

20th January 2015

Environment Improvement Campaigns and Projects

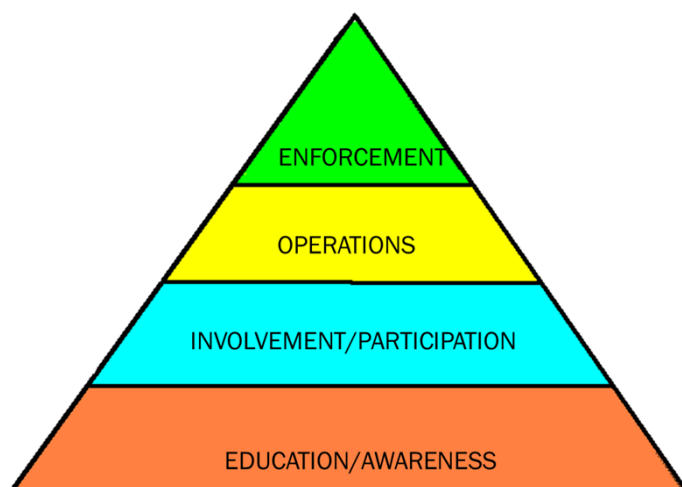
Report of Terry Collins, Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Members of the Environment & Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee with an update on the development and implementation of environmental improvement campaigns and projects.

Background

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



4. The Environment Partnership has developed a multi-agency thematic group “Pride in Our Communities” to oversee much of this work. This group, together with the Councils Neighbourhood Protection service considers and selects the most appropriate campaigns, and ensures their delivery is monitored and evaluated. The common theme and overarching aims of many of these campaigns are not only to promote behavioural change for the minority that spoil our environment, but also to increase opportunities for people to become more involved in making a difference in their area.

Overview

5. Members of the Committee will receive a short presentation from the Head of Direct Services, together with the Neighbourhood Protection Manager regarding some of the work that has been undertaken in the last twelve months, as well as have an opportunity to input to future priorities and issues.
6. The presentation will cover the following campaigns or projects have taken place in the past 12 months, are currently taking place or are currently being planned. Headline statistics from these campaigns are summarised below for reference:
 - a. Fly-tipping – Operation Stop It (November 2014 – Spring/Summer 2015).
 - b. Dog fouling:
 - i. Green Dog Walkers Scheme.
 - ii. Responsible Dog Ownership Campaign (February 2014).
 - iii. Mini Dog Fouling Campaigns.
 - c. Open space improvement:
 - i. Big Spring Clean.
 - ii. It’s Your Neighbourhood.
 - iii. Northumbria & Britain in Bloom.
 - iv. Green Flag
 - d. School activities:
 - i. Education sessions.
 - ii. Junior Neighbourhood Watch.
 - iii. Safety Carousels.
 - iv. Tidy Ted Awards (December 2014).

Operation Stop It

7. Operation 'Stop It' is a multi-agency approach including various DCC sections, Police, Environment Agency and Crimestoppers and it has 2 main aims:
 - a. to target fly-tippers and;
 - b. educate householders to understand their responsibilities in making sure their waste is disposed of properly
8. This campaign is ongoing but is already benefiting from the collective approach a number of facets:
 - a. Stop checks of those carrying waste in partnership with the Police and other agencies.
 - b. Increased CCTV at hotspot locations (some funded by members) which are increasing the amount of evidence which will result in greater prosecutions.
 - c. Use of media is also crucial to gather evidence/ intel, create awareness and act as a deterrent to those thinking of flytipping.
 - d. Durham has a national first with Crimestoppers piloting a campaign to allow communities to anonymously report those involved in flytipping and links with Durham Police were crucial to gaining this breakthrough.
 - e. 6 Neighbourhood Wardens have been allocated specific duties to focus on the investigation and use a wider range of legislation.

Green Dog Walkers Scheme

9. The Green Dog Walkers Scheme (GDWs) is a non-confrontational, friendly way for residents to change attitudes about dog fouling. To be part of the scheme, members of the general public sign a volunteer pledge to:
 - a. wear their GDWs badge as often as possible when walking their dog;
 - b. clean up after their dog and dispose of the bag in a bin at all times;
 - c. encourage other dog walkers to clean up after their dog; and
 - d. carry extra dog waste bags to distribute to other dog walkers if requested.
10. As of December 2014, there are 1364 residents signed up to the scheme.

Responsible Dog Ownership Campaign (February 2014)

11. This campaign focused on 15 hot-spot areas with each area centred on a sports pitch that had historically experienced dog fouling problems. These hot-spot areas were identified by liaison between Outdoor Sport & Leisure, Clean & Green and the Neighbourhood Wardens.

12. The campaign included a mixture of awareness raising, enforcement and, for the first time, a focus on how residents can report dog fouling incidents. The campaign was mainly delivered by Civic Pride and the Neighbourhood Warden, but there was also support and partnership working with town and parish councils, community groups, the Dogs Trust, Stray Aid and Deerness Kennels.
13. The campaign delivered the following results:
 - a. 9 articles in regional and local papers.
 - b. 713 views across the four dog fouling / responsible dog ownership related web pages.
 - c. 20 whole school assemblies and 13 individual year 5 and year 6 classroom sessions delivered to 4428 children.
 - d. 188 residents signing up as Green Dog Walkers.
 - e. 272 dogs micro-chipped.
 - f. 52 advisory letters issued to dog owners reported as probable offenders.
 - g. 9 fixed penalty notices issued.
 - h. 83% awareness amongst local residents that the campaign had taken place.
 - i. 60% of local residents surveyed indicating that they were willing to provide information about offenders.
 - j. An average 34% increase in residents who were surveyed feeling that the problem with dog fouling in the hot-spot locations had improved as a result of the campaign.

Mini Dog Fouling Campaigns

14. In addition to the county-wide campaign, a series of 19 mini campaigns have taken place across the county in 2014. Similar to the main campaign but flexible enough to respond to local issues, these mini campaigns focus on smaller areas of the county that has a specific issue with dog fouling. The areas are usually selected by the Neighbourhood Wardens and tend to be areas where the problem has persisted despite routine engagement and enforcement activity. The mini campaigns will continue in the coming months with a further 3 planned so far.
15. Outcomes delivered by the mini campaigns in 2014 include:
 - a. 314 dogs micro-chipped.
 - b. 326 residents signing up as GDWs
 - c. 99 golden tickets handed out to dog owners seen clearing up after their pets.

Big Spring Clean

16. Running since 2010, this annual month long campaign aims to get community groups and individual residents involved in cleaning up their neighbourhood. It is organised by LittFree Durham (a regional group set up as part of the Campaign to Protect Rural England's "Stop the Drop" campaign) and is delivered jointly by the group, Darlington Borough Council and Durham County Council. The three partners work together to promote the campaign and to provide support for people and groups wanting to take part in such an activity by either organising and supervising the event or by simply providing equipment and advice to groups that are capable of running their own event.
17. The 2014 campaign saw:
 - a. 1700 volunteers taking part;
 - b. 3000 hours of unpaid work being undertaken;
 - c. 1200 bags of rubbish removed; and
 - d. a clean-up of a section of the River Wear in a partnership activity involving the Environment Agency, the Council and some local volunteers.
18. The 2015 campaign is scheduled to take place from the 2nd March to 18th April and planning is already well underway.

It's your neighbourhood – Background

19. It's Your Neighbourhood (IYN) is a scheme run by the Royal Horticultural Society that aims to support and recognise community groups greening up and cleaning up their local neighbourhood. It is a non-competitive national scheme which recognises community participation, gardening achievement and environmental responsibility.
20. Groups entering their activities into the scheme are given an award based on the following achievement levels:
 - a. Level 1 – Establishing
 - b. Level 2 – Improving
 - c. Level 3 – Developing
 - d. Level 4 – Thriving
 - e. Level 5 – Outstanding
21. Through the general work of Civic Pride and a local campaign funded by Chester-le-Street AAP, the following results were achieved across Durham in 2014:
 - a. Outstanding – 23 groups.
 - b. Thriving – 8 groups.

- c. Developing – 5 groups.
22. For 2015, Civic Pride has established a county-wide community grant scheme that will encourage 15 new groups to undertake activities that will lead to an IYN award. The scheme will offer grants of up to £500 to groups who have not previously entered the scheme. The aims of the scheme are to:
- a. improve green spaces with sustainable projects;
 - b. harness community spirit;
 - c. forge new links with proactive members of the community; and
 - d. provide the basis for a future entry into the national RHS In Bloom competition.

