

## **NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

At a meeting of the **Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee** on Wednesday, 1 December 2021 at 10.00 a.m.

#### **PRESENT**

Councillor J. Reid  
(Chair, in the Chair)

#### **MEMBERS**

Cartie, E.	Hardy, C.
Castle, G.	Morphet, N.
Dodd, R.	Richardson, M.
Gallacher, B.	

#### **MEMBERS**

Riddle, J.R.	Local Services
Watson, J.	Healthy Lives

#### **OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE**

H. Bowers	Democratic Services Officer
G. Gavin	Head of Neighbourhood Services
R. Murfin	Interim Executive Director of Planning & Local Services
S. Nicholson	Scrutiny Co-ordinator
S. Rowell	Principal Transport Officer
J. Rose	Service Director, Corporate Services, Planning & Economy

#### **30. MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Chair referred to the changes in the membership which Council had made on 3 November 2021.

**RESOLVED** That the changes be noted.

#### **31. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bridget and Mather.

## 32. MINUTES

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the following meetings of the Communities & Place OSG, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair:

- a) 6 October 2021
- b) 27 October 2021

## 33. FORWARD PLAN OF CABINET DECISIONS

The Committee considered the Forward Plan of key decisions (December 2021 to March 2022). (Schedule enclosed with the signed minutes).

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

## 34. SCRUTINY OF CABINET REPORTS

The Committee was advised that the following reports would be considered by the Cabinet on 7 December 2021. Members were requested to comment on the proposals in the reports.

**The Local Services presentation was reported on first due to the presenting officer having to leave the meeting early.**

### 34.2. Local Services – Neighbourhood Services

Greg Gavin, Head of Neighbourhood Services provided a presentation which set out the primary purpose of Neighbourhood Services and outlined the key areas of responsibility and service provision. (Presentation attached to the signed minutes).

Following the presentation, the following information was provided in answer to questions from members:

- Markets had made a small surplus or had broken even pre lockdown, surplus was less because of the impact of Covid but progress was being made
- The commercial waste income had grown from £1.2m to nearly £2m in the last 5 years.
- The issue of parking at HWRCs and the suggestion of a traffic light system would be taken back, however, there had been restrictions on the numbers of vehicles during Covid but these had been rolled back and hopefully there would be less of an issue.
- The cleaning of public conveniences had increased from once a day to 3 times a day, 7 days per week which was presently temporary. There was now a £1m improvement budget for toilets over the next 2/3 years with key

facilities in main town centres and key tourism sites seeing a significant refurbishment of toilets.

- Most retailers benefitted on market days from the increased footfall.
- Rights of Way maintenance would be in the second tier of priorities in respect of clear up activities following storm Arwen.
- Contamination of recycled waste was less of an issue at Household Waste Centres as attendants are there to guide people, but there was a higher rate of contamination in kerbside recycling bins, which the team target in a number of ways.
- A list of composting facilities would be circulated to Councillor Morphet. The only landfill site to be used by NCC was at Ellington.
- NEAT stood for Neighbourhood Environmental Action Teams - street cleansing and grounds maintenance
- Local Services were focusing across all service areas in relation to climate change, with a carbon baseline of waste services being undertaken so we can measure all the impacts of new recycling arrangements mandated through the Environment Bill
- If recycling bins were contaminated, a red tag would be put on the bin for the resident to empty. The team would then return to empty the bin. If offenders persisted, letters would be sent out. A last resort would be to take the bin away.
- The HWRCs hours were only reduced on the facilities where there was low volumes being brought in
- A number of fitters had been sent on specialist courses on the maintenance for electric vehicles.
- The majority of medium and large vans used fuel as this was still a long way off being viable for electric vehicles. Charging electric vehicles during a power outage would need to be built into the business continuity plan.
- The income included the income received from parish and town councils for neighbourhood partnerships.
- It would be a good idea to bring the Trees and Woodland Policy to Scrutiny.
- The two recycling areas in the south east had an opposite collection cycle to Castle Morpeth, North and Tynedale,

Members conveyed their thanks for the hard work carried out by Local and Neighbourhood Services. In return Mr Gavin thanked members and would feed this back to the teams who had worked exceptionally throughout Covid.

