

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a virtual meeting of the **Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee** on Wednesday, 16 September 2020 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor J. Reid
(Chair, in the Chair)

MEMBERS

Armstrong, E.
Cartie, E.
Dunbar, C
Dunn, E.

Gallacher, B.
Gibson, R.
Hepple, A.
Pattison, W.

CABINET MEMBER

Sanderson, H.G.H.

Environment & Local Services

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

G. Gavin
P. Jones
S. Nicholson
N. Turnbull

Head of Neighbourhood Services
Service Director - Local Services
Scrutiny Co-Ordinator
Democratic Services Officer

55. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the Executive Director Corporate Resources – Planning and Economy.

56. MINUTES

In answer to a question, the Scrutiny Co-Ordinator confirmed that it was intended that an update on the Covid-19 Recovery Report would be presented to all of the Council's scrutiny committees in November 2020.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Communities and Place OSC held on 3 June 2020, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

Ch.'s Initials.....

57. FORWARD PLAN OF CABINET DECISIONS

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

In answer to questions from Members, the Scrutiny Coordinator stated that:

- A report on curbside glass was expected to be considered by the Committee at the next meeting on 7 October 2020.
- A report on Climate Change was scheduled to be considered by the Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC on 12 October 2020.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

58. OVERVIEW

58.1 Fly Tipping

The report provided an update on fly tipping and presented the proposed Fly Tipping Reduction Action Plan. (A copy of the report is attached to the signed minutes as Appendix B).

The Service Director - Local Services provided a summary of the report. He highlighted that whilst there had been a 34% increase in incidents in 2019/20 compared with the previous financial year, the figures in Northumberland were relatively low in comparison with other areas. Officers were not complacent. Analysis had been undertaken of the materials and location of incidents; there was no correlation with the charges introduced in 2015.

The highest number of incidents occurred in the Ashington Hirst and Blyth Cowpen Quay areas. Partnership arrangements with those Town Councils, streamlining of the process for removal and increased enforcement activity by NEAT teams meant that performance against response targets had improved.

Officers had noted that there had been a correlation between improved fly tipping removal activity and the number of fly tipping occurrences. They intended to address education as part of the upcoming enforcement campaign to reiterate that fly tipping was not acceptable and had consequences. They intended work with communities to improve cleansing standards and enforcement activity, including the issuing of fixed penalty notices and seizure of vehicles.

Members thanked the officers for the comprehensive report including the operational analysis which they had found extremely informative.

Issues raised by members included:

- How the message was to be communicated to residents and whether it should only be targeted in the hotspot areas or across the county. The Head of Neighbourhood Services stated that the information and penalties for fly tipping needed to be disseminated across the county. However, additional events would take place in the two hot spot areas with a week of action which would include staff in the streets and knocking on doors with leaflets to remind residents of their responsibilities and how to dispose of their rubbish. Several weeks later this was to be followed up with a stronger message about enforcement.
- The link between deprivation in the two wards and an inability to pay charges. The material which were being fly tipped could mostly be disposed of free of charge, i.e. bags of household waste and furniture. It was generally accepted that within the socio economic groupings there was a higher prevalence of fly tipping in more deprived areas.
- Whether other staff, such as housing officers, could be utilised for education and / or enforcement.
- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the closure of the Household Waste Recovery Centres (HWRCs) there had been an average of 105 fly tipping incidents per week which compared to an average of 96 per week for 2019/20. During the last few weeks of August, this had reduced to an average of 81 incidents per week.
- Whether it would be beneficial for information leaflets to be circulated more regularly, e.g. every 6 months, particularly in the hotspot areas where there was perhaps a higher turnover of residents in rented accommodation. There needed to be a greater emphasis on enforcement and the house holders responsibilities if the waste was irresponsibly disposed of by a contractor. It was confirmed that this was to be included in the message and the activity was to be repeated.
- The speedy removal of materials which had been fly tipped and the successful partnerships with town councils may have contributed to the problem, if residents knew the waste would be quickly removed. It was noted that as part of a Keep Britain Tidy trial a few years ago, street cleansing had only been carried out on one side of Ashington High Street and rubbish had accumulated very quickly on the other side. Whilst the ethics of not undertaking street cleansing to counteract the expectation that rubbish would be removed, was briefly discussed, it was considered this would not be fair to the majority of residents and business owners.
- Waiting times in excess of 40 minutes at some of the HWRCs, including Bebside, would deter some residents from visiting and disposing of their waste correctly. Analysis of HWRCs showed that the number of visits and waiting times were reducing as the operator had been able to increase the number of vehicles on site. It was hoped that traffic management, which had been required at a number of sites, would be withdrawn in the near future.
- A concession of 25% on bulky waste charges was available to residents in receipt of a number of qualifying benefits. The charges, concessions and help available to move wheely bins was to be reviewed.
- White goods were a particular issue in some wards. It was not thought beneficial to place a notice on the item as they were removed quickly.

