

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the Communities and Local Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday, 14 December 2016 at 10:30 am.

PRESENT

Councillor B Pidcock
(Chair)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

E Armstrong
L H Cairns
R R Dodd

G W Jones
V Jones

OFFICERS

S Nicholson
K Norris
M Roberts
P Simpson
B Telford

Scrutiny Officer
Democratic Services Officer
Senior Procurement Specialist
Public Health Protection Manager
Commercial Advisor

ALSO PRESENT

D Ledger
ICF Swithenbank

Deputy Leader
Cabinet Member for Local Services

38. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Foster, Graham and Grimshaw.

39. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Communities and Local Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 23 November 2016, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

Ch.'s Initials.....

40. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

Members received the latest Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period December 2016 to March 2017 (copy attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix A**).

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY CABINET

41. REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

Environmental Enforcement Fixed Penalty Notice Policy 2017

The above report would be presented to Cabinet on 10 January 2017 and comments made by this committee would be forwarded for its consideration.

Peter Simpson, Public Health Protection Manager, summarised the report which set out how the Council would enforce through the use of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs). (A copy of the report is attached to the signed Minutes as **Appendix B**.)

The Council's current fixed penalty policy was adopted in 2009 but was no longer fit for purpose because of legislative changes. The proposed new policy was produced following a review process by an officer group and took into account new legislation and amendments to other key legislation, details of which were set out in the report. Reference was made to the table in section 6 of the policy which set out the level of fines deemed appropriate for each particular offence listed and included provision for a reduced fine level of early payment.

The use of FPNs was an essential part of the Council's approach to environmental enforcement. They would normally be issued for first time offenders, were an alternative to prosecution for less serious offences and would deter repeat offences.

Members then asked questions and commented as follows:

- Concerns were raised about the FPN for fly tipping as it was felt that some larger businesses may consider a £400 fine preferable to disposing of rubbish. In response it was stated that issuing an FPN was at the discretion of the Enforcement Team, the size of the business would be taken into account and if it was considered more appropriate a prosecution would be made. It was noted that officers took a proactive approach to fly tipping and covert cameras were placed in areas considered to be hot spots. If members had any evidence of fly tipping or had suggestions about the location of hot spots they should contact the Public Protection Manager.

- In response to comments regarding the level of fines for individuals, it was noted that financial hardship was considered on a case by case basis but usually payment must be made.
- Concerns were raised about the dangers of approaching individuals who consumed alcohol in public places. It was noted that such offences were subject to Public Space Protection Orders and were dealt with by the Police.
- It was confirmed that enforcement was carried out on the illegal burning of rubbish but it was not included in the Policy because the relevant legislation did not provide the power to issue FPNs, however, the Council did have the power to prosecute.

RESOLVED - that the Communities and Local Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee support the recommendation to Cabinet that the Environmental Enforcement Fixed Penalty Notice Policy 2017 be received and adopted.

REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY

42. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PROCUREMENT

Progress on Green Energy

The report provided members with an update on the progress of the strategy on delivering cost-effective Green Energy to the Council and its wider population. A strategy designed to reduce the reliance on fossil fuels, reduce the cost of energy and alleviate fuel poverty and at the same time seek to generate financial value for the Council. (A copy of the report is attached to the signed Minutes as **Appendix C.**)

Bob Telford, Commercial Advisor, summarised the report stating that the commercial team had initiated a number of projects with a view to delivering a range of solutions to exploit renewable energy opportunities to alleviate fuel poverty and to generate additional revenues. The program consisted of a review of the energy markets; a review of the authority's existing energy purchase strategies; the expansion of the PV solar panels programme to remaining viable Council and domestic properties; an investigation into the opportunities available through the deployment of ground source heat pump technology; an investigation into potential deployment of new battery technologies; the delivery of a suitable strategy to support the move to low emission electric vehicles and the identification of potential market opportunities - full details of which were set out in the report.

Members were then invited to comment and ask questions:

- Discussion took place about the benefits of planting trees, generating income from wood and wood chip as an energy source.
- Questions were raised as to what currently happened to wood when trees were felled. It was stated that was under the remit of the Acting Head of

Neighbourhood Services and Housing Delivery so he would be requested to provide that information.

- Reference was made to the benefits of hydro electric power.
- The benefits of battery storage were discussed, it was noted that prices were dropping and it was now marginally economically viable.
- Concerns were raised that many chargers for electric cars were not being used and taking up much needed parking spaces in car parks. It was stated that last year the usage of EV car chargers had generated costs to the Council of £40,000. In response to comments about the number of chargers that appeared to be out of commission, it was stated that efforts were underway to bring those chargers back into commission.
- There were comments about the high cost of electric cars and it was acknowledged that they did command premium prices but were increasingly popular in the company car market, along with hybrid cars, because of the tax incentives. The accepted view was that the use of electric and hybrid cars were likely to increase but would be impacted by the available charging infrastructure.
- It was queried if chargers were provided at Berwick and Alnmouth railway stations as there was an opportunity to work with manufacturers and hire out vehicles.
- In response to a question about biomass boilers it was stated there were some operating in schools but they were not considered to be financially viable as the running costs were high.
- With regard to air source heat pumps, these received a lower government subsidy than GSHPs and their efficiency was determined by the external air temperature which meant that, as external temperatures fell, the ASHP was less efficient in generating heat at the time it was most needed.
- Planning permission was the biggest issue surrounding wind power as many people were opposed to wind farms and a number of applications had been turned down. However, it was acknowledged that many companies were looking at small turbines on buildings in industrial sites and these could be put on a future agenda as an item to be considered.
- The previous report in 2015 had been progressive but this report indicated there had been significant cuts in funding, as had been forecast in the 2015 report.
- The outcomes of discussions with Cornwall Energy and Municipal and Mutual had failed to identify any financially viable opportunities for the Council to enter the energy provider market at an acceptable risk level. Newcastle City Council was looking at a white label proposal and, whilst the Council hadn't agreed to take part, it was monitoring progress closely.

The Chair stated that he would have liked to have seen the report address major issues such as climate change and how to progress. Green solutions had been put forward and should be built into the Corporate Plan to show a clear commitment to reducing the carbon footprint.

A member suggested that a specialist group be formed to discuss this topic. There was a real opportunity to generate income from timber and produce wood chip but direction was needed. The Chair supported those comments but said it was unfair to put the onus on the Procurement Team who were only

a small part of those involved. A specialist group could discuss how this would fit into Council Policy.

The Cabinet Member for Local Services referred to a confidential Generation and Innovation report which had been discussed at full Council.

RESOLVED that the information be noted and the committee recommend that a specialist group be established following further examination of the points raised by members.

43. REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY OFFICER

Communities and Local Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

Members considered the above Work Programme (copy attached to signed minutes as **Appendix D**).

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

44. POLICY DIGEST

The report, available on the Council's website, provided details of policy developments that might be of interest to members.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____