

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 6 October 2017 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor E Adam (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors D Bell, J Carr, J Clare, J Clark, R Crute, P Howell, P Jopling, C Kay, R Manchester, C Martin, O Milburn, A Simpson, P Sexton and M Wilson

Co-opted Members:

Mr T Bolton

Also Present:

Councillors D Boyes and J Turnbull

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L Brown, A Gardner, A Patterson, L Taylor, S Zair and Mr D Kinch.

2 Substitute Members

No notification of Substitute Members had been received.

3 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2017 were agreed as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

4 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Milburn declared an interest in Agenda Item No.11 – Scoping Report: Review of Allotments Management Policy.

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

The articles were:

- Durham big winner in this year's Northumbria in Bloom after picking up eight top prizes – Durham scooped the overall top prize as well as the best small city but there were also awards for Sedgfield, Chester le Street and Seaham who all won top prizes in their categories with additional gold awards for Middleton in Teesdale and Tanfield.
- Turning the Tide on Litter along our Beaches – An army of volunteers had been recruited to clean up our beaches as part of a national fight against marine litter. Four of beaches on the County Durham coast took part at Seaham, Hawthorne Dene, Easington and Horden. (this links to a future work programme item on the Heritage Coast).
- Operation Spruce Up moves to Ferryhill – Operation Spruce Up moved to Ferryhill on Monday 25 September 2017 and will see a deep clean in the Market Place, Market Street, Main Street, North Street and the A167 and surrounding areas.
- Six fined after being found guilty of littering - Six people have been ordered to pay a total of almost £1,500 after being found guilty of dropping litter.

Councillor Kay referred to the Northumbria in Bloom awards and that not all awards were mentioned in the media.

Resolved: That the presentation be noted.

7 Winter Maintenance

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 information on the Winter Maintenance Policy that looked back at how the authority coped with the previous winter and what it has in place to deal with the forthcoming winter (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Members received a presentation from the Highway Asset Manager, Regeneration and Local Services that provided Members with statistics on salt for 2016/17; service change improvements; improvements to depots; current fleet; weather stations; winter maintenance policy; treatment routes; footway snow clearance; provision of salt and grit bins; key facts and figures; partnership working; the snow code and winter maintenance 'Go Live' (for copy of presentation, see file of minutes).

Members were advised that the service had used a total of 30,000 tonnes of salt, had carried out nearly 5000 pre salt runs, replenished 335 salt bins carried out 99 snow salt runs in the Dales area with a total expenditure of £3.3 million. The Highways Assets Manager advised that although last year's winter was considered as mild in comparison to the heavy winters of 2009/10 and 11 it was not without its challenges. 2016/17 winter had continued into April with snow fall which impacted on resources. Members were advised that all gritting vehicles including tractors used by farmers had a tracking system.

The Highways Assets Manager informed the committee that most of the vehicles used by their staff for gritting and snow clearing was less than 4 years old with a maximum age of 7 years old. The weather stations provided live updates on road conditions, which helped motorists plan their route safely. Members were advised that the government had issued a new code of practice which had some changes from the old one and that the authority would be aligning itself to the new code.

Information was given on treatment routes and members were informed that for priority 1 carriageways Durham County Council treat 45% of their roads which is the highest in the country some local authorities only treat 20% of carriageways. For priority 2 carriageways the authority only treat 10% of which are only treated during prolonged severe weather conditions. During heavy snowfall more intensive resource is required to keep carriage ways open, this has not been used since winter 2010/11. Footways are not treated unless there are extended periods of frost conditions and then only in specific places. Information was given on the provision of salt and grit bins and members were advised that anyone can request a grit bin and request forms were available on the website.

Members were provided with key facts and figures in relation to winter maintenance and with a list of parish councils who work with the local authority in gritting mainly footpaths. Members were advised that in other European countries householders are required to remove the snow from the footpaths in front of their properties but this wasn't law in the UK. However many householders are under the assumption that if they did this then someone fell and injured themselves they would be held liable – this is not the case as they can prove they had done this with good intentions.

