

ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT & PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 29th September, 2021

Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

Present:	Councillor Gary White (Chair)		
Councillors:	Helena Maxfield Grocott D Jones	Mark Olszewski Amelia Rout Jennifer Cooper	Fear J Tagg Panter
Officers:	Simon McEneny Denise French Georgina Evans Roger Tait Nesta Barker	Executive Director - Growth and Development Democratic Services Team Leader Head of Strategy, People and Performance Head of Neighbourhood Delivery Head of Regulatory Services	
Also in attendance:	Councillor Trevor Johnson – Portfolio Holder Environment and Recycling		

1. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Marion Reddish.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF A PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2021 be agreed as a correct record.

4. UPDATE FROM CABINET

There was nothing to report from Cabinet.

5. SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY UPDATE

The Committee considered a report on the Council's Sustainable Environment Strategy. The Strategy had been adopted by Council and included an Action Plan comprising a range of projects and initiatives to develop sustainable approaches to the council's own work as well as work with partners.

There were a number of key achievements so far including solar panels on part of the roof of Knutton Depot which were generating electricity that was used on site; replacement of the Environmental Health van fleet with electric vehicles and installation of charging stations at the Depot; and a pilot of e-scooters in Newcastle town centre.

There were a number of key projects being planned:

- A feasibility study was looking at a solar renewable energy farm at Keele on land in the council's ownership
- Sites were being sought for the first phase of tree planting over winter and early spring; this would be linked to the Queen's Jubilee project to create a Green Canopy
- There were various transport initiatives including a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan with the County Council; installation of eight rapid electric vehicle charging points on council car parks as part of the Low Emission Taxi Infrastructure Scheme; and promotion of the Council's Green Travel Plan for employees.

Members raised queries and points including:

- Would community groups be involved in tree planting schemes? Reference was also made to schemes to plant trees in memory of those who had died during the pandemic; this was something that some local authorities had participated in but not the borough council. In response, the committee was advised that now the Urban Tree Planting Strategy had been approved this gave a mandate for work to take place to involve communities especially in commemorations of the Queen's Jubilee in 2022 and the 850 celebrations of the Borough in 2023. There would be schemes to adopt a tree.
- Was there any feedback on electric vehicle charging points? No direct feedback had been received but it was a growing area based on increasing sales of electric vehicles and installation of charging points at many supermarkets.
- How long would it take to see a return on the investment in solar panels at the Depot? The committee was advised that this was expected to be 7 years. The project to install panels on other parts of the roof at the central Depot would be subject to any possible relocation plans but no monies would be spent until future plans were confirmed.
- Were there any specific sites or routes that would see developments or improvements as part of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan that could be shared with the committee? This Plan was led by the County Council but any list of sites would be shared with the committee when available.

RESOLVED: that

- (a) the report be received; and
- (b) the priorities set out in the Work Plan for 2021-2022 be supported.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PERFORMANCE AND ENFORCEMENT REPORT

The Committee considered a report on Environmental Health Performance and Enforcement. The report listed the key issues and activities undertaken by the service in 2020 – 21.

The Environmental Health service comprised four teams – Food & Safety; Environmental Protection; Environmental Services; and Licensing Administration. The report compared key activities over the past two or three years and outlined some of the main projects or investigations:

Food & Safety – key projects had included participation and promotion of the National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme. A large part of work undertaken by this service was in relation to Covid including investigations; track and trace; promoting Covid safe measures; this had included carrying out investigations into 305 outbreaks.

Environmental Protection – the main projects carried out by this service had included air quality work but the majority of the focus had been on Walley's Quarry landfill odour investigations.

Licensing Administration Team – main projects had included a review of Licensing Act Policy and review of Taxi Licensing Policy as well as ensuring vehicles licensed during Covid had been inspected for safety.

Environmental Services – some of the main projects included using Anti-Social Behaviour powers to resolve dog-related nuisance, through the issue of Community Protection Notices and Fixed Penalties; and taking enforcement action where residents were not taking appropriate action to control infestations.

The priorities for the current year included Walley's Quarry, Air Quality to deliver compliance with the Ministerial Direction and Covid work. The department would also continue with planned work, undertake reactive work as well as manage the backlog of work.

Members raised queries and issues including:

- What were 'pavement licences'? This was explained as an initiative to support businesses by enabling the serving of food and beverages on the pavement and had now been extended to September 2022
- What were high risk food premises? These were where vulnerable people were being served or were high risk such as meat production. There were not a high number of premises affected and this workload had been reduced during the pandemic as a number of premises had been closed
- Was there a hotspot for flytipping? There were no specific hotspots but it was an issue across the borough
- One priority was noted as taxi enforcement operations with partner agencies. What was the situation with licensed vehicles from outside the borough operating within the borough and what was the partnership working? It was confirmed that the council could only take enforcement action against its own drivers. However, one piece of enforcement work would involve linking with other councils or police to do vehicle safety checks or work looking at 'plying for hire'. Any issues not related to borough licences could be referred to the relevant council if necessary. The number of vehicles licensed from other councils that were operating within the borough was not known. If trends were identified then the possibility of joint initiatives with other local authorities could be explored.
- The number of RIDDOR accident notifications appeared high. The committee was advised that this category covered accidents that resulted in 7+ day's absence from work and often was a result of slips, trips or falls.

