

**Environment and Sustainable
Communities Overview and Scrutiny
Committee**



16 November 2020

Environmental Campaigns Update

**Report of Alan Patrickson, Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods
and Climate Change**

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide Members of the Environment & Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee with a progress report on environmental campaigns including fly tipping.

Executive summary

- 2 A high quality local environment can have a substantial beneficial impact on Council objectives of more and better jobs, long independent lives and connected communities.
- 3 The Council has a strong track record in delivering environmental campaigns, often in partnership with a variety of community groups, that seeks to raise awareness of an issue, provide opportunities for local involvement, and where appropriate undertake enforcement as a deterrent for the minority who spoil our environment.
- 4 Arrangements have been made for the Head of Environment to attend the meeting on the 16 November 2020 to provide more detail on four environmental campaigns:
 - Operation Stop It (Fly Tipping)
 - In Bloom
 - Operation Spruce Up
 - Find and Fix (replacing Spruce Up).

- 5 Whilst each campaign has different objectives, they all share the hallmarks of a common approach. In addition to an overview of each scheme, the presentation will give specific reference to issues arising due to COVID-19, and the recent work in combatting fly tipping.

Recommendations

- 6 That the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee note and comment on the information provided in the report and presentation.

Background

- 7 The local environment is crucially important to quality of life in our communities. Residents regularly report issues and concerns to the Council, Area Action Partnerships, Town and Parish Councils and elected Members on a wide range of matters from dog fouling and littering, to graffiti and flytipping. Not only do these matters impact on community safety and fear of crime, but they are also recognised as forms of anti-social behaviour, which the British Crime Survey consistently identifies that resident's feel is a big or fairly big problem in their area.
- 8 Whilst the Council does deploy considerable resources through its clean and green teams in ensuring the County is clean and attractive as possible, it is recognised that behavioural change is the key to a more sustainable environment as well as lower costs. The civic pride approach in Durham, applied since Local Government Reorganisation (diagram below) utilises programmes of education/awareness and community involvement as a key foundation to its approach to environmental services. Operations and enforcement will always have a part to play, but their role is lessened, if this more holistic approach to the local environment is taken.



- 9 The common ingredients to each campaign are a task group to oversee the work, a communications plan, and a form of evaluation/performance measurement to establish if the aims are met.

Operation Stop It

- 10 The years that followed Local Government reorganisation saw a year by year reduction in fly tipping, until a rise in 2013/14. In November 2014 Operation 'Stop It' was established to tackle this in a multi-agency way and includes various DCC sections, Police, Environment Agency and Crimestoppers and it has 3 main aims:
- (a) to reduce the number of incidents
 - (b) to target fly-tippers and;
 - (c) educate householders and businesses to understand their responsibilities in making sure their waste is disposed of properly
- 11 Since the start of Operation Stop It flytipping has reduced by 26% in comparison to the national picture that has seen incidents rise to nearly 1 million each year. For financial year comparison between 2013/14 and 2019/20 inclusive there has been a 28.3% reduction compared to an increase 20.5% nationally.
- 12 COVID-19 has presented significant challenges to the service, as the volumes of household waste increased with "stay at home" (at its peak in May having 24.8% more recyclate and 17.3% more residual waste). Furthermore some services such as Household Waste Recycling Centres, garden waste and bulky waste collection were temporarily suspended, with neighbourhood wardens also redeployed to other services.
- 13 In line with national trends fly-tipping increased during the year to date by approximately 5%. The presentation will cover the waste types identified (biggest increases in black bags), and the new initiatives to address the issues, utilising the now restored services, additional warden investments, and enforcement including seizure of vehicles linked to fly-tipping. Whilst not specifically fly –tipping, Members will also be updated on an e-learning course developed, and trialled for those caught with a littering offence, and wish for their fixed penalty notice level to be reduced.

Operation Spruce Up and Find and Fix

- 14 The presentation will cover both schemes. Spruce Up has been a highly successful multi service "deep clean" and refresh of a town or village nominated by their local Area Action Partnership. It involved teams from

clean and green, highways, building services, wardens and waste collection undertaking a concerted range of improvements in a selected area. Some 37 areas had the Spruce Up, and resulted in a range of improvements from bollards painted, to new street furniture, pathways cleared and revitalised landscaping.

- 15 Key to the work, and the momentum that the monthly programme produced was that of community involvement. Advance planning often allowed school children to design posters in their area, and a wide range of businesses and community groups worked alongside Council teams in the week long scheme.
- 16 Surveys undertaken after the spruce up saw on average a 90% recognition of the improvements made. The scheme has also gained national profile for instance, Keep Britain Tidy Campaign of the Year 2019 (indeed Operation Stop It was successful in gaining the same award the previous year).
- 17 Whilst Spruce Up allowed a focused effort in an area, there was considerable planning involved in each one. Find and Fix, a successor scheme is designed to be a similar approach but speedier through the deployment of four teams of three multi-skilled staff, who are able to proactively identify and tackle a wide range of tasks. They are guided by their own local knowledge of their areas, as well as complaints/service requests received by the Council, and in due course we will be opening up wider communication channels to the teams.
- 18 Whilst a start has already been made (122 improvements across 22 sites) we plan in the coming months that the teams are supplemented by apprentices and work placements, and in due course the local community. Whilst the improvements are small scale, they have nevertheless been greeted positively to date, the presentation will show some examples.

In Bloom

- 19 Members will already be aware of the prominence of In Bloom groups across County Durham. The Council works to support these groups through technical advice (where needed), grants (In Your Neighbourhood), and through support through the care and maintenance of public open spaces in the area, working as far as possible in collaboration with community requirements.
- 20 The benefits of these schemes should not be seen as restricted to pretty flower displays, but rather an important means of expressing identity of towns and villages, and helping communities work together for the common good.

Impact of COVID-19

- 21 Unfortunately many of our programmes of community work, including the Big Spring Clean needed to cease during lockdown. Staff in the Civic Pride Team that support much of this work were redeployed.
- 22 A move towards normality began to occur from late Summer onwards, as litter picking and other equipment was loaned out to small groups, accompanied by social distancing advice. In Durham City, the long tradition of the Beautiful Durham Garden competition was able to go ahead (socially distanced) and whilst the annual ceremony not held, there was excellent feedback from a variety of residents and groups, once again proud to show their gardens and community sites. Countywide the Civic Pride Team also launched a “Garden Treasures” competition where residents were able to send in pictures that showed their hard work – over 50 entries were received.

Conclusions

- 23 We all have responsibility to care for our local environment and not spoil it by litter, graffiti or allowing dogs to foul.
- 24 Environmental campaigns have proven a very successful mechanism of harnessing support from across the community in addressing local issues, and it is a formula that is set to continue, especially when the current pandemic is over.

Background papers

None

Other useful documents

None

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Not applicable

Finance

Not applicable

Consultation

Not applicable

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Not applicable

Human Rights

Not applicable

Climate Change

Many of the campaigns promote environmental responsibility, including sustainable practices, use of materials and minimising waste.

Crime and Disorder

The environment and how it looks is linked to crime and disorder and working to ensure that Durham remains a clean and safe place helps contribute to this agenda.

Staffing

Not applicable

Accommodation

Not applicable

Risk

Not applicable

Procurement

Not applicable