

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 25 August 2022

PRESENT – Councillors Allen, Bartch, Bell, Cossins, Mrs Culley, Donoghue, Haszeldine, McCollom, Tait and Willis.

ABSENT – Councillor Wallis.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Keir, Renton and Mrs. H. Scott.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Ian Thompson (Assistant Director Community Services), Brian Graham (Head of Environmental Services), Andrew Casey (Head of Highway Network Management), Paul Dalton (Elections Officer), Kay Gamble (Transport Policy Officer) and Hutchinson (Public Transport Officer)

CLS11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

CLS12 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY HELD ON 9 JUNE 2022

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 9 June 2022.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 9 June 2022 be approved as a correct record.

CLS13 STRONGER COMMUNITIES BOARD AND SUB GROUPS - UPDATE

The Member with Portfolio for Stronger Communities provided a verbal update on the Stronger Communities Board and Sub Groups, and in doing so advised Members that following the formal winding up of the Darlington Partnership in 2021, new arrangements for engaging public, private and voluntary sectors had been proposed by the Leader of the Council.

It was reported that a Public Sector Executives Group (PSEG) had been put in place for Senior Officer engagement with public sector agencies, and that it was proposed that a 'Stronger Communities Board' be established. Members were advised that the Board would bring together civic leaders from the different sectors in town and would include representation from governing bodies, as opposed to solely Senior Officers.

The Member with Portfolio for Stronger Communities stated that the purpose of the Board was to unite behind common goals and foster collaboration, and that by including representation of governing bodies the intention was to provide fuller commitment from agencies, and provide a strong mandate for groups such as the Public Sector Executives Group.

Members were informed that the launch of the Stronger Communities Board was scheduled for November 2022, at which time the Levelling Up Darlington Plan would also be launched.

The Member with Portfolio for Stronger Communities outlined the three priorities in the Levelling Up Darlington Plan, which were Quality Jobs (and in particular access to jobs for unemployed and underemployed residents of deprived communities); Access to Opportunities for Young People; and Reducing Health Inequalities.

RESOLVED – That the content of the update be noted.

CLS14 RESTORATION OF LOCOMOTION NO 1 REPLICA

The Assistant Director - Community Services informed Members of the acquisition of Locomotion No. 1 Replica from Beamish Museum, and advised Members 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 (S&DR) had been completed.

Members were informed that a report would be submitted to Cabinet on 6 September 2022, to request the release of capital to allow the required work to be undertaken.

The Assistant Director - Community Services advised that the intention was that Locomotion No. 1 Replica would 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. Members were also advised of the proposed development of a solution to allow Locomotion No1 Replica to operate under greener technologies.

Members were keen to ensure that the requested capital funding would be sufficient to complete the required works, and received assurances to that effect.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

CLS15 DARLINGTON TRANSPORT PLANS AND PARKING STRATEGY

The Group Director of Services submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the draft Darlington Transport Plan, Darlington Town Centre Transport Plan and Darlington Parking Strategy (also previously circulated).

The submitted report stated that 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; that the STP was developed to deliver three broad objectives; social opportunity, economic growth and carbon reduction and environment; and the Darlington Transport Strategy sets out how the priorities detailed in the STP would be delivered in Darlington, taking into account local priorities, and sets a delivery framework to ensure the priorities are delivered.

It was reported that the Darlington Town Centre Transport Plan would support 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 that 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.

Members were informed that consultation on the documents was ongoing and due to close on 2 September 2022, and that comments were welcome from Members, residents and interested parties.

Discussion ensued on the content of the Darlington Transport Plan, Darlington Town Centre Transport Plan and Darlington Parking Strategy, with Members praising the aspirational nature of the plans, however stressed that they were keen to scrutinise the actions around the delivery of the plans.

Members entered into discussion on the need for increased support for the bus companies, citing a reduction in services, reliability and accurate information on the travel-line and web application. It was noted that many of the issues highlighted were related to a lack of driver availability and recruitment, and that there had been recent improvements in this area, and that improvements in real-time information on the web application were forthcoming.

Members were keen to see an increased amount, and a more flexible approach to delivery, in terms of cycling training, both amongst adults and younger people, with a number of suggestions advanced for Officers to consider. It was noted that the Darlington Transport Plan did not reference e-scooters, and discussion ensued on the national position in relation to e-scooters and the legislation governing the use. Discussion then progressed on to the taxing and insuring of those riding bicycles on the public highway.

Discussion ensued on the balance within the plans in terms of national requirements and local discretion, and whether the plans reflected local priorities.

Members were interested to ascertain how many off-street car parks did not meet 'Park Mark' standards, and what the cost of work would be to bring them to the required standard. Members were pleased to note that cycle parking was to be 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 payment 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.

Discussion ensued on the method of consultation, and the lack of engagement with local businesses.

RESOLVED – That the content of the submitted report be noted.

CLS16 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS - QUARTER 4 2021/2022

The Assistant Director Community Services and Assistant Director Highways and Capital Projects submitted a report (previously circulated) providing Members with an update on performance against those key performance indicators within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee for the period 2021/22.

It was reported that of the 35 indicators reported to this Scrutiny Committee, 25 were reported six monthly and ten were reported annually.

The submitted report gave the performance position in relation to the 35 indicators, of which 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.

Members entered into discussion on the 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, and a resulting lack of local knowledge, with an acceptance that messaging could have been better. Members also 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.

Members also expressed concern over the disposal of single use vapes as an issue, and the lack of prosecutions for fly-tipping, although it was highlighted that prosecutions were now resuming following the pandemic period.

RESOLVED – That the content of the submitted report be noted.

CLS17 WORK PROGRAMME

The Assistant Director Law and Governance submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to this Scrutiny Committee's work programme and to consider any additional areas which Members would like to suggest be included in the previously approved work programme.

RESOLVED – That the work programme be noted.