

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 5 March 2015 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor B Graham (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors E Adam, E Bell, J Clare, J Clark, J Gray, D Hall, G Holland, I Jewell, C Kay, O Milburn, S Morrison, P Stradling, L Taylor and S Zair

Co-opted Members:

Mr T Bolton and Mrs P Spurrell

1 Apologies.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Armstrong, D Bell and K Hopper and P May.

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 Media Relations

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 completion of the Coastal Project which had seen the installation of new easy access paths and signs on Durham's Heritage Coast around Blackhall Rocks along with fencing, car parks and grassland restoration.

The second article looked at the importance of our woodlands and forests in helping to tackle climate change. The article suggested that 10% of Europe's carbon emissions were sequestered or stored by trees. The article suggests that architects and builders should

look to using more wood in house building and gives an example of Norwegian builders use much more wood in this way in Bergen where Europe's tallest wooden structure is situated, a 14 storey block of flats is being built with no steel or concrete.

The third article relating to young volunteers from the youth conservation group – The Dene, finishing woodland work in the heart of Durham City who had planted trees and shrubs to help biodiversity as part of Durham Cathedral's Woodland and Riverbanks Project.

The final article related to the benefit of extra CCTV cameras in catching fly-tippers. It was reported that cameras were becoming an increasingly useful tool to successfully prosecute people who spoil the environment by dumping their rubbish in country lanes and beauty spots

6 Update on the Waste Programme

The Committee considered a report and presentation of the Corporate Director Neighbourhoods which provided an update on the progress of the waste programme (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Head of Projects and Business Services advised that to date 45,026 sign ups to the garden waste service had been received, 32 % of which had signed up for a period of 3 years. First collections were due to start on 17 March 2015 and there was still time for those households who had not yet signed up to join the scheme. It was further reported that 77% of signups had been undertaken via the fully automated web process and as a result had negated the requirement for staff intervention.

With regard to the one year pilot of a Mobile Household Waste Recycling site at Frosterley it was reported that to date this had proved successful and over 34 tonnes of waste had been received at this site. 60% of which was recycling and 94.6% had been diverted from landfill. A reassessment of the scheme would take place in July 2015.

Moving on the Head of Projects and Business Services reported that the 'Bin it Right' campaign had also proved successful and promising results were starting to be seen. Further details were reported regarding clean waste and the benefits that this had in achieving a better price from the supplier.

Further details were reported in respect of the student recycling campaign, which in partnership with Durham University was working to improve city waste management including end of term move out, focused on the student let terraces in the City.

In conclusion the Head of Projects and Business Services reported upon the procurement process for the new contract for the receipt, sorting and onward delivery of mixed dry recyclables and glass. The contract which would be for a period of 6 years would be performance based. Further details were reported regarding the security of supply and it was explained that global economics did impact upon recycling levels and this had resulted in one company who was one of three in the country who recycled newspaper being no longer in operation due to an over capacity in processors and a drop in volumes.

Councillor Bell commented that high winds were common in his area and with such problems with lids blowing off recycling bins caused issues on bin days. With such he queried whether the service had considered supplying some form of lock to prevent this from happening. In response the Head of Projects and Business Services advised that it was known that this was a problem at this time of year, however it was known that this type of devices could add time to waste rounds and there were potential safety issues. The matter was however been investigated further.

Councillor Jewell asked whether it would be possible for the waste operatives to simply put the glass bins inside the blue bins to prevent them from being blown away or damaged. It was agreed that this suggestion would be taken back to the team.

Councillor Holland raised a query regarding the economics of the green collection and he asked how dispersed were the collections and how much the collection of this waste was worth to the council. In response the Head of projects and Business Services advised that the take up so far had been fairly uniform with some areas with more dense coverage. The team had been tracking sign ups and redesigning rounds. It was reported that the green waste was worth around £20/£25 composted.

Councillor Adam in referencing glass asked why there was no mention of the recycling of hard plastic. The Head of Projects and Business Services advised that hard plastics were pulled out from residual waste and taken to another centre who were able to process it.

