

DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Policy Overview Committee held on Tuesday 14 December 2021 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor M J Davis (Chairman)
Councillor M I Peters (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor S H Brown
Councillor Mrs. R M Currans
Councillor B Garden
Councillor K J Grehan
Councillor D T Nicklen
Councillor T Oliver
Councillor Mrs. J A Ozog
Councillor A S Sandhu, MBE

ABSENT: Councillor E H Ben Moussa
Councillor J Burrell
Councillor S P Butterfill
Councillor L A Canham
Councillor L H K Edie
Councillor R A S Jones
Councillor Mrs. R F Storey

Dartford Borough Council Officers

Peter Dosad	– Director of Housing & Public Protection
Adrian Gowan	– Community Services Manager
Mark Salisbury	– EARS & CSU Manager
Richard Cherry	– Enforcement Manager, CSU
Dave Thomas	– Waste & Parks Manager
Darian Keady	– Team Leader, Environmental Health
James Fox	– Scientific Officer

19. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chairman welcomed Members and attending Officers to the meeting and thanked them for attending the proceedings in the current Covid-19 climate.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: Ben Moussa, Burrell, Butterfill, Canham, Edie and Jones.

20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

21. CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE POLICY OVERVIEW MEETING HELD ON 14 SEPTEMBER 2021

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RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Policy Overview Committee held on 14 September 2021 be confirmed as an accurate record of those discussions.

22. URGENT ITEMS

The Chairman confirmed that there were no urgent items for the Committee to consider.

23. TO CONSIDER REFERENCES FROM OTHER COMMITTEES (IF ANY)

There were no references from other Committees for Members to consider.

24. REGULATION 9 NOTICE (FORWARD PLAN)

RESOLVED:

1. That Members note the contents of the Regulation 9 Notice [Forward Plan] for the period **29 November 2021** to **31 March 2022**.

25. AIR QUALITY UPDATE 2021

The report from the Council's Scientific Officer provided Members with information on pollution levels across the Borough and within the four (4) declared Air Quality Management Areas, together with an update on the Council's Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP). The Council's Air Quality Annual Status Report was attached at Appendix A to the report, with a Supplementary Air Quality Monitoring Report 2021 attached as Appendix B for Members' information.

The Chairman thanked the Scientific Officer for his report and appendices and proposed that Members accept the documents as tabled and that discussion proceed in a Q&A format with presenting Officers to address any specific questions or points of concern Members might have. He began that process by seeking confirmation of the dates and periods covered in the 2021 update report, including DEFRA's appraisal of Dartford's ASR [report p.5 agenda p.33 refers], which did *not* give a year or quote a period covered. He suggested 2020 was more appropriate than 2021 and expressed further reservations over the presentation of the data in the table recording '*Progress on Measurements to Improve Air Quality*' [report para 2.2 agenda pages 35-47 refers], which was too compressed and not overly user-friendly.

The Chairman noted in the wider context, that the report had recorded an improvement in Dartford's air quality during 2020-21, including during the period *prior to* the first COVID-19 lockdown measures being imposed. Measures that had served to help improve air quality levels in the Borough further, given the reduction in vehicle emission levels as a consequence of the Government's 'Work from Home' policy. In concluding his initial comments he emphasised the high profile nature of the topic, and encouraged all Members

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to take the opportunity to feed into and contribute to the Council's Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) going forward.

In response to subsequent questions of detail from the Chairman and individual Members the Scientific Officer confirmed the following points:

- He noted the Chairman's concerns over data and acknowledged that the majority of the report and appendixes had covered the 2020 calendar year and up to September 2021;
- The table format in the ASR was a prescribed DEFRA document which read better on-screen than when printed;
- There were no readily available figures for the number of electrical vehicle (EV) charging points in the Borough;
- Planning applications for new build properties had to include EV charging points as evidenced in the Ebbsfleet Green development, with some developers in the Dartford area also agreeing to undertake retrospective installation in some cases;
- An upscale of EV charging points was planned for the Council's car parks in the New Year, in conjunction with other Planet Dartford greening measures proposed for the Borough.

The Director of Housing and Public Protection supported the Scientific Officer in his responses. He advised Members that recent FOI requests had revealed that the Council did *not* hold comprehensive records for the number of EV charging points in the Borough. Examination of new planning applications had revealed some data but compiling accurate overall figures was difficult, given the disparate number of EV charging point suppliers. Officers would be developing a policy and strategy to help achieve a more comprehensive Council record holding in the New Year. On a more positive point, he was able to inform Members that the Council held the most super-charger points amongst Kent authorities. He also advised (in response to a further specific enquiry from the Chairman), that Council Officers were available to meet with Members to discuss the topic on request, and any other proposal contained in the Council's Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP).

The Chairman of the Joint Transportation Board (in attendance as a POC Member), advised the Committee that an electric bus had been successfully trialled on the FastTrack route and that KCC was committed to a non-diesel FastTrack service by March 2023 on all routes. He conceded, in response to complaints from the Mayor, that the new electrical service had not solved service punctuality for customers for the 1B FastTrack service, especially on parts of that route which had no set timetable, and also suffered from two notorious traffic pinch-points. However, following discussion with Arriva, a split route arrangement had improved that route and further talks were proposed with the company in January 2022 to address specific concerns of Bridge residents over the current FastTrack service, with the topic also being pursued in the JTB forum with all concerned parties.

The Chairman next addressed Items 17 and 18 in the table of Declared Air Quality Management Areas [agenda p.17 refers], and asked when the Kent

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Planning Guidance on Air Quality would be adopted [Item 17], and the current status of the Kent Energy and Low Emission Strategy [Item 18].

The Scientific Officer advised Members that the Kent Planning Guidance Document was rather dated and currently subject to review by KCC, but Council Planning Officers would be best placed to give advice on the progress of that review. It was confirmed that Item 18 had been published and the outcome reported to and noted by Cabinet [Cabinet Min. No. 33 refers.].

At the request of the Chairman, the Waste & Parks Manager updated the Committee on the Council's tree planting policy. Members were advised that Dartford already had a significant number of trees (not all on Council land), and that those numbers had been increased by the recent orchard tree planting initiatives in Hesketh and other Council parks totalling 125 new trees in 2021. Planting of a further 300 trees was proposed in 2022 as part of the Queen's Green Canopy event in Council parks to commemorate Her Majesty's Jubilee. However, he advised Members that demand for new trees was high and planting costly, both in terms of initial purchase and the labour-intensive aftercare required to ensure new trees flourished in the long-term. Development of the current depot facility in Central Park as a nursery area for growing good sized saplings to help de-fray capital costs was being considered. There was also a need to manage existing woodlands and thin-out overgrown areas including in Darenth Wood (an ancient woodland), where less rather than more planting was required to ensure continued healthy long-term growth. In response to a variety of questions from individual Members he confirmed that:

- The planting of fruit trees in Alamein Gardens was being considered;
- KCC held responsibility for bus stops [in terms of greening measures];
- Dartford did have its first green bus shelter through Council funding;
- No dedicated Council funding existed for Parish Councils to finance tree-planting schemes but KCC might have a funding stream on request.

The Chairman renewed his thanks to the Scientific Officer for his report and the Waste & Parks Manager for his additional verbal input, and thanked Members for their contribution to the debate, on what continued to be a vital and far reaching area of Council policy.

For the benefit of the minutes and to better inform Cabinet of the Committee's specific views and concerns, he summarised the principal points of the debate as follows:

- That the Committee commended the Council's tree planting scheme to date and encouraged further planting schemes to help reduce air pollution in the Borough;
- That the number and availability of EV charging points be identified and that the Council install further EV points in their car parks and encourage developers to do so in existing developments retrospectively and planned new builds as a planning requirement;

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- Welcome and encourage active Member involvement in the Council's new Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) going forward;
- Monitor the introduction of electric buses on FastTrack services under the provisions of the Kent Air Quality Action Plan;
- Promote the updating of KCC'S Local Planning Guidance document in respect of reducing air pollution.

On a final point, the Chairman requested an update on the progress of proposed Traffic Management Improvements to Dartford's Urban Traffic Management Control (UTMC) [ASR table Item 9 agenda p.40 refers]. The Scientific Officer was unsighted on progress but undertook to report back to the Committee as soon as possible.

