

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Monday 18 April 2016 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, D Hall, G Holland, I Jewell, A Liversidge, P May, O Milburn, S Morrison, P Stradling and L Taylor

Co-opted Members:

Mr T Bolton and Mrs P Spurrell

Also Present:

Councillors M Plews and B Stephens

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E Bell and C Kay.

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 22 January 2016 and 8 February 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Councillor Clare referred to the minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2016, minute 12 and sought clarification on how the scanning of the roads would work so that indicators NS04 and NS05 could be deleted.

The Customer Relations, Policy and Performance Manager responded that the NHT scanner survey fed into the national survey and was completed on an annual basis.

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 Overview and Scrutiny Officer referred Members to the recent prominent articles and news stories relating to the remit of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (for copy see file of minutes). The articles were:-

- Sewer collapse reveals lake of fat – Northumbrian Water have advised on the dangers of putting fat down drains.
- Environmental plan to tackle Wingate's crossing gates – the old level crossing gates and railway signal will be replaced using funding secured by the parish council and the Council's teams will spruce up the surrounding area by installing a fence around a grassed area planted with bulbs.
- Environment award for Castle Eden volunteers – award given to people or groups who are committed to protecting and improving the local surroundings.

7 Strategic Cycle Routes - Overview

The Committee considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive and Corporate Director of Regeneration and Economic Development which provided Members with an overview of the strategic cycle routes within County Durham (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

On the 4 April 2016 Members visited strategic cycle routes at Newton Aycliffe, along the A167 and in Durham City. The visit provided members with the opportunity to view completed successful cycling schemes, proposal for developing new schemes and locations where conflicting demands put pressure on design and development of cycling schemes.

Members received a presentation from the Principal Policy Officer and Sustainable Travel Officer that focused on the Policy context; Cycling Strategy and Action Plan; Cycling Network Planning process; Cycling infrastructure improvements; issues and challenges and the next steps (for copy of presentation, see file of minutes).

Members were advised that cycling had grown in popularity thanks to the success of the GB Olympic Cycling Team, Tour de Yorkshire and closer to home the Pear Izumi Tour Series. The benefits of cycling were highlighted too, which included reduced pollution and a healthier population.

Councillor May welcomed the cycle routes which were used by cyclists, but was also concerned for the safety of cyclists as some cycle routes were dark and enquired if there were any plans to install lighting and CCTV cameras which would deter would be thieves. During the winter months some cycling routes would not be used due to freezing weather conditions, the Member asked if the routes were included as part of the winter maintenance programme as there was a drive to get more people cycling.

The Sustainable Travel Officer responded that they had done a lot of work on clearing overgrown vegetation from cycling routes and the railway paths. People using these routes had indicated they felt safe when the routes are well maintained and well cared for and the routes had a good reputation. She advised Members that the Council would not be able to light the railway paths due to costs and there was an environmental impact too in relation to energy consumption. Cyclists chose to use well-lit routes during the winter when it is darker and the days were shorter. The Travel Planning Team were currently looking at a programme to count the usage and the survey equipment used would be cameras. They were developing winter maintenance actions within the strategy using a hierarchy of routes. In the snow people still used the cycle routes and some cyclists preferred the routes not to be gritted due to damage to the cycles.

The Chairman indicated that the Quality Network Principles covered the issues.

Councillor Armstrong commented that any works were dependent on funding, some of which was from the combined authority and were alternative arrangements in place if the combined authority was not established.

The Spatial Policy Officer agreed that getting access to the Local Growth Fund would be at a greater level of risk if Durham were not part of the Combined Authority.

Councillor Milburn referred to works which had been carried out at Stanley to improve the signage on the cycle routes and asked if they had spoken to Stanley AAP and Stanley Town Council as she would not like to see two lots of money spent on signage.

The Sustainable Travel Officer responded that they had looked at signage and cycle parking.

Councillor Stradling welcomed the work done on the cycle routes but had received some complaints in relation to motorcycles and quad bikes using the cycle routes and what plans were in place to combat inappropriate use.

The Sustainable Travel Officer responded that they were restricted in what they could do as barriers would stop other legitimate users such as mobility scooters using the cycle routes. They had put signage up along the Locomotion Way which set out who should be using the cycle route but this was ignored by some people.

