

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held remotely via Microsoft Teams on **Monday 16 November 2020 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor E Adam (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors O Milburn, B Avery, A Batey, D Bell, L Brown, B Coult, R Crute, S Dunn, T Henderson, J Higgins, C Kay, L Maddison, R Manchester, I McLean, A Simpson, P Sexton and M Wilson

Co-opted Members:

Mr T Bolton and Mrs P Holding

Also Present:

Councillors D Boyes, P Crathorne, C Hampson, B Kellett, H Liddle, J Stephenson and J Turnbull, Parish Councillor Nicola Dexter Bishop Middleham Parish Council and Mr Dennis Stoddart

1 Apologies

There were no apologies for absence.

2 Substitute Members

No notification of Substitute Members had been received.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2020 were agreed as a correct record and would be 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 Environmental Campaigns Update

Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee, County Councillor P Crathorne and Parish Councillor Dexter representing Bishop Middleham Parish Council had been invited to attend the meeting for this agenda item.

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change that provided Members with a progress report on environmental campaigns including fly-tipping.

The Head of Environment was in attendance to present the report and deliver a presentation that looked at four different campaigns, 'Operation Stop It', 'Operation Spruce Up', 'In Bloom/Streetscene' and 'Find and Fix' and the impact of COVID-19 on the relevant service areas delivering the various campaigns. Although the campaigns are very different they share a common approach of education, involvement /participation, operation and ultimately enforcement (for copy of report and presentation, see file of minutes).

The Head of Environment indicated that the number of fly tipping incidents in County Durham had reduced over several years which bucked the national trend, but this figure had increased over quarter one 2020/2021. It was understood that the vast majority of fly tipping was either black bin bags or old furniture and this in part could be attributed to the household waste recycling centres being closed at the beginning of lockdown, more people being at home and the redeployment of wardens to other services during lockdown period.

The presentation summarised enforcement actions taken over a period of five years and included the first two quarters of 2020/2021 which indicated that more vehicles had been seized during these two quarters than in the previous two years.

Operation Spruce up had been successful and had involved local people working together with the Council to improve their communities. Surveys carried out following Spruce Up initiatives indicated that 90% of residents whose communities had benefitted from the scheme had seen an improvement.

Find and Fix is similar to Operation Spruce Up, but where there was a lot of preliminary work with Spruce Up, Find and Fix is on a much smaller scale. Teams proactively look at where jobs are needed to be done, or where people have highlighted areas of concern and carry out the required work and then move on to the next job. There are four teams of three that are multi skilled, which has added to the speed of the work undertaken. The Head of Environment advised that it was

hoped to boost the capacity of the teams with apprentices. The scheme began recently and to date had undertaken 122 jobs in 13 locations and had received positive feedback.

The 'In Bloom' and 'Streetscene' campaigns have involved communities working with council operations in creating beautiful open spaces. Although some of the In Bloom and Streetscene campaigns did not go ahead in 2020 such as the Big Spring Clean, the Garden Treasures events did proceed with strong interest from the public. The Head of Environment highlighted a new initiative which is being trialled to address littering where people caught littering have the opportunity to reduce their £100/150 fixed penalty notice (FPN) fine to a £65 FPN fine if they agree to take part in a e-learning course about littering. This type of enforcement is the first of its kind by a local authority and initial feedback received is positive.

The Chair thanked the Officer for his presentation and commented that it was interesting to see how schemes had developed and he hoped the find and fix campaign would have an impact like the other campaigns. It was about encouraging and supporting the community to make them aware that fly-tipping was unacceptable, and education was a key feature.

Councillor Avery referred to his ward and congratulated the Head of Environment for the work undertaken, but highlighted that residents were leaving out their refuse bins and that there were issues with contamination in bins which had resulted in the bins not being emptied. He asked about education for residents to alleviate these issues.

The Officer responded that there were a number of areas within the County with similar challenges. The service approach started with education, they had roving recycling staff who would give advice about what goes in which bin but due to the current restrictions this was not being carried out on a face to face basis. They were currently looking at further promotion in relation to residents getting their bins in after collection with the use of localised signage or letters and staff labelling the bins. Enforcement would be used where necessary as a last resort.

