
**STREET SCENE AND GROUNDS MAINTENANCE
BUDGET REDUCTION MITIGATION PROPOSALS**

**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Nick Wallis,
Leisure and Local Environment Portfolio**

**Responsible Director - Paul Wildsmith,
Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To consider options to mitigate the reductions in the budgets of both these services.

Summary

2. The proposed MTFP significantly reduces resources in these service areas and since the proposal of the MTFP, Members and officers and the community have looked at mitigation options.
3. This report proposes mitigations to reintroduce an environmental enforcement team, a new approach to volunteering and engagement with the Probation Service to utilise Community Service hours to enhance the Core Offer Budget.

Recommendations

4. It is recommended that :-
 - (a) A Member led approach to volunteering is implemented with support from within proposed staffing structure be agreed.
 - (b) The £50,000 wild meadow fund be reallocated to fund a two year post to support volunteering.
 - (c) Agree to amend the missed bins process and to close some bring sites to fund an Environmental Enforcement Team to focus on fly tipping and back lanes.
 - (d) Agree to a review into the use of the private sector in litter enforcement.

Reasons

5. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:-
 - (a) To mitigate service reduction
 - (b) To support and co-ordinate volunteers.
 - (c) To provide funding for an enforcement team.
 - (d) To review alternative delivery options.

Paul Wildsmith
Director of Neighbourhood Services and Resources

S17 Crime and Disorder	A well-managed and maintained environment has a positive impact on reducing crime and disorder.
Health and Well Being	A well-maintained environment has a positive impact on the health and well-being of residents both physically and mentally.
Carbon Impact	Any outcome of this report has no impact on carbon emissions.
Diversity	There are no issues relating to diversity as a result of this report.
Wards Affected	All Wards are affected.
Groups Affected	No particular impact on any group as a result of this report.
Budget and Policy Framework	The MTFP must be agreed by Full Council.
Key Decision	The MTFP must be agreed by Full Council.
Urgent Decision	It is not an urgent decision.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The quality and maintenance of public spaces have an impact on Perfectly Placed and a number of the priorities within the overall Community Strategy.
Efficiency	Efficiencies will be delivered as a result of the report however there will be an impact on the services.

Key Areas of Reduction after taking account of the Application of the Futures Fund

6. Reductions to Grass Cutting – Grass will only be cut every 30 days instead of every 12/15 days.
7. Reductions to Street Cleaning Resources – A 39% reduction in staffing going from 31 to 19 across the Borough. A focus will be given to the Town Centre and key main roads. There will be a reduction in the number of bins or frequency of emptying, litter picking, responsive work and back lane cleansing. Speed of responding to litter/tipping will be much reduced; non core areas will deteriorate.

The Town Centre water feature is ceased.

8. No Environmental Enforcement – There will be no “enforcement” on things such as fly tipping and dog fouling. It is not possible to say whether this will definitely be detrimental but one would assume it is likely that we may see an increase in tipping etc. but we cannot be 100% sure.
9. Parks and Countryside Management - No overall management or support to friends groups including countryside volunteers.
10. Dedicated Officer support to street champions’ and litter picks – will cease.
11. The cuts highlighted above are from an existing low base following significant reductions in recent years of £1.9m.

Options to Mitigate Service Reductions

Grounds Maintenance

12. **Wildflower Meadows invest to save** -£50,000 – this was included in the Futures Fund however following more detailed work it is felt that there are now limited new possibilities that make a significant financial business case therefore it is proposed that this fund is re-used for other mitigation options – see later in this report.
13. **Volunteer Input** – We remain open to approaches to “adopt a space” however to date these have tended to be very small parcels of land so they have not produced any cashable savings. Individuals do cut their verges and more may well do so moving forward but unless whole streets adopt the verges the team still need to visit the streets thus saving very little and the journey still takes place. Friends of Parks carry out good work but they in the main add value to the Core Offer budget; they do not undertake core work such as large-scale grass cutting. The loss of support may well reduce the impact of friends groups however we would try to support through the Head of Environmental Services and the Nursery & Horticultural Manager.
14. Future mitigation is put in place via the planning process where new open spaces and parks have their ongoing maintenance costs placed with the developer of the site not the Council.
15. Through volunteering and Corporate Social responsibility and potential use of Community Service (see later in this report) where possible additional support will be facilitated.
16. Through implementation the team will look at innovative ways to utilise the reduced level of resources to maximise impact with the challenge of trying to increase grass cutting frequency particularly in key areas, however, this can only be an aspiration at this stage.
17. Early discussions have taken place with Durham Wildlife Trust with regard to the possibility of them taking on responsibility and ownership of or for supporting the Council to work with established groups for them to take ownership through a long

