

ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT & PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 17th December, 2020
Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor Gary White (Chair)

Councillors:	Gill Heesom	John Tagg	David Grocott
	Barry Panter	Amelia Rout	Stephen Sweeney
	Marion Reddish	Jennifer Cooper	

Officers:	Simon McEneny	Executive Director - Commercial Development & Economic Growth
	Georgina Evans	Head of People and Organisational Development
	Geoff Durham	Mayor's Secretary / Member Support Officer
	Roger Tait	Head of Operations
	Gordon Tebay	
	Shawn Fleet	Head of Planning and Development
	David Elkington	Head of Customer and Digital Services

Also in attendance: Portfolio Holder for Finance and Efficiency

Note: In line with Government directions on staying at home during the current stage of the CV-19 pandemic, this meeting was conducted by video conferencing in accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

1. **APOLOGIES**

There were no apologies.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest stated.

3. **MINUTES OF A PREVIOUS MEETING**

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 November, 2020 be agreed as a correct record.

4. **UPDATE FROM CABINET**

There was nothing to report.

5. **TOWN DEALS - KIDSGROVE AND NEWCASTLE**

Members received a presentation on the Future High Street Funding and Town Deal Funding from the Executive Director - Commercial Development and Economic Growth, Simon McEneny.

The presentation outlined the key milestones, overview and cost summary for Future High Street Funding for Newcastle Town centre and it also gave an overview of the Town Deal Funding for both Newcastle and Kidsgrove.

The Chair asked why there were no details for the Newcastle Town Deal Funding Overview. Simon McEneny explained that as it was still being worked on, it was not as yet a public document.

The Chair asked about resource requirements – overseeing the governance and steering groups, how would this be carried out?

Simon McEneny advised that Acon were driving this and a Project Manager had been appointed and these had been funded by money forwarded by the Government. Project Management and suitable revenue support costs had also been built in. As the Council had never delivered a programme of £75m over a three year period, whilst the Council had some very able officers, the skill set required at this scale and timescales meant that additional consultancy or project management or fixed term contracts would need to be brought in. The governance would stay as it was for the life of the project.

Councillor Panter asked if sufficient parking would be available to replace the Midway car park when it was demolished and if so, where would it be located.

Simon McEneny advised that the Future High Street bid included £7m to build a new car park on the Ryecroft site. As the Council was trying to reduce its carbon footprint, the use of cars needed to be discouraged in favour of other means of travel and therefore it was not likely to be as large as the existing one.

The car park would have sustainable transport solutions inside so that electric cars could be charged, spaces for electric bikes and scooters.

The Chair thanked Simon McEneny for the presentation and said that redevelopment of the Ryecroft was overdue.

Before the next meeting of this Scrutiny Committee the Council should have heard if the Kidsgrove Town Deal bid had been successful.

Councillor Reddish asked for a copy of the presentation to be sent electronically.

Resolved: That the information be received and the comments noted.

6. LITTER BINS - PROVISION AND SERVICING

Consideration was given to a report responding to a request for information on the current approach to litter bin provision and servicing within the Borough.

The Council's Head of Operations, Roger Tait drew Members' attention to paragraph 2 of the report which outlined the number and locations of dog waste and litter bins around the Borough and also the frequency at which the bins were emptied.

Operatives were encouraged to feed back if a bin was getting full and therefore the frequency of emptying needed to be adapted.

Members were advised that bagged dog waste could now be put into ordinary litter bins which helped to reduce the pressure on dog waste bins in parks and open spaces. In addition, dual waste bins were being considered with two separate compartments for litter and dog waste which would also help in terms of operational emptying.

Bins can be paid for through sponsorship and they were sometimes paid for through businesses and Parish Councils where it could be agreed for the Council to empty bins on land not in the Council's ownership.

Five operatives were fully deployed on litter bin emptying, four of whom go around in the caged vehicles and one operative who was based permanently in the town centre with an electric cart. There was no capacity to add any more bins for emptying, to the workload, at present.

When the Council receives a request for new bins, residents or businesses were worked with to see if existing bins could be moved around to solve the problem. Most of the time, this approach was successful.

A full scale review had been considered, but this would cost in the region of £26,000 and at present, feedback would suggest that there would be no business case to justify doing that.

A couple of pilot studies had been done in the area to test how many bins were out there and this was compared to the average number across the Borough and a comparison had been done with other areas as outlined on page 12 of the agenda. Newcastle compared well with its family group.

A couple of issues had been raised around the future demand created by new developments in the Borough. If a new development came along that had to provide public open space or a play area, colleagues in the Planning Department would be worked with to try and secure a Section 106 Agreement or a Planning Obligation whereby the developer would provide that facility and also provide litter bins if needed.

