

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Thursday 12 December 2013 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor B Graham (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors E Adam, J Armstrong, D Bell, J Clare, J Clark, D Freeman, J Gray, I Jewell, P May, O Milburn, S Morrison, J Shuttleworth, P Stradling, L Taylor and S Zair

Co-opted Members:

Mr O Graham, Mrs P Spurrell, Mr T Bolton and Mr D Easton

1 Apologies.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E Bell, D Hall, K Hopper and Mr D Kinch.

2 Substitute Members.

There were no substitute members.

3 Minutes of the Meetings held on 24th October and 31st October 2013.

The minutes of the meetings held on 24th October and 31st October 2013 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Matters arising

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer advised that in relation to minute A7 an update on Warm Up North arrangements had been made for a members seminar to be held on 12 February 2014 at 1.30pm and 6.30pm in No.2 committee Room, County Hall, Durham.

4 Declarations of Interest, if any

There were no declarations of interest submitted.

5 Any items from Co-opted Members or interested parties

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

6 Media Relations

The Committee received a presentation from the Overview and Scrutiny Officer on recent press articles relating to the remit of the Environment and Sustainable Communities.

The first article related to residents in Chilton being invited to get involved with a new body which will decide how to spend £645,000 'Green Fund' aimed at cutting energy bills. The second article related to the updated winter maintenance plan detailing how the Council will deal with snow and ice on the County's roads. There were two further slides relating to County Durham showing Europe how to go green highlighting work undertaken to reduce the County's carbon footprint and funding being awarded to DCC to cut bus pollution.

Councillor Armstrong commented that it would be useful to receive information relating to winter maintenance well in advance of the winter season next year.

7 Neighbourhood Services Revenue and Capital Outturn Quarter 2 2013/2014

The Committee considered a report of the Neighbourhood Services Management Team which set out details of the forecast outturn as at Quarter 2 from 2013/14, highlighting variances against revenue and capital budgets for Neighbourhood Services (for copy see file of minutes).

The Finance Manager (Neighbourhoods) advised that the Q2 forecast for the 2013/14 Revenue Outturn for Neighbourhood Services showed an under spend against the cash limit of £0.955m. An analysis by Head of Service was provided which highlighted those variances within the budget.

It was reported that all identified MTFP savings within Neighbourhood Services had been made in 2013/14 alongside some early achievement of savings for 2014/15.

Moving on to detail the reasons for the underspend, it was noted that the only overspend within the service was related to the delay in the development of the Culture and Leisure Management Options Appraisal, resulting in a projected overspend of £0.640m on NNDR costs, as the MTFP saving assumed that these would be saved in 2013/14. It has been agreed that £0.440m of this should be treated as being outside the cash limit, leaving a potential overspend of £0.200m. This is being partially offset by a projected underspend of £0.130m within Libraries, where some of the MTFP savings for 2014/15 have been achieved earlier than anticipated.

The Finance Manager (Neighbourhood Services) then went on to provide an update in respect of the Capital Programme. It was confirmed that the revised Capital budget was £38.206m for 2013/14 and that it was anticipated that £36.070m would be spent in 2013/14 resulting in a forecast underspend of £2.3m with the largest capital underspend in Technical Services, including highways maintenance. Further details were provided with regard to capital slippage.

Councillor Adam questioned what impact, if any, had been seen upon services as a result of the cuts and savings which had been made. In response the Finance Manager (Neighbourhood Services) advised that there had been no significant impact upon front line services as a result of savings.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

8 Quarter 2 Performance Management Report 2013/14

The Committee considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive which presented progress against the council's corporate basket of indicators (PIs) for the Altogether Greener theme and reported other significant performance issues for the second quarter of 2013/14 (for copy of report and slides of presentation see file of minutes).

The Customer Relations, Policy and Performance Manager provided an overview of performance in respect of direction of travel and performance against target. Details were provided in respect of performance challenges and it was noted that poor weather had impacted upon the number of registered feed in tariff installations.

Further details were reported in respect of pride in our communities including fly tipping. It was noted that the costs of fly tipping were also included for members in formation following a request for such, at the previous meeting.

The presentation went on to update on the work of the Local Nature Partnerships, mitigating the impact of and adapting to climate change and the Warm Up North scheme.

Councillor Stradling added that in his area in particular, a large percentage of fly tipping was taking place in urban areas, at empty properties/premises. He asked what work was being carried out to tackle these problems.

In response the Customer Relations, Policy and Performance Manager advised that the fly tipping campaign was launched on 2nd December and that the Council was working closely with the Police. In addition, Neighbourhood Wardens were also working to tackle these issues by monitoring sites and working closely with the Enforcement Teams to prosecute. She advised that details of recent campaign and enforcement action would be presented alongside the Quarter 3 performance report.

Councillor Jewell queried whether an error had been made in relation to the bid for Derwent Valley's natural environment. It was noted that this should read £3.4M not £2.4M as detailed within the slides.

Councillor Clare asked whether the dip in performance relating to street cleanliness was a result of the aggressive cuts and savings required by Service Groupings, in order to meet MTFP savings. In response the Customer Relations, Policy and Performance Manager responded that there had been a restructure within this service area and that a new manager had been appointed. It was suggested that the new manager should be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee to explain to members the restructure and plans for the future development of the service.

Councillor May asked whether there had been an increase in fly tipping figures following the closure of HWRC's. In addition he commented that he had received complaints that some staff at the HWRC sites had been somewhat overzealous and had refused access to

the site for those members of the public using company cars, although they were tipping general household waste.

The Head of Projects and Business Services advised of the various restrictions and types of vehicles that did require permits for the HWRC's. He did however advise that this issue at the Pity Me site, would be taken up with the contractors in order to resolve any issues surrounding these restrictions. In addition, the Customer Relations, Policy and Performance Manager commented that she would bring as part of quarter 3 performance information detail of fly-tipping incidents prior to and following the closure of the HWRCs within the County.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

9 Culture and Sport Services Trust

The committee received a verbal update by the Head of Projects and Business Services on the establishment of a Culture and Sports Service Trust.

It was reported that since the last update had been provided the Council had sought legal advice regarding procurement issues for the Trust project, to ensure that there would be no risk of challenge from other suppliers in the future. There had also been two phases of market testing, the first phase was 'light touch' and undertaken in March/April to establish if a market existed for the delivery of the services to be included within the project. The second phase of market testing had been undertaken to gain a full understanding of the market for those services for which there is currently a contestable market which had then resulted in interviews with interested parties.

However, in relation to the current situation the Committee was informed that the Service Grouping has been required to make additional savings as part of MTFP4 therefore further work was being undertaken to establish where the required savings can be made within the Service Grouping.

In relation to the Trust project work was focusing on services to be included, facilities and rates to ensure that the Trust would be able to achieve value for money for 2015/16 onwards.

In conclusion the Head of Projects and Business Services advised that a new plan would be presented for members' consideration in the New Year which would also outline the ways in which those savings would be mitigated.

Councillor Stradling asked whether there was a timescale for this process and it was reported that it is anticipated that a report will be considered by Cabinet in February / March 2014 which would set out the plan for 2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17. Further updates on the Trust would be presented to the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee in due course.

Resolved:

That the update be noted.

10 Update on Waste Programme

The Committee considered a joint report and presentation of the Assistant Chief Executive and Corporate Director, Neighbourhoods which provided an update on the council's waste programme (for copy of report and slides of presentation, see file of minutes).

The Head of Projects and Business Services advised that since the implementation of the new waste contract in June 2013, services were working well and the objectives of the plan were being achieved

It was reported that the contract had an incentivised point reward system in place which would assist in continually improving performance throughout the life of the contract.

Further details were reported in respect of recycling and landfill diversion performance and it was noted that at present landfill diversion was currently at 15%, however once the new line was added to the plant this would decrease to around 2/3%.

Further details were provided in respect of joint stock landfill and the work which had been taking place to install the engines which generated electricity.

The Head of Projects and Business Services also advised that refurbishment work was to be undertaken at the following waste transfer stations; Heighington, Stainton Grove, Thornley and Annfield Plain. In addition further work was to be undertaken on the contamination campaign and procurement of new recycling outlets.

Further information was reported in respect of co-mingled collections and reference was made to the current legislative debate and ministerial letter which was appended to the report. It was noted that further information regarding co-mingled collections would be reported back to the committee once further information had been made available.