lease of a number of the Council's nature reserves; Brinkburn, Drinkfield, Redhall, the Whinnies, Maidendale, Brankin Moor and Geneva Wood. It is anticipated that there would be a one-off payment required that would enable Durham Wildlife Trust to start the process of engaging local community and volunteers to get involved in the management and maintenance of these sites. The detailed proposal is still being worked up by Durham Wildlife Trust. There is an option to get the probation service (see later) to work with DWT.

18. See later in the report which suggests community hours may well assist generally in this service area.

Grounds Mitigation Conclusion

19. There will be a significant impact on grass cutting which will only become visible in 2017 growing season. There are a number of mitigations that will help however they are unlikely to offset the main reduction in cutting frequency. Work will progress on identifying options to mitigate the impact on nature reserves. The opportunity to use community hours will be explored.

Street Scene

20. There will undoubtedly be more litter in many areas particularly residential areas and those most likely to be impacted are listed below as these areas currently receive at least double the number of visits compared to other residential area.
 - (a) Eastbourne including Firthmoor, Lascelles and some of Bank Top
 - (b) Skerne Park, Park East and some of Bank Top
 - (c) Cockerton, some of Brinkburn & Faverdale and some of Pierremont
 - (d) Northgate, College and some of Pierremont
 - (e) Red Hall, Lingfield and some of Haughton & Springfield
 - (f) North Road, Harrowgate Hill, some of Stephenson and some of Park East

Options To Mitigate Street Cleaning Service Reductions

21. There are three main options for mitigation which are not mutually exclusive.
 - (a) Get the public to pick up litter
 - (b) Get the public not to drop litter
 - (c) Reintroduce enforcement to reduce littering.
22. Gaining public support and input has been tried over a number of years with success in terms of the following :-
 - (a) The Street Champions programme was started in April 2007 and a recent survey 290 Street Champions received 96 responses with 15% active more than once a week, 30% once a week, 20% every two weeks, 20% once a month and 15% once a year, with the majority of individuals litter picking.

- (b) Actively engaged in the Litter Free Durham campaign.
 - (c) Engaged in numerous promotional campaigns over the years, both locally and nationally.
23. It should be noted that the above volumes contribute to the existing levels of cleanliness and would need to increase to provide mitigation against new MTFP reductions.
24. There is clearly more opportunity to gain greater volunteering and in recent months a number of individuals and groups have established themselves in this area of volunteering. An option has been developed to increase volunteering with input via a Ward Member led approach which was in effect pre-signalled in the Boundary Commission submission. Using such an approach would see the Council potentially have 50 Street Scene Co-ordinators (Ward Councillors) who will know their communities well and therefore be able to best mobilise volunteers. Such an approach may well have the added impact of engaging the public in wider council issues. The proposal would see the £50,000 wild meadow “one off” funding being allocated to this mitigation to fund a 2 year support post. The draft proposal is as follows :-
- (a) Ward Members become the co-ordinators of street champions and volunteers within their Wards. There is not a pre-requisite others may lead or support Members. There will be some officer support.
 - (b) Each Member to be allocated litter picking equipment to hold and pass to volunteers. The equipment can stay at the depot or be given straight to the Member depending on preference. Initial thought is 20 pickers per Member.
 - (c) Bright orange “street scene champion” bags to be issued and these are to be used for litter picks and can be placed in wheelie bins or placed next to bins on collection days. If there is a significant collection that volunteers cannot take home, arrangements for collection will be made. A dedicated telephone number for volunteers and Councillors will be established.
 - (d) High visibility vests will also be allocated.
 - (e) A simple Do’s and Don’ts will be issued.
 - (f) Individuals carrying out Ad hoc litter picks are covered by the Council’s public indemnity insurance.
25. The Street Scene & Building Cleaning Manager would be responsible for coordinating and supporting Members and Street Champions alongside delivering street cleaning services and would be best placed to coordinate the work between both the volunteers and the Council to ensure that the best use of the overall resource is achieved across the Borough. Council services could focus on areas where volunteers were not working or at times support the work of volunteers. The key with limited resources will be to make it as easy as possible for people to engage in voluntary activity, working with the Council. To maximise volunteering it is proposed that the £50,000 from the wild meadows one off budget is allocated to

allow a post to be established for 2 years; after that the effectiveness of the post will be reviewed.