**RESOLVED** that the presentation be received

### **34.1 Active Travel and Road Safety for the Journey to School**

The report provided an overview of activities delivered across Northumberland to support more people to walk and cycle for the school journey.

Sarah Rowell, Principal Transport Officer informed members that current data showed that 37% of children walked to school with 6% either walking or scooting, with 6% parking away from the school and walking the remainder of

the journey. 20% used school transport or public transport and 30% had travelled to school in a car, with 2% of those sharing.

Mrs Rowell then shared a video which promoted support and active travel for school journeys.

Following the video, Ms Rowell informed members of Schools Go Smarter project run by the Authority, which supported schools across Northumberland to encourage a greater use of sustainable modes of transport and supporting more forms of transport, such as walking and cycling.

### **Schools Go Smarter**

The Authority supported the Schools Go Smarter Programme with Northumberland schools to promote sustainable travel for the school journey. Sustainable travel was promoted through regional and national events, competitions and school activities.

Each term, a Schools Go Smarter newsletter was distributed to highlight upcoming events, areas of best practice and achievements of schools taking part in activities.

Activities supported by the Schools Go Smarter Programme included:-

- Walk to School Month; Walk to School Week; Bike Week; Bike Leader Training; Walk Once a Week
- Theatre in Education which focused on road safety and sustainable travel
- Bikeability which delivered practical cycle training to school children
- Each year Schools Go Smarter was celebrated and this year as part of Love Northumberland, Stannington First School and Allendale were joint winners
- Park and stride zones
- Schools were requested to develop a framework travel plan programme which was accredited every year

Covid had presented schools with significant issues, which included change to how pupils travelled to school, with some hesitancy to use school and public transport and school access issues relating to social distancing requirements.

She hoped members agreed that the Schools Go Smarter project offered a wide range of initiatives and was set up so schools could choose initiatives which they could take part in.

Feedback from schools showed that the programme met their needs and were well supported. Schools had also expressed their thanks for the additional support they had received during the Covid period.

## **Go Smarter Safe Routes to School**

This was a joint programme between NCCs Highways Improvement Team and Schools Go Smarter, Go Safe Routes to School which aimed to improve road safety and reduce traffic management issues around schools.

School Streets was also introduced where appropriate as a solution to congestion issues outside schools. School Streets was considered as a solution to congestion issues outside schools and enabled the areas around the school to be closed to cars at the start of the day (residents were exempt) and pupils encouraged to walk, cycle or scoot to school. To date this had been implemented by 4 schools.

Road safety improvements had also been introduced around schools, where considered necessary, as part of the Local Transport Plan capital programme. These could include pedestrian crossing, improvements to footways and cycleways and introduction of traffic regulation orders to reduce vehicle/pedestrian conflict.

The Council also had a policy to introduce 20 mph speed limits outside all schools across the county.

## **Road Safety Education in Schools**

The Council had introduced the Kerbcraft programme which focused on a 6 week course delivered to primary school pupils and safety awareness, through 'Be Bright, Be Seen'. Some schools also attended 'Safety Works' - an interactive programme.

## **The Big Northumberland Gear Change**

The Authority had launched the campaign in April of this year which asked residents to think about the journeys they took and to consider swapping some car journeys to a more active form of transport.

The campaign featured inspirational stories and it was hoped that residents 'saw themselves' in those stories and felt motivated to make the small changes in their lifestyle that could make a difference to their physical health, their environment and mental wellbeing.

Funding continued to be sought, including the DfT Walking and Cycling Capability Fund.

Members raised the following:-

- The longstanding issue of a crossing point outside the Roman Catholic School in Alwick.
- A request for data to show the overall effectiveness of the Go Smarter and Safe schools programmes.

- What trends had the travel plan and Modeshift STARS data shown over the years?
- The Northumberland Schools Plan.
- Parents should be educated about respectful parking.
- Cycle tracks in Ashington were fitted in where it was best, but they were not always safe.
- The suggestion of members using some of small schemes if agreed by the Business Chair to contribute to schemes.
- Thanks were conveyed to the officers for all their hard work.
- The 20mph schemes were only advisory and not enforceable. Perhaps this could be changed in policy through Council.
- Children's safety was paramount.
- 20 mph schemes were requested in Norham and Islandshires especially where there were main roads.
- Was the Council doing enough to engage with those schools and children who were not getting enough exercise?
- The police do not enforce these speed limits which weakness their significance.
- Were teachers cycling to school?
- How many Northumberland schools had park and stride schemes?
- Could more be done to create park and stride schemes and to speed up the roll out of safe streets?

