

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the **Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday, 4 March 2020 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor J.Reid
(Chair, in the Chair)

MEMBERS

Armstrong, E.
Beynon, J.
Cartie, E.
Dunbar, C

Dunn, E.
Gallacher, B.
Gibson, R.
Pattison, W.

CABINET MEMBER

Sanderson, H.G.H.
Riddle, J.R.

Environment and Local Services
Planning, Housing and Resilience

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

G. Barlow
D. Laux
S. Nicholson
P. Soderquest

N. Turnbull

Street Lighting Manager
Head of Technical Services
Scrutiny Co-Ordinator
Head of Housing and Public
Protection
Democratic Services Officer

1 Press
1 Public

43. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Hepple.

44. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Communities and Place OSC held on 5 February 2020, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

Ch.'s Initials.....

45. FORWARD PLAN OF CABINET DECISIONS

The Committee considered the Forward Plan of key decisions (March to June 2020). (Schedule enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix A).

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

46. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORTS

46.1 Street Lighting LED Project

The report provided an update on the progress of the Council's Street Lighting Modernisation Project. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix B).

The Head of Technical Services and Street Lighting Manager provided a summary of the report including problems experienced during the project which had resulted in a delay in the completion and an increase in costs. These included design issues, sub-contractors going into liquidation and additional columns requiring replacement due to their poor condition.

Due to a number of reasons, some works had also been taken out of the contract and would be completed by the Council's own in-house team. A small amount of work remained outstanding whilst waiting for a Northern Powergrid connection. Final inspections were being undertaken on a sample basis for the issue of completion certificates and warranties were in the process of being transferred to the Council from Galliford Try. Negotiations regarding the final cost of the project were in progress.

The following information was provided in response to discussion and questions from Members:

- This was the first project of this type and lessons could be learned in a number of areas including: how contracts were set up and worded, day to day management and public consultation.
- More resource had been required to deal with complaints which had resulted in the employment of an additional officer.
- Some of the delay and additional cost had been down to sub-contractors going into liquidation which was beyond the control of the Council.
- With this being one of the first projects of this nature, officers had not been able to benefit from best practice elsewhere. However, they were willing to share their experience with colleagues in other Local Authorities.
- Whilst the project had experienced problems, the street lighting stock had been significantly improved including replacement of life expired columns, a 64% reduction in energy usage and costs with a significant saving in CO² and contribution to the Council's climate change commitment.
- Maintenance work had significantly reduced. Warranties for the new equipment varied between 15 and 21 years. There was also a 12 month defects correction period.

- The service was under review to assess what staffing level was required going forward. They were exploring opportunities for further external work including installation of Christmas lights and installation of street lighting in new housing developments. Employment of additional apprentices was also to be considered.
- Officers noted the disappointment of Members that more local labour and apprenticeships had not been as great as initially hoped.
- Queries or requests from Councillors for additional lights should be emailed to the officers for investigation.
- Estimates for new lighting columns could be provided on request. Costs for heritage lighting varied between £2,000 - £2,500 for a new column. An embellishment kit, where there was an existing column in situ, cost between £1,500 - £2,000.
- An external company had been employed to undertake inspections on a sample basis. They were also undertaking visual inspections of adjacent lights. The number of inspections had reduced significantly following the first phase in Ashington which had required an 80-90% inspection rate due to the design issues highlighted in the report.
- Discussions regarding the interpretation of the contracts were in the process of being held with Galliford Try. Officers were therefore unable to quantify the actual cost of the project due to commercial sensitivity.
- LED street lighting was being installed in all new housing developments in Northumberland, although not necessarily to the same specification given technological advancements since the project had commenced.
- Whilst it was noted that Newcastle City Council were operating trials to reduce street lighting on some of its main routes over night, this was not currently being considered in Northumberland, particularly in residential areas, to avoid increases in anti-social behaviour. Feedback from residents received during informal consultations on the current project indicated that they had not been in favour of lights being switched off overnight. The Portfolio Holder also wished to prevent accidents on roads where there were potential dangers.