Mr Bolton inquired about the costs involved in the purchase of salt and grit and if there were any regional arrangements with other local authorities to achieve economies of scale. The Highways Assets Manager advised that this was done via a North East Procurement Organisation contract to buy salt from Cleveland Potash so economies of scale involved.

Councillor Martin asked if getting access to priority 1 routes was an issue due to parked cars. The Highway Asset Manager responded that this was a more serious problem than it had been in the past with increasing numbers of households owning two or three cars which meant that at least one of the cars could be parked on the roadside. This could lead to problems if the gritter couldn't get past, then they have to pull off that route so parked cars were a massive problem. The service use media to ask people to park sensibly to allow the gritter to get past, but this was a national problem.

Councillor Clare advised that in his opinion, the system was fantastic and he was proud of the level of service being delivered. He mentioned that the public tend to criticise when there is a sudden burst of snow and everyone makes for the roads and the traffic grinds to a halt. The member asked if the service prepares the public for limitations of the service and if 'Go Live' was publicised. The Highways Asset Manager advised that the authority does use a weather forecast provider but sometimes it can be wrong. The worst conditions for the winter maintenance team was freezing rain, as rain washes the salt off the road and then freezes. The Highways Assets Manager advised that there had been lots of campaigns highlighting winter maintenance programme and media coverage including information on the website but the service is always open to ideas to increase public awareness and increase awareness of public responsibilities.

Councillor Boyes referred to the criteria used for the siting and supply of grit bins on steep gradients and if the gradient was stipulated or at the officers discretion. The Highway Asset Manager advised that the criteria for the siting of grit bins was published, but he didn't have the precise information but would get back to the Councillor with the information the Highways Inspectors assess whether a grit bins were needed. Members were informed that they had 2500 grit bins and they were nearly at saturation point.

Councillor Kay commented that he used the 'Go Live' system last year to see where the gritters were so that he could advise his constituents but anyone could use the 'Go Live' system who had access to the internet.

Councillor Sexton suggested that the Area Action Partnerships are used to get the message across to members of the public to make them aware of the problems the gritters have with parked vehicles.

In response to a question from Councillor Clare regarding the price of a dumpy bag of salt the Highways Assets Manager advised that this was approximately £108.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

8 Quarter One Performance Management Report - Report of Director of Transformation and Partnerships

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships that provided Members with progress against the Council's performance framework for the Altogether Greener priority theme for the first quarter of the 2017/18 financial year (for copy of report, see files of minutes).

The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager was in attendance to give a presentation of the Altogether Greener performance and explained to members the new performance reporting arrangements for 2017/18 in particular the key performance questions: How clean and tidy is my local environment?; Are we reducing carbon emissions and adapting to climate change? and How effective and sustainable is our collection and disposal of waste? (for copy of presentation, see file of minutes).

The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager advised that in some of the priority themes of the Council plan there were cross cutting questions and this was the case with the Altogether Wealthier question in relation to 'Is it easy to travel around the County?' which includes information on highways maintenance which falls within the remit of this committee.

Councillor Jopling referred to detritus on private land such as farmer's fields and sought clarification if the Council contacted private owners to ask them to clean it up. The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager responded that it depended on the severity but the Council did have powers to intervene to ask landowners to clear up sites on their land.

Councillor Jopling then queried about recycling figures being down, and was informed that the authority was below the national average. National studies show that attitudes to

recycling were linked to deprivation, but in relation to household waste level was in line with the national average. Councillor Jopling advised the committee that she had attended the visit to Suez, which had been very informative.

Councillor Howell asked in relation to levels of detritus, litter and dog fouling if officers visited the same areas to measure the levels and was informed that officers visited a different place each time and that there was a prescriptive methodology on sampling which enabled local authorities to be compared against each other. There are similar demographics but the methodology specifies certain aspects to ensure that there was coverage of all different areas and different types of area.

The Chair advised that this is a national average therefore national methods were used and gave the example of dog fouling being reported as low.

Councillor Martin commented on the success of the Council receiving additional funding for highways maintenance and referred to the state of some unclassified roads which were in need of repair and below performance target and asked how did this skew ability to use on unclassified roads and draw away match funding?

