

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 3 July 2014 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor B Graham (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors E Adam, J Armstrong, D Bell, E Bell, J Clare, J Clark, J Gray, D Hall, K Hopper, I Jewell, S Morrison, J Shuttleworth, P Stradling and L Taylor

Co-opted Members:

Mr T Bolton and Mrs P Spurrell

1 Apologies.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G Holland, P May and S Zair.

2 Substitute Members.

There were no substitutes.

3 Declarations of Interest, if any

There were no declarations of interest submitted.

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

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

5 Minutes of the Meetings held on 12 December 2013 and 10 April 2014

The minutes of the meetings held on 12 December 2013 and 10 April 2014 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

In relation to minute number 9 from the meeting held on the 12 December, 2014 the Chair requested the Head of Projects and Business Services to provide members with an update in relation to the Culture and Sports Services project.

The committee was informed that the Service Grouping was having to find additional savings as part of the MTFP process and that further work is currently taking place looking at various savings options. In addition, the level of savings previously thought to be generated by this proposal would not be able to be achieved therefore the proposal would

be considered with the other options to make the required level of savings as part of the MTFP process.

6 Media Relations - Updates on Press Coverage

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

The first article related to the 'Bin it Right' campaign which targeted households to ensure that the correct bin was being used. The second article related to Neighbourhood Wardens and action taken during March to tackle dog fouling, fly tipping and anti-social behaviour.

The third article promoted the 'Big Switch Off' campaign targeted at persuading DCC staff to switch off lights and computers when not in use which had resulted in the Authority receiving an award.. The final article was celebrating the launch of the Green Awards which was in its 25th year.

7 Quarter 4 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 performance indicators (PIs) for the Altogether Greener theme and report other significant performance issues for the 2013/14 financial year (for copy of report and slides of presentation see file of minutes).

The Customer Relations Policy and Performance Manager provided an overview of performance along with key messages, achievements and challenges from 2013/14 and furthermore reported upon delayed actions for 2013/14 along with the updated position. In relation to key achievements this quarter members were informed as follows:

- An improvement in street and environmental cleanliness – performance is better than target.
- The percentage of waste sent to landfill is decreasing significantly and the rate is now half what it was at the end of 2012/13.
- There were 1,170 feed in tariff installations registered and approved exceeding the year-end target of 1,000 installations

The key performance improvement issues for the theme included:

- Household waste re-used, recycled or composted is below target.
- There were 8,999 fly-tipping incidents reported in the twelve month rolling period from April 2013 to March 2014 an increase of 40.1% compared to twelve months earlier.

Concerning key Council Plan actions that have not achieved target they include:

- To coordinate the development and implementation of a re-charging network for electric vehicles to provide 35 charging points across the County by March 2014 which has been delayed until March 2015.
- To produce a new Waste Strategy for Durham County Council by April 2014, now delayed until June 2014.

The presentation went on to highlight the key ongoing projects which were taking place across the County in respect of the built environment, carbon emissions, natural environment and the clean and attractive environment.

The Customer Relations Policy and Performance Manager further reported upon the 25th year of the Environment Awards.

With regard to the Altogether Green theme and the basket of indicators it was reported that a number of new indicators had been included for 2014/15 and these were detailed within the presentation.

Councillor Adam raised a question regarding recycling and contaminates. In response the Head of Projects and Business Services advised that contamination was measured by sampling loads. In addition waste tonnage was measured when it arrived at the facility and again once the contaminants had been removed, this then provided the measures of contaminated waste.

The Head of Direct Services also pointed out that if operatives witnessed contaminants at the front line, then stickers would be placed on the bins and a follow up call would be made to discuss the issue with the resident..

Mr T Bolton commented that he noted that recycling performance was falling and questioned whether this was as a direct result of supermarkets and the way they were now packaging items. He further queried whether there was a similar trend across the country.

In response the Head of Projects and Business Services confirmed that the rate of recycling was now starting to level off however in order to instigate further change, significant investment would be required.

Councillor Clark asked whether a separate waste bin had been considered for food waste only. In response the Head of Projects and Business Services advised that this was something that had been looked at in the past and that DCC had submitted a bid for funding for a pilot scheme however the authority was not successful. The system does work very well in highly populated areas but implementation was very expensive.

Councillor Clark further asked what was being done to encourage local assets to come forward for inclusion in Heritage Open Days. The Customer Relations, Policy and Performance Manager advised that she was aware of work being undertaken by colleagues to encourage more sites to open to the public however she would provide detail of the work undertaken at a future meeting.

