

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 4 November 2019 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor E Adam (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors O Milburn, B Avery, A Batey, D Bell, L Brown, J Carr, B Coult, R Crute, S Dunn, A Gardner, J Higgins, L Maddison, R Manchester, A Simpson and M Wilson

Co-opted Members:

Mr T Bolton and Mrs P Holding

Also in Attendance:

Councillors C Hampson and J Stephenson
Mr D Balls (Co-opted Member on Safer and Stronger OSC)

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors 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 4 October 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and 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 Operation Spruce Up and Fly-tipping in County Durham - Progress Updates

The Committee considered the joint report of the Director of Transformation and Partnership and the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services that provided Members with a progress report on fly-tipping in County Durham including work being undertaken to reduce fly-tipping and details of the evaluation of 'Operation Spruce Up' scheme (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Mr G Knight, Civic Pride Officer was in attendance to deliver a presentation on Operation Spruce Up that provided the following information:

- Context - Durham had 19.6m visitors per year, with tourism worth £864m per year to the local economy. There had been 21,000 street scene requests a year with 7768 fly-tipping incidents in 2016/17 together with a 49% reduction in central funding.
- The What
 - Targeted 'Deep Clean' of specific areas
 - Location chosen between the local community via the AAP's and Clean and Green
 - 1 Spruce up per AAP area per year
- Much more than just a big clean up!
 - Community engagement in planning and implementation
 - Focused surge of activity
 - Longstanding results
 - Strategic approach
 - Partnerships with local business and organisations
- Excellent Value for Money
 - The project runs out of currently existing budgets with the only additional expenditure for a designated coordinator and some cost for materials and plants
 - The project utilises partnership working and focused activity to create good value for money
- Detail of partners involved in 'Operation Spruce up'
- Local Changes make a big difference
- Substantial media coverage
- Evaluation
 - Surveys are conducted after each spruce up of residents in the immediate vicinity of the spruce up area
 - Surveys and consultations conducted in partnership where appropriate
 - A breakdown of the evaluation was provided – doorstep evaluation
 - Feedback from local communities
- Outcomes
 - Substantial improvements evidenced following each of the 14 spruce ups
 - Over 4500 young people reached through the scheme

- More than 200 volunteer hours
- 6 additional 'Mini Spruce Ups' carried out
- What Makes Spruce Up Special
 - Exceptional teamwork across the council and community
 - Ground breaking results with innovative ideas
 - Low cost: more expenses covered through existing budgets and assets of clean and green team

Following the presentation, the Chair asked Members for their questions.

Mr T Bolton asked how the work carried out by the operation spruce up team was sustained.

The Civic Pride Officer responded that they had a conversation before the start of each project on how the work would be sustained and gave some examples of where organisations had taken over maintenance responsibilities.

Councillor Avery praised the work carried out in Ferryhill by the Operation Spruce Up team but commented that unfortunately the work had deteriorated and he felt that there was a need to get partners involved including the Town Council and Livin.

The Civic Pride Officers responded that they worked successfully with a number of housing providers however there had had been some difficulties engaging with Livin. It was recognised that some of the works carried out would fade in time such as painting but an application to revisit the area after 2 years could be made via the AAP.

The Chair indicated that Members could raise issues with Livin in the forum.

The Senior Civic Pride Officer then indicated that the public wanted to see clean and tidy areas and that the service does receive complaints about refuse/waste tipped on and the general maintenance of Livin land, as quite often Durham County Council land was adjacent to land owned by Livin. The Officer confirmed that Livin had changed its contractor and local Members commented that standards had improved.

Mr I Hault, the Neighbourhood Protection Manager indicated that he would check to ensure that conversations had taken place with Livin.

Councillor Stephenson referred to the spruce up in her area that had resulted in a resident's forming a friends group with several litter picks taking place. She continued that Operation Spruce Up in her area had been very successful.

Mrs P Holding referred to the photographs in the presentation showing fly-tipping and asked if lack of bin capacity was an issue that led to fly-tipping.

The Neighbourhood Warden Manager indicated that the Council had a policy of not collecting black sacks that were not located in the bin and this could contribute to a build-up of rubbish.

The Neighbourhood Protection Manager continued that Durham was a windy County and therefore rubbish blew into locations as indicated in the presentation. He continued that some areas like the coast to coast route were difficult to access to ensure that bins along the route were kept clean. The service carried out education on how to get rid of waste by knocking on doors and posting leaflets.