In response to a question from Councillor Kay in relation to recycling of newsprint the Head of Projects and Business Services advised that the volume of newsprint had declined and that it was still holding its income stream but this was dropping.

Further discussion took place regarding the garden waste scheme and it was asked whether bins which were not being used by those who did not take up on the scheme were being collected and reused. The Head of Projects and Business Services advised that bins were being reused where possible. No leaflets were being put out at last minute to encourage take up, however it was expected that further signups would occur once collections began.

Resolved:

That the content of the report and presentation be noted.

7 Local Nature Partnerships

The Committee received a report and presentation of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Economic Development which provided an update on the work of the Local Nature Partnerships and the 3Rivers Local Nature Partnership (for copy of report and slides of presentation see file of minutes).

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer advised that Steve Bhowmick was unable to attend however had forwarded his comments as follows:-

LNP arrangements over County Durham continue to develop and consolidate in terms of their roles and support mechanisms towards our environmental regeneration plans and programmes. As we are committed to achieving a more prosperous County Durham, we

will be looking for the LNPs to help demonstrate the economic and market advantage that comes with a healthy and vibrant natural environment.

We will therefore continue to work with both LNPs in our area in promoting the important role of our natural environment in this respect. We look forward to our LNP bodies taking forward further opportunities for supporting the work of the County's Landscape Scale Partnerships; attracting funding for future projects and working in collaboration on projects which are based on strengthening relationships with the North East Local Enterprise Partnership and the Health and Wellbeing Boards.

The Chair welcomed Chris Woodley Stewart who provided a presentation which detailed how the partnerships were formed as strategic bodies a result of the Natural Environment White Paper 2011 and built to focus on conserving and enhancing the natural environment and the many goods and services that nature provides to society.

The presentation further provided detail regarding the partnerships objectives, the boards themes, benefits of healthy peatlands, high nature value farming, woodlands and hay meadows.

Claire Thompson then went on to deliver a presentation on the work of the 3Rivers Local Nature Partnership including their aim and work themes, varied mix of projects, the HLF Bright Water River Skerne bid and timetable for the application and delivery phase. The presentation also provided detail on landscape area action plans, health and wellbeing, joint working and natural capital investment plans.

Mr T Bolton asked whether the large areas of common land in the County were being included in the partnerships work. In response Chris Woodley-Stewart advised that common land was included in plans.

Further discussion took place regarding peatland and its regeneration. It was reported that over many years peatland had been depleted by the insertion of drainage ditches extensive work now had to be done to reblock those ditches in order to regenerate and create functional wetland. The Committee were advised that more carbon is stored in peatlands of UK than the woodlands of France and Germany.

Councillor Adam made reference to offshore working and asked what the benefits were to this. Chris Woodley-Stewart advised that this was only at research stage and satellite data was being looked at which indicated that there was potentially huge economic benefits to offshore work. It would take around 6 months to identify any potential projects.

Councillor Bell in making reference to minewater which could be found along the coast commented that he would like to see more support from partnerships along this area of the coast with a view to being awarded a blue flag. In response Claire Thompson advised that the partnership would work with Durham Heritage Coast to assist filling in gaps and enhancing the coast line.

In making reference to meadowlands, Councillor Clare commented that he felt that more could be done on a community level to encourage the development and maintenance of meadowland and asked if there was anything that the council or indeed the parish and town councils could do to assist and was advised not to cut the grass as often.

The Climate Change and Sustainability Team Leader advised that the team were working with schools and she suggested that it may be useful for her team to bring a presentation on this work to a future meeting of the committee.

Resolved:

That the content of the report and presentation be noted.

8 Delivery of Clean Bus Technology

The Committee considered a report and presentation of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Economic Development which provided an overview of Clean Bus Technology in County Durham (for copy see file of minutes).

The Public Transport Network Manager provided detail on:

- European vehicle emission standards
- Emissions standards for new buses
- Development of low emission bus technologies
- 2013 Clean Bus Technology Fund and the Durham bids

It was reported that since the introduction of Euro standards there had been a striking difference in the amount of noxious particulates generated by buses. The current fleet used in County Durham had seen a reduction of 60% of nitrous oxides since the standards were introduced in 1992.

