

COUNCIL
25 MARCH 2021

OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee has undertaken.

Community Safety Performance 2020/2021

2. Members welcomed a PowerPoint presentation from the Head of Community Safety and Chief Inspector, Durham Constabulary, providing an update on Community Safety Performance 2020/2021.
3. Members were provided with details of the Council's vision and Council Plan priorities 2020-2023, the Stronger Communities Portfolio vision and priorities 2020-2023 and the service objectives. We also acknowledged the role of the Community Safety team during the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. We noted the key headlines and figures for the service areas within the Community Safety team and we received a breakdown of crime and disorder figures for Darlington and the Town Centre, noting that all crime had decreased for the period of April 2020 to January 2021 when compared to the previous year.
5. We did discuss in particular fly tipping in back lanes and dog fouling and were assured that various preventative measures were in place to deliver on the Back Lanes Project Action Plan, with 28 of the 48 actions completed and that a number of streets had been issued with Section 46 legal notices. In relation to dog fouling we noted that additional dog waste bins had been introduced and that a working group had been established to identify a number of actions to address dog fouling and to promote a safer and cleaner environment.
6. Members did raise concern regarding the reporting of incidents by residents, highlighting that residents may be reluctant to report any issues via 101 due to the call queues, perceived lack of response to reports and unclear online reporting mechanisms. Members were assured by the Chief Inspector that the police respond as quickly as possible to reported incidents where resources allow and Members and residents were encouraged to engage with Neighbourhood police teams. In addition, PCSO's have been tasked to engage regularly with their Ward Councillors and PCSO's will continue to engage with young people through school visits and youth projects when restrictions allow.
7. We also welcomed an update in relation to dog thefts in Darlington, noting that there had been 19 reported dog thefts across County Durham and Darlington in the last year, with 8 of those being in Darlington. This was considered a pandemic crime resulting from an increase in demand and in the price of dogs. Members were pleased to note the actions in place to address dog theft in the town.

Grass Verge Management

8. Scrutiny received a report which provided Members with details of the current position adopted by the Council in relation to the management of grass verges and to seek Members agreement for a process of reviewing the current arrangements.
9. The Committee were informed that verge parking was a common issue across the Borough that was increasingly causing problems and that the Council receives complaints regarding the current approach to grass verge damage.
10. Details were provided of approaches taken by other local authorities to manage verges along with solutions that were available to the Council to either deter or prevent parking or to accommodate parking.
11. Members of this Scrutiny Committee have agreed that a Task and Finish Group be established to assist the development of a new operational policy in relation to the management of grass verges.
12. Members also considered and agreed to the proposed format of the review and proposed expected outcomes which were detailed in the submitted report. Members noted that the scope of the review could be informed and broadened by Members' input.

School Streets Initiative – Review Group

13. Scrutiny received a report presenting the outcome and findings of the School Streets Initiative Review Group, established by this Scrutiny Committee to review the initial findings of a commission considering the potential for School Street Initiative.
14. The Committee agreed that a Quad of Aims be submitted to establish a Task and Finish Review group to review additional measures available to address issues associated with traffic problems around schools.
15. We also agreed to the following recommendations and Cabinet were requested to consider the recommendations at its meeting on 9 March 2021 :-
 - (a) that the School Streets Initiative should be progressed to the next phase; and
 - (b) that the prioritisation of the top three schools for phase three be conducted using the 'Essential', Traffic Impacts' criteria and 'Supporting Criteria'

Local Transport Plan

16. Scrutiny received a report seeking Members' views and feedback on the draft Cabinet report on Local Transport Plan, prior to its consideration by Cabinet at its meeting on 9 March 2021.
17. The report provided Members with an annual update on highways and transport from a regional and local perspective; outlined delivery, performance and public satisfaction in 2020/21 and provided an update on the Tees Valley Strategic Transport Plan and the Darlington Transport Plan.

18. Members noted the revised framework for the Darlington Transport Plan and were pleased to see the inclusion of safety as a specific aim following feedback received from the National Highways and Transportation Survey.
19. We also welcomed the framework for a specific Town Centre Transport Plan following the recommendation from this Scrutiny Committee in February 2020.
20. We did discuss in particular electric vehicle charging points, including the benefits and limitations associated with electric vehicles. We were informed that a procurement process would be undertaken to identify sites for electric charging points in Darlington and were pleased to note the £2M funding from the TVCA to appoint a provider to supply and manage the infrastructure.

Work Programme 2020/21

21. We have given consideration to the Work Programme for this Committee for the Municipal Year 2020/21 and possible review topics, the work programme is a rolling work programme and items can be added as necessary.

Councillor Mike Renton
Chair of Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee