

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a Meeting of **Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Wednesday 8 July 2015 at 10.00 am**

### **Present:**

**Councillor B Graham (Chairman)**

### **Members of the Committee:**

Councillors J Armstrong, D Bell, J Clare, J Clark, J Gray, G Holland, I Jewell, P May, P Stradling and L Taylor

### **Co-opted Members:**

Mr T Bolton and Mrs P Spurrell

### **1 Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E Adam, E Bell, D Hall, K Hopper, O Milburn and S Zair.

### **2 Substitute Members**

There were no substitute members.

### **3 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 April 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **4 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **5 Any items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties**

There were no items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties.

### **6 Media Relations**

The Committee received a presentation from the Overview and Scrutiny Officer on recent press articles and news stories relating to the remit of Environment and Sustainable Communities (for copy see file of minutes).

The first article was in relation to six people been fined a total of more than £900 for throwing away their rubbish in County Durham.

The second article related to Durham City going for gold as a finalist in this year's national Britain in Bloom having already won the gold award last year.

The third article was in relation to a volunteer army springing into action as part of the Big Spring Clean to help spruce up parks, walkways and other public rights of way with scores of volunteers across County Durham taking part.

The fourth article related to residents been encouraged to get composting in-line with international compost awareness week.

The fifth article was in relation to 17 fly-tipping cases investigated after the council installed 24 extra CCTV cameras at rubbish hotspots. The cameras were paid for partly by local councillors and part of Operation Stop It. The article highlighted that since the launch of Operation Stop It in November 2014 there had been a reduction in the number of fly-tipping incidents.

## **7 Review of the Management of the Woodlands Estate Owned by Durham County Council - Report of Assistant Chief Executive**

The Committee received a report and presentation of the Assistant Chief Executive which presented the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Review Group report on the management of the woodland estate owned by Durham County Council (for copy of report and slides of presentation see file of minutes).

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer provided a detailed presentation which provided members with details of the approach used for the review and the key findings with regard to management, strategies & policies, timber extraction, EU funding opportunities, volunteering and biodiversity.

Following the presentation Councillor Holland sought clarification on the procurement process and documentation issues raised in the report and whether there was an appropriate recommendation.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer responded that recommendation three covered procurement and that she had been advised that the four outstanding contracts would be revisited and that arrangements had been made to advertise these contracts via an Auction Company which had expertise with this type of contract. Members would receive an update on the progress made in relation to the recommendations contained within the review report at a future meeting.

Councillor Armstrong sought clarification on the timetable for the report to be presented to Corporate Management Team and Cabinet. Members were advised that the report had already been presented to Corporate Management Team and would be presented to Cabinet on the 16 September 2015.

## **Resolved:**

- (i) That the report of the Woodland Scrutiny Review Group be agreed.
- (ii) That the report of the Scrutiny Review Group be submitted for consideration by Cabinet at the meeting on the 16 September 2015.

## **8 Community Action Team - Update**

The committee received a report and presentation from the Environment Protection Manager to provide members with an update on the work of the Councils Community Action Team (CAT) and the use of targeted interventions (for copy of report and slides of presentation see file of minutes).

The Environment Protection Manager gave a detailed presentation which provided members with a brief explanation of the background to the Community Action Team (CAT), summer 2014 work results, summer 2014 review findings and the next steps.

Following the presentation T Bolton asked if they would continue to work with parish councils and keep them updated as they were the members at a local level.

The Environmental Protection Manager responded that parishes were a good source of local information and their input was valuable. It was confirmed that the Community Action Team (CAT) would continue to work with parish councils and further develop the existing relationship.

Councillor Holland referred to a recent residents meeting at which discussions had focused on litter left by students at the end of term. He highlighted that residents had praised the performance of staff which had been outstanding in clearing the litter away and a letter had been sent to the Corporate Director, Neighbourhood Services informing him of this issue and suggesting that Durham County Council needs more powers to deal with landlords and this type of incident. Councillor Holland requested if this issue could be brought back to a future meeting.

The Environmental Protection Manager responded that they would continue to develop the city centre strategy and target landlords as they were aware of the problems particularly at the end of term and would focus interventions on these identified areas.

The Chairman indicated that an update on this issue could be brought back to committee at an appropriate time.

Councillor Jewell asked the officer if the approach of the CAT was reactive or proactive. The Environmental Protection Manager responded that it was proactive but with a reactive response, pro-active in planning but reactive in how we deal with issues using a combined approach. They concentrated on certain areas and target with a Community Action Team, it was a big problem but they tried to punch holes in the worst affected areas but there were improvements.