Councillor Milburn commended the Find and Fix scheme and referred to fly-tipping and asked if the service had considered using the 'what3words app' to pinpoint locations of incidents rather than describe the location. She continued that the use of this app would be of particular benefit in rural or remote locations.

The Officer responded that this was an excellent suggestion, they did have some incidents where fly tipping had been reported but where no fly-tipping was found at the supposed location and using the app would help staff to find and deal with the fly tip, he would take Councillor Milburn's suggestion forward.

Councillor Boyes referred to covert cameras paid for by Members and asked for an update on where the cameras were deployed and how many cameras were still in

operation. He then referred to Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC) in neighbouring local authorities where an appointment system is used and suggested that residents from outside the area were maybe using Durham County Council's Recycling Centres and this may have contributed to the queues at Durham recycling sites as currently proof of address was not required. He then referred to empty homes in the Easington area and the high number of fly-tipping incidents in the back yards of the terraced properties and asked what the authority could do to make them less attractive to fly tippers as they also became a target for arsonists.

The Officer responded that he would get back to Councillor Boyes with the precise number of covert cameras in operation, but he was aware that a number of cameras had been stolen or damaged. Technology had also moved on and devices were now much smaller and more accurate. Members were not advised of where cameras had been deployed on a case by case basis but they had successfully deployed them which had resulted in a number of prosecutions, he would look at how they could update members whilst still maintaining an element of discretion regarding location of where the cameras were deployed.

With regard to the HWRCs, the Officer advised that there was no intelligence to confirm that there was any great cross border movement at the centres. Anyone who was issued with a permit for the HWRC had to be a resident within County Durham to obtain a permit. They were currently looking at a booking system but had found that a booking system could delay visits and could cause traffic management issues if residents turned up without an appointment, but this was something that they would review.

In relation to empty homes and fly-tipping, the service initially contacted landlords and issued community protection warnings and notices requiring them to remove their waste. However, this sometimes resulted in the rubbish being moved to another empty property and the whole process started again. Landlords were now required as part of the notice to provide evidence as to where the waste had been taken and by an authorised carrier, this was helping to address the situation. The service had also targeted areas to make it more difficult to dump waste. The Residential Landlords Accreditation Scheme might offer opportunities via incentives or standards.

Councillor Kay sought clarification if the HWRC were currently closed due to the second lockdown. The Member was advised that the HWRCs were currently open except for temporary closures.

Councillor Kay indicated that due to the lockdown residents were generating more household waste and asked if the capacity to recycle at HWRCs could be increased.

Members were advised that the service was operating within government guidance and regulations keeping the HWRCs open. They were also putting extra resources

into the bulky waste collections that had been busy. He would go into further details in his later presentation on Household Waste Management.

Councillor Coult thanked the Head of Environment and his team for the phenomenal work that had been put in and that they had done an exceptional job which should be recognised. She then referred to education and training and how COVID-19 had impacted on work that was undertaken by the service with children and asked if there were any plans in place to develop online educational training which would also enhance the number of schools that could receive training.

The Officer thanked Councillor Coult for the kind words that he would pass onto the teams. He advised that they were looking to expand the online resource and the civic pride team had been developing these resources and were in the phase of starting to roll out the online resources. They were also looking to expand the e learning element for littering to cover items such as dog fouling.

Councillor Sexton thanked the Find and Fix team for the clean up in his ward where they had transformed a shopping area that needed attention. He then referred to cameras and how he had problems with fly-tipping in the rural area at the edge of his ward and asked if members funded a camera would they be able to influence where the camera was located as he would want the camera he funded to be located in his ward. He also suggested that fines for fly-tipping should be increased, he understood the educational element but if fines were increased this may deter people and asked if there was any evidence that this would be effective.

The Officer responded that members views on the location of the deployed cameras were taken into consideration as much as possible and they occasionally worked with the police so that they could use number plate recognition which should be located in areas where there was not large volumes of traffic. Members were informed that there was a risk to the smaller cameras which were easily stolen.