The Strategic Highways Manager advised Members that the Council measured all road networks to identify their conditions and 3% had been identified for treatment. Over the last 10 years there had been improvements in A, B and C roads with the condition improving from 15% to 3%. Unclassified roads remained high at 20% and the strategy had now moved to these roads. Funds could be moved to fix unclassified roads but this would then impact on the deterioration of A, B and C roads. There was no match funding for Highways Maintenance, funds came from the Council's defined maintenance budget but there was £1m incentive funding available to Durham as a top performing authority.

Councillor Howell sought clarification on the classification for prioritisation. The Strategic Highways Manager responded that the roads were surveyed using a scanner machine that collects lots of data which is processed and allows the service to plan indicating if the highway condition is green amber or red. They were unable to use the scanner on unclassified roads so they had to carry out a visual inspection and use an agreed methodology.

Councillor Manchester referred to fly-tipping and the use of CCTV cameras and asked if there was a rotation system in place and if a criteria was used to site the cameras.

The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager indicated that there was no prescribed methodology in placing CCTV cameras but they were placed based on information reports received of fly-tipping and hot spot areas. Local knowledge of Members and officers also had an input into the location of the cameras.

Councillor Clare sought clarification on the number of CCTV cameras held by the Council and the number of locations as it had been reported that there were only cameras in 19 locations. The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager would obtain the information and advise the member accordingly.

Mr Bolton referred to his parish council having fly-tipping problems and they asked for the installation of a CCTV camera but were advised that the site was not suitable as it was next

to residential properties, Mr Bolton added that this was disappointing as the visual sign of a camera could have acted as a deterrent.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer advised Members that the Special Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be held on 23 October 2017 would be looking at fly-tipping and would ask the service to include information on CCTV cameras.

Councillor Turnbull indicated that Mid Durham AAP had purchased four cameras and he had been unable to determine where they were being used and would like to be provided with this information.

Councillor Sexton indicated that he was interested in technology and any alternative surveillance equipment available that were not subject to legislation such as wildlife camera traps and if covert cameras were used to detect dog fouling. The Chair advised that the members' questions would be picked up at the special meeting.

Councillor Jopling asked for an update on drain clearance as she had some issues with blocked drains which made the roads dangerous.

The Strategic Highways Manager responded that the drain and gully cleaning was a cyclic routine in some locations this could be three months but could be as long as two years. The Strategic Highways Manager advised that soil can get trapped and during the spring and summer months grass grows and causes blockages. The Chair advised Councillor Jopling that the Highways Maintenance was on the work programme and was scheduled to come to the January meeting of the committee.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

9 Quarter 4 Budget Outturn 2016/2017 - Joint Report of the Corporate Director of Resources and the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services

The Committee considered the Joint Report of the Corporate Director of Resources and Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services which set out details of the outturn budget position for the former Neighbourhood Services group highlighting major variances in comparison with the budget. The Finance Manager, Regeneration and Local Services gave a presentation (for copies, see file of minutes).

Councillor Howell referred to capital projects and questioned their underspend and what efforts were being made to ensure that capital projects are on schedule.

The Finance Manager responded that project boards monitor delivery of capital schemes some projects were delayed due to unforeseen circumstances impacting upon our ability to deliver on time.

Resolved: That the final outturn position on Revenue and Capital for 2016/17 be noted.

10 Quarter 1 2017/2018 Revenue and Capital Forecast - Joint Report of the Corporate Director Resources and The Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services

The Committee considered the Joint Report of the Corporate Director of Resources and Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services which set out details of the outturn budget position for the former Neighbourhood Services group highlighting major variances in comparison with the budget. The Finance Manager, Regeneration and Local Services gave a presentation (for copies, see file of minutes).

Councillor Martin congratulated departments on meeting the cuts year on year but asked how this was being done.

The Finance Manager responded that they had a high focus on keeping expenditure down using underspends, achieving savings and getting the best from contracts in the last few years.