- Was there additional support from Government to address the additional work arising due to Covid? There had been additional funding which was being coordinated by the County Council and this had been used to obtain additional support including recruiting environmental health officers.
- Did the service have enough resource particularly with the pressures of additional workload arising from Covid and Walley's Quarry? There had been an ongoing need to prioritise and as shown in the report, there had been some backlog in various workloads. There had been issues with resource and also difficulties in recruitment of qualified staff, this was a national issue. Some agency staff had been appointed to help with some workstreams. Management Team were aware of the pressures on the environmental services section and supportive.

RESOLVED: that:

- (a) The report be received; and
- (b) The priorities in the Work Plan 2021 – 2022 be supported.

7. STREETSCENE - POSITION STATEMENT

The Committee considered a report on Streetscene. The report provided an update on staffing, fleet, customer satisfaction and benchmarking.

Staff attendance had been very good during the pandemic. Resources had been redirected to support Recycling and Waste services with some core streetscene work such as litter collection and street sweeping being reprioritised. There remained a backlog in this area of work which had also been impacted by the suspension of key partner support including Community Payback and resident volunteering.

The report outlined that the team had an ageing profile but succession planning measures were in place that saw job roles reviewed when posts became vacant. There was also training in place and investment in equipment, technology and machinery. A number of apprentices had progressed to seasonal or permanent roles at the council.

There was a Fleet Replacement Programme in place that was regularly reviewed and expenditure staggered across the years.

Customer satisfaction surveys were carried out most years and results were presented. In 2020/21 86% thought their street was litter free or had low level litter and 73% thought their neighbourhood was litter free or had low level litter. The streetscene team also engaged with the community at various meetings including LAPs and Town/Parish Councils and through discussion with ward members.

The service was benchmarked in a number of ways including as a member of the Association of Public Sector Excellence Performance Networks. The service compared well with similar size councils and had reached the top 8 nationally in best performing or most improved categories on a number of recent occasions.

The future of the service would see a focus on a demand led performance approach rather than one based on frequency.

Members raised issues and queries as follows:

- What was the programme for grass cutting in rural areas? This would depend on the type including formal and informal open space; in urban areas town centre roundabouts were cut more frequently. It was noted that the council no longer cut Highways land. Amenity grass was cut when it reached around 75mm. Grass cutting was also based on seasonal and weather factors; supervisors would ensure the situation was kept under review.
- What was the road sweeping schedule? This was based on a demand led approach so areas of higher need would be swept more often. In general, urban roads were swept more frequently than rural roads.
- It was noted that core passageways and subways were often filled with litter and debris. Members were informed that these areas were cleansed daily but it was a constant challenge. There had also previously been additional support in high use areas from partners such as Community Payback but it was unclear whether support would be available in the future.
- Members commended the work of the service on public gardens.
- Members queried how the service could continue to meet the needs of the borough as it grew in terms of residential and other growth. In response, this was a decision for the council in terms of service growth and prioritisation. Officers undertook service planning to identify demand; town centres tended to be the focus. There would be opportunities as part of the One Council programme such as use of technology as outlined previously to facilitate job requests while out in the area rather than returning to the depot to pick up a task. The committee was reminded that housing and growth did bring income into the borough through council tax and business rates alongside also bringing additional demand for services.

RESOLVED: that the Cabinet be requested to review the strategic direction of operational services based on the next 5-10 years growth and consider how the service can be protected and grown, proportionate to predicted growth.

8. FUTURE HIGH STREETS FUND UPDATE

The Committee considered a presentation from Simon McEneny, Executive Director – Commercial Development and Economic Growth on Future High Streets Fund and Town Investment Plans for Newcastle under Lyme and Kidsgrove.

The update for the Future High Streets Fund noted:

- Funding had been confirmed and deposited
- The demolition of the former Civic Centre had commenced and was due for completion in summer 2022
- A procurement exercise was underway for the car park relocation on the Rycroft site, which was a design and build project
- A masterplanning exercise was to begin for Rycroft
- The possible purchase of York Place was still subject to negotiation. If the purchase was successful, the council would ensure careful stewardship of tenants.
- Designs were being developed to redesign the public space outside the market to make a dwell space; the market pitches were also being redesigned to be more attractive.

Kidsgrove Town Deal

- The Sports Centre development was underway and progressing well.

- The business case for Chatterley Valley had been submitted to the Government and works were due to commence in spring 2022. The development was expected to see up to 2000 new jobs.
- The works to upgrade the station were progressing and a consultant consortium had been appointed to prepare a business case; the mixed use development in the area in front of the station would also be subject to a business case in the near future.

Newcastle Town Deal

- A programme of schemes had been submitted to MHCLG in August 2021 and business cases would be developed for each scheme
- Funding would be released by Government on a scheme by scheme basis
- The council was procuring a consultant to develop each business case alongside the council's own staff; the council had recently appointed two project officers to also support the Town Deals schemes.

RESOLVED: that the updates be received.

9. **TOWN INVESTMENT PLANS FOR KIDSGROVE AND NEWCASTLE UNDER LYME**

This was covered under the previous agenda item.

10. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered the Work Programme. The Chair suggested inviting the BID Manager to the next meeting to update on their plans for Newcastle town centre. He also suggested the Committee have an update on the Local Plan as well as the regular update on Future High Streets Fund and Town Deals. If anyone had any suggestions they were invited to raise them with the Chair.

RESOLVED: that the Work Programme be updated for the meeting in December to include:

- an update from the BID Manager;
- update on the Borough Local Plan following the consultation period;
- the regular updates on the Future High Streets Fund and Town Deals for Kidsgrove and Newcastle.

11. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

12. **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business.

Chair

Meeting concluded at 8.45 pm