

ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT & PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 30th September, 2020

Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor Gary White (Chair)

Councillors: Gill Heesom Andrew Fear
Barry Panter David Grocott
Amelia Rout Trevor Johnson

Officers: Simon McEneny Executive Director -
Commercial Development &
Economic Growth
Daniel Dickinson Head of Legal & Governance
/Monitoring Officer
Georgina Evans Head of People and
Organisational Development
Nesta Barker Head of Environmental Health
Services
Andrew Bird Head of Recycling, Waste and
Fleet Services

Also in attendance: Portfolio Holder for Environment
and Recycling

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

Apologies were received from Councillor Marion Reddish.

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 18 June, 2020 be agreed as a correct record.

4. UPDATE FROM CABINET

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Efficiency stated that Newcastle Town Centre was doing well and a number of Councillors had commented on how busy it was. People were feeling safer shopping in the town and the 10pm curfew was working well. Councillor Sweeney encouraged Members to look down the side streets next time they were in the town as there were some 'hidden gems' of shops there too.

The Chair endorsed what Councillor Sweeney had said and added that he had spoken to shopkeepers who had said that trade was up and more buoyant than it had been for a number of years.

5. DELIVERY OF THE COUNCIL'S NEW RECYCLING SERVICE AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Recycling, Councillor Trevor Johnson stated that the old system had not been working. A cross-party Cabinet Panel was set up and a public consultation had been carried out. Taking the comments on board, a model was achieved that was liked by all.

The current pandemic brought the introduction of the new service forward as the service that was being operated during lockdown was a similar model to the new service. Twenty percent more waste was now being collected and contamination stood at two percent.

The Council's Head of Recycling, Waste and Fleet Services, Andrew Bird advised Members that reports had been brought to this Committee over the past eighteen months. It had been planned to roll out the new service in September but the Coronavirus meant changing very quickly to a service that could cope with social distancing and a reduced workforce.

The new service was brought in very quickly and for a short period, two systems were running at the same time.

The twin stream commenced on 8 June in Silverdale and Knutton and the full service was in operation by 27 July – two months ahead of schedule.

The new service was now two months in and Andrew Bird thanked everyone involved for their efficient and effective work. The roll out of the new containers had also gone well.

Andrew Bird stated that it could have gone better if an exact start date for the new system had been given to residents as the moving from weekly to fortnightly collections did cause some confusion.

Councillor Fear congratulated everyone involved for their hard work and stated that it had gone really well.

Councillor Panter asked if the Council had a cost effective service compared to the old system and if there were any future changes, could they be advertised in the press as not everyone had access to IT equipment.

Andrew Bird stated that the new collection system was more efficient and more productive.

The Chair asked if cardboard that had been left out in heavy rain reduced in value.

Andrew Bird stated that the processor accepted moisture of up to 40%.

Councillor Trevor Johnson asked what a contaminated load would cost to the Council and was advised that this would be between £1500 to £2000.

Councillor Sweeney thanked Andrew Bird and his team for the introduction of the new system, stating that it could not have gone any better, especially as the Country had been in lockdown at the time.

The Chair stated that, from a Ward perspective the feedback had been positive and he had not seen any negative issues raised on social media. The Chair advised that he would write to Andrew Bird and his team expressing thanks to everyone.

It was agreed that the recycling service did not need to send any further reports to this Scrutiny Committee.

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

6. ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES - IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Consideration was given to a report reviewing the Environmental Health Service's additional workload as a result of Covid 19. The Chair stated that the Council needed to be sure that everything was being done to ensure that the Department was supported.

The Council's Head of Environmental Health Services, Nesta Barker referred Members to Section 2 of the report which outlined the areas of work and changes that were made due to Covid 19.

Officers who were unable to do their usual work had assisted with Covid work or had helped in other areas of the Service.

Nuisance complaints had increased, possibly due to the increase in the daytime occupation of homes. The complaints had included noise and bonfires.

The pandemic had brought about new legal requirements such as ensuring that businesses were closed during the lockdown period and dealing with those that were still open. In addition, there was a requirement to advise businesses on their safe reopening and dealing with any non-compliances.

Members' attention was also drawn to paragraph 8 of the report which outlined the financial and resource implications associated with Covid 19.

A lot of the programmed work had to be set aside to deal with Covid issues. This would now be reintroduced and could highlight difficulties in resources as the pandemic continues.

The Chair referred to paragraph 8.1 of the report which stated that additional staffing resource had been secured and funding streams were being used. The Chair asked what those funding streams were.

Nesta Barker advised that £50,000 had been received from the County Council towards this, which was a first instalment. It had originally been estimated that Covid

19 would equate to one Environmental Health Officer over a twelve month period but it was actually coming in peaks and troughs.

The Chair asked, with cases increasing, what resilience was there within the Department to ensure that all legislative requirements could be met.

Nesta Barker advised that it was down to prioritisation and any officer who could deal with any issues, would. In addition, all District Councils in Staffordshire had a mutual agreement to help each other out as and when required.

Councillor Rout stated that she could see how much work the team were doing and asked if anything was being done to support them.

Nesta Barker stated that they were looking out for their teams who were being encouraged to take leave to ensure that people were taking a break. Work was being divided out and there were a number of support mechanisms in place.

