grant schemes. Where areas were threatened by disease such as Ash Dieback the service was planning to plant more trees.

The Chair went on to advise that Durham County Council should also be looking at new technologies such as hydrogen powered vehicles in addition to electric vehicles.

The Head of Environment indicated that hydrogen was an area that they were looking at.

Mr T Bolton referred to some excellent work carried out with Durham County Council and community centres that provided an energy efficiency survey that resulted in lights been replaced with LED lights and asked if this was something that Durham County Council actively promoted and contacted parishes and community centres. He also referred to the LED street lighting programme and asked if they had considered solar power units for road signage.

The Head of Environment responded that the work to retrofit 60,000 street lights was a significant project and that a further 15,000 street lights were being considered and would lead to further carbon reductions. He had not heard about solar powered road signage so would feed this back to colleagues. He went on to advise that giving advice to communities was an important element of reducing carbon emissions and that Evergreen fund was a government fund that provided upfront costs and then the communities paid back but it was for members to determine.

Mrs P Holding indicated that she was delighted that the Council had invested into tree planting around the County and that the County Durham Local Access Forum were looking at areas for tree planting with paths for walks that would help people's wellbeing and the environment.

The Head of Environment responded that the Head of Corporate Property and Land was systematically looking at the best use of land holdings. Members would hear more about the urban tree fund in the coming weeks where the council would be working with social housing.

Councillor Higgins asked if they had considered reducing the summer school holiday to 4 weeks and move to the winter months to make energy savings.

The Head of Environment indicated that he was not aware that this was being looked at, but all ideas would be looked at as part of the consultation.

**Resolved:** (i) That the report and presentation be noted.

(ii) That the Committee continue to receive updates on the Climate Emergency response and monitor its progress.

### **Councillor J Clare left the meeting**

## **8 Single Use Plastics: From Pledge to Practice**

The Committee considered the joint report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services and Director of Transformation and Partnerships that provided members with a progress report on the work to reduce the use of Single Use Plastics in Durham County Council and County Durham (for copy or report, see file of minutes).

The Head of Environment was in attendance to present the report and deliver a presentation that highlighted the following points:

- Background
  - What was the Council doing to phase out SUPs? Could it sign a pledge?
  - What partners in County Durham were doing including businesses?
  - What could the Council do as a land owner and licensing authority as well as public events
- Work to date: Action Plan – Corporate Procurement Services
- Adopted a bespoke Single Use Plastic Pledge for County Durham County Council
- Single Use Plastic Pledge – 188 had pledged to date
- SUP logo
- Work to date: Action Plan
  - DCC Catering Services
  - Consumer Protection Services
  - Education
  - Highways
  - Waste Management

- Culture and Sport
- External Partner Engagement
- Working with Partners – Northumbrian Water Refill Campaign
- Work to date: Action Plan – Communications
- Action Plan Summary
- Next Steps
- Summary
- Task Group Recognition – The team had won a national award

Members were advised that to date there were 188 Single Use Plastic pledges across County Durham from individuals, schools, community groups and businesses. There was a potential for regional SUP reduction pledge based on Durham County Council's example.

In Durham County Council offices and Beamish Museum crisp packets were being recycled through a registered scheme, however this was not open to households. In Durham City there were now recycling bins alongside general waste bins and street cleaning operatives carried two bags one for general waste and one for recycling.

The Head of Environment advised that while a lot of actions within the action plan was complete further work was being identified. Work was being shared with County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service.

The work to eliminate SUPs had achieved a lot in a short time and that the service had a better understanding. Alternatives should be more environmentally beneficial and would get more sophisticated.

The Chair thanked the Head of Environment for his presentation and indicated that the report demonstrated the tremendous amount of work that had been achieved over a small time period. He congratulated the team on winning the national award for the single use plastics pledge at the Local Authority Recycling Advisory Committee awards.

Mr T Bolton referred to environment champions within the authority that use to be in each service and asked if this structure was still in place.

The Head of Environment responded that the scheme was still in place but had been revamped with climate change in mind and a number of employees had signed up to the scheme.

In response to the question from Councillor Iveson, Members were advised that not many organisations were able to successfully recycle black plastic. The Strategic Waste Manager advised that in relation to carbon black food trays the infra-red technology in recycling plants cannot pick up carbon black. However, this was slowly being changed so that infra-red technologies could pick up black trays. Members were informed that when black enters the system it taints the colour of

other plastics. In this region organisations do not have the technology; the service had three years of the contract left and could write new specifications into a new contract.

A company in Peterlee had a use for microwavable food trays so they were hoping to work with the company.

Councillor Dunn commented that a significant amount of work and progress had been made. He commended the action plan and stated that single use plastics was not just about signing a pledge but was about what and how we are going to do to deliver. Some people did not know where to start and by publishing information others could pick it up, so the authority could lead. He was delighted to hear that suppliers were asking how they could help, and organisations were wanting to get on board. He was aware that the Co-op had moved away from black plastic trays which hopefully would force other food suppliers to move away from black plastic trays.

The Head of Environment advised that it was about communications and that there was investment of a web presence to signpost individuals and organisations. To date there was 188 signatories and most wanted further contact. Top tips were given on the web and it had generated a virtual community of interest.

The Chair advised that following Councillor Dunn's query at Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee about Climate Change being embedded into the implications sheet on committee reports this was being discussed by Committee Services and Legal Services.

Mrs P Holding indicated that she was pleased that more guidance was coming out on what could be recycled and understood that black plastic container if clean could be used for road surfacing.

