

Environment Sub-Committee

6 November 2018

Present: Councillor B Burdis (Chair)
Councillors L Bell, K Bolger, T Brady, C Davis,
D Drummond, E Hodson, G Madden and J Mole.

E12/11/18 Apologies

There were no apologies for absence reported.

E13/11/18 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members reported:

E14/11/18 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.

E15/11/18 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 4 September 2018 be confirmed.

E16/11/18 Overhanging Foliage/Branches on Pavements

At the last meeting of the Sub Committee consideration was given to a report which provided an overview of how the Authority dealt with branches and foliage which encroached over roads and footpaths. It was explained that this was of particular concern for the blind and partially sighted residents as well as pedestrians with buggies or wheelchairs (previous minute E11/09/18 refers).

Details of the number of requests for the Authority to investigate overhanging vegetation received between October 2016 and October 2018 were outlined. It was noted that the majority of requests for works to be undertaken were in respect of the Whitley Bay, Wallsend, North Shields and Longbenton wards. It was also reported that between May 2015 and October 2018 there had been 110 Members Enquiries in relation to overhanging foliage, with the top three hotspots being Benton, Weetslade and Whitley Bay Wards.

A member referred to the number of times that he had submitted requests for works to be undertaken to trees/shrubs in his ward and the prompt and efficient response which had been provided by the Authority's arborist team. He suggested that they be congratulated on their work.

Clarification was sought in relation to the steps taken to deal with foliage which blocked street lights. It was explained that where this occurred it would be referred to the contractor who managed street lighting in the borough and they could arrange for appropriate pruning to be carried out.

Reference was made to the standards in relation to the height of the foliage which was considered to be a problem. It was suggested that in relation to many pedestrians the problem was the width the foliage overhung the pavement which forced them on to the road to get around the blockage.

It was suggested that if householders were aware of the problems caused to pedestrians by foliage on their property overhanging footpaths they were more likely to take steps to address the problem. An awareness raising campaign might lead to a reduction in the issue as once aware householders would be more likely to properly maintain their shrubbery and foliage.

Officers agreed to meet with the member of the public to discuss his concerns and to consider the various options available. The Chair asked that an update be provided on the outcome of the discussions.

It was **agreed** that the report be noted.

E17/11/18 Reduction of Single Use Plastics

Consideration was given to a presentation which outlined the Authority's work to reduce the use of single use plastics in the borough following the Elected Mayors pledge to create a borough free of single use plastics. The presentation provided an overview of the history of plastics and explained that the plastic industry had an annual turnover of around £23.5bn and supported around 170,000 jobs.

The Environmental Sustainability Officer also explained that the widespread use of low cost plastics could have a downside in creating a throwaway society. He explained that with plastic there was no need to wash the dishes, they could be used and then thrown away. He referred to reports which suggested that by 2050 it was likely that there would be more plastic in the sea than fish.

Reference was made to the government's various consultations on how to deal with the plastics problem, these included:

- HM Treasury document entitled "Tackling the plastic problem – using the tax system or charges to address single use plastic waste"
- Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) – consultation on proposals to ban the distribution and/or sale of plastic straws, plastic stemmed cotton buds and plastic drink stirrers in England

It was also explained that DEFRA had published a new waste and resources strategy along with consultations on producer responsibility and deposit returns schemes.

Reference was also made to the Action Plan which had been developed to address the issue of single use plastics on the Council's estate. Initial work had been undertaken to address the use of any disposable plastic item which was designed to be used only once, such as cutlery, drinks bottles, cups, packaging, plastic bags and condiment sachets.

It was explained that the delivery plan had been split into three stages:

- Short term – working with the catering service to reduce the use of disposable cups used for hot drinks, the use of food trays and condiment sachets and to promote the use of reusable drinks containers.
- Medium term – work with the organisers of events such as Mouth of the Tyne to reduce reliance on single use plastics. The installation of water fountains in the various leisure centres was also included in the medium term strategy.
- Longer term – to examine what could be done in relation to the renewal of leases for local authority buildings to encourage the removal of single use plastics. In addition to examine the procurement strategy to encourage the use of alternative methods of packaging goods bought for the Authority.

The Sub Committee was advised that there had already been a number of successes. Plastic cutlery had been replaced across the catering service and a promotion had been carried out in relation to the use of alternative hot drinks containers. The Authority had also supported the Young Mayor's campaign in relation to reusable and refillable drinks containers. The catering service was currently examining the use of bio-degradable products and work was being undertaken in relation to the renewal of leases and catering concessions. Work was also being undertaken in relation to the alternative containers for water and soft drinks across Quadrant, the Langdale Centre and schools. It had been recognised that the use of glass bottles in the school environment could be problematic.

Reference was made to changes made at the North Tyneside 10K road race by the provision of a drinks point at the start of the event where runners could fill their own water bottles rather than lots of plastic water bottles being handed out. Work was progressing in relation to the various vending machines within leisure centres to reduce the use of plastics and replace with suitable alternatives. It was also explained that it was proposed to introduce public water fountains in leisure centres so that people could refill their own bottles.

The Sub Committee also received a presentation from Emmajo Haslam of Plastic Free North Tyneside which set out the development of the Plastic Free organisations which had already been created. She explained that there was still a lot to do to achieve a Plastic Free North Tyneside but progress was being made. It was not something which could be done by one organisation but required the engagement of businesses and the community as well as local authority.

The Sub Committee was advised that plastic pollution could be found on any beach in the world. A recent beach clean at Whitley Bay had resulted in 5 tonnes of rubbish being collected. She explained that it was now socially acceptable for people to pick up rubbish from the beach. They had had 175 volunteers cleaning the beach in the spring as part of a concerted effort but it was explained that many people took a bag with them and picked up some of the rubbish when they went for a walk on the beach.

Reference was made to the damage caused to sea creatures as a result of plastic waste entering the sea. Plastic fishing line could be wrapped around the neck or limbs of seals, dolphins and seabirds or micro-plastics being digested by birds and fish.

It was suggested that there was an estimated 200 million tons of plastic littering the oceans and the majority of it ended up being moved around the oceans in swirling gyres, circular ocean currents. Over 90% of the plastic pollution was made up of micro-plastics smaller than a finger nail.

Members sought clarification on a number of issues including:

- Recycling black plastic. It was explained that currently black plastic was not recyclable and mostly went to incineration. Reference was made to the Iceland supermarket announcement that it was to stop using black plastic trays in its ready meals and would instead use trays made of paper pulp
- Funding for recycling. It was explained that the government had identified £20M for retailers and manufacturers to come up with new products to replace plastic packaging. It was suggested that shoppers could encourage supermarkets to reduce packaging on goods such as fruit and vegetables by leaving the excess packaging in the supermarket.
- Whether the data collected by the Marine Conservation Society was now useless due to the actions of volunteers cleaning the beach on a regular basis. It was suggested that there was now a need to stop the plastics getting on the beach in the first place.
- Whether there were any plans to increase the products which could be recycled by the authority. It was suggested that under the waste hierarchy recycling was the last thing which should be done with more emphasis in reducing use and reusing products again and again.

It was suggested that an update on the progress made in delivering the delivery plan be presented to a future meeting of the Sub Committee.

The chair thanked Mr Keenlyside and Ms Haslam for their presentations and for responding to members questions.

It was agreed (1) the report be noted; and
(2) an update on progress in relation to the delivery plan be presented to a future meeting.