

ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT & PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 20th June, 2019
Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

Present:- Mayor's Consort - Councillor Gary White – Chair

A. Fear	A. Gardner	G. Heesom
E. Horsfall	M. Reddish	J. Tagg

Officers: Guy Benson – Head of Planning and Development
Andrew Bird – Head of Recycling, Waste and Fleet Services
Jayne Briscoe – Democratic Services Officer
Caroline Elwood – Interim Head of Legal/Monitoring Officer
Rob Foster – Head of Leisure and Cultural Services
Jo Halliday – Head of Housing, Regeneration and Assets
Sarah Moore – Partnerships Manager

Also in attendance: Councillor T Johnson (Cabinet member for Environment and Recycling)
Councillor S Sweeney (Cabinet member for Finance and Efficiency)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Olszewski, Councillor Panter and Councillor Rout (who was represented by Councillor A Gardner),

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest stated.

3. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING - 14 MARCH 2019

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2019 be agreed as a correct record.

4. UPDATE FROM CABINET

The Deputy Leader, Councillor Sweeney provided an update report in response to the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee to Cabinet on 14 March. This included the Economic Development Year 1 Action Plan, the conversion of Council owned town centre properties to residential accommodation, the relocation and display of exhibits at the Guildhall and car parking charges. Information concerning a visit to Nantwich Town Centre by the Cabinet member on June 19 for the purpose of benchmarking was also circulated at the meeting.

The Cabinet member felt that Nantwich was a 'destination' town and a place that Newcastle could aspire to become. Parking in the Town was half the cost of Newcastle.

Agreed That the Cabinet member be asked to undertake 3 further visits, (to include a visit to Leek to view the Totally Local market), prior to the next meeting of the Committee.

St Georges Chambers were being investigated as to suitability for conversion to residential accommodation.

A part of the Burgess exhibition would be relocated to the Guildhall to illustrate the history of the Borough.

Councillor Sweeney would continue to press the BID for recent car parking/footfall data. The car parking strategy was expected in September. Members went on to discuss the replacement of car parking machines and concluded that a combination of a cash/cashless facility at the most frequently used car parks was preferable.

Agreed: That the car parking strategy be reported to the September meeting of this Committee

Councillor Sweeney also updated members in respect to the request for an electricity supply to be installed for use by the market stallholders and stated that this would be carried out within the near future. The cost of the removal of surplus stalls was £1200 per stall and in this respect the Antiques Forum had indicated that their members would be able to fill all the stalls.

5. ALLOCATION AND HOMELESSNESS POLICY

In response to a request from the Committee (14 March 2019) the Head of Housing, Regeneration and Assets submitted a report which reviewed the situation regarding rough sleepers together with the provision which is available to those people who are sleeping rough on the streets. The report also considered the options available to assist and deter individuals begging in the Town Centre who are perceived to be rough sleepers.

Addressing rough sleeping and begging was a priority for the Borough. Together with partners the Borough had co-commissioned a Rough Sleepers Outreach Service with Stoke on Trent City Council and run by Brighter Futures and was working to co-ordinate services to ensure that anyone on the streets or at risk of rough sleeping was able to access advice and support.

The Rough Sleeper Outreach Team had verified a total of 53 people sleeping rough between 2 April 2018 and 31 March 2019, and around 4 rough sleepers per day in 2018. During the past year 14 new rough sleepers had been helped off the streets before they slept out for a second night; however there was a group of 16 entrenched rough sleepers who remained on a regular basis either in Newcastle or Stoke on Trent.

Continuing, the report set out the range of support available to a person sleeping rough. Homelessness was a complex issue and entrenched homelessness presented particular difficulties including addictions and criminal and offending behaviour. There was a range of powers available to both the Council and the Police to tackle these activities when outreach and engagement opportunities had either been exhausted or intelligence demonstrated that individuals were not legitimate rough sleepers were set out.

Officers encouraged members of the public to contact the Rough Sleepers Outreach telephone number with knowledge of rough sleepers so that help could be given.

Members discussed the Make it Count Scheme and, whilst it was acknowledge that publicity should be very sensitive, the profile and aims of the Scheme should continue to be raised with business, the public and rough sleepers.