Further discussion then took place regarding HWRC and Councillor E Bell commented that he was aware that some residents had been turned away at recycling facilities who had arrived on foot. He further queried whether any consideration had been given to extending the powers to impose fixed penalties to other DCC staff.

The Head of Direct Services advised that Town and Parish Council's did have the power to impose fixed penalty notices although none within County Durham had adopted those powers at this time. It was further noted that PCSO's were also able to impose fixed penalty notices. With regard to the issues raised regarding access to HWRC's, it was noted

that these sites were designed for vehicles access only and access on foot was prohibited. It was requested by Councillor Bell that this policy be reviewed by officers as this could encourage fly-tipping.

Discussion then ensued regarding whether DCC could track income from feed in tariffs from County Council buildings. In response the Customer Relations, Policy and Performance Manager advised that figures were reported in respect of the County as a whole but not just for the council. She advised that she would look into this with a view to including the information in future performance reports.

A query was further raised by Councillor Clare regarding permits for HWRC's and the process by which they were obtained and monitored by the council. It was confirmed by the Head of Projects and Business Services that the permit system was introduced to stop the disposal of business waste at HWRCs. The permit allows DCC to track how many times a vehicle is accessing the site.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

8 Development of Renewable Technologies in County Durham - Update on Recommendations

The Committee received a joint report of the Assistant Chief Executive and Corporate Director Regeneration and Economic Development which provided an update on progress made in relation to the recommendations contained within the 'Development of Renewable Technologies in County Durham' Scrutiny review report (for copy see file of minutes).

Principal Sustainable & Climate Change Officer proceeded to run through the recommendations and actions which had been implemented or were ongoing.

Councillor Armstrong asked whether the match funding that was required for the ERDF was likely to be found. In response it was noted that the team were fairly confident that match funding would be achieved from partners.

In addition Councillor Armstrong commented that a lot of calls were received by residents relating to replacement boilers but asked whether it was known what happened in the cases where there was no gas and homes relied upon solid fuel. In response it was noted that it would have to be profitable for the providers to extend the gas network to cover properties currently using solid fuel.

Councillor Graham asked whether there was any way of monitoring take-up by residents contacted by private providers.. Members were informed that as they are private companies it is difficult to monitor.

Further discussion took place sustainable development and what the government's plans were for future building and planning control standards.

Discussion then ensued on the subject of biomass boilers and the Warm Up North Scheme. The Principal Sustainable & Climate Change Officer advised that the scheme had

an extremely complicated application process however the team were able to offer advice and assistance to householders.

Councillor Hall further asked whether the team engaged with housing associations. In response the Principal Sustainable & Climate Change Officer advised that the team did regularly communicate with housing associations as this allowed for easier implementation of actions.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

That the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny committee receive a further update on progress made against recommendations at a future meeting of the committee.

9 Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership - Overview

The Committee received a joint report and presentation of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Economic Development and Assistant Chief Executive which provided an update on progress made by the Heart of Teesdale Partnership (for copy of report and slides of presentation see file of minutes).

The Partnership Manager proceeded to give a brief overview of the partnership and updates on the various projects that had been undertaken such as Scar Top and mini golf course, Barningham lime kiln restoration and Flatts Wood. In addition various other projects had taken place which had also been very successful such as ArtScapes.

In relation to current projects the committee was informed that Teesdale Views was a project celebrating views in Teesdale using photography, with an exhibition of works due to take place at Woodham Gallery during the Festival of Views.

Other current projects included historic landscapes and a field barn survey project which recorded unused buildings in the partnership area. Landscape Discovery was also an important project which sought to encourage people to explore landscapes.

With regards to the future of the partnership it was reported that three further projects were to be started:

- InvesTeesGate, to create ownership of the local environment.
- Creative Media – which was focused around digital interpretation.
- Creating disabled access to areas used for recreational activities.

In order for these projects to progress it was noted however that match funding in the region of £200k was required, however it was hopeful that this would be forthcoming in the very near future.

The Partnership Manager in conclusion advised that the ultimate legacy for the partnership was yet to be determined, however it was noted that the legacy was expected to extend some 10 years past the implementation phase.

Councillor Adam queried whether any training had been delivered in the partnership area on dry stone walling. In response the Partnership Manager advised that the partnership had established a field boundary programme with training which would be ongoing for 2 years.

Councillor Jewell raised a query regarding the legacy of the partnership and raised concerns that plans for this were not already in place. In response the Partnership Manager advised that she agreed that the legacy strategy could have been developed earlier however members should be reassured that this was in hand.

