

NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

9 DECEMBER 2021

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool.

Present:

Councillor: Cameron Stokell (In the Chair)

Councillors: Rob Cook, Rachel Creevy and Peter Jackson.

Also Present: Councillor Carl Richardson as substitute for Councillor Helen Howson in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.2.
Councillor Tom Cassidy as substitute for Councillor Brenda Loynes in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.2.
Councillor Shane Moore as substitute for Councillor Darren Price in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.2.

Councillors Ben Clayton, Brenda Harrison, Jim Lindridge.

Officers: Tony Hanson, Director of Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services
Kieran Bostock, Assistant Director, Place Management
Sylvia Pinkney, Assistant Director, Regulatory Services
Philip Hepburn, Enforcement and Car Parking Services Manager
Steve Hilton, Communications and Marketing Team
David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

28. Apologies for Absence

Councillors Helen Howson, Brenda Loynes and Darren Price.

29. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Carl Richardson declared a personal interest.

30. Minutes of the meeting held on 19 October 2021

Received.

Members sought an update on the traffic issues being caused by the works to create the new roundabout on the A179. The Assistant Director, Place Management reported that officers had been working with the developers undertaking the works and utility companies whose works would follow to minimise disruption by removing as much of the restrictions as possible

when work was not taking place. Officers would continue to monitor the situation and ensure all the restrictions were in accordance with regulations. An improvement in the lights at the Tall Ships roundabout had been agreed so there were only 3 stages to the lights and restricted access from the Clavering side and also that in the busiest traffic periods there would be manual override of the lights to allow as much traffic to clear the lights as possible. Members thanked the Assistant Director for the update and the improvements to the situation.

31. Review of Neighbourhood and Regulatory Services (Director of Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services)

Type of decision

Non-key – referral from Full Council. An invitation had been extended to all Members of Council for the consideration of this item.

Purpose of report

On 30 September 2021, it was agreed by Full Council, in response to a motion on the work delivered by the Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services Department that a report would be presented to the Neighbourhood Services Committee for consideration, before taking a further report to Full Council in December.

The report submitted detailed the work carried out by the Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services Department, some of the innovative work that has been undertaken in recent years, highlighting the challenges we have faced and the changes we have seen in service delivery during this time.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services outlined the motion that had been agreed at Council on 30 September and presented an overview of the service provided by the department. The Director highlighted that all the services currently being provided had to be seen against the background of the budget savings the department had been required to find over recent years.

Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services has achieved significant savings in the last few years with the reduction of nearly £1.7m over the last 10 years from its revenue budget. The Environmental Services Team has provided the majority of those savings with £1.4m achieved. The combined resources for this service had been reduced from 70 core staff and 16 casual workers in 2016, to 53 core staff, 7 casual workers and 3 apprentices in 2021. From those staffing figures remaining, 45 staff members were allocated to essential and ongoing work. The remaining staff carry out tasks such as weed management and cleansing duties, fly tipping removal, litter picking open spaces, shrub bed maintenance, hand grass cutting rounds, the maintenance of shopping parades and car parks,

marking out sports pitches, maintaining bowling greens, and reacting to customer service/Ward Member requests. The service had also reduced the number of fleet vehicles it operated, and in the last 5 years 8 sweepers, 5 mowers and 2 vans had been removed from the service to help achieve the necessary savings proposals.

In January 2016 the separate roles of civil car parking and environmental enforcement officer were merged to a general civil enforcement role. At that time there were 17 staff within the team, whereas the current team consists of 8 Civil Enforcement Officer posts, 2 supervisors and a team leader in this, which is a reduction of 6 employees in the service. There had been some recent issues with vacancies and the filling of those posts but the service was now returned to a full complement of staff.

The report set out the service transformation that the department had undergone to continue to provide services with the much reduced staffing resources available. The Director also highlighted the significant work that staff had undertaken during the Covid pandemic.

In terms of services innovation, the Director referred to the major innovation and efficiency to service delivery the new On Line Portal provided both the public and Elected Members, and also the significant benefits the integrated Hartlepool Community Safety Team comprising of the Council's Community Safety Team, Cleveland Police and Cleveland Fire Brigade, supported by a number of other Council services, and partners such as Thirteen Group and other housing providers had brought to the town.

The Director also highlighted the continued capital investment that had taken place and also the significant awards and achievements the department had achieved.

The Director in concluding stated he remained extremely proud of the services the department provided and despite the challenges that it had, and continued to face, staff had continued to deliver many front line services to residents, visitors and businesses across Hartlepool.

The Chair thanked the Director for the comprehensive report. The Chair asked if when submitting reports of issues into the online portal were the public, and elected Members, given any estimated time frame as to when the matter would be dealt with. The Director stated that not at this time but if the Committee wished for such to be added to the system, he would liaise with the Digital and Customer Services Manager on the potential of adding this to the response sent to the public / Elected Members. The Chair moved the proposal which was seconded in the meeting. Members also suggested some checking of jobs also be introduced to ensure that tasks were being dealt with in a timely manner. Members also asked for details of how many registered users of the system there were.