Northumbria-in-Bloom / Britain-in-Bloom

23. The County achieved considerable success in the Royal Horticultural Society led Northumbria-in-Bloom awards in 2014. In total there were 16 awards won by entries from Durham, including the category winners for the small and large town categories, with Sedgefield and Durham winning respectively. Civic Pride and Clean & Green were heavily involved in the Durham and Chester-le-Street entries and supported a range of other In-Bloom entries around the County. In addition to the County's performance at Northumbria-in-Bloom, Durham City and Sedgefield also both won gold at the prestigious Britain-in-Bloom competition. Sedgefield's gold marked a hat-trick at Britain-in-Bloom, scoring their third consecutive gold result.
24. Success requires a real partnership approach involving the community, business, the Council and other public bodies. Although the awards were initially focussed on horticultural achievement, there has been an increasing focus placed on environmental responsibility and community participation.
25. Following last year's success, Civic Pride will be working just as hard to support the 2015 entries for Northumbria-in-Bloom and Durham City's re-entry into Britain-in-Bloom.

Green Flag:

26. The Green Flag award scheme is the national standard for parks and open spaces that recognises excellence and good practice in their management and development. To achieve Green flag status a site should contribute to its locality and provide facilities suited to the needs of the community. This community should look at the sites as a true asset and be actively involved in this management and development.
27. We achieved 15 Green Flags in 2014, which was one more than in the previous year. Delivery of these is a collective effort across Direct Services and importantly community participation.

School Education Sessions

28. Civic Pride engage with schools, youth groups and colleges to deliver a range of educational sessions addressing the four most reported environmental crimes. Such sessions are delivered using a variety of teaching methods including:
 - a. story sack session for under 5's;
 - b. Tidy Ted and Scoop the Dog sessions for junior school children; and
 - c. an interactive DVD for older children.
29. The sessions are usually organised to coincide with a campaign or problem that is highlighted in an area. In addition, where the school or youth group is interested, Civic Pride will also organise a related activity for the children to participate in (e.g. litter picking, bulb planting, fence painting, etc).

Junior Neighbourhood Watch

30. This scheme is organised by Durham Constabulary and aims to engage with younger children. Spread over several weeks, the programme includes a range of sessions that encourage the children to take an interest in what is happening in their neighbourhoods and to generate an interest and awareness in their personal safety, their community and crime and disorder issues. Civic Pride deliver the envirocrime modules on the programme.
31. In 2014 there were 38 schools who signed up to the programme.

Safety Carousels

32. Also organised by Durham Constabulary, these sessions take part on a single day and are aimed at older children. Their main focus is anti-social behaviour enforcement and consequences; weapons awareness; hate crime; arson and fire setting; internet safety/cyber bullying; alcohol awareness, support and enforcement; environmental issues such as litter and graffiti; resuscitation awareness; prison life. As with the Junior Neighbourhood Watch programme, Civic Pride deliver one of the modules.
33. The team have delivered 129 sessions to 10778 children and young people.

Tidy Ted Awards (December 2014)

34. These annual awards aim to reward junior school children who have made a significant environmental contribution to their school or community over the previous 12 months. Schools are invited to nominate pupils for the award and those accepted receive a visit from Tidy Ted who presents them with a gold badge during an assembly. If possible, Civic Pride will also deliver one of their education sessions to the school at the same time.

Return on Investment

35. Although the benefit gained / delivered by what Civic Pride do is often not measurable (e.g. the additional happiness that a resident gains from living next to a nice open space that they helped to improve or the long term benefit from a child's environmental activities being recognised with a Tidy Ted Award), the team have generated a 'return on investment' of over £24,000 since 01 April 2014 from those things that are measurable
36. This is made up of the following:
- i. Nearly £1,800 in savings to schools from Civic Pride delivering sessions rather than the school employing someone to deliver them (using rate hourly rate for an NQT).
 - ii. Over £9,000 in free microchips for dogs that would otherwise have cost their owners at least £15 each.
 - iii. Over £21,000 in free labour from volunteers taking part in activities (based on employing someone on the minimum wage to do the same work).

Recommendations

37. Note the wide range of environmental campaigns aimed at promoting behavioural change and greater community involvement in their local environment.

Background Papers

Presentation to be issued.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance - None

Staffing - None

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty - None

Accommodation - None

Crime and Disorder – The campaigns contribute to safety agenda

Human Rights - None

Consultation - None

Procurement - None

Disability Issues - None

Risk and Legal Implications - None