Councillor Clark referred to the review walkabouts dates and asked if they could be shared with residents as soon as possible as there were not many community meetings in

July/August period. She asked if some publicity could be done and she complimented the team on their work/activity undertaken to date.

The Chairman thanked the Environmental Protection Manager for his very informative presentation and the positive feedback from members.

**Resolved:**

(i) That the information contained within the presentation and the update report on the work of the Community Action Team and the use of targeted interventions be noted.

(ii) That the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive a further update on the work of the Community Action Team at a future meeting.

**9 Quarter 4 2014/15 Performance Management Report - Report of the Corporate Management Team**

The committee received a report and presentation of the Corporate Management Team and the Assistant Chief Executive which presented progress against the council's basket of performance indicators for the Altogether Greener theme and report other performance issues for the 2014/15 financial year (for copy of report and slides of presentation see file of minutes).

The Customer Relations Policy and Performance Manager provided a detailed presentation which gave an update on performance relating to the following:-

- Performance summary
- Key messages in relation to cleaner, more attractive, sustainable environment
- Refuse and recycling
- Improved environmental cleanliness
- Enforcement: fixed penalty notices (FPNs)
- Fly-tipping
- Outcomes since the launch of 'Operation: Stop It'
- Conditions of the Local Authority road network
- Highway and footway defects
- Carbon emissions across the authority area
- Carbon emissions from local authority operations
- Renewable energy generation
- Street lighting
- Maximise value and benefit of natural environment
- Projects undertaken during 2014/15

Councillor Clark referred to highway works in her ward and asked if any discussion or planning takes place in advance of such works being undertaken. Within Horden there were a number of road closures and in addition temporary lights had been placed in Horden Village which has added to the congestion in Horden.

The Customer Relations Policy and Performance Manager responded that planners and programmers plan the work to co-ordinate and cause minimum disruption, she could only

assume that a risk assessment had been undertaken and it was agreed that they could go ahead at the same time but she would raise the issue with technical services.

Councillor Clark also referred to GPS systems and how their programmes are not updated resulting in drivers receiving wrong information about driving routes. The member asked as to whether there was anything Durham County Council could do to rectify this. The member was informed that currently there is nothing Durham County Council can do to update these systems.

Members then made reference to the comprehensive information contained in the quarter 4 performance report and commented that they receive an update locally from the neighbourhood protection team which used to contain post codes of where incidents involving fixed penalty notices were taking place. However the format of the update has changed with total numbers now quoted and members asked if this format could be looked at. The Customer Relations Policy and Performance Manager responded that she would feedback this request to the neighbourhood wardens.

Councillor Holland commended the content of the quarter 4 performance report and asked if the committee or a members seminar could be arranged to discuss the content of the report.

Councillor Armstrong referred to the work programme of the committee and commented that there was no capacity to look at the report in depth but this could be the basis of a members seminar and would need to be discussed with the Head of Planning and Performance.

Councillor Clare requested if members could receive a copy of the quarter 4 performance report due to the comprehensive detail of the information contained in the report. The Customer Relations Policy and Performance Manager confirmed that she would circulate the report to committee members.

Councillor Stradling referred to dog fouling and asked if people were not been caught or if it had reduced. The Customer Relations Policy and Performance Manager responded that the reduction was due to the successful dog ownership programme which had resulted in the number of incidents reduced and the performance had improved significantly.

Councillor May indicated that when walking about there was not as much dog fouling and those walking dogs had bags. He referred to the dog bins which were not easy to obtain as he was advised that they needed to be in an area where they could be emptied. The Customer Relations Policy and Performance Manager responded that Neighbourhood Wardens do a survey and a walkabout to determine as to whether a bin is necessary. If it was necessary they would look at installing a bin but it was about balance.

The Chairman indicated that they had been more successful with fly-tipping prosecutions. The Customer Relations Policy and Performance Manager responded that the team had a solicitor on board who advised on the powers and what information would be required for a successful prosecution. Training had also been delivered by Legal Services which had helped to increase prosecutions.

Councillor Jewell referred to waste permits and how these were targeted. The Customer Relations Policy and Performance Manager responded that they had a dedicated team for fly-tipping and the team concentrated on areas where incidents were high. They worked closely with the police and went to sites and asked to see their licence.

Councillor Clare sought clarification on 5.33 for litter. The Customer Relations Policy and Performance Manager responded that it was a percentage and litter and dog fouling were given a grade which was fed into a spreadsheet which gave a percentage.