Members also made the following comments / observations during debate on the report: -

The out of hours message for the emergency contact number needed to be revised to highlight the emergency number first before saying the Council offices are closed as many people hung up at that point. The Director stated he would take this up with the Digital and Customer Services Manager.

Online booking for the Household Waste and Recycling Centre (HWRC) was working well but some people were still 'digital averse', so there was need for publicity to include the telephone number for bookings.

The closure of the HWRC on Monday and Tuesday was questioned and the Director stated this was due to a previous Council decision on budget savings in 2019/20. In response to further questions, the Director explained that some staff at HMRC only work the five days it is open, while other do switch to other duties on the site or in other areas on Monday and Tuesday. Members considered that there had been increased fly-tipping due to the reduction in opening of the HWRC and questioned the increase of fly-tipping incidents since the changes in opening times. The Assistant Director, Regulatory Services commented that the majority of fly-tipping reports related to waste in back alleys. The Officer Working Group established to tackle the problem of fly-tipping was reviewing the collection of information to separate out the waste from back alleys.

Litter and fly tipping – Members considered that there needed to be greater public education on the costs and environmental problems fly tipping caused. The Director indicated that HBC staff collecting litter and dealing with fly tipping could be utilised elsewhere, such as on weed spraying and grass cutting, if people simply took their litter home or didn't break the law on fly tipping and took waste to HWRC. Recently the variable signage into the town had been used to highlight that the cost of the most recent litter collection from verges due to inconsiderate drivers on the A689 into the town had cost £6000.

Members raised concerns that while some 'main road' areas were being cleaned, there was some disparity in the general appearance of some areas over others. The Director requested that Members email either himself or Kieran Bostock if they saw particular problems. Ward 'deep cleans' had only just re-started following Covid and were only happening due to the retention of some seasonal workers to assist the permanent staff. Permanent staffing had been reduced by a third in the last decade yet standards were still comparably higher than several neighbouring authorities.

Volunteer litter pickers – the Director stated that the department would happily support any volunteer litter picking group, they only had to get in touch with the department.

Collection of grass cuttings which could cause problems on footpaths, particularly for the elderly, was being investigated by officers and would be reported to the Committee.

Spraying of weeds; Members were concerned that many areas were looking 'scruffy' due to a lack of weed spraying. The Director stated that weed spraying had reduced during Covid due to the redeployment of staff elsewhere to respond to the pandemic. Weed spraying would recommence and was being undertaken as part of the 'deep clean' process. Members had to be aware that not all problem areas were public land and officers simply could not enter privately owned land. There also needed to be some 'local pride' where the public could tackle small issues in their locale.

The Firmstep system was a significant innovation for reporting and managing work for frontline staff; efficiency was significantly improved. Officers did regularly speak to other local authorities across the North East and new ways of working and new methods were discussed and shared. Several such improvements had been made here and others had copied many of ours.

Parking issues at schools; Members considered that there needed to be more coordinated enforcement with the Police to educate parents at school drop-off and pick-up times. Officers undertook to look at greater coordination between Council enforcement officers and the Police.

In concluding the debate the Chair thanked Members for their attendance and contributions to the debate.

Decision

1. That the report and Members comments be noted.
2. That the problems/issues reported to the online 'Portal' (Firmstep) be improved to provide an indicative timeframe for the problem to be resolved.
3. That the Council should improve and reinforce its messages on littering and fly-tipping with the public by all means possible – print media and social media.

32. Additional Highway Maintenance Programme (*Assistant Director, Place Management*)

Type of decision

Key Decision test (i) and (ii) applies. General Exception from Forward Plan applies.

Purpose of report

To seek approval for an accelerated programme of highway resurfacing schemes, following the confirmation of additional funding under the Pot-Hole Fund and Highways Maintenance Incentive Fund. The total additional funding was £393,000.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Place Management reported that the additional funding has only recently been received from the Tees Valley Combined Authority, with the intention that this is spent in the financial year 2021/22. The proposed works had been selected (set out in Appendix 1 to the report) using the usual methods of assessing data from scanner surveys, supplemented by rating assessments carried out in house on the basis of Highway Inspector's reports, with consideration also being given to requests received from members of the public and Elected Members. Full resurfacing schemes are more sustainable and offer a greater value for money than 'pothole filling', and as this additional funding has allowed schemes on the existing programme to be accelerated, this will be reflected when the refreshed five year programme is brought before Committee in 2022.

The Chair welcomed the report and the additional funding which was a good news story for the town. Members questioned some of the costs quoted in the report for the schemes which didn't match the costs set out in the previously approved 5 year plan. The Assistant Director stated some would only be partial works while others may be due to changes in materials or because recent surveys had pushed them much higher up the priority list.

There was also concern that a substantial amount of work seemed to centre around Dalton Piercy which a Member considered not to be as bad as many other routes. The Assistant Director indicated that not the whole of Dalton Back Lane had been proposed for resurfacing. Members proposed that if the remaining scheme for Dalton Piercy was scheduled to come forward in next year's schemes and was a separate section of the road, it should be pushed back to allow other schemes in other areas to come forward. The Assistant Director indicated that the schemes would be reviewed and reported back to Members.