The Senior Civic Pride Officer referred to the first photograph and confirmed that was in Seaham and the waste shown on the slide was a mixture of fly-tipping and rubbish from dog walkers, even though there were bins located in the areas. The Officer confirmed that the service had used an education enforcement approach in this area.

Councillor Coult referred to the mini spruce up that had taken place in her area and commented that this was a good example of partners working together and residents taking responsibility to maintain the work done.

Councillor Higgins congratulated the Clean and Green team on the standard of their work and asked if the evaluation figures could show the number of people who took part in the evaluation process.

The Civic Pride Officer responded that he could provide this information following the meeting.

Councillor Avery commented that in his local area he had an issue with dog fouling in social housing areas and sought clarification as to whether he should contact Durham County Council or Livin to request additional dog waste bins.

The Neighbourhood Protection Manager confirmed that he would clarify who was responsible for the provision of dog waste bins and respond to the member accordingly.

Councillor Adam asked whether secondary fires were classed as fly-tipping.

The Neighbourhood Protection Manager responded that they were separate issues, although fly-tipped waste could be set on fire, however he confirmed that the number of secondary fires in the county was small compared to the number of fly-tipping incidents.

The Chair thanked Officers for their presentation.

Mr R Brown, Neighbourhood Warden Manager was in attendance to deliver a presentation on Fly-tipping that provided the following information:

- How is Durham doing
- The Durham Approach
 - Enforcement, Partnership Operations, Involvement/Participation, Education/Awareness
- Education and Awareness – Social Media/Video Footage
- Reporting Fly-tipping
 - Residents can report online
 - Link jobs between Wardens and Clean and Green
- Bulky Collections
 - Book online, localised promotion, subsidised and one of the cheapest in the North East
- Waste Permits
- What gets fly-tipped and where – Live Demo
- Enforcement
- Stop Checks
 - Work with Police to carry out stop checks
 - Waste Carriers and Duty of Care compliance
- Vehicle Seizures
- Successful Prosecutions
- Partnership Task Force
- Methods of Vehicle Disposal
 - Crushed/sold at auction
- Civic Pride – money from the sale of seized vehicles put back into community events
- Future Plans and challenges

Following the presentation, the Chair asked Members for their questions.

Councillor Batey made reference to the previous presentation and questions and commented that in her role as a member of the fire authority and as a licensing member she was concerned on how fly-tipping incidents were reported and were fly-tipping incidents being masked in fire authority statistics. Councillor Batey then referred to the two covert camera that were purchased for her division and asked if the cameras could be used in other areas.

The Neighbourhood Warden Co-ordinator responded that Durham County Council did use signage in the county to act as a deterrent as people did not know whether a camera was deployed or not. In relation to cameras they were designed to be dug in and therefore cannot be used in street locations. It was confirmed that the Neighbourhood Wardens use education in the first instance with leaflet drops, then gather information and would then speak to the individual concerned. In relation to concerns about the masking of fly-tipping statistics the Neighbourhood Warden Manager indicated that they were working with the fire brigade as a partnership group and were looking at their systems and how fly-tipping was defined. He then

referred to secondary fires and confirmed that they were not masking incidents of fly-tipping in the county.

Councillor Avery commented that he had heard that some fires in the county were deliberate and were for insurance purposes.

The Neighbourhood Warden Manager commented that he had not heard of this however there had been a slight increase in primary fires as fires were used to destroy evidence following a burglary.

Councillor Avery referred to the use of black bags for additional waste and commented that he had been told that only clear/transparent bags would be collected. He then asked if local residents were aware of this policy.

Members were advised that this only applied to recycled waste and it was confirmed that the strategic waste team would be responsible for publicising this and the comments raised and the suggestions made by members during the meeting would be forwarded to that team.

Councillor Dunn referred to the slide on 'How is Durham Doing' that showed the 6 year trend and commented that if you looked at the 4 year trend from 2015/2016 onwards the figures had plateaued. Despite the national trend going up Durham's figure was not acceptable and there was a need to look at how this figure could be further reduced. He continued that if cameras could only be used in certain situations and locations then Durham County Council needed to look at different technology to increase higher prosecutions. Councillor Dunn then informed members that he had a household recycling centre in his area however there was still fly-tipping around the area of the centre and that there was a need to do more publicity highlighting action taken by Durham County Council and more prosecutions.

