

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 18 April 2024

PRESENT – Councillors McGill (Chair), Coe, Mrs Culley, Garner, Mahmud, M Nicholson, Snedker and Walters

APOLOGIES – Councillors Cossins and Keir

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors McCollom and Dr. Riley

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Ian Thompson (Assistant Director Community Services), Brian Graham (Head of Environmental Services), Graham Hall (Head of Community Safety), Paul Branch (CCTV & Security Control Centre Manager), Christine Booth (Private Sector Housing Manager), Lynne Davies (Strategy and Policy Manager) and Olivia Hugill (Democratic Officer)

CLS39 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Garner declared an interest in the Tree and Woodland Strategy due to a Tree Preservation Order at his property. Councillor Walters declared an interest in the Private Sector Housing Strategy due to the ownership of rental properties in Darlington.

CLS40 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:

Submitted – The Draft Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 22 February 2024.

Resolved – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 22 February be approved as a correct record.

CLS41 TREE AND WOODLAND STRATEGY 2021 - 2031

The Group Director of Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide members with an update on delivery of actions within the strategy, the proposed 2024/25 and revised approach to risk management and climate declaration.

The submitted report covered the aim of the Tree and Woodland Strategy which was to proactively manage and enlarge the tree population of the Borough of Darlington in order to protect our historical heritage of trees and provide a valued environmental amenity for future generations.

The report stated the following aspects which the strategy covered: How the Council manages trees that they own, how the Council protected trees on private land, an action plan setting out what needs to be done over the next five years.

The report mentioned the policies in which the strategy covered: Street Trees, Woodlands, Trees in Parks and Open Spaces, Trees in Cemeteries and Disused Churchyards, Housing Area Trees, Privately Owned Trees.

The report stated the key highlights of the work completed so far; 37,571 trees had been

planted since 2022. The report reflected the eight successful funding applications from 2021 to date which totalled at £533,975.94.

The report also covered the Risk Management, Risk Management Tree Inspections New Approach, how tree inspections are completed, recorded and who by, the timescale of inspections, Tree works, Climate Declaration and Monitoring.

Members discussed how the Council managed trees on land that is not owned by them, officers explained that the landowners were responsible for the risk and safety management of that tree. Tree Preservation Orders were discussed by the Committee and at what stage is planning permission required.

Members queried the total numbers of trees in the borough the Council is responsible for and how tree inspections can be carried out due to the vast amount.

Members discussed the Ash Dieback disease, if there were any issues of this in the borough and the risk assessments in place for this. Members queried the risk assessments around the root lifting in roads and if this hazard had been identified for wheelchair users etc.

RESOLVED – That the report content and proposed action plan for 2024/25 be noted.

CLS42 CCTV CAMERA REPLACEMENT PROGRAMME

The Group Director of Services submitted report (previously circulated) to update members on the Camera Replacement Programme.

The report stated that the review of the CCTV was completed in May 2021 to determine whether the public space CCTV system in Darlington was fit for purpose and met operational requirements.

The report stated that the review established that the Internet Protocol (IP) cameras installed in the town centre produced high equality images and met operational requirements, however, the images from the legacy analogue cameras were soft and compared poorly to the IP Cameras. The review concluded that the analogue cameras should be replaced with new technology and a delivery programme was agreed.

The report detailed that Darlington Borough Council operates a Public Space CCTV system throughout the Borough which primarily supports the Council Plan objectives of keeping the Borough safe.

The report stated that through the Home Office Safer Streets 2 Fund, the Council were awarded £230,400 to introduce 17 additional cameras in and around Darlington Town Centre (including subways). Included in the total amount was £54,510 which was match funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner office.

Members discussed how the CCTV Replacement Programme had been funded, if CCTV was implemented in areas of the Borough which were higher in criminal offences would this stop any crimes being committed.

Members wanted to understand whether facial recognition is in use in Darlington, officers advised that this is something in the future that could be looked at. Members wanted to understand if there were any risks assessments in place if a cyber-attack were to take place.

RESOLVED – That the contents of this report be noted.

CLS43 PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING

The Group Director of Services submitted a report (previously circulated) that provided members with an update on the Private Sector Housing Strategy and Service Area update.

The report stated the strategy's three core aims: Aim 1 – Decent quality homes in the private rented sector, Aim 2 – Enable growth in the private rented sector, Aim 3 – Working with and supporting all residents in Darlington.

The report detailed that around 80% of Darlington's 51,885 homes were in the private rented sector. The Private Rented Sector had more than doubled size in the last 15 years to 2021, this has now stabilised and has been estimated to be 20% of the housing market, approximately 8,875 properties.

The submitted report outlined that there are increasing demand and duties on the service area, some of the existing and future challenges which include empty properties which are expected to rise in the short term as private landlords are evaluating their market position and there has been an increase in energy efficiency advice requests both owner occupiers and private rented.

Members questioned the process for inspections on Private Rented Properties, and how landlords respond to the inspections.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report be noted.

CLS44 COUNCIL PLAN 2024 - 2027

The Chief Officers Executive submitted a report (previously circulated) to introduce the draft Council Plan to the Committee.

The Council Plan outlined the long-term ambitions for Darlington and priorities of the Council to deliver over the next three years.

The submitted draft plan stated strategic direction to the Council, Council services, defining priorities and shaping delivery. The draft plan gave clarity to residents, businesses, and stakeholders on the Council's values and what is important and what they will do.

The public consultation for the draft plan had been opened and will run till the 25 April. The plan stated that the Council was seeking views from residents, businesses, charities, and key stakeholders. The Council Plan once finalised goes to Cabinet and Council in May for approval and adoption.

The draft Council Plan expressed three core values which fed into the plan: which addressed

inequalities, tackling climate change and efficient an effective use of resources.

The six priorities of the draft Council Plan show equal importance: Economy, Homes, Living Well, Children and Young People, Communities and Environment.

The report stated the political accountability for the priorities and core values for the draft plan, how it will be collaborative with a Cabinet Member leading each priority, core value and working with relevant portfolio leads to delivered.

Councillors McCollom and Dr Riley explained the priorities within the Stronger Communities and Local Services Portfolio areas, such as the Hopetown attraction.

Members appreciated the approach which will lead to better outcomes but wanted clarification around vogue wording.

Members discussed their concerns around biodiversity and the nature emergency which should be reflected in the Councils plan.

Members wanted to clarify how many responses were received from the public during consultation so far. Officers explained there has been 199 responses which has been, an improvement compared to previous Council Plan consultations.

RESOLVED – That draft Council Plan be noted, and Members share the plan with networks and encourage people to complete the survey.

CLS45 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 work programme.

Members discussed which areas they would like to see on the work programme for the next municipal year.

RESOLVED – That the work programme be noted.