The council had obtained £77m worth of grants for innovative new buses which would benefits over 1200 vehicles. Electric buses could now been seen being used on the Cathedral bus in Durham City and Go North East had introduced hybrid power buses on the Angel 21 bus route. These changes significantly impacted upon fuel economy.

Moving on to the Clean Bus Technology Fund it was reported that funding was available in order to retrofit older buses in order to bring them up to higher Euro standards. The presentation outlined the various bid proposals and the likely timescales for each.

Councillor Jewell added that in his opinion the current strategy although good was not well joined up, with it being clear that certain routes were still using very old buses. He therefore asked what effect this has upon reliability. In addition he raised a query regarding engine re-builds and whether modern engines could be used instead of retrofitting add on technology on older engines. In response it was reported that many of the buses used in County Durham were of Euro IV or V fleet. Those vehicles were fairly low maintenance and the service were fairly happy with their current reliability.

Councillor Jewell raised a question in relation to modifications of older buses such as engine rebuild or exchange and was advised that the vast majority of the fleet in County Durham is new and the older buses were in the process of being renewed.

Councillor kay asked whether the energy produced by flywheel braking used on the electric vehicles in the City was used to power other elements on the vehicle. The Public Transport

Network Manager advised that the energy generated simply supplemented the electric motor rather than replacing it in full.

Councillor Adam asked what the cost would be, if any, to Durham County Council as a result of grant funding. In response it was advised that there would be no other cost to the authority other than officer time.

Mr Bolton raised a query to the commissioning of services and the contract process in obtaining higher specification of Euro buses. The Public Transport Network Manager advised that this was solely driven by cost and the economy.

Resolved:

That the content of the report and presentation be noted.

9 Climate Change Delivery Plan

The Committee received a joint report of the Assistant Chief Executive and Corporate Director Regeneration and Economic Development which provided an update on the County Durham Climate Change Strategy and Delivery Plan (for copy see file of minutes).

The Senior Sustainability and Climate Change Officer provided a summary of the key points of the consultation and provided detail relating to emissions for County Durham, noting that there was a slight increase, however this was in line with national trends resulting from a harsher winter and the increase in the use of coal power stations for generating electricity.

Further details were then reported with regard to ongoing projects and the year ahead. It was noted that the final draft Strategy was scheduled to be reported to cabinet for adoption in Q1 of 2015/16. Further work was ongoing with the Climate Change Strategy Group in order to address education and awareness, community energy and adaption / flood resilience.

It was also reported that the council was working on developing a bid to deliver action for community buildings and other funding sources were further being explored for a number of other projects.

The Sustainability & Climate Change Team Leader further added that there had been some complications arising from the progress of the County Durham Plan but the Climate Change Strategy will be progressing whilst the future of the County Durham Plan is decided.

In response to a questions from Mr Bolton, the officers responded that they were working specifically with the Teesdale Action Partnership board on the Toastie in Teesdale project. They are also working with other AAP's such as the Weardale AAP, where they are partnering with Northern Powergrid to work on energy demand management.

Further discussion took place regarding Biomass and it was reported by the Sustainability & Climate Change Team Leader that a lot of research was ongoing relating to this subject and the team were working closely with Sue Mullinger. A more detailed presentation on this

subject was to be given to the Woodland Review Group which was taking place the following day. The presentation would provide details regarding current issues and problems and where potential funding streams and business cases could be built.

Resolved:

That the content of the report and presentation be noted.

10 Update on Management of Woodland Estate

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer provided an update on the findings of the group to date. She advised that the next meeting of the group was scheduled to be held on 6th March when the working group would receive information on policies and strategies in relation to timber extraction and the development of woodland by DCC for use as biofuels.

In addition Andrew Kitching from Northwoods would be in attendance to provide an overview of the management of privately owned woodlands and some of the initiatives, opportunities and current schemes.

Resolved:

That the update be noted.

11 Minutes from Durham Strategic Flood Group

The minutes of the Durham Strategic Flood group held on 20 November 2014 were noted.