

HEALTH, WELLBEING & ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 7th September, 2023
Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

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Present:	Councillor Ian Wilkes (Chair)		
Councillors:	Adcock Barker MBE Brown	Dymond S Jones Northcott	Reece
Apologies:	Councillor(s) Crisp and Wright		
Substitutes:	Councillor Gillian Burnett -Faulkner (In place of Councillor Nicholas Crisp) Councillor Dave Jones (In place of Councillor Ruth Wright)		
Officers:	Becky Allen Krestal Al-Daami Nesta Barker	Landscape & Community Manager Rough Sleeper & Homelessness Lead Service Director - Regulatory Services	
Also in attendance:	Councillor David Hutchison Councillor Stephen Sweeney	Portfolio Holder - Sustainable Environment Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder - Finance, Town Centres and Growth	

1. **APOLOGIES**

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllr Northcott declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to item 5. The Chair declared a non-pecuniary interest later on under item 7 for working where provides accommodations to the homeless.

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

Cllr Brown asked if members could have sight of the tree maintenance program referred to in item 4 of the minutes of the previous meeting. Officers confirmed this would be arranged.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 14th June 2023 be agreed as accurate record.

4. UPDATE FROM CABINET

There were no requests for Cabinet update in matters previously raised by the Committee. The Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Environment said he would liaise with the relevant service director and get back to Cllr Brown regarding tree planting strategy. The portfolio holder then gave an overview on the food waste discussion that took place at the last Cabinet meeting and the related procurement process that had been agreed.

Resolved: That the update be noted.

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5. STAFFORDSHIRE HEALTH & CARE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

Resolved: That the District & Borough Council Digest from Staffordshire County Council Health & Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee be received.

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6. WALLEYS QUARRY UPDATE

The Service Director for Regulatory Services presented an update report on the problematic odours associated with Walleys Quarry and progress made liaising with the operator.

Members raised questions and responses were provided as follows:

- Cllr Brown asked about the correlation between hydrogen levels and complaints and whether this extended to incidents reported. – This varied and a clear link couldn't be established.
- Cllr Adcock welcomed the work done and wondered about monitoring stations other than those mentioned in the officer's report. – No information had been received and could be presented at this moment.
- Cllr Jones asked about the reliability of the system now in place in the event of odours coming back in the cold months and what would be the process if it were to occur. – The situation was very different from the previous year. Practices and processes were regularly updated and regular meetings were taking place with the operator so that the right action was taken at the right time. The respect of the abatement notice was being monitored and legal action could be undertaken in the event of a breach resulting in statutory nuisance.

Cllr Jones commented that residents may be more sensitive to odours than they were in the past and while lower levels of pollution may be recorded the number of complaints may still rise.

Resolved: That the contents of the update report be noted.

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7. HOMELESSNESS - REVIEW OF NEW ARRANGEMENTS

The Rough Sleepers & Homeless Lead gave an overview on the development of roles and activities to support individuals who were or had been homeless and rough sleeping. The Service Director for Regulatory Services added a note on homelessness as a result of changes in personal circumstances and Newcastle Housing Advice.

Members asked questions and responses were provided as follows:

- Cllr Reece wondered if there were any contingency plans in case of suspension of funding. – Funding had been received since 2018 and was secured until 2025. Provided there would still be a need then, which would be demonstrated, the agreement would be renewed.
- Cllr Jones wished to have more information on the role of veterans' charities. – The Council was working closely with those and veterans concerned by homelessness were signposted to the right place.
- Cllr Burnett asked how to differentiate rough sleepers in a tent from travellers and eviction procedures. – It was the responsibility of the land owner, to take action to move people on. The Council was focusing on trying to find a more permanent resolution of the issue in terms of homelessness.
- Cllr Barker didn't know what to do when witnessing altercations involving homeless people. – Incidents were to be reported to the police. The Chair commented that details of who to contact would be useful for cases of mental health episodes for which the police was powerless. Information would be provided by officers after the meeting.

Resolved:

1. That the report on the Homelessness Review of New Arrangements be received.
2. That views on the roles and activities included in the review be provided.

