

**COUNCIL**  
**29 SEPTEMBER 2022**

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**OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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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.

**Stronger Communities Board and Sub Groups - Update**

2. The Stronger Communities Portfolio Holder provided an update to Scrutiny on the Stronger Communities Board and Sub Groups.
3. Scrutiny were informed that a Public Sector Executives Group (PSEG) had been put in place for Senior Officer engagement with public sector agencies and it was proposed that a 'Stronger Communities Board' be established, bringing together civic leaders from the different sectors in town and including representation from governing bodies.
4. The Stronger Communities Board is scheduled to be launched in November 2022 and seeks to unite behind common goals and foster collaboration, providing a strong mandate for groups such as the Public Sector Executives Group.

**Restoration of Locomotion No 1 Replica**

5. Scrutiny welcomed a verbal update from the Assistant Director Community Services on the Restoration of Locomotion No 1 Replica. We noted the acquisition of Locomotion No. 1 Replica from Beamish Museum, and that an assessment of the condition and the work required to bring Locomotion No. 1 Replica back into full operational order in time for the 2025 bicentenary of the Stockton and Darlington Railway, has been completed.
6. Members were informed of the intention for Locomotion No. 1 Replica to be operating under steam as part of the overall celebrations for the 2025 bicentenary for the Stockton and Darlington Railway, together with the construction of a number of chaldron waggons and coaches for people to ride in. We were also advised of the proposed development of a solution to allow Locomotion No1 Replica to operate under greener technologies.
7. Scrutiny were assured that the requested capital funding of £496,000 would be sufficient to complete the required works.
8. Scrutiny awaits a full report on this item which will also include detail around greener technologies.

**Darlington Transport Plans and Parking Strategy**

9. Scrutiny received a report seeking Members' consideration of the draft Darlington Transport Plan, Darlington Town Centre Transport Plan and Darlington Parking Strategy.

10. The Tees Valley Strategic Transport Plan (STP) 2020-2030, which was published in 2020, sets out the strategic direction for transport in the Tees Valley and was developed to deliver three broad objectives; social opportunity, economic growth and carbon reduction and environment. The Darlington Transport Strategy sets out how the priorities detailed in the STP will be delivered in Darlington, taking into account local priorities, and sets a delivery framework to ensure the priorities are delivered.
11. The Darlington Town Centre Transport Plan supports the Town Centre Strategy 2019-2030 and the Towns Fund Investment Plan, setting out how transport can help deliver the new focus set out in the Town Centre Plan and the Darlington Parking Strategy sets out a framework for the provision and control of parking within the borough in order to meet the aspirations of the Darlington Transport Strategy and the Darlington Town Centre Transport Plan.
12. We discussed in particular the need for increased support for the bus companies. We noted that many of the issues highlighted were related to a lack of driver availability and recruitment and that there has been recent improvements in this area. We were informed that improvements in real-time information on the web application were forthcoming.
13. Members are keen to see an increased amount, and a more flexible approach to delivery, in terms of cycling training, both amongst adults and younger people and a number of suggestions were advanced for Officers to consider especially around an advertising and communication plan to gain a further reach and awareness. Members also suggested times for cycling training in schools are looked at to have a more flexible approach, after hours when school clubs are on as it was felt this may have a better take up.
14. Scrutiny noted that the Darlington Transport Plan does not reference e-scooters, and we discussed the national position in relation to e-scooters and the legislation governing the use. We also discussed the taxing and insuring of those riding bicycles on the public highway. Members discussed that E-scooters were seen as a cleaner/greener mode of transport and did not want Darlington to be left behind as other areas progress with them. It was also noted that data would be readily available from areas who have them in use in regards to accidents and fines.
15. Discussion ensued on the balance within the plans in terms of national requirements and local discretion, and whether the plans reflected local priorities. Members are also interested to ascertain how many off-street car parks do not meet 'Park Mark' standards, and what the cost of work would be to bring them to the required standard. We were pleased to note that cycle parking was being reviewed and revised as part of the Darlington Parking Strategy, however were disappointed to note a lack of residential parking for new town centre accommodation. Members were also interested in the positioning of payments points in relation to on-street parking, particularly in the west of the town centre, and the use of residential parking permits in parking zones.
16. We also discussed the method of consultation and the lack of engagement with local businesses.

#### **Performance Indicators – Quarter 4 2021/2022**

17. Scrutiny Committee received an update on Quarter 4 performance against key

performance indicators for 2021/2022 which are within the remit of our Scrutiny.

18. We gave consideration to the performance position in relation to the 35 indicators, noting that 12 were showing performance better than the same period last year or from when last reported, two indicators were showing performance the same, whilst nine indicators were showing performance not as good as the same period last year or from when last reported; and that 12 indicators did not have comparative information from last year.
19. We did discuss in particular communications and social media output in relation to the lack of emptying of litter and dog bins, which had arisen due to staff absenteeism and sickness. Members suggested the use of the 'What Three Word' app to identify litter and dog bins, the provision of additional bins, an increase in the capacity of bins, additional signage requesting that residents take their litter home with them if bins are full, and an additional option to report full bins on the Darlington app. Officers advised that there was a resource issue that was impacting the service with bins being full which was also impacted by the weather – with it being hotter for longer. Members discussed extreme weather conditions and felt that this was something the Council would be required to manage due to climate change and we queried the provisions that would be made for this. Members continue to have concerns regarding bins being left full across the town, particularly during hot weather.
20. Scrutiny also expressed concern over the disposal of single use vapes and the lack of prosecutions for fly-tipping and we noted that prosecutions were now resuming following the pandemic period. Members discussed single use vapes, which are now a very common item to find discarded on the streets, and the lack of instruction for disposal of these items, particularly as they include a battery often built into the device which is not removable. Officers advised that these items could not be placed into household waste due to the fire hazard. It was noted that the Council have only had one fire in a bin wagon recently which was in the Eastbourne ward, but others have occurred across the TVCA which resulted in communication going out to remind households how to correctly dispose of batteries.
21. As Chair of this Scrutiny Committee, I have started the conversation regarding single use vapes with officers and the cabinet member on 22 August – with input from street scene, environmental health and trading standards. An advertising/communications campaign is being planned to inform the public about the correct way to dispose of these items safely and correctly.

### **Work Programme 2022/23**

22. We have given consideration to this Scrutiny Committee's work programme for the Municipal Year 2022/23 and to any additional areas that Members would like to be included.

**Councillor Steven Tait**  
**Chair of Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee**