

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the **Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held at County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday, 29 June 2022 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor J. Reid
(Chair, in the Chair)

MEMBERS

Gallacher, B.	Mather, M.
Lang, J.	Morphet, N.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

M. Baker	Service Director, Climate Change, Business Intelligence and Performance
C. Curtis	Resources and Waste Contracts and Commercial Manager
N. Johnston	Project Manager, Climate Change
S. Nicholson	Scrutiny Co-Ordinator
N. Turnbull	Democratic Services Officer

7. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Carr, Cartie, Castle, Dale, Dodd, Riddle and Sanderson.

8. FORWARD PLAN OF CABINET DECISIONS

The Committee considered the Forward Plan of key decisions (July to October). (Schedule enclosed with the signed minutes).

Members agreed that a new item on 'Declaration of an Ecological Emergency' due to be considered by Cabinet in September, be included in the committee's work programme.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

9. SCRUTINY

9.1 Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy 2022/25

The report proposed a strategy for funding, siting, installing and maintaining Electric Vehicle Charge Points (EVCP) for three years from 2022/23. (A copy of the report is enclosed with the signed minutes).

Matt Baker, Service Director, Climate Change, Business Intelligence and Performance, stated that as transport accounted for approximately one third of all positive carbon emissions, it was necessary to consider how the Council could assist use of electric vehicles in order to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2030.

Nick Johnston, Project Manager, Climate Change, explained that on street EVCP installations would remove one of the barriers to EV use by residents who did not have access to their own driveway. He made reference to the prioritisation of sites, the framework for the implementation and review of charges to ensure that the EV estate was sustainable.

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

- Contactless payments for EVCP were likely to become mandatory and introduced in the future.
- Input from residents and town and parish councils regarding possible locations was welcomed. Suggestions could be sent to the Climate mailbox. Factors to be taken into consideration by officers included proximity of electrical supply and current parking arrangements.
- It was intended that capital and revenue costs be covered from EVCP income by year 10 the estimated life of the equipment. However, due to the volatility of energy prices, the current tariff did not cover running costs and therefore the fifth recommendation had sought authority to make in year adjustments to the tariff when necessary, whether this be an increase or decrease.
- The Council were working with the Energy Savings Trust to increase the success of application to the Office for Zero Emissions Vehicles (OZEV).
- Members Local Improvement Scheme funds could be utilised to part fund EVCP, if suitable locations could be found.
- A pilot programme had seen a number of on-street EVCP installed by a third party across the county in 2021/22. Knowledge gained from that project would be utilised when siting future EV chargepoints. It was intended that the work would be carried out in-house which would include opportunities for apprenticeships and improving local skills.
- Evidence suggested that EVs would become more attractive in the future with a growing secondhand market and technological advances.
- Proposed site locations were split across the county geographically and socio-economically.
- Tariffs would be set to be competitive and cover costs without being driven by profit.
- Decisions on locations would be informed by evidence of demand via expressions of interest by residents.

- Use of Traffic Regulation Orders with maximum limits of stays should ensure that bays were not occupied by one vehicle for long periods of time. Contraventions could be enforced with penalties, as with other parking restrictions. Depending on battery capacity, a full charge could often be obtained in 1-2 hours using a rapid charger. Restrictions would be applied during the day on a case-by-case basis.
- Emerging vehicle to grid technology could become part of the solution for power outages and improve grid resilience either on a house or community basis.
- Emergency vehicles were more likely to run on dual or hydrogen fuel cells as significant technological advances would be required before they could become all electric. It was noted that resilience issues had also been experienced with fuel shortages earlier in 2021.
- A synthetic fuel pilot was about to commence with some of the Council's refuse wagons which it was hoped would reduce emissions to 10% of an equivalent litre of diesel. Results would be shared with the fire service and North East Ambulance Service.
- Careful consideration of EVCP locations would be undertaken to ensure they were not in heavy footfall parking areas, not immediately adjacent to residential properties or high conflict areas for parking. They were likely to be located in car parks near terraced houses and therefore eligible for funding. It was hoped that in the future there would be behavioural change with increased use of electric vehicles it would become more desirable to live next to an EVCP. The tensions between those in favour of EV and in opposition, needed to be carefully managed.
- EVCP were required to be installed on new build properties.
- Approximately 2,000 electric vehicles were registered annually with DVLA in Northumberland.
- Provision had been made within the capital programme within local services and climate change budgets to increase the number of EVCP.
- Wifi connectivity needed to be considered when determining locations.
- Permission would need to be sought from Town and Parish Council's landowners if they owned the car parks where it was proposed an EVCP be located.
- Finance and the Energy Team would be involved in the calculation of tariffs.
- It was intended that the next version of the Climate Change Action Plan would include a section on emerging technology.
- Climate change training for elected members was to be rolled out and officers would liaise with colleagues in Democratic Services to arrange dates as soon as possible.

Members of the committee welcomed more accessible EVCP and made the following comments:

- Input by residents and town and parish councillors was welcomed to ensure use was optimised.
- The costs of the project should be recouped.

- Use of electric vehicles continued to have an impact on the environment including congestion and accidents.
- Residents needed to be a move away from individual car ownership via improvements to public transport and active travel infrastructure and encourage shared EV ownership.
- A protocol for the setting of EVCP tariffs be shared for transparency.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

1. Supported the recommendations in the report.
2. The protocol for the setting of EVCP tariff be considered by Communities & Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee at a future meeting.
3. Encourage members to undertake the climate change training.

9.2 Northumberland Waste Management Strategy – Proposed Food Waste Recycling Pilot Schemes

The report set out future obligations to offer food waste collections to households arising from the Environment Act 2021 and sought approval for a weekly household food waste collection pilot scheme to assess the viability of collections across Northumberland, together with a home food waste composting pilot scheme to consider potential options in rural areas where weekly food waste collections may not be practicable or affordable. (A copy of the report is enclosed with the signed minutes).

