

Cleaner Greener Safer Scrutiny Committee has met four times since last report to Council

The **October** meeting was taken up with reviewing the **Subways** survey process undertaken by the members. 14 surveys have been completed on the 15 subways with more surveys done for town centre subway arms than outlying ones

The results of field surveys show on balance subways were fairly litter free, At the time of most surveys there hadn't been heavy rain so the drain 'problem' ie not sufficient of capacity to take away storm water was not recorded.

The lighting was just about adequate and walking surfaces also adequate. All the subways were recorded to a greater or lesser degree as being rendered unpleasant due to scrawls of graffiti, some of it offensive and bordering on offensive. Nearly all the walls and lighting were shabby, dirty and giving an impression of neglect

It was noted that the subway arms with properly planned and executed art work appear to be less subject to random graffiti. Moves are planned by various officers of the Council to work with Darryl Colbourn, BID and 'Enterprise' (commissioners of the current successful art works) to put together a bid for Arts Council England funding for further high quality artworks in the town centre arms of the subways. It is thought appropriate that one of the Borough's current 'art themes' might be used; for instance, the life and times of Philip Astley, son of Newcastle and originator of the modern circus

The Staffs Youth Offender Team have been tasked by NULBC Environment team to clean whatever they can and whenever they can; an informal arrangement which is a good initiative but unlikely to keep pace with the increasingly dirty and down market appearance of most of the subways

The Chair has contacted the Police Crime Commissioner's office with a view to engagement with a Proceeds of Crime Initiative. Still waiting for further and more detailed discussion

The November meeting addressed scrutiny to the Open Space Strategy and Green Infrastructure Strategy.

The Council's Landscape Manager and Head of Operations presented the strategies to the committee. The strategies identify a range of strategic aims and objectives for open space as well as green infrastructure planning provision maintenance and alternative use. The Committee were required to assess the robustness of these strategies to ensure the assets fulfil their potential to deliver a wide range of environmental, social and economic benefits. The strategies have been prepared by external consultants.

In response to questions from scrutiny committee, officers confirmed there would be links to already existing strategies for example: North Staffs Green Space Strategy, Rural Green Space Strategy. NBC's Equestrian Strategy and SCC's Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

Committee members were assured that our open spaces will remain accessible for public use. Less intensive maintenance regimes in some areas would release resources for areas needing a more intensive treatment. Members noted the promotion in the report of local consultation regarding any changes to local open space provision. The objective of seeking green corridors and linear access across LA boundaries also expressed in the documents and welcomed by members

It was noted that the key message of the executive summary was one of 'rationalisation' in the new climate of reducing resources and therefore the need for informing and consulting with local communities

Members were impressed by the high quality of the documents (notwithstanding poor proof reading with misspelling and poor grammar in places) The level of detail and complexity of information makes the accessibility of the strategies somewhat difficult for the general public but the overall opinion of the committee was that these are very thorough reports dealing with a very important aspect of daily life in Newcastle.

The **December 14** meeting was an ad hoc invitation to C'lr Mark Deaville Portfolio holder for Highways at Staffs CC and James Bailey officer at SCC The meeting was held to discuss the condition ,maintenance and future of our **subways**.

The following preamble was presented prior to discussion

Our 14 subways are under Staffs Highways, with the Borough Council's Streetscene sweeping floors daily and collecting litter and as a 'service' to the County and our residents of course- painting out offensive graffiti. And that is a major issue; our subways have become haunts of disaffected youths tagging with spray paint, and inflicting general anti-social behaviour on the public

Generally, the condition of walls, barrel roofs and especially drains (which are inadequate to take flash floods) is poor and none of which can be currently remediated by the Borough Council. Not to be all negative, this Council and its partners have made some of the subway arms quite dramatic and colourful public art venues. These areas appear NOT to get tagged Postcards have been made of these art works, these are popular among residents

