

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 25 February 2021

PRESENT – Councillors Renton (Chair), Mrs Culley, Allen, Bartch, Cossins, Donoghue, Durham, Haszeldine, McCollom, Tait and Wallis

APOLOGIES –

ABSENT –

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Dulston, Keir and Chris Knox (Durham Constabulary)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Ian Thompson (Assistant Director Community Services), Dave Winstanley (Assistant Director Transport and Capital Projects), Brian Graham (Head of Environmental Services), Graham Hall (Head of Community Safety), Sue Dobson (Sustainable Transport Manager), Kay Gamble (Transport Policy Officer), Silke Oldridge (Marketing and Communications Officer) and Hannah Fay (Democratic Officer)

CLS30 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

CLS31 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY HELD ON 10 DECEMBER 2020

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 10 December 2020.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 10 December be approved as a correct record.

CLS32 COMMUNITY SAFETY PERFORMANCE 2020/21

The Head of Community Safety gave a PowerPoint presentation (previously circulated) updating Members on the Community Safety Performance 2020/21.

The Cabinet Member with the Stronger Communities Portfolio introduced the presentation and in doing highlighted the strong partnership working in Darlington; that positive results had been seen over the last twelve months as a result of the work of the Community Safety Team; and that community safety was a priority area for continued investment.

Reference was made to the Council's vision and Council Plan priorities 2020-2023; the Stronger Communities Portfolio vision and priorities 2020-2023; and the service objectives were outlined.

Members were advised of the role of the Community Safety team during the COVID-19 pandemic; and details were provided of the key headlines and figures for the

Community Safety service areas.

In relation to civic enforcement, Members were advised that the Council had successfully completed the re-accreditation process for Purple Flag status and Darlington was identified as a national area of best practice; the Council along with Police and partner organisations continued to meet during the pandemic to provide signposting for vulnerable people to various pathways for relevant support; and as a result of the work around begging and homelessness, the number of people on the streets had reduced from 20 people to five in a two year period.

Members were informed of the progress in relation to the Action Plan that had been developed as part of the Back Lanes Project, with 28 of the 48 actions completed; that enforcement officers were key in identifying areas of concern and reporting to street scene for swift action; 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.

In relation to CCTV it was reported that the six deployable cameras in the town had resulted in a noticeable reduction in crime in their vicinity; that four additional CCTV units would be placed in Northgate and North Road following receipt of Home Office Funding; and a review of CCTV provision had commenced.

Members were advised of the key headlines in respect to Licensing; Trading Standards; and in relation to Private Sector Housing Members were informed of government funding received to introduce Warmer Homes 4 Programme; that £59k had been secured to undertake a Housing Stock Condition Survey; and funding had been secured to convert empty homes in the Northgate ward with eight units identified.

It was reported that a key focus area for Community Resilience and Engagement was CONTEST; in light of the transfer of statutory responsibilities from the Police to Local Authorities improved training would be provided to Members; and in relation to the Safer Streets Initiative, 32 properties in the Northgate and North Road wards had been target hardened, with 48 properties part completed.

Details were provided of the crime and disorder figures for Darlington and the Town Centre. Between April to January 2021 all crime had decreased by 18 per cent in Darlington when compared to the same period in the previous year which equated to reduction of 1911 incidents; incidents were down 10 per cent, whilst antisocial behaviour had increased by 1 per cent; and for Darlington Town Centre all crime had reduced.

The Chief Inspector outlined the values and visions of Durham Constabulary; made reference to strong partnership working in Darlington; informed Members of the spike in dwelling burglaries seen at the beginning of the pandemic and detailed the actions taken to address this, resulting in a projected 12 per cent decrease when compared to the previous year. Details were also provided of police operations in place to respond to crime, antisocial behaviour, brothels and off-road motorcycles; and it was reported that 240 fixed penalty notices were issued in Darlington for breaches of covid restrictions.

Following questions in relation to fly tipping in back lanes and dog fouling, Members were advised that various preventative measures were in place to deliver on the Back Lanes Project Action Plan; a number of streets had been issued with Section 46 legal notices; additional dog waste bins had been introduced; and any reported incidents of dog fouling were investigated. Members requested figures for dog fouling prosecutions in Darlington.

Discussion ensued regarding reporting of incidents by residents; 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 mechanism. The Chief Inspector advised Members that control room staffing levels had been affected by the pandemic; assured Members that every 101 call was logged; and Police respond as quickly as possible to reported incidents where resources allow. Members and residents were encouraged to engage with Neighbourhood police teams; were assured that PCSO's had been tasked to engage regularly with their Ward Councillors; and PCSO's would continue to engage with young people through school visits and youth projects when restrictions allow.

Discussion ensued on drones, of which there were two trained officers in place to operate Darlington's drone; the increase in dwelling burglaries in Darlington; and following a question in relation to empty properties, Members were assured that the Housing Stock Condition Survey would help to identify empty homes.

Following a question, Members were advised that there had been 19 reported dog thefts across County Durham and Darlington in the last year, with 8 of those in Darlington; that this was a pandemic crime resulting from an increase in demand and price of dogs; and details were provided of the actions in place to address dog theft in the town.

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

(b) That the Community Safety Performance 2020/21 presentation be shared with all Members.

(c) That Members be provided with figures for dog fouling prosecutions in Darlington.

(d) That Members be provided with figures for empty properties in Darlington

CLS33 MANAGEMENT OF GRASS VERGES

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report (previously circulated) outlining the current position adopted by the Council in relation to the management of grass verges and to agree a process of reviewing the current arrangements.

The submitted report stated 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.