In addition Councillor Jewell commented that the project was very localised and wondered whether it was possible to encourage people from outside the area to take part. In response it was reported that the partnership were not permitted to perform direct marketing, however the partnership did work with Visit County Durham and publicity did go out via Corporate Communications.

Resolved:

That the content of the report and presentation be noted.

10 Clean and Green Teams - Overview

The Committee considered a joint report and presentation of the Assistant Chief Executive and Corporate Director Neighbourhoods which provided an overview of the work of the Clean and Green Teams within Neighbourhood Services (for copy of report and slides of presentation see file of minutes).

The Head of Direct Services provided some detail regarding the strategic vision and scope of Direct Services. It was reported that the Clean and Green Team were a combined service offering area based management and local knowledge.

Since the implementation of government cuts, savings had been achieved by weed control. There had also been some closures of depots and rationalisation of mechanical sweepers. With regard to staffing there had been a marked reduction in seasonal posts and annualised hours had also helped to achieve savings.

It was reported that the Clean and Green Team took a sustainable approach to the work that was undertaken by the team from growing all the County's own plants at the Morrison Busty depot to thinking clever to ensure efficiency through the services delivered by the team.

The presentation went on to outline the service standards and a breakdown of service requests was also provided. Further details were reported in relation to performance regarding litter, detritus and how the authority measures against national performance standards (KBT). It was noted that the service did compare well nationally.

Moving on the presentation highlighted how the team responded to planned and unplanned events and the work which was being undertaken by the team to work with partners / organisations and parish councils.

In conclusion the Head of Direct Services advised that the Council had been awarded a number of Green Flags across the County and Durham City had also been shortlisted for the finals for Britain in Bloom.

Councillor Armstrong added that he wished to congratulate the team on the excellent organisation of the clear up after the Miners Gala in previous years.

The Head of Direct Services made reference to the Clean and Green Teams t, f who are dedicated to ensuring their particular areas are as tidy as possible.

Councillor Bell raised a query with regard to the reduction in grass cutters and asked whether as a result of this more travelling was taking place to share equipment across depots. In response the Head of Direct Services advised that it was only the more specialised pieces of equipment that were not used on a daily basis that were shared and therefore there was no impact upon carbon emissions as everyday equipment was rarely moved.

Councillor Adam raised a query as to whether hand cutting rather than heavy machinery was used in some areas. In response the Head of Direct Services advised that hand work was only carried out in exceptional circumstances, however strimmers and mowers were used in more difficult areas.

Further discussion and debate took place regarding the obstruction of footpaths from overgrown trees / shrubs and the action that could be taken against private landowners in these circumstances.

Details were also reported with regard to the independent surveys which were carried out on pathways and detritus. Incidents were also reported through the CRM system and directed to the appropriate team.

Mr T Bolton asked whether grass cutting standards had been changed. In response the Head of Direct Services advised that standards had not been changed since their implementation 3 years ago. It was noted that every cut was recorded, and in years such as this which had been to date a very good growing year more resources were deployed to ensure extra cuts were carried out.

Further discussion took place regarding litter picker routes and agency workers.

Councillor Morrison commented that in her opinion the litter bins in some areas were inadequate for the volume of waste received. In response the Head of Direct Services advised that new waste bins were currently being deployed which had wider receptors to take pizza boxes and other larger items of rubbish.

In conclusion the Chairman added her appreciation of the hard work that was carried out by the Clean and Green Teams throughout the County.

Resolved:

That the content of the report and presentation be noted.

11 Refresh of the Work Programme 2014/15 for the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive which provided an updated work programme for the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny for 2014-2015 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager suggested that the following three areas be explored by members to identify a topic for focused scrutiny review:-

- Environmental review of cleanliness, fly tipping.
- Waste & Recycling
- Conservation, partnerships and how we used our woodlands.

Councillors Armstrong commented that bullet points 1 and 2 above were standard items that the committee would receive regular updates on via the performance reports and the waste programme reports.

Councillor Hall commented that he considered conservation of woodlands, their uses, biodiversity and potential income was a good topic to look into further.

In addition Councillor Stradling also agreed that this would be a good topic to explore and other members also concurred with this proposal.

The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager advised that the work programme would be revised to include the topic selected for scrutiny review purposes..

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted and that the work programme be revised to reflect the topic identified by the Committee for focused scrutiny review.

12 Minutes of the meetings of the County Durham Environment Partnership Board held on 23 January and 20 March 2014

Resolved:

That the minutes of the County Durham Environment Partnership Board meetings held on 23 January 2014 and 20 March 2014 be noted.