Councillor Riddle, Portfolio Holder thanked Ms Rowell for the presentation and informed the Committee that he had asked for the 20 mph speed limits to be rolled out as quickly as possible. If there were any problems at a particular school, then vehicles with cameras could be deployed but because of the geography of the county, this could be difficult.

Rob Murfin, Interim Executive Director for Local Services and Planning informed members that whilst some schools wanted to get involved, others did not, and some were resistant. Every time a school was extended or built, or changed, the opportunity was taken to make a formal requirement that the school must go through the travel planning process and careful decisions had to be made on parking to ensure it was carefully balanced. The Planning Team was working its way through the schools and at some point, all schools would be covered by this those arrangements.

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

- Schools that signed up to Modeshift STARS, were required to have at least, annual travel surveys. As they developed through the accreditation, evidence was required to show how a shift towards more sustainable travel had been achieved. The data from rest of the county was a 'hands up' data survey which was voluntary data collection. The data would be shared with all members of the committee.
- For those children that could not walk or cycle to school, they were encouraged to cycle in school, eg in the playground

- The School Travel Plan encouraged teachers to cycle to school but that could not be enforced.
- It was suggested that Councillor Morphet email Ms Rowell regarding the numbers for the park and stride schemes.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

### **35. 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).

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator reported that:-

- The meeting scheduled for the end of December would be cancelled as there were no pre-scrutiny reports to consider.
- Fire and Rescue were due to give an overview of their service at the January meeting, however the Inspector's report would not be received, until mid-December therefore, that item would be deferred to February's meeting.
- January - Complaints Improvement Framework Report.
- The Trees and Woodland Policy would be brought to a future Scrutiny meeting.

Discussion took place regarding Storm Arwen and it was suggested that a de-brief report from officers should be presented to a future Scrutiny meeting with an external invite to Northern Powergrid.

The Council's contingency plans should be presented to Scrutiny with follow up meetings from other organisations regarding their contingency plans.

A member stated that contingency plans and preparedness should be in place to enable the public to communicate in any future storm/emergency situation.

Mr Murfin advised the Committee that Communications information was being prepared with the necessary contact information to enable people to report any problems. The emergency services, local services and waste collection were working the police and the post office, checking for vulnerable people. The Council had been proactive in reporting problems to Northern Powergrid.

Members were asked to contact the Scrutiny Co-Ordinator with suggestions for the work programme for future meetings.

**RESOLVED** that the work programme be noted.

**36. URGENT BUSINESS**

The Chair sought Members' agreement for future meetings to be moved to a commencement time of 2:00 pm.

**RESOLVED** - Members agreed that future meetings of Communities and Place OSC commence at 2:00 pm.

**37. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**RESOLVED:-**

- (a) that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items on the Agenda as they involved the likely discussion of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of the Schedule 12(A) of the 1972 Act, and
- (b) that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure for the following reasons:-

Agenda Item	Paragraph of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
10	3  Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
AND	The public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure because disclosure would adversely affected confidentiality requirements with external partners.

**38. DESTINATION MANAGEMENT – STRUCTURE AND FUTURE FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS**

The report provided an overview of the current and proposed management arrangements for the strategic management and marketing of tourism in Northumberland and requested the development of a two year Partnership Agreement and associated funding allocation to provide a stable platform for the further development of Visit Northumberland (previously Northumberland Tourism). The report also requested that members note the current status of the DCMS Review of Destination Management and the potential implications for the county.

Councillor Watson, Portfolio Holder explained the importance of tourism in Northumberland and referred to the figures outlined in the report.



Nigel Walsh, Head of Cultural Services, explained the downturn in visitor numbers and the challenge to ensure growth was sustainable.

Whilst members welcomed the report, they questioned the timescale of the Partnership Agreement and the contribution to Visit Northumberland.

The Committee therefore **resolved** that the Cabinet be advised that the Committee supports the recommendations in the report, subject to the comment set out above.

**CHAIR** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE** \_\_\_\_\_