Councillor Panter referred to paragraph 2.8 of the report – monitoring of air quality and asked, what disruption there had been due to Covid 19.

Nesta Barker advised that air quality had been monitored for two months during the pandemic and there had been a reduction in Nitrogen Dioxide and was currently at 90% of what it was before lockdown. Regarding the Air Quality Project, there would be a number of forecasts up to 2023 and an update on this would be given at the next Scrutiny Committee meeting.

The Chair asked if anything needed to be brought to the Committee's attention.

Nesta Barker stated that everyone had been very supportive and, if Covid 19 continues, she would have to look at how to deal with the routine work and how it was prioritised and delivered in order to get back to a new normal.

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

7. FUTURE HIGH STREET FUND APPLICATION

Members received a presentation from the Executive Director – Commercial Development and Economic Growth, Simon McEneny.

The presentation gave an overview of the Future High Street Funding bid that had been submitted by this Council to create a 'New Town Centre for All'.

The main purpose of the bid was to deliver aspiration for the Ryecroft site, the Midway Car Park and potentially, York Place. The development would bring more residential units into the town plus more business usage.

Key milestones were also outlined in the presentation with works commencing in May, 2021 and a completion date of July 2023.

The Chair thanked Simon McEneny for the presentation stating that it would be a big change for the town.

The Chair asked if the Future High Streets Fund and the Town Deal Fund, covered in the next report, were separate mechanisms.

Simon McEneny confirmed this stating that the Future High Streets Fund had to be applied for whereas the Town Deal Fund was available on submission of a bid. Both Funds would bring in a total of almost £70m over the next few years.

With regard to the Future High Streets Fund, an answer as to whether the Council had been successful was expected within the next month.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Efficiency, Councillor Stephen Sweeney endorsed the proposals put forward in the presentation stating that, improving the edges of the town would change the whole town centre.

Councillor Panter asked if there would be any consultation with the traders on the proposals. Simon McEneny confirmed that market traders had been met with last week to discuss a prototype for new market stalls. One would be placed outside of WH Smiths within the next two weeks.

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

8. TOWN DEALS UPDATE

Members received a presentation from the Executive Director – Commercial Development and Economic Growth, Simon McEneny.

The presentation gave an overview of the Town Deal Fund which the Government had invited 100 places across the UK to develop proposals. This would include both Newcastle and Kildgrove Town Centre's. Bids had been invited for up to £25m for both Town Centres.

Two Town Deal Boards had been set up, chaired by the private sector with Councillor Sweeney being the Council's representative on the Newcastle Board and Councillor Simon Tagg on the Kildgrove Board.

The Newcastle Town Centre Masterplan was under development and would link to the Future High Streets Fund focussing on the key development sites and looking at transport routes including subways, walkways and cycle routes.

It would take in elements of the Knutton Masterplan and the Cross Street, Chesterton Masterplan. The Chatterley Valley plan could be a joint Town Deal Project with Kildgrove.

The Kildgrove Town Centre Masterplan would also look at the Railway Station and Canal footpath plus the Leisure Centre and health and wellbeing facilities including Clough Hall Park. Also, the small business units at West Avenue, Butt Lane would be included in the project.

The Town Deal Grant award, to deliver capital projects during the 2020/21 financial year, was £1m for Newcastle and £750,000 for Kildgrove. The Plans had been endorsed by the respective Boards and have support from the Members of Parliament representing both areas.

The Chair thanked Simon McEneny for the presentation and asked when the bids needed to be ready by. The bids could be submitted in either October this year or

January, 2021. The Town Boards had agreed to submit the bids in January to allow time to finalise them. Submission in October would bring the money in April, 2021 and submission in January would bring it in July. There would then be a period of five years given to spend the money.

The Chair asked if resources were in place to support this and was advised that a company called AECOM were getting the bids ready.

The Chair asked if public opinion had been taken on board from consultations and was advised that this was the case for the Future High Streets Fund but not, as yet for the Town Deals Fund.

Councillor Sweeney stated that he was the County Councillor for Newcastle South which included the Town Centre and said that all of the work would make the Town Centre more welcoming.

Councillor Panter thanked Simon McEneny for the clear and informative presentation and requested a paper copy.

The Chair stated that it was a great summary and a great opportunity to revitalise a number of areas in the Borough.

Updates on the Town Deals Funding would be brought to future meetings.

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

9. **SCRUTINY WORKING PARTY'S FINDINGS ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

Consideration was given to a report providing Members with the outcome and recommendations of the Climate Change Working Group.

The Chair summarised the recommendations of the Working Group which were appended to the report, stating that the aim was for all Council owned buildings to be carbon neutral by 2030 and for the Borough by 2050.

The Council needed to ensure that it continued to work with Keele University who was leading the way in energy efficiency.

There was a need to look at other initiatives for electric charging points in the Borough and to make the transport infrastructure more efficient.

More cycle tracks were needed as was enhanced tree planting around the Borough.

The recommendations of the Working Group would be submitted to the Cabinet.

Resolved: (i) That the recommendations of the Climate Change Working Group be endorsed and recommended to Council

10. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair stated that a meeting would be held soon to discuss the Work Programme and Members were asked to email the Chair with any topics that they wished to be added to the programme.

Resolved: That the Work Programme be received and the comments noted.

11. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

12. **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business.

Chair

Meeting concluded at 8.40 pm