26. The use of Community hours (see later in the report) offers an additional source of voluntary in his service area.
27. This approach will require overall leadership and this will be provided by Ian Thompson the Councils Assistant Director with responsibility for these group of services.

Enforcement

28. Attached at **Appendix A** is a separate paper on Enforcement. Should Members agree to some changes in other provision existing levels could be retained excluding the part-time supervisor role. There is also an option to enhance the enforcement service by utilising the private sector model issues with this are :-
 - (a) Additional Legal Resources – it is estimated that legal involvement would significantly increase, however more work is needed to fully understand and quantify this.
 - (b) High number of fines 5,000 a year, an increase of 2000% on current levels.
29. Given the profile of littering and the potential benefits to be gained from this option, it is suggested that Place Scrutiny in conjunction with the Cabinet portfolio holder undertake a review of the options and report back to Cabinet in due course. At this stage it is officers' view that there may well be a workable option to be developed.

Conclusion – Street Scene

30. The proposals above give an opportunity to relaunch and increase volunteering, including the probation service, in this area. Reintroduce some enforcement resources and the opportunity to enhance enforcement. These proposals will go some way to mitigating service reductions and Members and officers will continue to review the service over the coming months and years.

Probation Service

31. The council is a part owner of the Community Interest Company that runs the local probation service and a recent update meeting has suggested that there is a significant opportunity to utilise community service hours in Darlington on the street scene and grounds maintenance services. In discussions with their Director it has been agreed that regular resources will be made available to assist with work no longer undertaken by the Council so they will add value to the Core Budget offer. Early indications are that teams of approximately six will be available to work regularly in the Street Scene and Grounds maintenance areas.

Proposal presented by Paul Harman

32. A proposal has been received from Paul Harman (PH) representing a number of interest parties, attached at **Appendix B** in this proposal. The cost per year is between £80,000 and £100,000 with the intention of the amount reducing over the 3 year period although exact figures are not ready.
33. In discussions the following is understood :-
- (a) The document sets out what they are offering; it is generally the work of the Council's existing Greener Communities Team which is to cease under the MTFP proposals.
 - (b) The Darlington Greener Communities Group does not exist in any form as yet they have had one meeting.
 - (c) PH believes it would become a Community Interest Company (CIC) quickly.
 - (d) The CIC would then contract with another charity to provide the services described in the attached.
 - (e) The other charity would employ the former Council employees who the Council had made redundant to provide the services back to the Council.
34. Officers have reviewed this proposal and as can be seen there is more work needed to have a fully worked up proposal and there are a number of procurement and service delivery issues that would require resolution before any agreement could be reached. Given this and the required increased budget to fund the proposal, it is not recommended that this should be progressed but the mitigation options highlighted earlier in this report be implemented.
35. However, Members and officers are keen to work with the group to look at ways of harnessing the groups wishes to work more with the Council in the new framework described in this report.

Environmental Crime Discussion Paper

Environmental Crime Enforcement

The Environmental Crime Enforcement Team consists of 0.6 Supervisor, 2 full time Officers and 1 full time Dog Warden. The team deal with a range of environmental crimes from litter, waste, fly tipping, dog fouling, dog control orders, nuisance vehicles, etc. So far this financial year, to the end of February 2016, 251 fixed penalty notices have been issued for the following crimes:

- Litter in town centre 3
- Commercial refuse 6
- Litter other (which will include refuse placed out at the wrong time) 211
- Litter clearance fine 1
- Dog fouling 10
- Dog control order 3
- Abandoned motor vehicle fine 8
- Failure to produce waste transfer notes 9

Where a fine is not paid, the Council pursue this through the Magistrates Courts as well as taking fly tipping cases directly to Court. The following is a list of Court cases this financial year to date:

- Abandoned vehicle 1
- Dog control order 3
- Dog fouling 4
- Dog ban in cemetery 2
- Fly tip 3
- Litter clearance 1
- Litter (household, litter from vehicle etc.) 66
- S110 (failing to answer questions regarding litter, fly tips etc.) 51

In addition to the above, a range of other actions and cautions are carried out by the team these include:

- Formal warning cautions 30
- Abandoned vehicles 231
- Total dogs handled 389
- Of dogs handled 236 placed in DBC kennels
- Of 236 placed in DBC kennels 203 forwarded to boarding kennels

Budget Proposal

The current budget proposal is to delete the Supervisor's role, the two Environmental Crime Enforcement roles, and retain the Dog Warden service which would increase to 1.5 FTE from 1 FTE. This would mean the Council would not carry out investigations into environmental crime issues, no fixed penalty notices or prosecutions through the Court for the range of environmental crimes. The Council will continue to deal with stray dogs and abandoned vehicles.