Councillor Clark raised a query regarding the impact of heavy haulage vehicles on roads, transporting waste to the processing plant at Tees Valley, and questioned whether the waste could be transported during the night to lessen the impact upon traffic conditions at peak times. In response the Head of Projects and Business Services advised that there were a number of planning issues and conditions which could prevent waste from being transferred to the site outside of peak hours, however the notion would not be completely discounted and this may be an option which could be explored in the future.

Councillor Adam raised a query regarding the capital outlay for the procurement of the diesel engines which were used to generate electricity. In responding the Head of Projects and Business Services advised that the engines had been acquired from Premier Waste and had been refurbished. Once in use the engines could yield between £120-130k per month. It was also noted that the engines used diesel to start up but then ran on converted landfill gas.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

11 Update on Local Nature Partnerships

The Committee considered a joint report of the Assistant Chief Executive and Corporate Director, Regeneration and Economic Development which provided background information on the Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs).

The Director of Durham Wildlife Trust and the Director of the North Pennines AONB Partnership were in attendance to provide an update in respect of the current work that the partnership were undertaking to promote:

- Identity.
- Information.
- Co-ordinating project delivery.
- Relationship with NELEP.
- Recent successes.

The committee was informed that there are 2 LNPs wholly or partly within County Durham, the Land of the Three Rivers LNP and the Northern Upland Chain LNP and that these two bodies for their relevant geographical areas, facilitate coordinated decision making on the natural environment with members of the LNPs acting jointly to deliver integrated outcomes that provide a wide range of benefits and ecosystem services.

It was confirmed that the LNPs look at how they can support the work of the Limestone Landscapes Partnership and continue to attract funding for the various projects. In addition the LNPs are establishing relationships with the North East Local Enterprise Partnership and Health and Wellbeing Boards and hope to work in collaboration on various projects.

Detail was then provided in relation to some of the projects currently being undertaken in collaboration which included:

- Work on woodlands – a perspective for woodland- 2 collaborative bids for woodland projects to SITA.
- Hay meadows – currently sharing information.
- Bio-diversity and carbon off setting – a lot of work currently being undertaken in this area.
- High nature value farming.

Councillor J Armstrong commented that as there was more than one LNP it would be beneficial if all the local LNP's could work together. A further query was raised regarding the Combined Authority and whether it was thought that the creation of this authority would be of any benefit to the work of the LNP. The Director of the North Pennines AONB responded that the LNPs currently work closely with LEPs building good relationships. In addition the LNPs would be happy to work with the Combined Authority.

Mr O Graham asked where nature tourism sat within the LEP agenda. In response the Director of the North Pennines AONB Partnership advised that the AONB partnership were doing a great deal and were collaborating with organisations to encourage nature tourism.

In addition reference was made to the Dark Skies Park Project in Northumberland National Park as an example of where nature tourism was working well and experience from this project could be drawn upon.

Resolved:

That the content of the report and update be noted.

That a further update on the development of the Local Nature Partnerships be considered at a future meeting of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

12 Flooding Review

The Committee considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive which provided members of the committee with background information, policy drivers, best practice and terms of reference to review the impact of flooding on council services (for copy see file of minutes).

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer reported that the Head of Technical Services had submitted some amendments to the proposed objectives of the review group, to include, reference to the role of Neighbourhood Services in dealing with Bronze command emergencies and in addition, to review building community resilience, alongside community engagement.

Councillor Armstrong commented that he felt it was important to inform all councillors of the work of this review group, as flooding issues affected many areas within the County. He also suggested that it may be useful to call upon some councillors who had experienced first-hand flooding issues, to give evidence during the course of the review.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer advised that updates on the findings of the review would be forwarded to all members who had experienced incidents of flooding within their areas.

Resolved:

- (i) That the content of the report be noted.
- (ii) That the objectives within the terms of reference for the scrutiny review be revised to incorporate the above amendments suggested by the Head of Technical Services.
- (iii) Nominations from 10 members be sought to form the membership of the scrutiny review group.

13 Minutes of the meeting of the County Durham Environment Partnership Board held on 12th September 2013.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meetings of the County Durham Environment Partnership Board held on 12th September be noted.