Councillor Clark commented that 31% for England was shocking and that she would also like to share the information in the quarter 4 performance report with residents. The Customer Relations Policy and Performance Manager indicated that she was happy to share the information and would arrange to have it sent to members.

### **Resolved:**

That the contents of the report and presentation be noted.

## **10 Light Touch Review of Parking on Council Land - Report of Assistant Chief Executive**

The committee received a report of the Assistant Chief Executive which provided members with a scoping document in advance of a mini review of parking on council land including highway verges and council owned public open amenity space (for copy of report see file of minutes).

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer advised members that they would be looking at two areas in relation to parking problems which would be Highways and Environmental. They would look at current legislation and policy opportunities and the options available to deal with parking on open space amenity land.

The expected outcomes of the review would be as follows:-

- Members fully aware of the powers and options available in relation to parking on council land.
- All enforcement and educational remedies in relation to parking on council land would be discussed together with the relevant issues/challenges identified.
- Members would have the contact details of those Durham County Council officers who could provide advice and support.

The membership of the review group would be all the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee in addition to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and Councillor Hopgood who raised the issues with the original motion to Council.

There would be two meetings which would be held on 14 September 2015 and 1 October 2015.

Mr T Bolton advised the Scrutiny Officer that Durham County Council had done a project that looked at footpaths and some of the issues from this project could still be valid.

Councillor May commented on the high costs involved to remove grass verges and there was no Durham County Council budget available and that some residents did not want to get rid of the grass verges.

Councillor Clark referred to the crossover of terminology in the report which needed to be clear. She also referred to housing estates which had now been transferred to various housing providers and there was a need to be mindful of who could use enforcement and would the housing associations adopt any policies.

The Chairman indicated that they were aware that Durham County Council did not own all the land. The Overview and Scrutiny Officer also indicated that they had looked at maps in relation to the areas of land transferred to the new County Durham Housing Group which showed that not all of the land had been transferred over.

Councillor Stradling indicated that enforcement was a key and would be looked at as part of the review process however there is no Durham County Council budget and the police find it difficult to enforce.

Councillor Clare asked that the planners be invited as many issues were in relation to modern estates where the roads were narrow which resulted in refuse vehicles and cars not been able to pass, which meant that people had to park on the pavement to prevent an obstruction. Planning could look at parking bays for future estates.

Councillor Armstrong responded that members would do what they could with this review topic and come up with recommendations however there are limitations to what Durham County Council can do and had recently put in parking bays in his community which had been costly.

Councillor May indicated that sometimes they were utilities underneath grass verges which added to the cost of any proposed scheme.

Councillor Armstrong indicated that new estates were required to provide one and a half parking spaces and if a buggy could get past on the footpath enforcement would not be taken.

**Resolved:**

That a review group with all members of the committee with the addition of the Chairman and Vice Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and Councillor Hopgood be set up.

**11 Council Plan 2015-18 - Refresh of the Work Programme - Report of Assistant Chief Executive**

The Committee considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive which provided members with an updated work programme for the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny for 2015-2016 (for copy of report see file on minutes).

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer presented the report reminding members that this was the second report on the work programme to be considered by the committee with the first report considered at the meeting on the 17 April. That report had identified areas on which the committee had requested further updates new areas under the 'Altogether Greener' priority theme of the Council Plan, updates on previous review recommendations and the quarterly budget and performance reports. It was agreed by members at that meeting that those areas identified be included in the work programme for 2015/16. This has resulted in a busy work programme for the committee with three additional special meetings currently identified and two visits with the possibility of further special meetings having to be arranged as the work programme develops.

Members are asked to identify an area for focused scrutiny review and two areas had been identified, winter maintenance which was the topic of a previous scrutiny review considered 4-5 year ago or consideration of the allotment policy.

Councillor Armstrong advised members that there would be a report on allotments sometime in September and they could wait until that report had been completed. He also indicated that a budget announcement would be made later today which may result in budget restrictions therefore it may be timely to look at winter maintenance.

The Chairman indicated that there was a need for flexibility in relation to the future topic and that it be left to the Chair and Vice-Chair to decide.

**Resolved:**

- (i) That the new work programme as detailed for 2015-2016 be agreed.
- (ii) That the future topic for focused scrutiny review be determined by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the committee.

**12 Minutes of the County Durham Environment Partnership Board held on 12 March, 2015**

The minutes of the meeting of the County Durham Environment Partnership Board held on 12 March 2015 were received for information.