It was reported that the Council had a duty to ensure the highways were kept in a

safe condition; verges form part of the Highway and were subject to legislation and regulation; and the sources of the problem and scenarios where grass verge parking created issues were outlined.

The report outlined previous approaches taken by the Council to alleviate the issues associated with verge parking; there was previously a relatively small budget for verge conversions and other type of physical works however this budget was no longer available. The Council continued to regularly inspect and respond to reports of damage and would only consider physical measures to prevent parking where the parking was causing a serious road safety concern in accordance with the Councils statutory duty.

Details were provided of approaches taken by other local authorities to manager verges; and the solutions that were available to the Council to either deter or prevent parking or options to accommodate parking.

Members questioned whether greater responsibility could be given to residents to manage grass verges; and requested that damage by utility companies and council owned vehicles be considered as part of the review of current arrangements. The Assistant Director Transport and Capital Projects advised that the Task and Finish Group would investigate all possible options to address the management of grass verges and that the scope of the review could be widened based on Members experiences.

RESOLVED – (a) That a Task and Finish Group be arranged to assist development of a new operational policy in relation to the management of grass verges.

(b) That Members agree the format of the review based on the proposed format as outlined in paragraph 73 of the submitted report.

(c) That Members agree the outcomes expected from the review based on the proposal as outlined in paragraph 74 of the submitted report.

CLS34 SCHOOL STREETS INITIATIVE REVIEW GROUP

The Chair of the School Streets Initiative Review Group submitted a report (previously circulated) presenting the outcomes and findings of the review group

The submitted report outlined the background to the establishment of the Review Group to review the initial findings of a commission considering the potential for School Street Initiative and it was reported that the Review Group had met on two occasions and a range of issues had been discussed and considered.

A Member highlighted the importance of clear communication with the Health and Police colleagues to ensure that these services were not impacted by the initiative.

RESOLVED – (a) That the Communities and Local Services agree that the following recommendations be forwarded to Cabinet for consideration :-

- i. that the School Streets Initiative should be progressed to the next phase; and

- ii. that the prioritisation of the top three schools for phase three be conducted using the 'Essential', Traffic Impacts' criteria and 'Supporting Criteria';

- (b) that a Quad of Aims be submitted to this Scrutiny Committee to establish a Task and Finish Review group to review additional measures available to address issues associated with traffic problems around schools.

CLS35 LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting Members give consideration to the draft Cabinet report (also previously circulated) prior to its consideration by Cabinet on 3 March 2021.

The submitted 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.

It was reported that the Strategic Transport Plan was adopted as the Local Transport Plan for the Tees Valley in January 2020; the Plan would help direct the investment of £256.7M into transport projects across the Tees Valley in the period of 2019-2029; and details were provided of the programmes already being progressed or delivered.

Following questions by Members it was confirmed that the Tees Valley Bus Partnership continued to be developed and that the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) continued to pay the concessionary bus fares at a pre-COVID-19 level to ensure services would still in place post COVID-19; that the decline in public satisfaction identified by the National Highways and Transportation Survey may be related to COVID-19 and that this would be closely monitored over the next year; and a number of schemes had been identified to address the key areas identified by the survey.

Details were provided of the capital and revenue investments in transport in Darlington 2020/21; and the TVCA and Darlington Borough Council funded programmes for 2021/22 were outlined. Following a question, Members were advised that a number of bids were being submitted to the Government; that Darlington had received a significant investment of £1.274M into the pothole fund; and Darlington would be submitting bids into the TVCA for further funding.

Members were concerned to note the suspension of both pedestrian and Bikeability cycle training programmes. The Assistant Director Transport and Capital Projects confirmed that sustainable travel was a priority; that these programmes had been suspended due to COVID-19 risk assessments and would be re-introduced as soon as restrictions allowed; and discussions were underway with TVCA to secure funding to enable these programmes to continue.

Particular reference was made to the Darlington Transport Plan; a framework for the basis of consultation on the plan was approved by Cabinet in March 2020; progress had been delayed to due Covid-19 however the resources were now in place to

progress the Plan. A PowerPoint presentation given by the Transport Planning Manager accompanied the submitted report, detailing the vision of the Darlington Transport Plan and the four key aims, which had been reviewed and updated, with a focus on supporting economic growth through the delivery of sustainable transport options and identifying key traffic pinch points on the highway network. Members were pleased to note the inclusion of safety as a specific aim following feedback from the National Highways and Transportation Survey.

Following a request from this Scrutiny Committee in February 2020 for a specific transport plan for the town centre, Members welcomed the framework for the Town Centre Transport plan, noting the principles identified for the Plan and their links to Darlington's Town Centre Strategy.

Particular discussion ensued in respect of electric vehicle charging points. Reference was made by Members to the benefits and limitations associated with electric vehicles; and Members were informed that a procurement process would be undertaken to identify sites for electric charging points in Darlington, with £2M funding from the TVCA to appoint a provider to supply and manage the infrastructure.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

CLS36 WORK PROGRAMME

The Managing Director submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to this Scrutiny Committee's work programme for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2020/21.

Members were advised that the Tees Valley Combined Authority Transport Strategy which was scheduled for the meeting this Scrutiny Committee on 22 April 2021 had been postponed to the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee on 17 June 2021.

Members were also informed that the update on the Drug and Alcohol Service scheduled for the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee on 3 March 2021 had been postponed to the meeting of the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee on 14 April; and that an invite would be extended to Members of this Scrutiny Committee.

Following a request at the previous meeting, members were informed that to increase the number of bins in Darlington by 10 per cent, which equated to 112 bins, would cost £25K with annual service costs of £15K.

RESOLVED – That the current status of the work programme be noted.