Councillor Clare referred to the cycle route along the A167 where the lights had been removed and if routes needed lighting there was a clash as it was being removed as a saving initiative.

The Principal Policy Officer responded that they would consider the issue of street lighting and how its importance could be referenced in the transport policy of the County Durham Plan.

Councillor Hall suggested that solar panelled street lights which were aimed at pedestrians and lasted 25 to 30 years could be a solution and they would become the responsibility of the parish council could be considered as part of the strategy.

Councillor Liversidge referred to the cycle routes in his ward which were owned by third parties, the land was subject to flooding and a boardwalk that had been erected over twenty years ago was now in disrepair. He had also received complaints about the surface of the cycle route and the pier had collapsed the Member asked what the policy was for repairs when the land was not owned by Durham County Council.

The Sustainable Travel Officer responded that generally the railway paths were not on private land. Their team did not have revenue they only had capital monies but they were trying to establish a system to formalise the status.

Councillor Liversidge responded that the surface on some routes had not been touched in 20 years and the plants which had been planted at that time were now overgrown and looked unsightly and were encroaching onto the cycle path.

The Sustainable Travel Officer responded that it was proposed that there was a bypass around the boardwalk which would open up around 10 miles of railway path for horses.

Councillor Clare asked how they were going to maintain the cycle routes if they had no revenue and did not own some of the land.

The Sustainable Travel Officer responded that although Sustainable Transport would not maintain the cycle routes, other team carry out maintenance i.e. highways, countryside and public rights of way. In general, the strategy is to carry out works to improve existing routes and not create new routes.

Councillor Hall referred to new developments and asked if the team got involved in the creation of cycle paths at this stage rather than later.

The Principal Policy Officer responded that they were consulted on new developments via the planning process but developers weren't obliged to provide funding for new strategic cycling routes, particularly those routes outside the development site boundary. Under Section 106 rules, planning officers can only ask for funding for infrastructure required to make that development site acceptable in planning terms. Unless that individual application would be refused without the infrastructure, officers can't request developers to provide funding for it. Sometimes the paths were narrower than they would like but it had to be balanced to meet everyone's needs.

Councillor Holland referred to the conflicting agendas in separating traffic from cyclists and gave an example of the Netherlands where cycling routes were designed to make cycling safe and popular. He added that there was a dedicated cycle path along the A167 at Neville's Cross, but it stops at the roundabout at the top of South Road and was never continued. There was a need to provide safety education to cyclists to be safe and wear a helmet and appropriate footwear but cyclists too had a responsibility as they were responsible for their own safety.

The Sustainable Travel Officer responded that education was part of the strategy.

The Chairman thanked officers for a very informative presentation.

Resolved: That the contents of the report and presentation be noted.

8 Quarter 3 Revenue and Capital Outturn 2015/16

The Committee considered the report of the Neighbourhood Services Management Team which set out details of the forecast outturn as at Quarter 3 for 2015/16 and highlighted variances against revenue and capital budgets for Neighbourhood Services and the Finance Manager, Neighbourhoods, gave a presentation (for copies see file of minutes).

Councillor Clark referred to the savings made by leisure contracts with 3rd party providers and raised concerns that the standard of leisure facilities was not going to be reduced.

The Finance Manager responded that the 3rd party provider was for two or three facilities and it was up to the leisure contractor to ensure that the facilities were up to the standard of the contract. The main savings that had been achieved in this area was through rationalising facilities ran by Leisureworks at Consett where a single centre had replaced two previous buildings and formed part of the Consett Academy/Consett Leisure Centre complex.

Mr T Bolton referred to the £1m transferred from the Capital Expenditure Earmarked Reserve in relation to additional costs for Thornley Waste Transfer Station and sought clarification if the consultants had not identified the issues.

The Finance Manager responded that it was a much bigger scheme than anticipated and was not a failing of the consultants.

Councillor Freeman sought clarification on the additional development expenditure for the Gala and Town Hall.

The Finance Manager responded that the Gala were protecting their position so were developing the cinema and were engaging with Picturehouse. The costs for the Town Hall were in relation to works anticipated to improve the facilities and increase usage.

Councillor Clare referred to the £0.9 m overachievement in Direct Services and commented that a parking bay in his ward that had no services cost £27,000, and asked if the prices had been brought down.

The Finance Manager responded that the prices had been reduced but parking bay construction was within the remit of Highways. Both Highways and Direct Services were reviewing their prices.

Councillor Armstrong commented that the monies were recycled back into the council.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

9 Quarter 3 2015/16 Performance Management Report

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Management Team which presented progress against the Councils corporate basket of performance indicators for the Altogether Greener theme and report other significant performance issues for the third quarter of the 2015/16 financial year, covering the period October to December 2015 (for copy of report, see file of minutes)

The Customer Relations Policy and Performance Manager gave a presentation which gave an update of the performance indicators relating to:

- Refuse and Recycling
- Environmental Cleanliness
- Land and Air Quality
- Fly-tipping
- Local Authority Road Network
- Reduction in Carbon Emissions
- Renewable Energy Generation

Councillor Clare referred to the results of litter and detritus which were brilliant and in his area some response times were the same morning. He then sought clarification on the 96% of waste diverted from landfill as his understanding was that nothing went to landfill.

The Customer Relations Policy & Performance Manager responded that there was always some residual that went to landfill but some planned essential works had taken place at SITA so it had to be sent to landfill, but they still met the 95% target.

Councillor Jewell referred to the action plan for developing a countywide allotment forum which is constantly been extended.

The Customer Relations Policy & Performance Manager responded that there were different tenancies from the various authorities which were complex to harmonise.

Councillor May referred to the improvements on roundabouts in particular the impact on local residents as a roundabout in his area one road could not get onto the roundabout as it was so fast which resulted in them using an alternative route and was this taken into consideration.

The Customer Relations Policy & Performance Manager responded local consultation was carried out and the scanner transport survey would look at satisfaction levels.

Councillor Holland congratulated the team on the quality of the service and the absence of complaints would suggest that they were doing a good job. He commented that the recycling scheme was most economic, sending waste to SITA, which was a good initiative.

The Chairman commented that in view of the savings that had to be made they were still doing a really good job.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

10 Refresh of the Work Programme

The Committee considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive which provided members with information contained within the Council Plan 2016-2019, relevant to the work of Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This allowed members to refresh the committee work programme to reflect the three objectives and subsequent outcomes identified within the Council Plan for the 'Altogether

Greener' priority theme which highlighted development of the wildflower planting scheme, working in partnership to conserve areas of distinctive landscape character and relocation of the fleet vehicles to align service delivery (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Members were reminded of work undertaken in the last twelve months and of the number of updates coming forward from this work.

Members discussed the work programme and commented that they already had a lot of work in the current plan and 2017 was a County Council election year so it was important to complete the work programme by March 2017.

The Chairman suggested that they leave the plan as it is for now and bring back to a future meeting.

Recommended: (i) That the contents of the report be noted.

(ii) That no amendments be made at this stage to the work programme for 2016-2017.

(iii) That a further report detailing the committees work programme for 2016-2017 be submitted to the meeting on the 8 July 2016.

11 Minutes from the County Durham Environment Partnership Board held on 10 December 2015

The minutes of the County Durham Environment Partnership Board held on 10 December 2015 were received for information.

The Chairman drew Members attention to her attendance at the Environment Partnership to present the conclusions and recommendations of the Woodlands Review and advised Members that she was concerned at the aging workforce within the woodland industry and had mentioned the importance of recruiting younger people into the woodland industry but was advised that this was difficult as they needed specific training. The Environment Partnership Board had suggested that they would discuss with the Economic Partnership Board about how they could help to encourage young people into the industry.

Councillor Armstrong advised that the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) funding is used for apprenticeships. Houghall College works with apprenticeships in this industry and perhaps this is an area they could pursue. It was also indicated that Mr T Batson employs people in the woodland industry and takes on apprenticeships every year.

The Customer Relations Policy & Performance Manager responded that as customer services were taking on apprenticeships there was an upcoming manager meeting where she would raise this and feedback to Members at the next meeting.

12 Minutes from the Durham Strategic Flood Group held on 18 November 2015

The minutes from the Durham Strategic Flood Prevention Group held on 18 November 2015 were received for information.