A report from **Staffordshire Police** handed out at this meeting gave the nature and statistics relevant to subways in Newcastle of ASB

Following discussion these were the points raised with C'lr Deaville and James Bailey:

- There are other towns with subways in the County, MD and JB could not say whether renovation schemes were under way elsewhere
- Reporting of problems by members of the public, the SCC website does not have on the drop down menu a specific for lodging problems with subways
- There is no specific dedicated officer for 'subways' Chris Plant had been visited by Chair and Kim Graham; meeting -friendly but with NO specific solutions offered
- Discussion about short medium and long term strategies for subways MD and JB stated there is a new strategy being developed this coming Spring ref. aspects of the public domain This strategy upgrade may have a bearing on the matter. It may include the possibility-long term- of closure of some
- MD was keen to welcome the initiative of the Scrutiny meeting as a way forward to engage more directly with Newcastle on improving the 'subway experience' for our residents; one aspect to stress is that some arms are certainly be part of County's Safer Routes to School
- Existing partnerships of relevance: Town Centre Partnership, the B I D, Joint Operations Group, and Newcastle Sustainable Transport Group MD stressed using existing mechanisms and groups C'lr Williams wants our College and schools to be 'involved' Kim Graham suggested a 'task and finish group' approach could be useful
- Discussion: using Community Payback and Proceeds of Crime initiatives, Chair had contacted Helen Jarvie of the Police Crime Commissioner's Office(still waiting further contact) .MD and JB said they had engaged with these in other areas
- Kim Graham outlined the successful 'artwork' enhancement of subways in Newcastle. There is an application pending to the Arts Council England (Sustrans is also involved) for funding more professional artwork. . There was a specific request made of JB for SCC funds for antigrffiti

lacquer (which protects 2D art work) This, if committed, would form an important element of the ACE bid for funds

- C'Ilr Cooper suggested light up panels in subway arms with high footfall. Paid for advertising could be sought. MB and JB said this is already to be trialled in Stafford, they would provide update on the idea

Specific Actions recommended from this meeting:

- Kim Graham to finalise the offer of lacquer with James Bailey
- The NBC website can be changed to allow complaints about subways
- From this meeting, we were offered three-month *review and update* meetings by Mark Deaville

December 21 meeting: Scrutiny of the Davis Report on the Council's introduction of new recycling processes and provision

The members were pleased to have senior officers present at the meeting and their briefing paper helped members to focus on the Davis report recommendations

Members felt they had learned a good deal about the process of recycling from the deeply through work presented in the Davis Report

The recommendations in respect of the following aspects were of concern and interest;

The increased volume (some 25%) of recyclates had not been anticipated and therefore some of the operational aspects had proved overstretched.

The need for a better 'in day' handling of material was addressed in the report and recommendations endorsed by Scrutiny. The handling was slowed down dramatically because of return trips to depot in an ad hoc way exacerbating delays

A better approach to pre-trialling new vehicles was recommended and this accorded well with Scrutiny members' experience of complaints (vehicles being too big for some areas)

Missed collections was also very much an issue involving members. Recommendations in the report about refining reporting processes and firming up bespoke requests for assisted collections; also, a clear centrally operated policy about kerbside collection (to be communicated to all residents) would have smoothed the first few weeks.

Davis report made several specific recommendations to address these issues. Endorsed by Scrutiny members

Issues for future operations were analysed and recommendations made: whether trolleys could be provided on request (with extra fee?), whether further household separation (glass/cardboard) should be pursued and how; more effective use of existing data bases with additional staff training

Reintroduction of 'missed bins' as a Key Performance Indicator and a much more comprehensive approach to communications, all endorsed by Scrutiny

Members of the Scrutiny Committee could get answers from senior officers about specific anecdotes they had heard about in their Wards in addition to the work of analysing the report

The solutions and recommendation all had 'time line added by the Consultant. Scrutiny members look forward to a further chance to match performance against these dated recommendations