The Officer advised that the service was getting six larger cameras that could go out in more urban areas and may be able to deal with localised issues. Fines for fly-tipping carried a maximum of £50,000 and in some cases up to 12 months imprisonment in a Magistrates Court and in a Crown Court the offence could attract an unlimited fine and up to five years imprisonment. However, the courts make the decision on fines within their guidelines and the council has no influence on this. Durham County Council can issue fixed penalty notice of £400 and the number issued had increased. In addition to the fixed penalty notice if a vehicle had been identified with a fly-tipping incident then the Council could seize the vehicle.

Councillor Crathorne commented that her ward has had a great deal of fly-tipping issues over the last year in areas where there were no cameras or no one to witness the incidents. She referred to people who had lost their jobs during the pandemic and did not have the finances to pay for a bulky waste collection and asked if the Council could look at reducing the costs of bulky waste collections so

that it was more affordable and prevent fly-tipping. She then referred to education and awareness and asked when a resident gets building work on their property are they required to check that the business/contractor has in place the necessary waste permits.

The Officer indicated that HWRCs were free, but he appreciated that not everyone had access to a vehicle. The service tried to keep the cost of bulky waste collections to a minimum with the current cost being £16 for six small items or three large items and the current cost was the cheapest in the region. Members had discretion with their local funding and could fund a community skip if there were issues in an area. Residents using a business to take away their rubbish should be asking for evidence as to where their waste was going to ensure it was legitimate. Residents could check this by using the Environment Agency website to ensure the business had a waste carriers' licence and that spot checks were carried out by enforcement Wardens. He then advised Members that the service were looking to proactively carry out test purchases similar to those carried out by Community Protection Services, as part of the enforcement element.

Parish Councillor Dexter indicated that her parish council had asked about additional cameras that they would fund but they had not yet reached a satisfactory agreement with Durham County Council. They had problems in rural areas and were interested in the number plate recognition cameras as this may be something that the parish could look at in more detail. She then referred to the gap in the campaigns that the council run as householders would not know to ask a contractor/business about a waste carriers permit and suggested an enhanced awareness programme to local residents about the process regarding waste carrier licenses so that residents were more responsible.

The Officer responded that we can always do more education with householders and when we do track back some of the fly-tipping material and in a number of incidents the householder was shocked, they gave their waste in good faith without realising they had a responsibility for the disposal of the waste. The Council do have enforcement powers in this regard but had not gone down this route, they could start issuing fines to households, but they wanted to go down the education route first. With regard to the cameras he would pick this up with the team but there was a limit on what they could do with cameras as they had to be located in places where they would not capture innocent activity and generally had to be in places out of the way which may discount a number of areas, otherwise you would need a RIPA (Regulatory Investigation of Powers Act 2000) authorisation. If RIPA was required, then the Council would need to apply to a magistrate for the authority.

Councillor Stephenson referred to the online reporting system for Members to report incidents and found the list for forms limited and asked if there was an opportunity to look at having a search facility.

The Officer indicated that he would welcome a further discussion about the system and specifics so that they could refine the system.

The Chair commented that there was an opportunity for members to feed into the online system to suggest improvements.

Resolved: That the report and presentation be noted.

7 Bereavement Services

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change that provided members with an overview of the Bereavement Services.

The Neighbourhood Protection Manager and Bereavement Services Manager were in attendance to present the report and deliver a presentation that looked at Bereavement Services; Cemeteries and Woodland Burial Sites; Crematoria; Recycling of Materials; Memorialisation; Public Health Funerals; Achievement so Far; Impact of COVID-19 and Key Issues (for copy of report and presentation, see file of minutes).

The Neighbourhood Protection Manager highlighted that the service has many facets and works with other services such as Clean and Green and Administration. The cemeteries in County Durham were treated with respect and they had more Green Flag awards than any other local authority. Members were advised that there were approximately 15-20% of burials compared to 85-90% cremations and that there were other places where burials are carried out such as woodland sites; parish and faith cemeteries. Space for burials is limited and extensions to Durham County Council cemeteries had been made at Pelton and Sacriston.

