

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a Meeting of **Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Friday 14 July 2017 at 9.30 am**

**Present:**

**Councillor E Adam (Chair)**

**Members of the Committee:**

Councillors B Avery, L Brown, J Carr, J Clare, P Jopling, R Manchester, C Martin, O Milburn, A Patterson, P Sexton, L Taylor and M Wilson

**Co-opted Members:**

Mr T Bolton and Mr D Kinch

### **1 Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Bell, J Clark, R Crute, A Gardner, P Howell, A Simpson and S Zair.

### **2 Substitute Members**

No notification of Substitute Members had been received.

### **3 Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13 April 2017 were agreed as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

Councillor Carr referred to Item 6 of the minutes and the emissions from schools increasing from 53% in 2008/9 to 61% in 2015/16 as a percentage of the total emissions from all council buildings and sought clarification as to whether this was due to fewer council buildings or increased usage by schools.

Councillor Clare indicated that he had asked this question at the meeting and was advised that it was a combination of both. The Overview and Scrutiny Officer suggested that a response would be provided to Councillor Carr by the appropriate officer.

### **4 Declarations of Interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

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

The Chairman advised Members that Mr Kinch a co-opted member of the committee in May had raised a question about collective energy purchasing and switching schemes. A detail response had been provided by the Housing Regeneration Team and Mr Kinch had indicated that he was happy with the response and had suggested that it was circulated to the members of the committee as it contained information which members may find useful.

It was agreed by the committee that the response would be circulated to members following the meeting.

## **6 Media Relations - Update of Media Items**

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer referred Members to recent press articles relating to the remit of Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The articles were:

- £628m and rising needed to fix region's roads – Five road authorities in the North East and North Yorkshire had a combined backlog of road repairs valued at more than £628m with Durham County Council saying that its accumulation of highways issues needing to be dealt with and had reached more than £191m. The Committee would receive an overview on highway maintenance at its meeting on the 23 January 2018.
- National Lottery revives Durham's woodlands – Durham's woodlands had received a welcome cash boost from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the 'Durham Woodland Revival' project. The project would run from the start of 2019 to the end of 2023 resulting in £1m of investment in woodland and the forestry sector. This media item links to agenda item 7.
- 'Operation Spruce Up' comes to Wingate – A deep clean of the village is to be undertaken involving Durham County Council staff and partners. The scheme would involve: the sweeping and cleaning of footpaths; painting and cleaning of street furniture such as bollards, railings and benches; replacement of bins and removal of weeds. The Committee would receive an overview on Operation Spruce Up at its meeting on 13 November 2017.
- England's local roads to get boost from Government cash pot – English councils are to be given access to a multimillion pound fund originally intended to be spent on motorways and major roads, with some funding diverted to be spent on roads run by local authorities.

The following questions were raised in relation to the press articles:-

Mr Bolton asked if the monies released for roads were for specific categories. The Overview and Scrutiny Officer responded that the monies were for roads in general.

Mr Kinch referred to 'Operation Spruce Up' and how Evenwood had returned to the condition it was prior to the work undertaken by the 'Operation Spruce Up' visit and asked if the operation was worth undertaking. The Overview and Scrutiny Officer advised that as part of the committee's future work programme an overview and evaluation of the 'Operation Spruce Up' would be considered by committee at the November meeting.

Councillor Taylor indicated that Wingate had undergone the spruce up which had been a success and a good job had been done by the team.

Councillor Jopling commented on the costs associated with 'Operation Spruce Up' and asked as to whether regular maintenance would be more cost effective.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer advised that the Committee would receive an update on the 'Operation Spruce Up' programme in November which would include detail of the evaluation of the project.

**Resolved:** That the presentation be noted.

## **7 Scrutiny Review of the Management of the woodland estate owned by Durham County Council - Update on recommendations**

The Committee considered the Joint Report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships and the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services that provided Members with details of the progress made in relation to the recommendations contained within 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, see file of minutes).

The Landscape Delivery Officer provided Members with an update on the progress made in relation to the recommendations contained in the review report together with details of the 'Durham Woodland Revival' project resulting in an investment of £1m in woodlands and the forestry sector in County Durham.

Mr Kinch referred to the employment of a forestry officer and asked if the 'Durham Woodland Revival' project included apprenticeship opportunities. The Landscape Delivery Officer responded that 6 months traineeships were included within the project and that three trainees would be employed with either Durham County Council or partners.