The Head of Environment responded that recycling changed throughout the country and the government's intention was to make every authority the same, however this needed a lot in investment in the infrastructure to bring everyone to the same level. The Council constantly sent out advice on what could and couldn't be recycled. At Durham County Council the service had put stickers on bins and invested in officers to go out to knock on doors and explain and engage with communities. The Head of Environment gave the example of how the service engaged with students of what can and cannot be recycled in Durham.

Councillor Coult asked if other city centres had dual bins and referred to the pledge for the recycling of crisp packets and asked how many schools had signed up and if they could be used as a drop off point for members of the public to take their crisp packets.

In response to the question, Members were advised that 20 schools had signed up to the Walkers pledge, however the number of trials was limited at this stage and the authority were lucky to be part of the scheme. Walkers do have public collection points for crisp packets. In County Durham the Care Share Foundation were offering crisp packet recycling to the public.

Mrs R Morris sought clarification if the council recycled black plastic plant pots as her local nursery recycled these.

The Head of Environment indicated that he was not aware of a scheme, but he did know that the council's nursery reused plant pots and looked to avoid the use of single use plastics.

Mrs R Morris asked if companies who recycled could be recognised.

The Waste Strategy Team Manager responded that they were working with the Comms Team to show case some examples.

The Strategic Waste Manager indicated that plant pots could be recycled at the household waste centres but not the kerbside. They had also been approached by a company for plastic pellets for use on roads who they had put in touch with the household waste centres.

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

## **9 Budget Outturn Quarter 4 2018/2019 Report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services**

The Committee considered the Joint Report of the Corporate Director of Resources and Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services that set out details of the final outturn position for the service highlighting major variances in comparison with the budget, based on the position to the end of March 2019.

The Finance Manager for Resources – Regeneration and Local Services Finance was in attendance to present the report and deliver a presentation and advised Members that there was a typo in para 4 of the report and that the underspend was £1.2m as shown in the table (for copy of report and presentation, see file of minutes).

**Resolved:** That the final outturn position for 2018/19 be noted.

## **10 Budget Forecast and Outturn Quarter 1 2019/2020 Report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services**

The Committee considered the Joint Report of the Corporate Director of Resources and Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services that set out details of

the forecast outturn budget for the service area highlighting major variances in comparison with the budget, based on the position to the end of Quarter 1.

The Finance Manager for Resources – Regeneration and Local Services Finance was in attendance to present the report and deliver a presentation (for copy of report and presentation, see file of minutes).

Mr T Bolton referred to the Gala Theatre and one of the challenges was the new cinema in Durham City and commented on the state of the theatre in particular the seats in the auditorium and asked if there were plans to refurbish the Gala.

The Finance Manager responded that they were looking at the catering facilities in the Gala, but he was not aware of any refurbishments to seating but would obtain an update and advise members accordingly.

**Resolved:** That the outturn position for Quarter 1 be noted.

## **11 Performance Management Quarter 1 2019/2020 Report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships**

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships that presented progress toward achieving the key outcomes of the Council's corporate performance framework (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategic Manager was in attendance to present the report and outlined to the committee highlights of the quarter one performance management report relating to environment cleanliness, carbon emissions and recycling.

Councillor Crute referred to paragraph two of the report on page 127 in relation to graffiti and advised that all members of the council were invited to a seminar following the last meeting of Council and were informed about the correlation between racist graffiti and identify areas of extremism or identify with issues and asked if the figures could be broken down to gather evidence to help other services. The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager confirmed that the figures could be broken down.

Councillor Dunn commented that graffiti removed by the Highways Agency was sometimes as bad as the graffiti itself and asked why buildings and structures subjected to graffiti were not coated with anti-graffiti paint. He commented that at one time there had been a zero tolerance on graffiti and hoped to get back to that. He asked if anti-graffiti paint was used so that graffiti could be washed off with water.

The Head of Environment advised Members that any racist or offensive graffiti on Durham County Council land would be removed within 24 hours. A record of the

graffiti was taken which could be broken down and shared. On private or other public land, they were encouraged to remove the graffiti but was a long process and they were looking to see if they could be more proactive on public land. In cases of private land Durham County Council did have some powers on private land, but it was usually a process of consent but would carry out the works in the public interest and charge the landowner. There were resource issues but it was a case of becoming more proactive and 'nipping in the bud', apply anti-graffiti paint and work with the police

Mr T Bolton referred to graffiti on parish signage and how he struggled to find someone to remove the graffiti in his parish so there may be an opportunity to promote this service to parish councils.

The Head of Environment responded that they could not guarantee that the jet spray would not cause any damage.

The Chair referred to waste collection contamination and the 9.58% fines and sought clarification on this.

The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategic Manager responded that this was small items of plastic such as bottle tops that are too small to be processed and are rejected by the machinery used to sort recycling material.

The Chair asked if this was an education opportunity as previously in committee members had been told not to keep tops on bottles but to be put into the recycling separate, should bottle tops now be kept on the bottle.

The Head of Environment advised that he would speak to the strategic waste manager and advise members accordingly.

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

## **12 Verbal Update on Review Activity**

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer advised that the working group held its final meeting on 22 July where they received evidence from the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Assets regarding allotments and then considered the key findings of all the evidence put before them and formulated their recommendations.

During the summer work was done on a draft report that was circulated to officers for accuracy. It was expected that report would go to Cabinet in December/January following sign off by the committee.

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

### **13 Durham Strategic Flood Group Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Durham Strategic Flood Group held on 6 September 2019, were received by the Committee for information.