The Neighbourhood Protection Manager highlighted the rising costs associated with funerals and the prospect of funeral poverty for some families. This had been the subject of an inquiry by the Competition and Markets Authority who had recently announced in their provisional findings there was a lack of transparency in parts of the market.

The authority has a statutory duty to make arrangements for funerals for those who die without anyone else to make the arrangements for them.

The impact of COVID 19 on the service has been significant, over April and May there was an increase of approximately 500 deaths on the usual figures, there has been a necessity to keep up to date with changing regulations; staff from other service areas were redeployed to assist and at the peak crematoria had extended days and were open seven days a week. Crematoria are cleaned between services

and signs highlighting Space – Face – Sanitise are displayed prominently around the crematoria.

In addition to the key issue of COVID, other key issues include the need for sensitivity when dealing with the bereaved and some of the regulations date back to ecclesiastical law.

The Chair noted that funeral poverty was a real concern moving forward with COVID-19 and unemployment, so the situation was only going to get worse and asked if the industry were looking into making funerals more affordable or at least supportive to people in difficult circumstances.

The Officer responded that they tried where possible to advise people where help was available including the social fund. The Competition and Markets Authority report highlights that people were very traditional at these times and were likely to use a funeral director they have used previously. People are very vulnerable at this time and want to do the best they can for their deceased relative. The authority was currently investigating transparent costings and the possibility of setting up a service that provides funeral directing.

Mr Stoddart a Member of the Public was in attendance at the meeting and had submitted in advance of the meeting a question, a copy of which had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting, together with a copy of the response from the service.

Mr Stoddart was invited to provide members with the background to his question. Mr Stoddart provided the following background and question to the committee.

My name is Dennis Stoddart and my family has memorials in five County Durham cemeteries. The background to my short presentation and question results from the Council undertaking maintenance in cemeteries and as part of that process uses the herbicide Round Up, which contains glyphosate to kill the grass around the base of memorials to aid grass cutting. This, in my view is leading to accelerated soil erosion and the destabilisation of head stones.

Members in wards with cemeteries where my family have graves and the Chair of this committee have been provided with a photographic survey to show how this is already causing soil erosion around our family's recently erected and refurbished memorials. The council carries out a testing regime on memorials to ensure they do not become destabilised to an extent that would present a danger to public and staff. A method was found to ensure memorials were safe by testing and action, but what has never been carried out is a study to determine why memorials are becoming destabilised and the role of herbicides may be having in them becoming destabilised and accelerating soil erosion, resulting in the destruction of memorial foundations.

Memorials given enough time may well become unstable as a result of the natural forces of wind, snow and ice. However, what I believe can be shown to be happening here is that the use of herbicides leaves bare ground devoid of grass on their root systems binding the soil together. That there is an acceleration of that process as a result soil erosion is being accelerated and contributing to the failure of foundations. It is desirable, if not essential that the use of herbicides be ended.

Memorials would not become destabilised in a relatively short period of time. There would seem to be a divergence of opinion between the liability for the memorial and the desire of the council between undertaking maintenance in an effective cost manner. As we have been advised that the Council is going to further review this matter then it needs to do so based on a professional report into what is causing memorial foundations to destabilise. This request will ensure that a professional assessment is carried out and an appropriate report is produced that is made available to the Council to make informed decisions. Turning back to the question before the committee if approved and such would provide information that would allow a focus on prevention of memorial destabilisation. This would in turn reduce the efforts and costs of the Council in carrying out its duty of care to ensure the safety of memorials, reduce danger occurring from destabilised memorials as well as reducing financial burdens for the Council and the holders of the Exclusive Right of Burial who are the owners of the memorial. In effect a less destructive maintenance regime without the use of herbicides may well be the outcome.