Councillor Jopling referred to £1m not being a substantial amount of money over a 4 year period and asked how successful the programme would be when funding was limited. She also asked if there was any commercial element to the project as the woodland was on Durham County Council land.

The Landscape Delivery Officer responded that the management plans were funded elsewhere so were not part of the £1m and there was only a small amount of capital works. The focus of the project was on providing advice and signposting the sector to various support available. There would be a commercial element to the project as the woodland would need to be thinned which would require a licence to allow felling to be undertaken and for the timber to be sold.

Mr Bolton referred to recommendation 6, that the contact details of the Countryside Service are displayed on community woodland sites and suggested that contact details be made available to Town and Parish Councils of the appropriate key contacts in relation to fly-tipping in woodland areas, the illegal cutting down of timber and volunteering. The Landscape Delivery Officer responded that they would engage with parish councils.

Councillors Brown and Carr asked if this information could also be shared with the Area Action Partnerships.

**Resolved:** That the contents of the report be noted and that the relevant key contact details be circulated to both Town and parish Councils and the Area Action Partnerships.

## **8 Air Quality Management in County Durham**

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director of Adult and Health Services that provided Members with details of progress on all air quality management work in County Durham (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Members received a presentation from the Pollution Control Manager and the Senior Air Quality Officer that provided Members with an update on the various air quality projects that had been on going across the County during the last 12 months (for copy of presentation, see file of minutes).

Mr Bolton indicated that the continuous monitoring results for Hawthorne Terrace in Durham City were interesting and that the levels were higher when there were queues of traffic and was this queuing traffic the fundamental issue.

Officers responded that the queuing of traffic was a major factor but other factors were gradient, houses near to the road and that if houses were set further back from the road then levels would not be so much of an issue.

Mr Kinch commented that the A1 had been closed in Teesdale and traffic including large lorries had been diverted through Barnard Castle and smaller surrounding villages for over a year and wondered whether any monitoring of emission levels had been undertaken during that period. The Pollution Control Manager responded that monitoring had taken place in Barnard Castle some years ago but not recently. The Highways Agency is one of the partners who are invited to attend the Air Quality Technical Working Group however they do not attend on a regular basis and have not attended for some time.

The Chairman asked if large lorries diverted through Barnard Castle and small villages for a year would have an impact on the air quality. Officers advised that it would depend on how long the diversion was in place but extensive monitoring had been carried out at Barnard Castle some time ago and no problems had been identified.

Mr Kinch continued that if more maintenance work is planned on the A1 then Durham County Council needs to be informed so that arrangements can be made to monitor the emission levels in those areas where traffic is being diverted to. The Pollution Control Manager confirmed that she would take these concerns back to the Highways Agency.

Councillor Brown referred to the air quality samples currently being taken at Nevilles Cross which were not showing high emission levels but one of the monitors is set in George Street away from the road. However children walk to school on the pavement next to the traffic where emission levels will be higher. Another monitor had been placed in a cul-de-sac and the third monitor had been vandalised. In addition would the SCOOT system include the traffic lights at Nevilles Cross. Officers responded that tubes had been placed in

the Nevilles Cross area. The readings from the samples taken from the house exceeded the stated air quality levels 3 years ago but readings from the last 2 years were acceptable levels. The levels taken next to the road were high but did not breach legislation. The officer responded that she would check whether the SCOOT system would include the traffic lights at Nevilles Cross and respond to the member.

The Chairman indicated that the committee was concerned about people's health in County Durham and that was why regular progress updates on air quality management is included in the work programme and that the committee would continue to monitor progress in reducing emission levels particularly as people are being encouraged to take up cycling for health reasons.

Councillor Martin referred to the air quality levels at Chester-le-Street Menceforth Cottages and asked what the reason for the high levels of emissions was and was the centre of Chester-le-Street being monitored as he would have expected levels to be higher in the centre as traffic is often stationary and queuing.

Officers responded that a consultant had to try and find out the reasons for the high levels but he was also unsure of the reasons. The officers continued that the cottages are on a bus route, they are in a valley with a viaduct above. Members were advised that the centre of Chester-le-Street was also being monitored.

Members discussed the impact of standing traffic on air quality in particular in the Chester-le-Street area and around Menceforth cottages. The Pollution Control Manager commented that it is difficult to come up with an action plan if not sure what is causing the high levels of emissions.

