

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, 28 March 2018 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor J. Reid
(Chairman, in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

Cartie, E.
Dunbar, C.
Dunn, E.
Gallacher, B.

Gibson, R.
Pattison, W.
Swithenbank, I.C.F.

PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

Sanderson, H.G.H.

Environment and Local Services

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

J. Rose
P. Johnston
P. Jones
M. Jeffrey
D. Laux
N. Snowdon
D. Rumney
S. Nicholson

Economic and Inclusion Policy Manager
Interim Executive Director: Place
Service Director - Local Services
Green Spaces and Countryside Manager
Head of Technical Services
Principal Programme Officer
Principal Programme Officer
Scrutiny Co-ordinator

37. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor E. Armstrong.

38. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Communities and Place OSC, held on 24 January 2018, as circulated, confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

39. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator presented the latest Forward Plan of key decisions (March - June 2018). (Forward Plan enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix A).

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

40. CABINET REPORTS PREVIOUSLY CONSIDERED BY THE COMMITTEE

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator advised members of Cabinet decisions regarding issues previously commented on and been subject of report by this Committee. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix B).

Members requested that further updates be provided to the Committee regarding progress on the review of the existing boundary of the Northumberland Coast AONB, as recommended at the last meeting and subsequently endorsed by Cabinet. The Chairman agreed to ensure that this issue featured on the Committee's work programme in 2018/19.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

41. SCRUTINY OF CABINET REPORTS

The Committee were advised that the following report would be considered by the Cabinet on 10 April 2018. The Committee were asked to comment on the proposals contained in the report. Those comments would be presented to the Cabinet by the Chairman.

41.1 Northumberland Cultural Strategy 2018 - 2030

The purpose of this report was to present a refreshed Northumberland Cultural Strategy 2018 - 2030 for approval. The Council recognised the tremendous opportunities culture provided and had actively positioned culture at the forefront of strategic development and delivery. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix C).

The Committee welcomed the report and draft strategy. They were assured that the delivery plan was being developed with key partners and would be presented to the Committee in due course.

Members identified some wording in the draft Strategy that they felt could be changed, for example: references to North of Tyne or where statements of certainty should be replaced with words of aspiration or ambition. Ms Rose noted all the suggestions and undertook to review the document accordingly.

The Committee requested details of the evidence base that illustrated the clear benefits in engaging with culture to health. It was agreed that a summary would be provided to members following the meeting.

The Committee also requested further information on the 'Bait Programme' which was established to create a long-term increase in levels of arts engagement in South East Northumberland, together with programme details of GREAT Northumberland 2018.

RESOLVED that

- (a) the Cabinet be advised that the Committee supported the proposals contained in the report, subject to the comments above, and
- (b) the additional information on culture and health; the Bait Programme, and GREAT Northumberland be provided to members as requested.

42. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORTS

42.1 Tree Policy

This report provided members with an update on the council's tree and woodland management work and policies in advance of a full review of the Tree and Woodland Strategy prior to its expiry in 2020. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix D).

A number of members raised issues around the modernisation of the street-lighting programme and how it impacted on trees in their areas. Members were advised that all tree works affected by the street-lighting programme had been completed in south east Northumberland, however if they felt that problems within that area remained unresolved, they should contact the Street Lighting Manager.

Members were advised that in rural areas, highways inspectors monitored the encroachment of trees across roads. If such encroachment impacted on road safety, the inspector would identify the problem to ensure that the necessary remedial works were undertaken.

The Committee noted that essential tree works would always take priority over works that were considered 'desirable'. However, they were advised that in previous years, additional funding had been provided to reduce the backlog of the desirable works, although members were concerned that it would rise again if funding reduced.

The Committee were advised that the Council received a very small number of insurance claims as a consequence of tree damage, which were mostly caused by the root structures.

Although there was not a programme for removing tree stumps, they could be extracted if they were identified as causing problems.

The Committee noted that there were many residential streets in the county where trees, not appropriate for that setting, had matured and were causing unintended problems such as blocking light to properties or causing hazards through overgrown roots. However, they were also aware that this was an emotive subject for many residents who enjoyed the amenity that the trees provided and would be opposed to any plans to remove them. Assurances were sought that proper consideration be given to the impact tree planting would have on new housing developments and to new road layouts.

Members agreed that the Committee should review the Tree and Woodland Policy in full, well in advance of the expiry of the existing policy in 2020. To assist in that process, members requested that they received details of the costs of various tree works and any existing implementation programmes to aid in setting priorities.

RESOLVED that

- (a) the progress made in implementing the Council's Tree and Woodland Strategy since 2015 be noted, and
- (b) the Committee include the review of the Policy prior to its renewal in 2020 on its 2018/19 work programme.

42.2 Northumberland Road Safety Strategy 2018-23

The purpose of this report was to inform the Committee about the review of the Northumberland Road Safety Strategy that had been updated and of the new priorities set based on accident data analysis and a revised strategy developed for the next five year period from 2018 - 2023. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix E).

The Committee were advised that motorcyclists were included in the vulnerable user group as they had less protection than car users. Members noted that older people (70+) were also included in this group and suggested that road markings needed to be continuously refreshed to alert them to potential dangers. They also felt that road safety issues, particularly for older people, should be promoted more widely via social media, at Council facilities such as leisure centres and libraries, and in partnership with colleagues in health and social care.

Cycle routes should be clearly signposted to encourage their use, particularly where they divert users away from busy roads.

Members further suggested that the behaviour of road users aged 17-24 needed to be checked through greater enforcement and the use of mobile speed cameras at known 'hot spots', although they noted that this was largely an issue for the police,

albeit in partnership with the Council through the Northumberland Road Safety Co-ordination Group.

The Committee were advised that cycling proficiency courses were available to adults. Members requested that officers work with colleagues in the Communications Office to promote such courses as extensively as possible,

The Committee suggested that the views of school crossing patrol wardens be sought as part of the consultation process.

RESOLVED that the Committee's comments on the draft strategy be noted for inclusion in the document where appropriate, prior to submission to the Northumberland Road Safety Co-ordination Group.

42.3 Network Hierarchy

This report provided an update on the review of the Highway Maintenance Hierarchy and the categorisation of Northumberland's road network. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix F).

The Committee highlighted the following issues which arose from the report:

- the resilience route did not attract any additional government funding;
- the proposed additions to the resilient route would attract a higher maintenance priority on those roads;
- there was a suggestion that other routes could be added to the resilience network, including Scots Gap - Rothbury, but members noted that the proposed consultation would include all county councillors and town and parish councils which may attract requests for further inclusion of additional routes;
- officers were consulting colleagues in the Scottish Border authorities to ensure that, where practicable, the Northumberland resilient network links with key routes in Scotland, and
- with regard to the consultation with the town and parish councils, officers assured the Committee that they would emphasise the benefits of the road network hierarchy, including the reasons why it is needed and what it does not affect. Presentations targeting those councils should be given to the Local Area Councils and to the Town and Parish Liaison Working Group.

RESOLVED that

- (a) the Committee's comments be noted, and
- (b) the proposed consultation with all county councillors and town and parish councils be supported, subject to the comments above.

43. REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATOR

Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Monitoring Report

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator presented the Committee's Monitoring Report which reviewed the work of the Committee during 2017/18. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix G).

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

44. INFORMATION REPORT - POLICY DIGEST

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator advised the Committee that the Policy Digest gave details of the latest policy briefings, government announcements and ministerial speeches which may be of interest to members. The report could be accessed through the service finder element of County Council's website at www.northumberland.gov.uk.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Chairman _____

Date _____