The question I have put is:

I ask the Council to commission a technical report to be made available to members of the Council and the general public into why memorials in cemeteries where the Council undertakes maintenance are failing the testing regime as a result of foundation instability. To determine what is causing the ground below sub-base to erode away when adjacent ground remains intact. That the report determines if the use of herbicides in practice causes damage or is responsible in a way leading to accelerated soil erosion and that they also be required to make recommendations to prevent such failures in the future in a cost-effective manner. The report to be undertaken by a reputable professionally qualified structural engineer, civil engineer and environmental specialist engineer in the impacts and causes of soil erosion.

The Chair thanked Mr Stoddart for his question and background information and asked The Neighbourhood Protection Manager to respond.

The Officer responded that the Council knew and fully appreciated that the Council's cemeteries and the closed churchyards were places of great significance for the loved ones of anyone buried there. The Council did try their best to maintain these spaces and were proud that the Council had more cemeteries with 'Green Flag' status than any other local authority in the country. The Council were aware that in some cemeteries over the last year there had been some instances where the

application of herbicide had been too wide. This was not appropriate for a cemetery, falls short of the Council's standards and this had been addressed.

He was pleased to confirm that the vast majority of memorials in the Council's cemeteries passed the stability tests, and where they do not, it was often associated with poorly constructed and laid foundations. Notwithstanding this the Council did acknowledge Mr Stoddart's concerns, the National Association of Monumental Masons (NAMM) advice and the general reservations that some people had about herbicide/glyphosate use.

He was pleased to confirm that the Council had recently commenced work in reviewing the position regarding herbicides in cemeteries albeit there were no easy alternatives – to cease altogether would have grass growing high around headstones where mowers could not reach; to trim would not only be more labour intensive, but risked damage and may result in the cut grass being spread across the memorial.

The Council's work to date had involved benchmarking with other Councils (the vast majority of which use herbicide), and the Council had also been seeking advice from wider industry bodies. The Council were undertaking some further investigations to consider the options for the future. This would include alternatives, impacts and the costs associated with all these options.

If need arises as part of the above review, then the Council would consider employing a specialist to look at causes of headstone instability, however the numbers of headstones are so large, and the construction and ground conditions so varied, it may be difficult to draw any general conclusions from such work. The Council's key focus at present would be recognising the widespread interest in more environmentally friendly alternatives and would therefore seek to explore options around alternatives, which would be a necessary if current practices were to change.

The Council would of course be keeping the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee informed of this progress.

Mr Stoddart stated that the issue was that the Council has implications of maintenance and the way that is undertaken but also owners bear the cost where destabilisation occurs, and work is necessary. Mr Stoddart then reiterated his belief that the use of herbicides is leading to an accelerated rate soil erosion and the need for a technical survey with professional involvement to present findings to the Council at the start of a review not at the end.

Councillor Coult indicated that she welcomed the review as she was aware of the damage that herbicides could cause to the ground and this herbicide, had a high acidic pH, so does have an impact on the ground surface. Cemeteries were sensitive areas and acknowledged the work of the service in keeping these areas

well maintained but suggested that alternative methods should be considered to reduce the use of herbicides.

Councillor Brown indicated that she was a holder of a pesticide certificate which allowed her to store and use pesticides and indicated that pH 4.5 given that neutral was pH 7 this product has a fairly high pH. The impact of acid rain on the cathedral could be seen rotting away the sandstone and we have limestone gravestones that would rot away by a high pH as would the cement that forms the foundation of the gravestones. She suggested that this needed to be looked at on a wider scale and gave an example that dog urine had been accused of rotting lampposts that had a pH of 6.5. She welcomed the review but asked that the review be extended to the use of herbicides around street furniture.

Councillor Sexton also welcomed the review and agreed with Councillor Brown that the general use of herbicides was damaging and could be a false economy. In the past everything was strimmed but he appreciated the damage this could cause, and the council needed to look at other methods.

Councillor Avery welcomed the report and commented that some cemeteries were under the control of Town and Parish Councils and asked if the findings could be shared with Town and Parish Councils so that they could introduce the council's recommendations.