Councillor Sexton commented that it is a major traffic route with a high volume of vehicles using that route to get to the motorway across the town centre.

Councillor Jopling indicated that she was surprised that emission levels had not been reduced due to the introduction of electric and hybrid cars. The Officer responded that 2016 was a high pollution year as weather can effect readings and that monitoring needed to continue for a longer period of time to see if there was a reduction in levels.

Councillor Patterson asked what consultation was being carried out in relation to Menceforth Cottages with local residents and that the committee be informed of progress made in relation to air quality in Durham City and the consultation to be undertaken in relation to Menceforth Cottages.

Members were advised that in relation to the management of air quality in Durham City an extensive consultation exercise was carried out in 2015 in relation to the action plan. Concerning Menceforth Cottages a further six months of monitoring would be undertaken and then a consultation exercise would be undertaken depending upon whether an action plan is to be produced or revocation.

The Chairman asked for details of the go smart to work initiatives in particular the feedback and type of responses received. Members were advised that this information would be provided by the Transport Team and that the information would be obtained for the Chair.

Councillor Martin referred to the improvement in bus engines and asked if this was something that had been done by the bus companies. Members were advised that it was led by the bus companies.

Councillor Clare referred to the current process of air quality management in County Durham and that the Pollution Control Manager and her team were responsible for the implementation of air quality monitoring, measuring air quality, determining if an action plan was necessary and producing the plan however the delivery of the plan was in the hands of Various Durham County Council Service Groupings and partners. Cllr Clare continued by asking how much power did the authority have to ensure that the action plan is delivered.

Officers responded that these issues were recognised nationally by the government. They did have an implementation plan and a corporate steering group where issues could be raised with the relevant Durham County Council officers and partners.

Councillor Clare responded that it was all based on the strengths of partnership working and the committee needed to know how successful this was. In addition, it was suggested that relevant Durham County Council colleagues and partners responsible for the delivery of the actions in the implementation plan be invited to attend the committee when it is receiving a report detailing further progress.

The Pollution Control Officer advised that they would feed the comments made by members back to the Air Quality Corporate Steering Group.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer suggested that a copy of the air quality implementation plan together with detail of the progress made against the identified actions is circulated to members of the committee.

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

(ii) That the Committee receive a further report detailing progress on the development of air quality management within County Durham.

(iii) That a copy of the air quality implementation plan together with detail of the progress made to date against the identified actions is circulated to members of the committee and that relevant Durham County Council officers and partners are invited to the future meeting of the committee when detail of progress will be provided.

## **9 Waste Programme**

The Committee considered the Joint Report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships and Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services that provided Members with details of progress made in relation to the Waste Programme and to outline some of the future work in waste management across the county (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Refuse and Recycling Manager and Waste Contract Team Manager gave a presentation that reviewed progress to date with waste programme; outline current work underway and highlight longer term waste management issues (for copy of presentation,

see file of minutes). Mr Patrickson had asked the Officers attending to pass on his thanks to the committee as he had moved to another position in the authority.

The Chairman asked the officers to convey the committee's thanks to Mr Patrickson for his support to the committee. The Chair then thanked the officers for an excellent presentation.

Councillor Jopling asked what the procedure was for dealing with contaminated bins.

Officers responded that they would initially place a sticker on the contaminated bin asking for the contamination to be removed; once the contamination was removed they would empty the bin. There was a three stage approach, involving three letters being sent to the resident. However if the contamination continued then they would finally remove the bin, but they tried to educate to stop contamination in the first instance.

Mr Bolton referred to recycling playing a part in the reduction of landfill however the authority used to receive income for plastics going to recycling but the amount paid has dropped significantly resulting in the authority having to pay for them to be recycled. What were the costs and does it currently generate an income.

Officers responded that the recycling of plastics was now exported to other countries and that the market fluctuated. They did receive an income but now it currently costs the council to recycle plastics however the current contract allowed the cost per tonnage to go up and down to reflect the market conditions.

Councillor Clare commended the team for their excellent work and then referred to the confusion about what to do with specific types of waste such as a fridge and suggested that a guide needed to be produced for residents identifying how specific waste should be dealt with including detail of key contacts. Councillor Clare continued by asking if the company O'Brien Waste Recycling Solutions being taken over would impact on the council's contract. He concluded by highlighting the value for members of attending the SUEZ visit which is included in the future work programme.

