

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a Meeting of **Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 1A, County Hall, Durham on **Friday 24 January 2014 at 11.30 am**

**Present:**

**Councillor B Graham (Chairman)**

**Members of the Committee:**

Councillors E Adam, E Bell, J Clark, J Gray, D Hall, G Holland, K Hopper, I Jewell, P May, O Milburn, S Morrison, J Shuttleworth and L Taylor

**Co-opted Members:**

Mr O Graham, Mr D Kinch, Mr T Bolton and Mr D Easton

**1 Apologies.**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Armstrong, D Bell, J Clare, P Stradling and Mrs P Spurrell.

**2 Substitute Members.**

There were no substitute Members.

**3 Declarations of Interest, if any**

There were no declarations of interest.

**4 Any items from Co-opted Members or interested parties**

There were no items from Co-opted Members or interested parties.

**5 Update on Climate Change Strategy and Delivery Plan**

The Committee considered a report and presentation of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Economic Development which provided an update on the Climate Change Strategy and Delivery Plan (for copy see file of minutes).

The Sustainability and Climate Change Team Leader advised that a report on the Climate Change Strategy and Delivery Plan had been considered by Cabinet in December where it was agreed to set the medium target (2031) target of a 55% reduction, to link in with the County Durham Plan duration. It was noted that the 40% carbon reduction target by 2020 had almost been achieved and it was proposed that for 2050 a target of 80% would be set.

With regard to consultation, the Sustainability and Climate Change Team Leader advised that it was intended that public consultation would commence within the next few weeks at the end of January, 2014 with various focus groups and engagement with schools to take place. It was highlighted that the consultation would be available via the website, press releases and social media with further engagement planned with elected Members and that two members seminars were planned for February and March on the subjects of Warm Up North and Climate Change in the community.

With regard to public engagement it was reported that the consultation was the first step in engagement with Durham communities on climate change and that changes in funding and DCC reorganisations meant that involvement in communities cannot be as all-encompassing as in the past. The emphasis is much more on individuals and groups taking actions and making changes themselves. The Council cannot lead on projects in communities but will support groups that want to improve their own localities.

Details were then reported to the committee of potential ERDF funding which could be coming in to the council and would result in a significant ring fenced allocation for low-carbon projects within County Durham of £16m (2014-2020). M The following seven activity areas had been identified:

- Building retrofit – Warm Up North
- Low carbon supply chain – helping local businesses especially biomass, district heating and renewable energy
- Skills and training – Green Skills Academy, engaging with colleges and universities.
- Business energy efficiency – big switch off, changing behavioural attitudes.
- Renewable energy – encouraging community owned energy and other local schemes.
- Green infrastructure / climate change adaptation – using land to help adapt to climate change, especially flooding, including wetland creation, tree planting and peatland protection.

The funding which was expected to be available in around a year's time would have to be met with 40% match funding. In conclusion the Sustainability and Climate Change Team Leader advised that she was currently leading for the North East Local Enterprise Partnership in respect of the ERDF funding for low carbon and would keep Members updated with any significant developments.

Councillor Clark raised a query regarding solar panel installations at schools and whether the ERDF funding would be able to be utilised for this type of scheme. In response the Sustainability and Climate Change Team Leader advised that the council were very keen to support schools to install solar panels but she did note that there were various loopholes which would then prevent schools from being able to access feed-in tariffs and therefore the best option for schools, if they could find the capital, was to invest in renewable energy sources independently.

Further discussion took place regarding planning conditions for the inclusion of renewable energy sources and that there is a need to ensure that new development within County Durham is as sustainable as possible. It was suggested that a planning officer should be invited to attend a future meeting of the committee to discuss planning criteria and constraints.

A further query was raised by Councillor Adam regarding encouraging large business such as HITACHI to support carbon reduction by ensuring that developers build buildings with high energy standards to ensure that CO2 emissions are low and ensuring that businesses have the support needed to reduce carbon emissions. In response it was suggested that The Head of Planning and Assets be asked to provide a response on this to Councillor Adam.

It was then suggested that if there was an upturn in the economy then emissions may increase, there is a need to encourage business to invest in energy efficiency measures. In response the Sustainability and Climate Change Team Leader advised that the council were absolutely committed to achieving the 2020 target.

Discussion then ensued regarding community buildings following a question from Councillor Hopper regarding how it was proposed to help improve energy efficiency in the buildings. It was noted that work was being undertaken in respect of community buildings ensuring that advice is available on the range of energy efficient and low carbon technologies available however there is only one member of staff to carry out this work although it is hoped that free online advice would be made available in the future.

Councillor Bell added that he felt that assurance was needed that the council could deliver what was trying to be achieved by 2020. The Sustainability and Climate Change Team Leader advised that the council was committed to developing suitable projects to access the funding. With regard to the LEP administering the money to County Durham it was noted that at the earliest it would be expected to be available in Autumn 2014 however it was more likely to be January 2015.

**Resolved:**

(i) That the content of the report and presentation be noted.

(ii) That the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee receives an update a future meeting on the development of the EU funding programme 2014-2020 in relation to low carbon projects.

## **6 Overview of Winter Service Plan**

The Committee considered a report and presentation of the Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services which provided an overview of the winter maintenance programme and service plan (for copy of report and slides see file of minutes).

The Policy and Asset Manager proceeded to run through the presentation highlighting the law and code of practice surrounding the obligations on the highways authority to ensure that safe passage along a highway was not endangered by snow or ice.

Durham County Council's policy and procedures on presalting carriageways, footways and cycleways were reported. It was noted that the council gritted 45% of the highways in County Durham and details were provided within the presentation as to priority 1 and 2 carriageways. Further details were reported in respect of footways and those which were treated in extreme weather conditions.

It was further reported that in the event of major snow, all work on unclassified roads was ceased and important routes were restored in priority of road hierarchy.

Moving on the Policy and Asset Manager detailed policy relating to priority 2 routes and it was noted that these routes were only treated during prolonged extreme weather and when Priority 1 routes were clear and resources were available.

The presentation then went on to detail external systems used by the council to help forecast periods of inclement weather. The Policy and Asset Manager advised that the council used an ice prediction system called Vaisala which was currently in year 1 of a 5 year contract. The system was operated in partnership with all 12 North East local authorities.

With regard to weather forecasting it was reported that the council in partnership with Darlington and Tees Valley used a company called Meteogroup, based in London. The service provided by Meteogroup included a 24 hour consultancy service, training of all winter personnel and national severe weather warning services. Both Vaisala and Meteogroup worked together to provide accurate forecasting data to DCC personnel.

The presentation gave a brief overview of the structure of the service and how decisions on winter maintenance were made within that structure. It further detailed priority 1 and 2 gritting routes within County Durham. A copy of the winter salting routes booklet was circulated to members for their information.

Moving on the Policy and Asset Manager proceeded to detail fact and figures associated with treatment of highways. It was noted that the council stocked 42,000 tonnes of salt at the start of the winter season and any salt unused at the end of the season could be utilised the next winter. It was also noted that before any routes were gritted the cost to the council was in the region of £1m (this included plant costs, forecasts, ice prediction, etc.) It was also noted that it cost in the region of £30k to grit one route. With regard to salt bins, details were provided within the slides as to the salt store locations across the County and the costs associated with building the barns which were used to house the salt. Further details were reported in respect of salt bin criteria and annual servicing costs. Partnership working was key in maintaining salt bins and various arrangements had been made with Parish and Town Council's for gritting within their areas.

In conclusion detail was reported in regard to changes to the Code of Practice. It was noted that the council may have up to 10 years to implement any changes to the code.

Councillor Adam questioned what the arrangements were for gritting roads across county boundaries as he had noticed significant differences in the quality of road treatment between County Durham and Darlington. In response the Policy and Asset Manager advised the council had cross boundary arrangements in place with every authority that the county bordered. In addition he further advised that he attended a 6 weekly meeting with neighbouring authorities who each offered each other mutual aid and assistance where required. He also pointed out that each authority worked to the same code of practice and therefore this led to greater consistency across the North East area.

Councillor Adam asked a further question regarding community engagement and the role of residents associations in assisting with gritting in their own areas. He further thanked the

team for allowing a visit to be made by a residents association to see how the service operated.

Clarification was provided regarding the controlled use of county council salt supplies and advised that residents associations were not permitted to use council supplies for spreading. Further queries were raised regarding helping those older or vulnerable people with clearing properties and the Policy and Asset Manager suggested that any groups who required assistance with this should contact him directly to discuss.

Councillor Jewell commented that in his area he had a particular issue with residents abandoning cars on roads and access could not be made to estates or their properties. In response the Policy and Asset Manager advised that this was a big problem for the council as this prevented the successful treatment of highways. He further commented this was a national problem and a move to police intervention may come in to force in the future.

Councillor Milburn asked whether the presentation could be delivered to AAPs in advance of next year's winter season. The Policy and Asset Manager advised that his team would be happy to come out and deliver presentations at any time.

Councillor Clark raised a query regarding partnership working, insurance and litigation. In addition she raised a query regarding the criteria for salt bins and the difficulties she had experienced within her parish area. The Policy and Asset Manager advised that the council are strict in applying the salt bin suitability criteria, unfortunately there were no further avenues for obtaining a bin following refusal. With regards to any arrangements which had been made between Parish and Town Councils, it was noted that they were insured under the DCC umbrella.

Mr T Bolton raised a query regarding new housing developments and how they were assessed for salt bins. In response the Policy and Asset Manager advised that if the builder requests a salt bin to be placed on site then the council would take action to ensure that one was provided.

**Resolved:**

That the content of the report be noted.

## **7 Update on Flooding Review**

The Committee considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive which provided an update on the progress to date of the scrutiny review of the impact of flooding on council services (for copy see file of minutes).

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer advised that two meetings of the group had taken place, with three further meetings scheduled to take place over the coming 2 months. In addition she advised that all members who had experienced incidents of flooding had been invited to attend a session on 18 February 2014 to share their experiences of flooding.

The Corporate Improvement Manager advised that Members were also welcome to bring residents along with them to the meeting. Flood wardens from the Lanchester area had also been invited to attend.

**Resolved:**

That the content of the report be noted.