

COUNTY COUNCIL

6 DECEMBER 2017

QUESTIONS FROM AAPs

Question from Great Aycliffe and Middridge AAP

Whilst the AAP acknowledges the efforts of the Council to tackle unsightly land, we understand in a small number of cases, it can take three to five months going through the process of Community Protection Warning/Community Protection Notice to enforce the clearance of littered yards/gardens in some housing properties. The AAP understands that there are many challenges facing the Council given the current financial climate, however we would ask the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Assets if there are any further measures that could be introduced with housing partners to help tackle these unsightly and often unsanitary conditions?

Response

Thank you for your question. As a Council we share the concerns about untidy yards and gardens, not only are they unsightly but also they can pose risks to public health, can harbour pests and also raise fire risks.

There is a variety of legislation that our neighbourhood wardens, environmental health and planning utilise to combat the problem, but the simplest approach and least cost is having a word with the occupier. In many instances this does the job and it also affords an opportunity to advise on waste collection services to encourage more responsible disposal.

Beyond education, where organic, noxious waste is present, notice to the tenants can be as little as 48 hours. For other forms of waste our wardens issue community protection warnings, followed by notices, and the timescale for each is one week. Our wardens issued 3,448 in the last year, and 90 percent of these resulted in compliance at the notice or warning stage, only 10 percent going to court or being issued with a fine. It is important that we recognise this considerable work on the ground.

I do acknowledge that in a relatively small number of instances enforcement can take some time. This can be a result of many factors - tracing a changing ownership, new tenants moving in inheriting the waste through no fault of their own, or this issue might form part of wider, more complex casework.

We are keen to work with housing associations on this matter, who can also utilise their tenancy agreements to help ensure responsible behaviour. We already work with County Durham Homes who carry out inspections and first stage enforcement and over the coming months we will be looking to promote this partnership approach more widely including in the GAMP area.

Question from 4 Together AAP

Since 2014 the 14 Area Action Partnerships have each welcomed the annual grant of £10,000 from Durham County Council to tackle welfare reform and poverty issues. These grants have provided the AAPs with opportunities to develop community based projects tailored to support families and individuals who are experiencing hardship. As portfolio holder for social inclusion how are you approaching your role to find out what local projects are being developed, how these are helping those affected by welfare reform and poverty, and, how learning from such projects can be shared across the County to benefit others?

Response

Unfortunately Cllr Jane Brown is unable to be here today so I will be responding on her behalf as her Cabinet Support Member for Social Inclusion.

On behalf of Councillor Jane Brown, thank you for your question. Residents of the County continue to struggle with the Government's ongoing programme for welfare reform and the lasting impacts of the recession which has seen our County, and this region, suffer much more than others.

These impacts cut across all of the Council's strategic themes and have implications across the entire council. It is therefore vitally important that the Council continues to respond and provide as much support as we can.

The Council has recognised this as one of its key priorities and as the Council's portfolio holder for Social Inclusion Cllr Brown and myself will be working to ensure that we and our partners continue to work together to ensure our most vulnerable households are properly supported.

As portfolio holder for this area Cllr Brown is working hard to understand as much as she can on how our residents are facing up to these challenges and what more the Council and its partners can do to help, for example attending regular updates meetings and briefings around the roll out of Universal Credit. Cllr Brown is taking as many opportunities as she can to meet and hear directly from those teams of staff, local groups and organisations which deliver projects, services and initiatives and offer the type of help and support necessary to local residents and communities to help them cope with welfare reform and poverty.

This has included Cllr Brown recently meeting the AAP co-ordinators to find out more about the excellent work the AAPs are doing to make best use of the £10,000 grant from the Council whilst ensuring it is reaching those most in need and it is achieving positive outcomes for residents and local communities. I know Cllr Brown has been heartened by the passion and enthusiasm of these teams and their utter determination to help our residents in particularly learning about the various projects around the issues of holiday hunger for children.

There are excellent examples of projects that have helped ensure local children continue to receive a substantial meal during the school holidays. Through the Council's Poverty Action Steering Group chaired by Lorraine O'Donnell, Director of Transformation and Partnerships and the Child Poverty Working Group which is chaired by Margaret Whellans, Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services, we will soon be starting to look at how we can share the learning from these projects.

Working with AAPs, we will be identifying opportunities where good practice from these projects can be expanded to existing projects in other parts of the County which are being delivered around holiday activities. For example we will be exploring how we can link these holiday activity projects to existing projects, initiatives and partners working towards tackling hunger and food poverty.

I am also pleased to announce the allocation of an additional £10,000 from the Welfare Assistance Fund to each AAP for 2018/19. This will enable them to continue and expand on the excellent work already being delivered within their communities to help those affected by welfare reforms and poverty, and we would encourage Councillors to share any ideas they may have for existing or new projects with their AAPs.

Whilst this is just one of many examples of the work Cllr Brown will be involved in as portfolio holder, and as a member of the Poverty Action Steering Group and Child Poverty Working Group, she will be ensuring Cabinet and members are kept up to date on developments as this agenda progresses. I would encourage members to get in touch with Cllr Brown to let us know what issues your local residents are facing or to discuss your ideas on what more we can do.

Cllr Brown has already met with local MPs and will continue to speak regularly with them to share our experiences and concerns. She will ensure our local MPs are kept informed on what is happening here in Durham which in turn will help the MPs when updating central government. She therefore welcomes any questions, comments, feedback and suggestions you may have now or in months ahead.