The Officer responded that the Council were committed to doing a review and had already started some investigations and were already following up with some of the national bodies. The council wanted to ensure that they had something that was sustainable and they already had a range of different cemeteries with some left to wildflowers but he did not want to pre-empt what would result from the review and the options that may result to address Mr Stoddart's concerns. If required, they would employ a technical expert and they would update, share with parish councils the outcomes of the review.

In response to the question from Councillor Brown in terms of the wider use of the herbicide, the government had licenced the use of glysohate through to the end of 2022 period and this was already on the agenda and widely reviewed and it would be up to the government if they wished to licence it any further.

The Chair referred to the quality of the foundations of the gravestones and asked if the council had any evidence of this.

The Officer responded that when the new unitary authority was established a review was undertaken and some foundations were fixed with wooden dowels and in some cases, foundations were sitting on top of the surface. Part of the reason for the council adopting the British Register of Accredited Monumental Masons (BRAMM) or NAMM standards was that they wanted memorial masons to fix to a particular

standard and the latest review of that was in 2018 and that would continue to be updated and reviewed.

The Chair thanked Mr Stoddart for his question and clearly the Council was going to take his question seriously and realised that this was a sensitive and costly issue. The Officers had an ongoing review that would continue until such time as sufficient evidence to suggest that they possibly need to take it to the next stage which may be a formal technical report. This committee would monitor the report and if felt it necessary that a more technical report was required, they would recommend this to officers.

Resolved: That the contents of the report be noted.

8 Overview of Household Waste Management

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change that provided an overview of the management of household waste in County Durham.

The Head of Environment was in attendance to present the report and deliver a presentation that provided Members with the big picture and the Hierarchy, Economy and Operations together with details of waste reduction campaigns; encouraging reuse; what happens to your recycling; the challenge of contamination; garden waste 2020: energy from waste; other collection services; safety and policy; the impact of COVID-19 and details of the last decade, now and the next decade (for a copy of the report and presentation, see file of minutes).

Members were advised that there is now greater concern about what happens to our waste with a focus on reduction, reuse and recycling. It was highlighted that recycling should be built into the lifecycle of products as this will lead to economic benefits and Members were provided with data in relation to the resource within the County Council.

It was highlighted that nationally we throw away about a third of the food we buy and in county Durham there are love food hate waste campaigns, smarter shopping and home composting to reduce the amount of food waste thrown away. The service highlights the importance of reuse and has a very successful programme with Durham University on the Green Move Out scheme where students leaving donate any of the household goods, they are leaving behind rather than throwing them away. Other schemes promoting reuse include single use plastics; water refill scheme; furniture reuse schemes; the reuse shop at Stainton Grove HWRC; the community fridge and HWRCs do have elements of reuse.

The Head of Environment highlighted that in relation to recycling some of the recycling material can be used to form raw materials that form new cans and

cartons within six weeks of being recycled. The greatest challenge in terms of recycling to the service is contamination of bins therefore it is very important that householders know what can and cannot be recycled and the service has addressed this with the bin it right and recycling matters campaigns.

It was emphasised that this year the materials from the garden waste collections are being composted in house.

The residual waste is taken to an energy from waste plant where it is turned into energy for 39000 homes, this contract will continue until 2025. As of June 2020, Durham County Council had diverted 96.8% of residual waste from landfill. Also, it was recently announced that a joint North East Council procurement to treat waste.

The Head of Environment stressed the importance of keeping the workforce safe and ensuring that the vehicles have all the necessary safety equipment. Also highlighted was the range of policies in place to assist residents in relation to collections.

Members received data from the first lockdown that indicated the increase of waste (17.3%) and recycling (24.8%) collected compared to last year but unfortunately there was also contamination of 34.18%. As we were currently in a second lockdown, Christmas was approaching and most were ordering gifts on line and this could lead to greater amounts of recycling being collected.