[Watch the debate here](#)

8. **REVIEW OF ALLOTMENT WAITING LIST**

The Landscape and Community Manager presented a review on the current situation in terms of allotment waiting list and strategy going forward.

Members asked questions and responses were provided as follows:

- Cllr Dymond suggested that unused tennis courts be used for raised beds and additional plots.
- Cllr Jones wondered why recommendations about involving developers in providing allotment plots were not implemented through section 106. – The recommendations formed part of the most recent Open Spaces strategy and were therefore not featured in previous developments.
- Cllr Reece asked when plots were inspected by officers and how many were currently being neglected. – Inspections were taking place twice a year around springtime and the autumn. 98% of the plots were occupied.

- Cllr Reece suggested that applicants who don't have a garden or only a small one take priority when allotments were being allocated. – This could be considered when updating the policy.

Resolved:

1. That the report be received.
2. That views on potential affordable and sustainable community solutions to address the demand for allotment plots be provided.

[Watch the debate here](#)

9. CHIEF FIRE OFFICER - Q & A

The Chief Fire Officer gave a verbal update on recent matters relating to firefighting of which the recent inspection undertaken by His Majesty Inspector for Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services and the current situation with regard to each recommendation.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer then went through the ongoing trial in response to the motion recently brought to Council allowing the deployment of crews of three instead of four which was already proving to be successful in terms of response time and rescue of residents.

Members asked questions and responses were provided as follows:

- Cllr Jones wished to have more information about what would have happened in the cited case of the tumbler dryer fire if the neighbours hadn't intervened. – The fire would have escalated and the situation would have been much more dangerous.
- Cllr Reece asked if the previous availability of fire appliances could be maintained. – Firefighters were being trained and this was taking time but progress was underway to meet again the previous figures.
- Cllr Brown wondered if the trial would be done if all resources were available. – Money was not always solving problems and on call service was mostly about availability, proximity to the fire station and readiness to drop everything.
- Cllr Adcock asked about timescales. – The trial was due to conclude in December and would be scrutinized through the Fire Services governance to decide whether it was to continue or not.
- Cllr Jones wished to know more about the technologies used and whether crews of three would be able to operate them. – The reduced crew would come to get the work started as soon as possible and be joined afterwards by other crew members to help operate the whole of the equipment.

The Chair expressed his respect for the work and experience of the Chief Fire Officer and the firefighting team.

Cllr Jones suggested that the team comes back after December to report on the outcomes of the trial once completed.

Resolved: That the item be scheduled again at a later meeting of the Committee for the Fire Services team to come back and report on the trial following its completion in December.

[Watch the debate here](#)

10. CYCLE ROUTES & LANE PROVISION

Staffordshire County Council Head of Connectivity Strategy gave a presentation on Cycle Routes in Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Members asked questions and responses were provided as follows:

- Cllr Barker asked about social prescribing. – The project consisted in working alongside GP surgeries on the prescription of physical activities with an element of social interaction.
- Cllr Jones asked if communication had been engaged with the hospital regarding nearby cycling routes. – The standards required by the government were that cycle routes be segregated from both pedestrians and traffic. The County Council had picked a route that was safer and quieter and were keen to engage with cycling groups.
- Cllr Reece asked for clarification regarding the first map included in the presentation. – Details were provided.
- Cllr Dymond asked how the main cycling routes were identified. – The data was collected using Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

Resolved: That the presentation be received.

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11. WORK PROGRAMME

The Vice-Chair confirmed the request for the Chief Fire Officer and his team to come back at the meeting after December to present the outcomes of the trial.

The request to have an item about involving leisure centres to tackle child obesity was reiterated and would be discussed with officers.

Cllr Heesom suggested that someone from the police team comes to speak about right care and right person.

Cllr Jones wondered if the NHS dental care could also be added.

Resolved: That the work programme be noted.

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12. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions from members of the public.

13. URGENT BUSINESS

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There was no urgent business.

14. **DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION**
15. **HOMELESSNESS CONFIDENTIAL APPENDIX 2**
16. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Resolved: That the next meeting be held on 27th November 2023.

**Councillor Ian Wilkes
Chair**

Meeting concluded at 9.08 pm