Colin Curtis, Resources and Waste Contracts and Commercial Manager, explained that the kerbside food waste collection pilot would be undertaken at 4,800 properties in central Northumberland. The properties and route had been chosen due to their proximity to the waste transfer station at West Sleekburn and collection would be by a single specialist refuse vehicle. The provision of hot bin home compost bins in three rural locations (Chatton, Eldson and Gilsland) would enable the feasibility an alternative food waste disposal to be assessed where it was not technically, economically or environmentally practical to provide a weekly collection vehicle.

Examples of the 5-litre kitchen caddy, optional polythene lining bags and the external container with lockable lid were displayed and circulated.

It was hoped that the schemes would lead to increased awareness of food waste and eventually a reduction in the amount being sent for recycling and in residual waste. Whilst they hoped to have high participation rates and provide data on quantities, inform the Council's decisions and provide evidence for new burdens funding when the collection of food waste became a legal requirement, potentially in 2024/25.

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

- Around 1.3kg of food waste within residual bins was avoidable and expected to be collected on a weekly basis. (This amount was technically greater, but more material would be adhered to packaging which could not be extracted).
- Arrangements had been to take between 500-700 tonnes per annum of the estimated food waste from the trial to plants in Gateshead or Durham.
- None of the material collected during the food waste trial would be sent for conventional composting. Anaerobic digestion plants at Gateshead and Durham were designed to create renewable energy and were bottling gas as an alternative to it being sold as electricity to the national grid, due to connection difficulties. The digestate at the bottom of the tank was removed and used as a fertiliser / soil improver which was monitored and tested by the Environment Agency.
- Defra estimated that capacity would be required for 100,000 tonnes to process food waste from residential properties between Teesside and Northumberland.
- It was anticipated that collection rates would be highest in the first half of the pilot and then decrease as residents became more aware.
- Consideration would need to be given for facilities to dispose of the estimated 10,000 tonnes of food waste in Northumberland when mandatory as the plants at Durham and Gateshead would not have sufficient capacity for all of the waste collected by local authorities and commercial entities such as restaurants, schools, prisons and hospitals.
- Suez had recently started a consultation exercise to build an anaerobic digestion plant in the Ashington area which would replace the existing in-vessel compost at the Ellington land fill site.
- There was a limited market to source the receptacles to be used by households. The samples handed round members was currently being used elsewhere in the country and recommended by the Government's consultants.
- Officers had been looking at the costs and sources of lining bags currently available. The polythene liner bags cost 1.5p each whereas corn starch bags costs 4p each and would significantly increase annual costs. However, some residents may choose to not use a liner bag or participate in the trial.
- *The AD plants charged commercial entities around £15 per tonne to dispose of food waste which was approximately 15% of the cost of disposing of residual waste. The cost of separately collecting the food waste had to also be factored in.*
- The calorific value and minimum tonnage of residual waste would need to be monitored to ensure there was not a negative impact on energy from waste / residual waste contracts with the removal of food and plastic from residual waste. The contracts had broad upper and lower tolerance limits but would need to be renegotiated, if the calorific value fell outside these.
- The home compost hot bin trial would be commencing later than originally planned. Local members and Town and Parish Councils would be informed.
- Residents who volunteered for the home compost trial would be provided with information from the manufacturer. There would also meetings held

locally, and a support group established with assistance from the Climate Change Team.

- The supplier of the specialist refuse vehicle required for the pilot had recently informed officers that there was a 4–5-month delay sourcing the vehicle. Officers were considering whether an adapted vehicle be used or whether the pilot scheme be delayed until circa November 2022. The vehicle was to be hired for the duration of the trial.

The following points were made by Members:

- Provision was required for enforcement and advice regarding cleansing of bins to avoid material in the street.
- There was some concern regarding the design, size and weight of the bins, particularly on collection days when there was adverse weather or interference from wildlife.
- Whether the indoor caddy and plastic bags were required or if other materials could be used such as paper.
- Facilities in the county were welcomed but it was queried whether the location proposed was Suez was the most appropriate.
- There be better communication with County Councillors and Town and Parish Councils regarding facilities and locations of the hot bin home composting pilot to enable them to assist with promotion of the scheme.
- Whether the food waste receptacle could sit within one of the larger wheeled bins.
- Whilst the home compost bin trial was aimed at residential properties, it was suggested that officers consider working with local schools.

Members of the Scrutiny Committee had expressed a number of concerns but were informed that the Council was piloting the Government's recommended food waste collection and the pilot would explore the issues that had been raised.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

1. Supported the recommendations in the report.
2. Consider involvement by local schools in the home compost bin trial.
3. Receive an interim report on the home compost trial in Autumn 2022 with a final report on the kerbside collection in the summer of 2023.

10. REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATOR

Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Monitoring Report

The Committee reviewed its work programme for the 2022/23 council year. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes).

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator outlined the reports due to be considered at the meetings on 31 August 2022 and 5 October 2022. It was agreed that no more

than 2 items be scheduled per meeting to enable a thorough discussion of subjects.

In answer to a question, the Scrutiny Coordinator reported that the Chairs' Group had recommended that the Chief Constable and Police Crime Commissioner be invited to attend a meeting of the County Council rather than a scrutiny committee. It was also noted that area commanders attended the Local Area Councils in the Autumn each year.

It was agreed that Items suggested for inclusion in the work programme:

- Space for Shore Birds Project funded by Section 106 contributions.

Members who wished to suggest items for inclusion in the work programme were requested to contact the Chair or the Scrutiny Co-ordinator.

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____