
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel was held on Wednesday 20 July 2022.

PRESENT: Councillors J McTigue (Chair), R Arundale (Vice-Chair), D Branson, T Furness and J Thompson

OFFICERS: G Field, S Lightwing and J Pearce

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors B Hubbard, L Lewis and T Mawston

22/8 WELCOME AND EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair welcomed all present and read out the Building Evacuation Procedure.

22/9 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at this point in the meeting.

22/10 MINUTES - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL - 15 JUNE 2022

The minutes of the meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 15 June 2022 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

22/11 UPDATE ON TEESSIDE CREMATORIUM INCOME

In 2020 the Panel undertook a scrutiny review to examine any potential impacts of bereavement services offered by neighbouring local authorities on those provided by Middlesbrough Council at Teesside Crematorium. One of the recommendations of that review was that a six monthly update on income and any mitigation required should be provided to the Scrutiny Panel until further notice.

The Director of Environment and Community Services provided the latest update in relation to the Bereavement Services.

Originally, the Teesside Crematorium had provided services for the whole of the area. However Hartlepool, Redcar and Stockton On Tees had now opened their own facilities.

Middlesbrough's Bereavement Services included:

- Cremation and Burial Services.
- Teesside Crematorium – Crematory and two chapels for funeral and memorial services.
- Six Cemeteries: Acklam Cemetery, Thorntree (Protestant) Cemetery, Thorntree Roman Catholic Cemetery, Linthorpe Cemetery and Nature Reserve, St Joseph's Cemetery and North Ormesby Cemetery.
- Burial and Cremation record management and compliance.
- Memorialisation.
- Supplementary Maintenance (Memorial areas, grave maintenance).
- Customer Service – Public enquiries, bereavement support.
- Headstone safety testing (a statutory requirement).

Recent improvements included:

- A new Media/Tribute system – Obitus - had been installed in the Chapels.
- Committal buttons had been installed to lectern devices.
- New footpaths had been installed in Acklam Cemetery and footpath repair works were scheduled.

- Digitisation. Online forms were now available for memorial purchases.
- Improved Burial appearance. The soil was taken away from the graveside prior to interment.
- Training and Development. Industry standard training (Institute of Cemetery Management and Compliance) had been undertaken as follows:
- Five additional members of staff recently qualified to ICCM CTTS qualification (Cremation Technician).
- Exhumation training, Cemetery Management Training, CRUSE Bereavement Training and others.
- ICCM Cemetery and Crematorium Management Diploma – one ongoing.
- Middlesbrough Council had been awarded the APSE Performance Network Award for Best Performing Cemetery and Crematorium Service 2021.
- Income from metal recycled from the facility was given to charity each year.

The charities benefitting from the scheme in 2022 were the Friends of Linthorpe Cemetery and Nature Reserve and the Friends of Thorntree Cemetery.

A financial summary of the Crematorium's income was provided in the presentation. The 2021-2022 income target had not been met and the potential impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on mortality rates were not yet fully known. £150,000 additional funds had been allocated in the Council's current Medium Term Financial Plan to cover some of the pressures in the Service. Rising energy costs would have a significant factor on the service.

The Council had increased cremation prices by 1% this year, with inflation running at 3%. Inflation was now running at almost 10% and therefore prices would be kept under review.

Future plans for Bereavement Services included:

- Review pricing model annually.
- Further digitisation: Plotbox and Digital Grave mapping 2023 onwards, subject to financial approval.
- Develop and review service offers.

It was suggested that the Scrutiny Panel would receive further updates annually rather than every six months.

With regard to land available for burials in Middlesbrough it was confirmed that most of the future cemetery provision would be in Acklam and plots could no longer be pre-purchased. There was currently around 15 years of burial space left in Acklam. There had been a natural move away from burial towards cremation.

One of the services now offered by Middlesbrough Council was a direct cremation, which was less costly than a traditional funeral. This was an unattended cremation whereby the deceased was cremated without a service at the crematorium. The cremated remains could be returned to a family member or scattered in the gardens of remembrance at the crematorium. Direct cremations were arranged by Funeral Directors rather than the Council.

In response to a query about liquid or water cremation, it was explained that these were relatively new methods and not yet widely in use in the United Kingdom. Middlesbrough Council would not consider these options until they were common practice.

AGREED as follows that:

1. the information provided was received and noted.
2. future updates would be provided to the Scrutiny Panel annually.

22/12

IMPROVING AND ENHANCING THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT TOWN-WIDE - SCRUTINY REVIEW

Members watched a short video clip that had recently appeared on the BBC's Look North programme that reported on fly tipping in Middlesbrough, the Council's Environmental Enforcement Squad, and highlighted the action being taken.

The Director of Environment and Community Services provided further information in relation to environmental enforcement. The Council had identified a significant need to increase

environmental enforcement as part of reducing anti-social behaviour in Middlesbrough. There had been a rise in commercial and domestic fly tipping across the town.

The Council decided to try a new approach towards reducing fly tipping by introducing a flying squad to investigate and clean fly tips within three days of them being reported and increase enforcement activity against perpetrators. Since the flying squad was introduced there had been a 28% reduction in fly tipping and the team had been shortlisted for a national Local Government Chronicle (LGC) award.

