

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the **Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee**
on Wednesday, 25 August 2021 at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT

Councillor N. Oliver
(Chair, in the Chair)

MEMBERS

Cartie, E.
Castle, G.
Hardy, C.
Morphet, N.

Mather, M.
Richardson, M.
Robinson, M.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

C. Angus
P. Jones
R. O'Farrell
N. Turnbull

Scrutiny Officer
Service Director – Local Services
Executive Director - Place
Democratic Services Officer

14. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bridgett and Gallacher.

15. FORWARD PLAN OF CABINET DECISIONS

The Committee considered the Forward Plan of key decisions (August to November 2021). (Schedule enclosed with the signed minutes).

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

16. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORTS

16.1 Overview of the Fleet Replacement Programme in 2020/2021

The Committee were provided with an overview with the delivery of the Council's fleet replacement programme in 2020/2021 and an update on the progress made in current financial year 2021/2022. (A copy of the report is enclosed with the signed minutes).

Paul Jones, Service Director – Local Services, explained that it was essential that the fleet replacement programme was delivered in a timely manner to ensure delivery of front-line services, secure benefits of new technology, minimise impact on the environment and make a positive contribution to tackling climate change. He reported that:

- Service reviews and challenging the need for vehicles had resulted in a number of vehicles being removed from the program.
- Of the 391 vehicles scheduled to be replaced during 2021/22, 117 had been rescheduled.
- The programme had been severely impacted by the pandemic and to a lesser extent, Brexit. There were significant delivery delays due to closure of businesses, reduced capacity during lockdowns, world-wide shortages of semi-conductors and other parts from suppliers.
- Service critical vehicles had been promptly replaced to ensure service resilience.
- Purchase of some vehicle types had been delayed to enable assessment of reduced payloads, following the introduction of new standards, and potential replacement with electric vehicles (EV).
- Cost and differential impact of cost, particularly for larger electric vehicles and their current availability, was being closely monitored. Financial assistance would be sought from Council for any increased costs to purchase EV.

The following information was provided in answer to questions from members:

- Vehicles were primarily purchased outright and sold at auction at the end of their life to maximise returns. Operating or finance leases were also considered when viable to do so, although negotiation of extensions incurred additional premiums and they also had strict return conditions and values. Reviews were undertaken quarterly and generally it was cheaper for the Council to borrow at lower rates. Some specialist plant and equipment were bought second hand, although the majority was purchased new.
- Some vehicles with quick change bodies had been purchased to enable use all year round and ensure vehicles were not standing unused for many months. Examples included gritters which were also used as tar tankers for road maintenance. Some vehicles were dedicated solely as gritters due to the nature of their use. The fleet was kept under review as it was not beneficial to have high value vehicles sat unused.
- Services were challenged as to whether vehicles needed to be replaced; this had resulted in the removal of 18 vehicles from the programme in 2020/21. This challenge included specifications, as a standardised fleet was also cheaper to purchase and maintain. Other vehicles had been added due to the increased capital allocation for highways maintenance to do more in-house and reduce cost and reliance on third party contractors.
- Acquisition of additional gulley tankers would require consideration as a growth item and an additional financial allocation through the budgetary process.
- Use of new vehicles in parks was beneficial to the teams in saving time and enabling them to undertake more work.
- New vehicles were generally quieter than older vehicles and it was suggested that lower volumes of traffic during the pandemic could have impacted on the background noise and influencing perception of noise levels of ride on lawnmowers.

- The none removal of grass arisings contributed to blocked drains and associated problems.
- The new chipping spreading paving machine, to be used mainly on rural roads, had been purchased under an invest to save opportunity. Income generation work was also undertaken for other local authorities when capacity and capability permitted, given seasonal constraints. This was not at the detriment of the council's own programme.
- The specification had now been agreed for 6 compact sweepers which would be replaced during 2021-22. The replacement cycle had been reduced on other equipment due to issues with reliability.
- Ancillary equipment on vehicles, such as jettors on gulley wagons, would be checked and reported back.
- It had been necessary to ensure there was an adequate charging infrastructure at depots when 'greening' the fleet. Improvements were being made to depot-based charging network to accommodate the growing EV fleet. This had necessitated 'power up' bids and other climate change improvements at key operational depots, such as PV on roofs and ground source heat pumps, as part of the Council's climate change action plan. Capacity and availability with the local grid was an issue nationally for larger vehicles. Planning permission had been obtained by estates management for the construction of solar PV car ports with EV charger capacity at County Hall.
- There was concern regarding the environmental impact of alternative fuel sources, e.g. hydro treated vegetable oil. The Energy Savings Trust had been engaged and were considering 'greening' the fleet, feasibility of EVs and alternatives, as EVs might not be suitable across the whole fleet. Technological advances and availability of models were being closely monitored.
- Quick change body jet patchers had been acquired following trials although they had been expensive to operate and provided a temporary repair. A change of approach to a greater proportion of permanent repairs on the road network had resulted in them being replaced with hot box vehicles.

The officers were thanked for the informative report and work undertaken by Local Services, which had continued with little interruption during the pandemic.

RESOLVED that:

1. The work undertaken to deliver a challenging fleet replacement programme during 2020/21 and 2021/22, be noted.
2. Cabinet be recommended to consider an invest to save or business case to acquire more gulley wagons to increase capacity as part of the capital programme budget discussions.