Mitigation Options for Discussion

Some concern has been raised with regard to the proposal and whether or not there are any options to continue an Environmental Crime Enforcement Service. A number of options have been looked at and are below for discussion.

Option 1: To retain the existing team in full

To retain the existing team would enable the current level of service to continue, however Members would need to find efficiencies elsewhere to fund the service.

Option 2: Reduce the resource and fund from other savings in Environmental Services

There would be an option of retaining 3 FTEs to deal with stray dogs and a range of environmental crime, particularly focusing on refuse out too early in back lanes and fly tipping. The additional post could be funded from savings as follows:

- At present if a resident claims the Council has missed their bin on collection day (currently an average of 40 per week); the Council then arrange another visit to collect the bin. Generally on investigation and discussions with the crew and where necessary, viewing CCTV footage from the refuse vehicles, the bin has been emptied or not placed out for collection. There will however be the odd genuine case where a bin has been missed. If the Council were to change the policy and not return for missed bins, this would save approximately £20,000 per annum.
- The Council currently has 8 bring sites in total where residents can take recyclable material to place in appropriate containers. All residents receive a recycling collection service or can visit the Household Waste Recycling Centre. The Council could remove 5 of the 8 sites, the ones focussed in the town where it is easier for residents to visit the Household Waste Recycling Centre than those in the rural area. The sites proposed to be removed would be at Asda, Harrowgate Club, Haughton Working Men's Club, Morrison's Morton Park and Chesnut Street Car Park. The 3 remaining sites would be on the outskirts of town; Hallgarth Hotel Brafferton, Heighington Primary School and Baydale Beck. This would save approximately £8,000.
- The total saving would be approximately £28,000 and therefore the Council would be able to retain 3 FTEs.

Option 3: Car Park Wardens to issue litter fines

The Council currently have five Car Park Wardens and two Seniors dealing with car park enforcement. Some other local authorities have issued further powers of enforcement to their Car Park Wardens allowing them to deal with environmental crime such as littering, dog fouling, etc.

The key role of the Car Park Wardens will continue to be focussed on car parking enforcement, however while out and about would be able to issue fixed penalty notices for littering. There would be some benefits to this option; however there would be limited or no resource to deal with other environmental crimes such as fly tipping, refuse out too early in back lanes, etc.

Option 4: Private Sector Partner

There are a number of organisations who will take on the role of environmental crime enforcement for local authorities. They provide a range of services from issuing fixed penalty notices for litter through to carrying out investigations into fly tipping and preparing case files for Court. For fly tipping there would be an hourly charge while the fixed penalty notices service is free of charge.

One company, Kingdom, will deliver the following services:

- Issue fixed penalty notices (FPNs) for litter and dog fouling.
- Would cover all areas but would specifically want to focus in the town centre and fringe areas.
- Cover private land, schools, supermarkets, colleges, universities, etc.
- For DBC, they will provide a dedicated admin officer, team leader and four enforcement officers on the ground.
- For a cost neutral service based on the above number of staff would need to issue four tickets per officer per day, six days a week, therefore issuing 96 FPNs per week.
- Therefore approximately 5,000 FPNs per year at £75 per ticket = £375,000 per year.
- They would provide case file for court, however DBC Legal Team would need to go to court to present the cases.
- A highly automated system, front to back end.
- Will deal with other environmental crimes such as fly tipping but will charge on an hourly basis as this area of work is time-consuming.

Officers have had discussions with two Councils who have used Kingdom's services; the Wirral and Barnsley. Generally feedback is very positive and they do issue a high number of fixed penalty notices. In the Wirral, in the early days they did get bad publicity, however over time this subsided. From Barnsley there was a lot of support from Members and the public, particularly where enforcement action wasn't undertaken before.

Option 5: Combination of any of the above

It would be possible to provide a combination of any of the above; however the most desirable would be Option 2 with Option 4. This would enable Council staff to focus on fly tipping and refuse placed out too early in back lanes whilst working with a private sector partner to focus on general littering offences.