The Government was committed to halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending it by 2027 which is supported by funding and in this respect the Council had been successful in bidding for funding and had achieved £45,000 to cover the costs of a Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator post for 19/20.

In general members were supportive of the activities being carried out to help and support rough sleepers although Councillor Fear contrasted the picture with the absence of beggars in Nantwich Town Centre where there was no offer of support services and questioned whether there was a link between homelessness and the provision of services.

Agreed: That Cabinet be requested to support further sensitive PR work and comprehensive communications work around the Make it Count Scheme.

6. UPDATE OF PLANNING AND ENFORCEMENT RECRUITMENT

Following on from a previous report (4 July 2018) the Head of Planning and Development submitted a report which updated members on the Planning Service. The report included a review of case load, percentage compliance with required completion of workload, a review of the number of staff vacancies within the department and the current action plan to meet the need identified.

It was reported that out of 339 District Councils the Borough Council, on the basis of the most recently available figures, ranked 313rd for the speed of determination of applications for major development, 303rd for speed of determination in relation to applications for non-major developments, ranked 227th in relation to appeals for major development decisions and 62nd in relation to appeals for non-major development decisions.

The Chair noted that the Authority was in the bottom quartile in a number of areas and questioned further on specific measures to help address the difficulties. In response the officer explained that a shortage of qualified planning officers contributed to the poor performance issues and the ability of the Authority to attract suitable qualified applicants within a financially competitive market.

Agreed: Cabinet be requested to review the circumstances leading to the shortage of qualified officers within the planning department and to put in place an effective recruitment and retention policy.

Specifically, Cabinet is requested to review the reasons for the Councils planning performance to be in the lower quartile across the country and to provide recommendations as to what is required to support the function to ensure substantive improvements.

7. RECYCLING SERVICE UPDATE

The Head of Recycling and Fleet Services submitted a report which updated members on:-

- Progress on the development for the introduction of the new recycling collection service.
- What the service will look like
- Update briefing on the current absence and sickness levels within the department and progress on the implementation of new policies
- Quarter 4 performance – for information.

The report outlined progress on the development for the introduction of the new recycling collection service. Detailed data capture for existing refuse rounds was complete and this would ensure the effective and realistic modelling of rounds which was now underway. The procurement of wheeled bins and bags to hold cardboard and paper have commenced and the Committee was able to examine samples of these at the meeting. Procurement of vehicles (at least 7 split body RCV and 7 food waste vehicles) to operate the service has also commenced. Branding for the new service was complete and a communications plan approved.

Sickness and absence levels had recently reduced and the Officer thanked the HR Department for their additional support.

Members viewed the proposed recycling containers and engaged in discussions around their ease of use. Concern was expressed at the weight of a full paper/card recycling bag for some residents. It would be possible to request an additional bag and also the existing blue box could be used. Assisted collection would remain in place.

The existing garden waste bins were not suitable for use and all brown bins would be collected in September.

Moving to look at communications on social media and the need to ensure robust timely and correctly informed communication to residents it was noted that the recycling officer within the department was well placed to respond and inform; they concluded that communication was critical to the success of the introduction of the new recycling scheme. Members requested that the paper recycling bag be sufficiently weighted to prevent it blowing away and voted 5 for and 2 against in favour of the new recycling system.

Agreed: It was agreed that the communication element of informing residents of the new system is of paramount importance and it was requested that Cabinet ensured that the department prioritised the communications aspect and works closely with Andrew Bird.

Agreed: It was also requested that the recycling team, through Andrew Bird, had control of the Councils Facebook page specifically to respond to residents queries.

8. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chief Executive submitted a report on Work Programme Planning and invited members of the Committee to submit items for consideration.

Agreed: That the September meeting would consider a report on single use plastics reduction strategy; climate change mitigation; an update on the development of the Rycroft area; recycling service update.

9. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public present at the meeting.

10. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of urgent business.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 25 SEPTEMBER 2019

MAYOR'S CONSORT - COUNCILLOR GARY WHITE
Chair

Meeting concluded at 9.40 pm