Officers advised that there would be no impact on Durham County Council's contract with O'Brien's and that the management team at O'Brien's Waste Recycling Solutions would remain in place.

The Chairman commented that both the presentation and report highlighted that a number of the waste programme contracts were to be reviewed and suggested that a further progress report and/or presentation be provided to the committee particularly in relation to contract reviews and re-procurement.

Officers responded that some of the current contracts would terminate in 2018 and that work on reviewing the contracts would start in February/March 2018 and that a progress report could certainly be provided to the committee later in 2018.

The Chairman continued by highlighting that fly-tipping was an issue which featured in the quarterly performance reports and asked if further information on fly-tipping could be provided to the committee. Members were advised that the Neighbourhood Protection Manager was looking into this and a report would be brought to the November meeting of the committee as part of an overview on Environmental Campaigns.

The Chairman suggested a special meeting be arranged to focus on fly-tipping and that this meeting is added to the work programme for 2017/18.

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

(ii) That the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee at a future meeting receive a report detailing progress of the waste programme including detail of the review of waste contracts and re-procurement.

(iii) That a Special meeting of Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee be included in the 2017/18 work programme focusing on fly-tipping and Household Waste Recycling Centres.

## **10 Performance Management Quarter 4 2016/17**

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 fourth quarter of the 2016/17 financial year (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager gave a presentation focusing on:

- Achievements
- Partnership Update
- Performance Summary
- Refuse and Recycling
- Improved Environmental Cleanliness
- Improved Environmental Cleanliness Enforcement
- Fly-tipping
- Fly-tipping Actions and Outcomes
- Condition of the Local Authority Road Network
- Reduction in Carbon Emissions
- Renewable Energy Generation

Mr Kinch sought clarification as to whether the Council had won a blue flag award for beaches. The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager responded that the Council had not received this award but he would look into this matter to see if the Council met the relevant criteria.

Councillor Martin referred to achievements one of which was the completion of works at Villa Real bridge and commented that the work had taken longer than expected due to the discovery of utilities and asked if any work had been done to look at the current condition of bridges in the county to ensure that any delays due to utilities would not happen again.

The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager responded that the relevant Service Grouping was conducting a stock condition survey of all bridges in the county and that he would provide the Committee with further information as to where Durham County Council

is with the survey and if it includes detail of whether the bridges are being used to carry utilities so that arrangements can be made for rerouting if necessary.

Councillor Jopling referred to the increased charges for garden waste and asked if it was cost neutral.

Councillor Clare responded that the Council had a contract with farms in the county who take the garden waste for a fee and then compost the waste for use later on their fields.

Mr Kinch indicated that in Teesdale they had a different system as a private company collects the bags of garden waste which are then sold on for compost.

The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager confirmed that he would check as to whether the charge for garden waste covered the costs of collection.

**Resolved:** That the report be noted.

## **11 Refresh of the Work Programme**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships which provided members with an updated work programme for the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee for 2017-208 (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Members were advised that the circulated proposed work programme for 2017/18 had been developed following the conversation with members at the April meeting. At that meeting members had identified a number of topics from the 2016/17 work programme where they wished to receive further progress reports including: regional funding; winter maintenance; fuel poverty; environmental campaigns, Community Action Team and the Carbon Management Plan.

In addition new areas had been identified for inclusion including an overview of the Culture and Sports Service, Bereavement Service, highways maintenance and the Business Energy Efficiency Project. A number of special meetings have been arranged looking at fuel poverty and engagement with the Flood Risk Management Authorities for County Durham.

A number of visits are also included in the proposed work programme and the topic for focused scrutiny review was identified as Durham County Council's future allotment policy providing members of the committee with an opportunity to be involved in the development of Durham County Council's future policy.

**Resolved:** (i) That the new work programme for 2017-18 be agreed.

(ii) That an additional Special meeting of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee focusing on fly-tipping and Household Waste Recycling Centres be included in the work programme for 2017/18.

(iii) That the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee focus on Durham County Council future allotments policy as the topic for the focused scrutiny review for 2017/18.

**12 Minutes from the County Durham Environment Partnership Board on 9 March 2017**

The Minutes of the meeting of the County Durham Environment Partnership Board held 9 March 2017 were received by the Committee for information.