It was recommended to Members to continue with this current approach, keeping it under review and if a bigger demand arose in the future it could be at that point, Members would be approached to advise that more resource needs to be put into this or more bins provided.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Efficiency, Councillor Sweeney made reference to the Cambridge Drive shops in Clayton. As the Ward Councillor, if problems arose, Roger Tait or his team were contacted and the problem would be sorted.

Councillor Reddish asked about the Section 106 Agreements where litter and dog bins were requested. Could this be done retrospectively on large estates which were already built and populated that had problems with dog fouling and litter. Councillor Reddish was under the impression that because it had not been adopted for eight years or more, the Council could not do that. Could this be clarified?

Roger Tait explained that Section 106 Agreements were not to secure litter bins but to secure public open space and play facilities and if bins were appropriate that would be included in the brief to the developer.

Councillor Reddish referred to an estate with 3-400 houses with no litter or dog bins and how could that be rectified?

Roger Tait stated that once adopted, the Council could see if litter bins should have been provided. If this was the case, they can be insisted to be put in on play areas or public open space but they are not usually provided within the residential areas.

The Chair stated that he had similar concerns in that, when the Local Plan is looked at and the substantial number of new homes that needed to come into the Borough over the next twenty years was considered, to say that the Council - which was already at capacity and could not accept any new bins, would not work.

Given that the issue had already been raised by Councillor Reddish, would it be appropriate for this Committee to ask that Roger Tait, along with the Head of Planning and Development, Shawn Fleet look at any mechanisms that could be used in future developments.

Roger Tait stated that the Planning Department was already worked with where it was appropriate and open space was being secured. Regarding future development, where some of the larger developments were looked at, that was not actually increasing the pressure on the bin stock. Operationally, bins may be moved around where demand increases.

The Chair did not feel that this approach was addressing the concerns raised this evening in respect of future housing developments and that was where the Committee was looking for an official mechanism to be looked at and put into place, not simply working together but an actual mechanism put into place.

The Head of Planning and Development, Shawn Fleet stated that the Local Plan had a section on commuted sums and obligations which included play spaces and affordable housing but the document could look to be revised. As Roger Tait had said, it was generally around open spaces where littering occurred and where demand arose. However, the obligations and leverage applied to developers could be looked at and ask for monies to provide bins. However, viability has to be considered as there had to be a cut-off point in asking a developer to provide various facilities. This was looked at on an application by application basis.

The Chair stated that the Committee would like this extended and a review done so that it was not just about open spaces and play areas but also about where large developments were going to be put in place. The Chair asked that Roger Tait and Shawn Fleet work together to come up with a solution that would accommodate this and bring it back to this Committee at an appropriate time.

The Chair also raised the issue of communication and how it could be improved, for example, people of the Borough were not aware that bagged dog faeces could be placed into the ordinary bins. The Chair gave the example of the Recycling Team who, this Committee made the recommendation that they had their own Facebook page to notify and communicate with residents and maybe this could also be applied to Streetscene.

Roger Tait confirmed that they had a twitter feed and 'green team' where work around the Borough was posted so messaging could be put out on there and stickers could be put onto bins to explain what waste can be put into them.

The Chair asked if there was a mechanism where the twitter feed could be linked to Facebook. Roger Tait would ask the Communications team if this was possible.

Councillor Jenny Cooper echoed what the Chair had said about communication in that services had been affected throughout lockdown, for example food waste collections stopping and starting up again. People don't always get the information straight away.

- Resolved:**
- (i) That the information be received and the comments noted.
 - (ii) That the Head of Operations and the Head of Planning and Development work together to find a mechanism which can be put into place in considering the provision of litter and dog bins when a new residential development was proposed or an application submitted.
 - (iii) That the Head of Operations work with the Communications Team in setting up a Streetscene Facebook page that residents of the Borough could refer to.

7. PLANNING ENFORCEMENT UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report informing Members of the current situation regarding the enforcement caseload, the tools that are used and how the service could be moved forward.

The Council's Head of Planning and Development, Shawn Fleet took Members through the steps to enforcement action, outlined on page 16 of the agenda. Shawn Fleet explained that there were occasions where people were unaware that they had breached planning regulations, and some would approach the situation in a positive manner by addressing the problems that had been created. Sometimes, a retrospective planning application had to be submitted which ran the risk of being rejected and therefore the unauthorised works having to be put back, which could be costly. Failure to put the works back could result in an Enforcement Notice being issued or going as far as full demolition. People also ran the risk of a fine or imprisonment.

A common enforcement notice was a Section 215 or a 'Tidy up Notice' which required people with untidy gardens to get them tidied up.