The impact of COVID-19 on the service had seen waste and recycling collections prioritised, there was an initial suspension of the garden waste collections but reinstatement on Saturdays and Mondays and there was a 5.6% increase in the numbers using this service. Staff from other services such as Highways and Leisure services were re deployed to work alongside collectors. Initially HWRCs closed and bulky waste collections stopped but both were back operating now; the majority front line staff were back at work and office based staff were working from home. Extra resource was required to support main crews in relation to garden waste.

In looking forward to the next ten years the Head of Environment advised that there was still the issues associated with COVID; the competitive dialogue with the multi authority waste treatment procurement would be happening soon; future saving pressures; aging workforce; ensuring there is a lower emission fleet and establishing a viable circular economy. Additionally, the government's Our waste, our resources: strategy for England could see potentially mandatory food waste collections and potentially mandatory garden waste collections.

The Chair thanked the Officer for his presentation and commented on the extensive range of services provided and that they were well run, very efficient and very effective and very important to communities. He then referred to the HWRCs and was concerned about the contamination levels as there appeared when he visited

his local HWRC that there was no separation or segregation of waste and what was the cost to the council.

The Officer responded that the contamination referred to in his presentation was from the contents of household recycling bins. This figure had now reduced and could be attributed to the pressure that some households were under during the lockdown period when the residual bin was full, they were resorting to using the recycling bin. A lot more promotion work was being carried out by Roving recyclers and the crews were also focusing on collections and were now looking at contamination procedures. In relation to HWRCs, when they reopened some of the supply chains were in a mixed position and did not have the outlets they previously had; some of their staff were furloughed and in order to get people through the HWRC as quickly as possible meant that the usual separation of materials did not occur and they were not able to recycle as much as they could.

Councillor Brown noted that the presentation was timely and referred to an article in the Guardian about carbon emissions from energy from waste plants stating that because of the incineration of waste the UK will not be able to meet its commitment to net zero carbon emissions by 2050 and asked if the chimneys at the Suez plant had filters.

Councillor Coult asked when garden waste boundaries would be reviewed as she had a number of rural areas who were currently unable to benefit from the scheme. She then referred to food wastage and asked what the council could do to get the message across to manufactures to look at the volume of food that gets wasted and to look at the type of packaging.

Councillor Milburn asked if there was a mechanism for residents to request a smaller residual waste bin.

In response to the questions, the Head of Environment highlighted that using the waste to energy plant was a last resort in the waste hierarchy and would encourage recycling. The Government's waste strategy would see a lot less materials going through to incineration, mechanisms such as the deposit scheme referred to in the strategy would mean less waste going through to incineration. He suggested that the Strategic Waste Manager would be able to provide a response to Councillor Brown regarding CO² emissions at the energy to waste plant outside of the meeting.

There was annual review of garden waste to assess how the year had gone and take onboard any lessons learnt also they needed to determine if they were going to continue with the garden waste collections on a Saturday and Monday or revert to the normal collection days. The boundaries were set in terms of efficiency but if they could be extended to further properties they would. With regard to food waste the service does what it can, with the likes of community fridges and promoting the OLIO food sharing app. The service was encouraged that there were points within the Government waste strategy that limits supermarkets on their promotions such

as buy one get one free offers and if the government's strategy is fully implemented this will reduce packaging.

In relation to Councillor Milburn's question regarding requests for smaller bins the Officer advised that the 240ml bins were used as this fits with most households and added that the service would explore this further, if there was an opportunity to swap bins for a smaller bin, they would look at this being done through the self-serve system.

The Chair asked if the response with regard to emissions from the energy plant could be circulated to all members of the committee.

Councillor Dunn referred to the green recycling plant at Joint Stocks that was located in his division and highlighted an area of concern for residents relating to the compression of the garden waste collection and shredding into Saturdays and Mondays and a breakdown of the odour control system. Officers worked on the introduction of a temporary odour compression system until a permanent solution was sourced. He was advised that since this had happened and he had not had any recent reports of issues but one of his constituents who lived close to the site had been informed that the new system was not working and wouldn't completely compress the odour issues particularly if there was an easterly wind and asked for assurances that the new system was now working or over the winter the necessary changes would be put into place.