The Assistant Director also responded to Members queries around the phasing of some roads being resurfaced, such as Mowbray Road and Chichester Road which had been done in smaller phases rather than all at once causing several periods of disruption for resident. The Assistant Director stated that with limited funds, doing a complete scheme such as Mowbray Road in one would have taken up a very significant proportion of the finance available. Phasing allowed the worst sections to be dealt with first and other areas also to benefit.

A Member commented that a resident whose local estate road had been paved with red tarmac had complained that remedial 'spot' repairs had

been done in black tarmac. The Assistant Director stated that red tarmac was not a surface the Council recommended to developers as it cost three times as much as black tarmac. If areas were to be subject to full resurfacing consideration may be given to reinstating with red tarmac but for small patching work it was impossible for the authority to purchase such small volumes of red tarmac.

Decision

1. That the programme of works reported be approved.
2. That further consideration be given to the schemes around Dalton Piercy in the five year plan in light of the scheme approved as part of this funding.
3. That power be delegated to the Director of Neighbourhood and Regulatory Services, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee to amend the list of schemes if necessary and that any changes be circulated to Members of the Committee and appropriate Ward Members.

33. Health and Safety Enforcement Service Plan 2021/22

(Assistant Director, Regulatory Services)

Type of decision

Non-Key decision.

Purpose of report

To consider the Health and Safety Service Plan for 2021/22, which was a requirement under Section 18 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Regulatory Services submitted for Members approval the Health and Safety Service Plan for 2021/22. Members referred to the notices issued under Coronavirus legislation and asked what type of businesses had been in breach of the regulations. The Assistant Director stated that a circus, a fitness gym and a dance studio had all been issued with notices, though there were a range of measures that could be applied before utilising fixed penalty notices. Where fixed penalty notices had been issued, they had either been paid or action was being taken to recover the payment.

The following decision was agreed without dissent.

Decision

That the Health and Safety Enforcement Service Plan for 2021/22 be approved.

34. Local Plan Authorities Monitoring Report 2020/21

(Assistant Director, Place Management)

Type of decision

Non-key Decision.

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report was to inform Neighbourhood Services Committee of the Local Plan Authorities Monitoring Report (AMR) 2020/21.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Place Management reported that the AMR is a statutory Local Development Framework (LDF) document produced annually by Planning Services on behalf of the Council. It reviews the progress made on the implementation of policies in the Local Plan and generally assesses their effectiveness. It was a statutory requirement that the AMR was published on the Council website each year. The Assistant Director indicated that while the Covid-19 pandemic had had some impact over the last year, it was not proposed that any policies should be amended at this time.

Members commented that some of the data used in the document did appear to be old date and a year or two out of date and Members requested updated information on the following –

- The numbers of affordable and social housing.
- Members also noted that some of the crime statistics set out in the document made very poor reading and requested details behind the reported 34% increase in recorded rape.
- Some information on the potential causes of the widespread deaths of crustaceans along the coast. The Leader of the Council stated he would share some information he had received as the Council's Member of the North east Inshore Fisheries Board.

Members also expressed some concern at the house values for Hartlepool when compared with other neighbouring areas. Members also sought an update on the numbers of beat Police Officers and PCSO's in the town.

Decision

That the content of the Local Plan Authorities Monitoring Report (AMR) 2020/21 be endorsed and published as part of the Local Development Framework.

35. Civil Enforcement Update (*Assistant Director – Regulatory Services*)

Type of decision

For information.

Purpose of report

To provide an update to members on the work of the Civil Enforcement Team and the activities they have been involved with during this reporting period.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Regulatory Services reported on the work of the Civil Enforcement Officers in the town over the past year. The Assistant Director highlighted that much of the teams work over the last year had been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and the difficulties in recruiting to vacant posts. The Assistant Director was pleased to report to the committee that all post had now been recruited to.

The Assistant Director highlighted some of the key points within the report in her presentation and indicated to Members that, as had been discussed earlier in the meeting, the recording of side waste issues in back lanes would now be recorded separately from fly-tipping incidents. 46 fly tipping notices had been issued during the year.

In relation to dog fouling, Members commented that many of the problems occurred either early in the morning or late at night when owners were walking their dogs. The Assistant Director indicated that if Members and the public could provide them with reports and intelligence they could target areas for enforcement and the time of day was not an issue.

There was debate around fly-tipping and waste on private land. Officers stressed that they had no powers to enter private land and clear fly tipped waste and then recharge the land owners. If there was dangerous waste present, the Council could take action but otherwise the law was frustrating.

Decision

That the report be noted.

36. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent

None.

Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to be held on Thursday 27 January, 2022 at 10.00 am in the Civic centre.

The meeting concluded at 4.30 pm.

H MARTIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

PUBLICATION DATE: 17 DECEMBER 2021