16.2 Northumberland Waste Management Strategy - Kerbside Glass Collection Trial Update

The report provided an update on the kerbside glass recycling trial which had commenced in November 2020, including key performance measures on

recycling yields, resident participation and acceptance levels. A final report on the trial and proposed next steps for the roll-out of an enhanced glass recycling service was to be presented to Cabinet in October 2021. (A copy of the report is enclosed with the signed minutes).

Paul Jones, Service Director – Local Services, stated that whilst the Council provided a very good performing waste service which was cost effective and, reliable, no significant improvements had been made to recycling rates for a number of years, with continued high landfill diversion rates. This needed to be addressed as part of the Climate Change Action Plan.

He referred to recent Government policy reviews and consultations and the expectation that local authorities in England would need to achieve a recycling rate in excess of 50% with a wider range of materials collected at the kerbside and more consistency between areas. This was expected to be financed through 'new burdens' funding for local authorities and taxation on manufacturers and retailers under the 'producer pays' principle.

Modelling in 2019 identified the preferred way forward to improve recycling on a phased approach which included kerbside collection of glass, more plastics including pots, tubs and trays and food waste. Cabinet had agreed to a kerbside glass collection trial in October 2020 to test assumptions and put the Council in the best position to bid for funding and implement changes as quickly as possible.

The trial had commenced in November 2020 with approximately 4,000 households in Morpeth, Bedlington, Hexham and Alnwick/Lesbury. A 140-litre wheeled bin had been provided and was emptied every 4 weeks. An average yield of 71 kg per household was projected for the year which compared favourably with neighbouring authorities.

Noise monitoring and ear defenders had been provided for employees to reduce exposure to noise to an acceptable level but also allow them to hear noise from road vehicles and instructions from colleagues.

89% of residents were satisfied or very satisfied following a survey undertaken in May 2021. Monthly collections were also working well with more than sufficient capacity in bins which were rarely full and not always presented.

To date they had been unable to assess the additional benefit due to the Covid-19 pandemic as residents had been unable to go to hospitality venues resulting in more alcohol being consumed at home. There had been a 22% increase in glass collected at HWRC's and bring sites since 2019/20 and they were unable to distinguish what impact the trial had on diversion rates from these facilities.

The report to Cabinet would consider next steps, whether the trial be extended beyond November 2021 to obtain additional data now that there were no restrictions in place, and timing of rolling out kerbside collection of glass given availability of Government funding.

The Service Director – Local Services, replied to members questions with the following information:

- Whilst average put out rates were relatively low, this could be due to a number of factors: whether residents were recycling or perhaps continuing to put glass in general waste, the size of the container and if only half full it might not be considered necessary to have it emptied every month. Consideration also had to be given to average yield and participating residents responses to the survey. Smaller households had capacity to put the bin out less frequently and there could be capacity to increase the number of households participating in the trial, if extended. Other factors would also need to be taken into account including extension of the working day if there was a larger round, capacity of vehicles and potentially extra trips to unload etc.
- A comingled collection of glass and other recycling material required consideration of the contamination risk from glass shards amongst fibre material, health and safety risks, separation of materials, end uses and quality. The lifecycle of the material needed to be assessed to ensure robust, high value end uses in the UK to ensure maximum environmental return. Some local authorities had invested in the mechanical removal of material at the front end of the process, however this resulted in lower values and minimal usage due to contamination of other materials.
- Glass collected in Northumberland was taken to transfer stations for storage to enable efficient transportation in bulk to end users for remelt, which provided the highest value, into other glass products or for construction uses, e.g. sandpaper.
- Glass manufacturers wanted large pieces of glass for remelt which was obtained with less handling. Introduction of colour segregation technology would mean that clear glass would increasingly no longer need to be separated from brown and green glass. Some breakage was desired when collecting glass to maximise refuse vehicle loads.
- The Government had recently consulted on a glass deposit return scheme, or reverse vending, which was actively being considered.
- Private waste producers made their own arrangements for the collection of waste. The Council offered the full range of waste collection to business premises with a reduced cost for material which could be recycled to recognise the financial benefits received by the Council from the sale of the material.
- Transport emissions were taken into account in the calculation on 140 tonnes of carbon dioxide saved through usage of conversion factors developed from high level industry lifecycle assessment modelling across a range of European recycling plants.
- If the glass recycling trial was expanded across the county, it was expected that investment would be required in additional refuse vehicles and crew with new collection arrangements. Overtime had only been used during the trial period to enable an assessment.

Members commented that the trial had been well received and more residents wanted to be included.

The officers were thanked for the report.

RESOLVED that:

1. The contents of the report, be noted.
2. The success of the glass recycling trial scheme to date, in terms of high customer satisfaction levels and very high yields of glass collected per household, be noted.
3. The Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee supported the trial and expansion of glass recycling across Northumberland.

17. REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATOR

Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Monitoring Report

The Committee reviewed its work programme for the 2021/22 council year. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes).

Members with any queries or suggestions were asked to contact the Scrutiny Co-ordinator, Chair or Vice-Chair.

Members enquired whether the Communities & Place OSC could receive information on:

- The Local Nature Recovery Strategy Pilot
- Priority be given to the implementation of a policy banning dogs in fenced off Council sports areas. This had been raised previously but reports had been received regarding a recent incident at Ridley Park tennis courts. It was queried whether this could be added to the policy which banned dogs from fenced off children's play areas.
- Youth Services Outreach Programme and anti-social behaviour.
- Bulky Waste Collection Services (charges and subsidies).

The requests would be referred to the Chairmen's Group.

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____