Officers responded that they were using education to get it right and were carrying out tougher prosecutions and seizing vehicles. They were also working with landlords in relation to fly-tipping and the waste carrying duty of care would make a bigger impact. The team also had monthly meetings with the clean and green team and had designed some of the laybys out that had been hotspots for fly-tipping.

The Neighbourhood Protection Manager Commented that it had been his decision to include the 'How is Durham Doing' slide as the national press were saying that fly-tipping had increased over a period of time and he had wanted to show how the council was performing in tackling this issue. He continued that fly-tipping was a top priority for Durham County Council. In addition, there had been a significant increase in e- permits, Durham County Council continued to promote bulky waste collections and tougher enforcement which had resulted in the crushing of a vehicle to give a clear message that in County Durham the authority takes tough action with people who pickup waste and fly-tip. The number of people who care about the

community was growing and the culture towards waste was changing and that schemes such as a deposit return scheme would continue to grow this cultural change. An issue for the Council was renovation works on properties where the builder disposes of the waste, however the resident does not know or does not ask how the waste would be disposed of. The introduction of a duty of care where householders need to know how their waste was to be disposed of would further add to this cultural change. In addition, the introduction of Selective Licensing in the county would also help in bringing further regulations to private landlords.

He advised that he would produce a further slide to show how the figures compared at a more local level per head of population showing how well the Council was doing in tackling this issue however, there was still more to be done.

The Chair referred to the slide which showed the categories of fly-tipped waste and indicated that 80% of fly-tipping was black bag domestic waste and not waste from contractors.

The Neighbourhood Protection Manager commented that householders duty of care links to this and that residents in the future would need to ask for a receipt from contractors to confirm where the waste was going for disposal.

Mr T Bolton referred to the bulky waste collection scheme and asked if there was a maximum number of items to be collected and whether neighbours could share the bulky waste collection and if this option was available, was it advertised.

The Neighbourhood Protection Manager responded that neighbours could share the option of a bulky waste collection however this was not advertised but he would take the suggestion back to colleagues to consider a campaign to advertise this. Members were advised that the maximum number of items for a bulky waste collection was 6.

Councillor Gardner indicated that he was surprised to see Durham and Cheater-le-Street on the lists of hot spots for fly-tipping and asked if the council had any information to indicate why fly-tipping was taking place in these areas. He continued by asking how effective publicity was as acting as a deterrent.

The Neighbourhood Protection Manager referred to the media releases on fly-tipping enforcement and commented that the press release was always balanced and gave examples of the various options for the disposal of waste including Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs), bulky waste collections and permits. The way people were operating was changing and it was important that they continued with the promotion, particularly the 'Your Rubbish Your Responsibility'. The seizure of vehicles by Durham County Council was discussed in the community and the tonnage at household waste recycling centres was increasing.

Councillor Maddison commented that she had previously referred to fire authority statistics on secondary fires and then asked for the figures to be broken down further. This breakdown showed that there was a link between where empty properties were located and where secondary fires were located. Going forward teams needed to collectively look at the statistics and identify areas of focus and interventions to be undertaken. She then referred to bulky waste collections and commented that items such as mattresses or carpets, should they have to be out for collection for a week and get wet would not be collected. Councillor Maddison continued by suggesting that Durham County Council needs to look at a far quicker collection service for this type of item.

The Neighbourhood Protection Manager advised Members that he would take this up with the relevant team.

Councillor Coult referred to green waste and commented that a resident had contacted Durham County Council, having already tied the green waste into six bundles and was told that if the individual bundles were too heavy then they would not be taken. This resulted in the resident making the bundles smaller but lighter in weight, with eight bundles waiting for collection. However, two of the bundles were not taken as he was above the maximum number of bundles/bags. Councillor Coult asked what should have been done and should there not be more clear guidance regarding weight.

The Neighbourhood Protection Manager responded that if the customer could lift the bundles then Durham County Council's collection team would be able to lift them, but he would feed this back and look into incorporating this into customer service advice in the future.

Councillor Manchester referred to the Members dashboard that showed fly-tipping in his area as two, which was not correct and should be higher. He suggested that other members may want to check the figures quoted in their individual dashboards. He continued that he had been informed that this was a technical issue that was currently being investigated.

The Neighbourhood Protection Manager responded that the information shown was fly-tipping incidents that had been removed as there was the issue of multiple reports in relation to fly-tipped waste.

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

(ii) That a progress update on fly-tipping in the County and the various initiatives being undertaken to tackle the issue be included in the future work programme for 2020/2021.