The Officer indicated that the new system was now working, and they had been some issues with odour which was magnified due to collections taken place on Saturdays and Mondays. They were learning in relation to wind conditions and temperatures and cease the operations where necessary. They were hoping to return to Tuesday to Friday garden waste collections that would help reduce the impact and allow lower volumes of turnover on the site.

Councillor Sexton referred to the cost of the garden waste scheme and asked if consideration could be given to those residents who could not afford the scheme.

The Officer indicated that for low volumes of garden waste the service advocate a home composting bin and offer a subsidised priced bin. They recognised that this would not suit everyone but this was the most environmentally friendly way to deal with garden waste rather than transporting for composting. The service were happy to encourage neighbours to share the garden waste bins. The Government has indicated in its Resources and Food Waste Strategy the introduction of free garden waste collections and this would have potentially significant impact, as it would increase from 65,000 customers to potentially 150,000 customers including the cost of all the receptacles involved. The Government had indicated that should this be introduced then councils would be recompensed for the service. The council would abide by the government decision but would have a loss of income and the added cost of collection throughout the county.

Resolved: That the contents of the report be noted.

9 Quarter One 2020/2021 Budget Forecast

The Committee considered the Joint Report of the Corporate Director of Resources and Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change which set out details of the forecast outturn budget position for the service area. The report highlighted and explained any major variances in comparison with the budget. The Finance Manager, Neighbourhoods and Climate Change was in attendance to present the report and gave a presentation (for copy of report and presentation, see file of minutes).

The Finance Manager indicated that the quarter one report was the first since the split of the Regeneration and Local Services service grouping. He highlighted the COVID costs for quarter one which the authority will be reimbursed from Government.

The Finance Manager advised that the underspends were masking budget pressures and unachieved medium term financial plan spends. Some contracts had been delayed due to COVID-19 and are manifest as an underspend within the current year.

Members were advised of a typo in the Capital Outturn table for Environmental Services outturn which read £2,978,000 that should be £6,089,000, the total was still correct. The capital budget is expected to be fully spent by the year end.

Resolved: That the contents of the report be noted.

10 Performance Management 2020/2021 Quarter One - Report of Corporate Director of Resources

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

The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager was in attendance to present the report.

During quarter one there were 302 reports of bonfires recorded which is an increase of 175% on the same period last year. Most reports occurred in April and related to garden fires and smoke. During the same period there were 731 reports of untidy gardens which is a 27% reduction on the same period last year.

Members were advised that performance data for carbon emissions in the report related to 2018/19 data which was before the council declared its climate emergency and provided members with the 2019/20 figures that showed a 51% reduction in carbon emissions. This had enabled the council to set a new carbon emissions target of 70% reduction for carbon emissions for 2025.

Members were also provided with up to date figures for highway maintenance that showed A Roads as 3%, B roads 3.3% and C roads 2.3% and footpaths 20.9% and advised that the figures were updated following the Transport Asset Management Plan (TAMP) which was expected to be published soon.

Councillor Crute referred to highway maintenance and asked in relation to data for footpaths maintenance for further information regarding the percentage of footpaths requiring maintenance and where they were located. Residents were being encouraged to get out more, so the council needed to ensure that the links between communities were safe and accessible.

The Officer confirmed that he would obtain some further in-depth data on footpaths as the data provided was a global figure for the whole county and a much greater level of detail could be obtained.

Resolved: That the contents of the report be noted.

11 County Durham Environment Partnership Minutes from the meeting on 11 March 2020

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer referred members to the County Durham Environment Partnership Board minutes that had been circulated for information.

Members were advised that a briefing note would be circulated later this month explaining that County Durham Environment Partnership was undertaking a governance review, with a further briefing note detailing the outcome of that review to be circulated to Members in March 2021.

Resolved: That the minutes of the Environment Partnership Board were received by the Committee for information.

12 Any Other Business

The Chair reminded members that Durham County Council had two current consultations on their website in relation to leisure centres that closed on the 6 December 2020. He encouraged Members to review and comment on the consultations as appropriate.