

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 June 2017

PRESENT – Councillors Carson (in the Chair), Coultas, KE Kelly, Lyonette, MR Nicholson and Tostevin. (6)

APOLOGIES – Councillor Donoghue. (1)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – (0)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Ian Thompson, Assistant Director, Community Services; Bill Westland, Assistant Director – Regulatory Services; Barbara Copson, Performance Manager; Dawn Taylor, Principal Officer (Trading Standards and Animal Health) and Lead Officer; and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

P7. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interests reported at the meeting.

P8. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2017/18 – The Head of Strategy, Performance and Communication submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to a number of proposed performance indicators which could be monitored by this Scrutiny Committee during 2017/18 and which might help to inform its work programme.

It was reported that the draft indicators were based on those being monitored by the Chief Executive and would be reported to Scrutiny on a quarterly basis, with the relevant Assistant Directors attending meetings to update Members and answer any questions.

Members had discussion around every Indicator and in doing so suggested that REG 201 CCTV : time to answer Lifeline Calls was not relevant to this Scrutiny Committee; TCP 200 to TCP 203 was useful data and trends needed to be included within these Indicators; figures and locations would be useful to have included in TCP 600 to TCP 603 and that PI's relating to litter, fly tipping and complaints received relating to Street Scene services be included within the indicators.

RESOLVED – That the report be received and that any further comments or suggestions from Members in relation to the proposed performance indicators be forwarded to Officers.

P9. MONITORING OF OUTCOMES FROM THE MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2016-20 – GROUND MAINTENANCE – The Assistant Director, Community Services presented a PowerPoint presentation in light of decisions made around the MTFP which included a significant reduction in resources resulting in a saving of £380k.

Particular references were made to the number of employees and grass cutting service standards before and after the budget cuts in October 2016 and Members were advised that the grass cutting standard had dropped resulting in grass growing longer, becoming harder to cut and looking untidy when it was left.

It was stated that the grass cutting had commenced in early April and that two full cycles had been completed with the Town Centre and Inner Ring Road being cut more frequently.

Members were pleased to note the excellent work of Community Groups which included maintaining open spaces, gathering of leaves for collection by the Council, litter picks and painting of play equipment.

Details were provided of the seven out of 24 Borough Roundabouts currently sponsored by businesses and the efforts being made to encourage businesses to maintain Council planted roundabouts rather than sponsorship.

Scrutiny Committee noted that the budget for flowers for Roundabouts was now £10k which is substantially less than in previous years.

Details were supplied of ongoing work to secure Durham Wildlife Trust looking after some of our Open Spaces including The Whinnies, Geneva Wood and Brankin Moor and of residents of West Park and Central Park paying a levy to ensure green spaces on those estates were maintained.

Discussion ensued on the exhaustive Health and Safety Document and insurance restrictions provided for Volunteer and Community Groups; household insurance generally covering people who wished to cut their own grass verges outside of their property; imminent launch of a Members' toolkit containing advice and guidance and a list of do's and don'ts for Volunteers.

Serious concerns were expressed on the reduced maintenance, condition and overall look of the Borough's roundabouts and open spaces in Darlington and it was felt that if this was not improved Darlington could gain a difficult reputation that could discourage businesses to come to Darlington.

Following a question Members were advised that Wildflower Meadows and verges had been created in recent years, some successfully, and although this did not necessarily save money, further experiments would continue.

RESOLVED – (a) That the thanks of this Scrutiny Committee be extended to the Assistant Director – Community Services for his informative and interesting presentation.

(b) That this Scrutiny Committee requests Cabinet to re-investigate resources to maintain, to a reasonable standard, the Boroughs roundabouts and provide further grass cutting to open spaces in Darlington to ensure businesses are encouraged to come to Darlington.