Leaflets were distributed in the locality of incidents. The pilot in the two wards identified would be replicated elsewhere, if successful.

- PACE interviews. It was reported that a solution had been found so these could now be carried out and the backlog, due to the pandemic, addressed.
- Communication with landlords where there was a high turnover of rented property, particularly in the Hirst and Cowpen Quay wards. The Head of Neighbourhood Services confirmed that there was an effective process to remove items left in properties operated by Advance Northumberland. However, the majority of landlords in Cowpen Quay were private. The Service Director – Local Services confirmed that the Communication Plan included contact with local councillors, town and parish councils and community associations to engage as proactively as possible.
- Information about the cost of fly tipping was available but not specifically included within the information leaflet to residents.
- Repeat offending did not generally occur for low level littering offences. However, larger scale problems, such as fly tipping of van loads in more rural areas, was followed up with use of covert surveillance cameras and joint working with the Environment Agency.
- a Successful enforcement needed to be widely publicised to give reassurance that action was being taken. Some press releases, such as the crushing of a vehicle seized due to its involvement with fly tipping, had been the subject of numerous press articles.

Councillor Sanderson, Portfolio Holder for Environment & Local Services commented that the issue was taken extremely seriously as fly tipping and other litter clearing costs a significant amount of money which could be spent elsewhere. He was extremely grateful for the partnerships with Ashington Town Council and Blyth Town Council and the assistance given by local Members.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted:

- 1) The report and options for reducing fly tipping in Northumberland.
- 2) That the majority of the increased incidents of flytipping relate to items of household waste that have been encountered in Ashington and Blyth and that these areas will be prioritised when taking actions to reduce fly tipping.
- 3) The enforcement and collection staffing resources deployed to prevent and remove fly tipping have increased in the last 18 months, so the increase in fly tipping is not a result of reduced investment, be noted.
- 4) There are a range of options available for households to dispose of their bulky household waste legally and that demand for these services remains at a high level and there is no evidence of a link between the increase in flytipping incidents and the introduction or increase in charges for waste services.
- 5) That overall bulky waste service performance in terms of availability of collection slots and undertaking collections on the agreed date is good and improving, so focusing on enhancing education and enforcement messages and activity is

likely to have a bigger impact on this problem than further improvements in service performance.

- 6) Officers engage as actively as possible with officers in other departments, local members, Town and Parish Councils, community associations and other groups to tackle the issue of fly tipping.

59. 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).

The Scrutiny Co-Ordinator reminded Members that an update on the Covid-19 pandemic was now included as a standing item on the agenda for the Health and Well-Being Overview and Scrutiny Committee. All members were welcome to view the meetings. The next meeting was at 1.00 pm on Monday 21 September 2020.

A member requested clarification with regard to the first item on the Committee's terms of reference and overview of the management arrangements for Active Northumberland. The Scrutiny Co-Ordinator confirmed that he was discussing with the Business Chair how this would be addressed and would be included in the programme for a future meeting. He provided a brief explanation of the performance and enforcement reports which would be programmed.

A member requested a report on:

- Anti-social behaviour in car parks including littering of gas cannisters.

The matter would be referred to the Chairmen's Group which it was hoped would be held before the end of October.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____