The team was currently made up of one Senior Environmental Warden who oversaw the day to management, nine Environmental Wardens, and five Area Care Operatives.

Environmental Wardens were responsible for taking action and responding to service requests for the following areas:

- Fly tipping, littering, dog fouling, waste accumulation, waste presentation both domestic and commercial, trade waste enforcement.
- Illegal waste carriers, untaxed vehicles, abandoned vehicles and vehicles used in environmental crime.
- Dog Warden Service – Responsible for providing a statutory stray dog service (Not Dangerous Dogs).
- Enforcement of Public Space Protection Order (PSPO).
- Dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and other low level criminality when required.

The approach was that if people fly tipped in Middlesbrough, they would be fined. Successful prosecutions were publicised in order to deter others from fly tipping. The Council also tried to encourage people not to fly tip through environmental education.

Details of the prosecutions to date were as follows:

Section 46 Notice issued (not presenting waste correctly) - 92
Fixed Penalty Notice Issued - 65
Fixed Penalty Notice Issued for Dog Fouling -12
Community Protection Warning Notice Issued - 35
Community Protection Notice Issued - 10
Vehicles seized in fly tipping -10
Vehicles Seized for untaxed or Abandoned - 56
Active Investigations pending referral to legal for court action - 60+ Cases
Stray Dogs taken to Registered Charity - 25
Weight of waste removed by Operatives - 650 Ton of Waste removed in last 12 months by Environmental Flying Squad.

In relation to time taken for prosecutions, it was explained that once evidence was provided there was legislative process to complete, which included identifying the perpetrator, contacting and interviewing them and forwarding the case to Legal Services to proceed to prosecution. There was now a dedicated case working in Legal Services which had been a positive improvement to processing cases.

The Neighbourhood Safety Manager agreed to provide some statistics in relation to timescales for prosecutions.

The timescale for collection of bulky waste items was up to 12 weeks for a free collection and up to 4 weeks if it was paid for. It was highlighted that this was a service offered by the Council to assist residents but it was not a statutory requirement.

Where properties were run down or gardens overgrown and likely to cause unreasonable alarm or distress to others, a Community Protection Warning could be issued. The warning provided advice to a landlord or tenant to tidy up their property. If the advice was not heeded this would be followed by a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN). If the FPN was not complied with, the ultimate sanction would be prosecution. However, the Council would never prosecute someone who was unable to keep their property tidy for a legitimate reason.

Discussion took place in relation to side waste placed next to waste bins when they were full.

If this was outside commercial properties such as shops or takeaways, the Director stated that the bin capacity available may need to be reviewed. Side rubbish that had been left from litter picks or by area care staff would be collected by the Council and taken to the appropriate waste disposal facility.

The Chair highlighted an incident where subsoil had been dumped on open land belonging to the Council. It was confirmed that this incident was being dealt with by the Planning Development.

AGREED as follows that:

1. the information provided was received and noted.
2. information in relation to the timescale for prosecutions for fly tipping in Middlesbrough would be provided.

22/13

WORK PROGRAMME 2022-2023

Motion No. 153 – Toxic Chemicals in the River Tees had been carried at a Council meeting held on 6 July 2022. The Panel was requested by Council to give consideration to adding Toxic Chemicals in the River Tees to the scrutiny topics in this year's Work Programme.

Given that a formal request from the Council would be submitted to the Tees Valley Combined Authority for a further independent investigation to be undertaken, the Chair suggested that the outcome of that investigation (if one was undertaken), was needed prior to the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel undertaking any work on this topic.

AGREED that Councillor Branson would keep a watching brief on this developing issue and report back to the Panel as appropriate.

22/14

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE

The Chair provided a verbal update on items considered at the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 22 June and 19 July 2022.

At the meeting held on 19 July 2022, in respect of the Scrutiny Panel's proposed Work Programme Items for 2022-2023, the Overview and Scrutiny Board recommended that for its main scrutiny review topic this year the Panel should look at either Food Waste or Nutrient Neutrality.

Issues that the Panel had considered as priorities for this year including Prevention of damage to grass verges, the new Pest Control Service for residents and Enforcement of Planning Conditions would be retained in the work programme. However, other topics including the Tree Replacement Programme, Allotments and Empty Properties would not now be considered this year.

Following discussion, the Panel agreed that the main scrutiny review topic for this year would be Nutrient Neutrality.

AGREED as follows that the:

1. information provided was received and noted.
2. main review topic for this year would be Nutrient Neutrality instead of Improving and Enhancing the Physical Environment Town Wide.
3. Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel's amended Work Programme 2022-2023 would be re-submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

22/15

DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 14 SEPTEMBER 2022

The next meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel would be held at 10.30 am on Wednesday 14 September 2022. The Mayor would be in attendance to provide information in relation to the Middlesbrough Mayoral Development Corporation.

ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED

Cargo Fleet Depot – Site Visit

The Chair informed the Panel that arrangements would be made for a site visit to the Cargo Fleet Depot. The Democratic Support Officer would send the proposed dates to all Panel Members and a convenient date and time would be organised.

Teesside Crematorium

Following an invitation from the Director of Environment and Commercial Services during the meeting, a Panel Member proposed a site visit to the Teesside Crematorium. The Democratic Support Officer agreed to arrange a site visit for those Members who wished to take up the offer.