Shawn Fleet stated that one major issue was the timeliness of appeals. Members' attention was drawn to the chart on page 17.

This year had seen an increase in the number of neighbours reporting the same case. This was as a result of people working from home or being at home through furlough. However, new problems had not risen by many.

New staff were being brought into the Planning Department, one had started this week and a further member of staff would start in the new year. These officers would start to target enforcement work.

The Council's enforcement work was self-monitored, checking its own targets and performance indicators. It had become apparent how difficult it was to get hold of

national data to do a comparison with but, in the new year, benchmarking across the country would be looked at to try and establish a set of benchmarks to enable the Authority to track its progress and how it compared to similar Authorities.

The Chair referenced paragraph 3.4 of the report regarding the Technical Support team and being more checkbox based, allowing for an appraisal to be undertaken. Was this something this actively beginning to be undertaken?

Shawn Fleet confirmed that this was the case. It was currently being worked on, looking at the forms. Upon receipt of an application or enquiry, officers had looked at a longer assessment, checking compliance with all of the details. The aim was to rationalise this down – looking at the key facts and deciding if it needed to be pursued or whether it required no further action.

The Chair referred to paragraph 5.1 regarding benchmarking and process efficiency. Were these being progressed?

Shawn Fleet confirmed that his team were working with officers within the Council to discuss some of the questions and which other authorities could help to compare.

Councillor Panter asked for clarification that the service was not a compulsorily provided one but could be provided as and when necessary.

Shawn Fleet confirmed that it was a discretionary service. The Local Government Ombudsman does keep an eye on how the Council performed on this and a number of authorities had been criticised because of neglect or under-enforcement. Every case, therefore needs to be investigated and the expediency test used to assess severity of the harm.

Resolved: That the information be received and the comments noted.

8. OVERVIEW OF DATA AND POTENTIAL SAVINGS IN THE RELOCATION TO CASTLE HOUSE

Consideration was given to a report summarising data relating to the move from different Council buildings to co-location at Castle House.

The Chair advised that the report had been brought to committee following a request at a previous meeting.

The Council's Facilities and Engineering Manager, Gordon Tebay advised that the report did not contain full data due to the lockdown and officers working from home and therefore less occupancy of the building. In terms of the comparison of data, moving from the other buildings to Castle House, concentration of the data had been placed on the resources and energy aspect of the move. Colleagues in the Finance Department could provide information on the financial savings.

Key findings to date showed a 33% saving on energy usage and approximately a 30% saving on water usage.

In terms of the co-location facility, there was awareness of all of the different partners within the building and at the current time, some areas were more fully occupied than others, but the figures were still good.

Members' attention was drawn to the table on page 23 of the agenda and in terms of actual savings this was approximately £99,000.

The savings gave a good picture. Certain guidelines had been received from Government and other advisory bodies about letting more fresh air into Castle House because of Covid and it being a sealed building. Therefore, more flushing of the building had taken place than would usually be done as it relies on mechanical ventilation.

Responsibility for the Business Rates element of the water passed to the County Council in 2016 when the 62 year lease to the former school site was issued.

Energy management-wise, Newcastle worked closely with the County Council and en-capita.

The financial aspect would pass into history as being a good move in terms of future opportunities for Ryecroft development and reuses of other sites. St George's Chambers had already found a new use in terms of cold nights and winter night's provision.

The Chair stated that the Committee were tonight looking at the savings attributable to a small element of the move. This was more the environmental side and the attainment of more carbon neutral buildings.

Gordon Tebay stated that in terms of carbon neutrality there had been recent studies by university researchers and partners which, in terms of the development of a new building some factors suggested that the embedded carbon of existing buildings and the energy used to create the new building had to be taken into account.

In terms of Castle House, carbon neutrality mean that less and less fossil fuels were being used. There was no gas provision in the building.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Efficiency, Councillor Sweeney stated that he believed that moving from the Civic Offices to Castle House, in terms of carbon neutrality was a massive saving just in that one move. The former Civic Offices was a 1960's badly insulated building.

Gordon Tebay agreed. Castle House had been to modern day modelling and regulations for buildings so from a carbon management perspective it had to comply with Parts L and F of the Building Regulations. Castle House was a super-insulated building but the mechanical ventilation did need to be worked on.

Councillor Rout asked for clarification whether it had been said that recirculated air had been used in the building during Covid or that there had not been?

Gordon Tebay confirmed that the thermal wheel had not been switched on during summer months as natural fresh air coming in had to be maximised.

Resolved: That the information be received.

9. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair asked Members to email any ideas for Scrutiny to him which would then be incorporated into the Work Programme.

10. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

11. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

CLLR GARY WHITE
Chair

Meeting concluded at 8.07 pm