The Chair advised that this was not a choice and the Council had tried to reduce the impact on front line services.

Councillor Crute indicated that the budget savings had been achieved through prudent management of the Council, choices had been made and pressures to spend reserves had been resisted. This was a sensible approach as once reserves are spent they are gone.

Councillor Howell indicated that it was difficult to assess performance against a budget and would like to see a year on year comparison.

Resolved: That the Quarter 1 forecast outturn position on Revenue and Capital for 2017/18 be noted.

11 Scoping Report: Review of Allotments Management Policy - Report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships

The Committee considered the Joint Report of the Director of Transformation and Partnership and Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services that provided Members with background information together with the terms of reference and project plan for a review of Durham County Council's future management of allotment services (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer presented the report highlighted that the review would be more than a light touch review as indicated in the report and reminded Members that scrutiny reviews can be policy review or policy development and this piece of scrutiny review activity would help to develop the new allotment policy and tenancy agreement.

The objectives of the review were:

- Examine and understand Durham County Council's current allotment service policy including implementation challenges experienced with the current countywide lettings policy.

- Examine and comment on Durham County Council's future allotment policy including:
 - The revised countywide lettings policy and countywide tenancy agreement and consider the possible implications of introduction.
 - The proposed options for further devolved management of Durham County Council's allotment estate to TOWN & Parish Councils where applicable or self-managed allotment associations including consideration of any advantages and challenges.
 - The options for Durham County Council's future management of non-allotment plots currently included in the allotment portfolio.
- Ensure engagement with existing allotment tenants in the review process by using social media to capture views/comments on Durham County Council's future allotment policy.
- Consider and compare Durham County Council's future allotment policy with allotment policies implemented by other local authorities
- Comment on the proposed consultation arrangements for Durham County Council's future allotment policy.

Following the review, it was expected the following outcomes will be achieved:

- Awareness of Durham County Council's current allotment service and policy including challenges experienced with the introduction of the countywide letting s policy
- An opportunity for members to further develop and inform Durham County Council's future allotment policy
- An opportunity for County Durham allotment tenants to influence Durham County Council future allotment policy
- Awareness of allotment policies implemented by other local authorities and the possible implications of introducing Durham County Council's future allotment policy.
- An opportunity to influence the proposed consultation arrangements for Durham County Council's future allotment policy.
- Durham County Council's future allotment policy and proposed consultation arrangements will have been further developed and informed by Overview and Scrutiny Members.

The review group would consist of up to 10 Members of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee together with the Chair and Vice-Chair and the Chair and Vice-chair of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board who would be ex-officio members. Members who were interested to be part of the review group to give their names to the Overview and Scrutiny Officer at the end of the meeting.

The Chairman indicated that they were looking to develop the policy which was an in depth process which needed commitment. The first visit to the allotments would be held on 11 October 2017 and they would be looking at current and future policy and communicating

with allotment holders. He asked that any interest in joining the group be given to the Overview and Scrutiny Officer.

Councillor Jopling indicated that allotments were a hot topic in her village.

Councillor Carr suggested that a representative from the Regional Allotments Association be invited to one of the working groups. Members were advised that a representative from the National Allotments Association would be attending the meeting on the 7 December 2017. Members agreed to also invite a representative from the Regional Allotments Association to a meeting of the group.

Mr Bolton referred to Parish Council's statutory providing allotments and he suggested that they also had an input into the review and this could be done through the County Durham Association of Local Councils.

Resolved: (i) That the terms of reference as set out in the report be agreed.

(ii) That the project plan circulated with the report be agreed.

(iii) That a representatives from the Regional Allotments Association and the County Durham Association of Local Councils be invited to attend a meeting of the group.

12 Durham Strategic Flood Prevention Group Minutes held 13 June 2017

The Minutes of the Durham Strategic Flood Prevention Group held on 13 June 2017 were received by the Committee for information.

13 Minutes of the Northumbria Regional Flood and Coastal Committee Minutes held 21 April 2017

The Minutes of the meeting of the Northumbria Flood and Coast Committee held on 21 April 2017 were received by the Committee for information.