The Chair and Members thanked officers and all those involved in the project for their hard work and dedication.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

46.2 Community Safety and Anti-Social Behaviour Control

The report presented to the Committee the current discharge of the Council's duties towards community safety and the control of anti-social behaviour, including the support provided to Ward Councillors. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix C).

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and resilience stated that it had been necessary to review the way of working following the reduction in funding. The model currently in use delivered what was needed to meet the statutory requirement, with less resource.

The Head of Housing and Public Protection outlined the report including the statutory framework, the forums which could provide assistance including Single Point of Contact (SPOC), Victim Offender Location (VOL) meetings, ASB Risk Assessment Conferences (ASBRAC), involvement of key personnel to allow rapid escalation of serious cases, number of service requests, categorisation and response targets.

A number of Members complimented the service and officers as they had found the system extremely helpful. Another Councillor was less satisfied due to the speed at which some matters had taken to resolve.

The following issues were raised:

- Comparison was made with the 'Safe Reporting Centre' and 'Safe Place' schemes. Further discussion would take place outside the meeting with Councillor Cartie.
- More publicity was required about successful outcomes, including numbers of fixed penalty notices and prosecutions. Use was also made of Community Protection Notices (CPN) and Community Protection Warnings (CPW), as appropriate. Not all individuals were aware that their behaviour was anti-social and that it impacted on their neighbours. The level of complaints and evidence available for officers to investigate and determine whether the required threshold was met to take action.
- Action was required against irresponsible use of trail bikes and other vehicles on bridleways and public places which was dangerous to members of the public. Responsible use was promoted and residents encouraged to report irresponsible activity. Reference was made to an incident where criminal damage was caused and the farmer threatened. Any dangerous driving should be reported to Northumbria Police on 999. The police were understood to be taking a firmer view. Meetings were held with senior police officers on a regular basis and a commitment had been given to address bikes and other unlicensed vehicles. Consideration was also being given how each other's meetings could be utilised, for example, 'Cuppa with a Copper'. Calls to the police were risk assessed and intervention allocated where this was deemed appropriate.
- Reports of anti-social behaviour from Members, who were representing one or more residents, were taken very seriously although details would be requested about the source of the information and its robustness.
- The issue of 'car gatherings' in Council car parks was problematic in some areas and it was queried whether rumble strips could be installed. This would be raised with the Head of Technical Services.
- Lower levels of anti-social behaviour were handled by the Council whilst more serious incidents were dealt with by the police. Information was shared between both organisations, for example, police evidence was used by the Council to take enforcement action.

RESOLVED that:

- a) The report be received.

- b) The email containing the Single Point of Contact details be recirculated to all Members with the report and minutes from the meeting.

46.3 Environmental Enforcement Website

The Head of Housing and Public Protection gave a demonstration of the new Environmental Enforcement web pages. The web pages were nearly ready to go live, although with the imminent move from Google to Office 365, the form and structure of the pages needed to be re-checked.

The pages contained statistical information, action taken and reports received for incidents of environmental enforcement and animal welfare. Data was broken down by year and ward where investigations had taken place. Other sections contained details of successful prosecutions, advice and information, calendar with details of activities and a reporting tool.

Members discussed the information that was going to be available on the new web pages and the following issues were highlighted:

- Reporting tools for members of the public were also available on the front page of the Council's website.
- There was a positive correlation following the introduction of the Green Dog Walkers scheme and a reduction in the number of reports of dog fouling. The scheme was extremely successful and now had over 3500 participants.
- Data regarding use of the website and number of 'hits' could be monitored by officers.
- Concern about adverts on social media regarding rubbish removal and whether this was disposed of correctly.
- Every opportunity should be taken to publicise successful prosecutions and other news stories. Notices of successful prosecutions should be displayed in known dog fouling locations.
- Payment of a fixed penalty notice was not a conviction and therefore details could not be released about recipients. However, statistical data on numbers issued could be promoted.

RESOLVED that the presentation be received.

47. REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATOR

Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Monitoring Report

The Committee reviewed its work programme for the 2019/20 council year. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix C).

A members requested a report on:

- A cigarette butt campaign

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____