Post Meeting Note

Members were subsequently advised that it was proposed to implement a new and upgraded Urban Traffic Management and Control (UTMC) system by ensuring the traffic signal junctions across Kent Thameside utilised the latest control systems and were linked to the Highway Management Centre (HMC) in Aylesford.

The purpose of the proposed scheme was to improve journey times for all road users and ensure that the transport infrastructure across Ebbsfleet and the surrounding area was used as efficiently as possible. Implementing the UTMC system would also minimise delay and congestion for all vehicles and increase capacity wherever possible. This will be of particular benefit for FastTrack services and other local bus services. KCC's Intelligent Transport team had identified 41 junctions within Dartford and Gravesham that required upgrading to operate an efficient UTMC system of which 21 were situated within the Borough. The construction programme had begun in the Spring of 2021 and the 1st junction in Dartford at Thames Way with Vale Road now completed, and a further three junctions due for completion by November 2021.

RESOLVED:

1. That Members note the air quality findings and associated work as set out in the body of the Air Quality Update 2021 report, the Air Quality Annual Status Report (attached at Appendix A), and the Supplementary Air Quality Monitoring Report 2021 (attached at Appendix B).

26. LITTER & ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT UPDATE

The report from the EARS Manager updated Members on the operating effectiveness of the Council's policies pertaining to environmental crime (fly tipping and litter) offences in the Borough, together with an overview of the systems and processes in place to deliver those policies. Attached as Appendix A to the report was a summary of the Council's performance for the period April 2018 to October 2021 in combating environmental crime.

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The Chairman thanked the EARS Manager for an excellent report and comprehensive appendix recording locations, investigations and outcomes for environmental crime (EC) committed in the Borough. He noted that most incidents of EC had been reported (Appendix A p.114 refers) and praised the pro-active efforts of Council and LA Support (Kingdom) officers to combat offences at known hot spots. He also welcomed the increased breakdown of data for fines issued, which would help Members to identify and relate to action being taken against offences being committed in their Wards. He had personally walked through known hot spots in Joydens Wood, the adjacent Golf Course area and viewed the impressive new high tech CCTV camera installation at Birchwood Road and asked how it had been financed.

The EARS Manager thanked the Chairman for his kind comments and, before referring points of operational detail to the Enforcement Manager for response, took the opportunity to set the Council's performance in a Kent and country-wide context.

He reminded Members that the investigation and prosecution of EC offences remained a discretionary local authority service in Dartford. The Council had been a trail-blazer in the field of combating EC both in the Kent county and wider national context, and had been the 1st local authority to implement fixed penalty notices (FPNs) for low level fly tipping offences, including 'Duty of Care' FPNs for the use of illegal or unlicensed refuse carriers, and the imposition of waste contract arrangements on local businesses. The Enforcement Manager, Richard Cherry, with only 2 Council Enforcement Officers at his disposal, ran a tight and increasingly diverse and effective operation to combat EC together with the Council's contractual partner, LA Support (Kingdom).

The Enforcement Manager advised Members that the combined running costs for the two new high tech CCTV cameras at the Birchwood Road and New Barn re-cycling facilities amounted to a total of £690 per week. This was mainly due to a lack of electrical power-sockets for the moveable installations (to be remedied in the future) which were presently gas powered. However, the present running costs were more than off-set by savings accrued from reduced clean-up and disposal costs previously experienced at both sites. Those savings were augmented by significant revenue from the single justice court system, with £205 accruing to the Council for each proven offence. Ultimate success was defined as a significant reduction in offences at both sites which had already been achieved, with increased signage and the enormous camera capacity, acting as significant deterrents to potential offenders. The Council had also benefitted in reputational terms with local residents and the general public.

In response to a variety of further questions from individual Members the Enforcement and the Waste & Parks Managers confirmed the following points:

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- Use of high tech CCTV camera surveillance in the urban environment was being considered by some Housing Associations to encourage positive tenant behaviour in communal bin areas;
- White goods left in alleyways (whether private or Council owned) should be reported either to the council direct or the police who would refer matters to the council to examine the possibilities for prosecution. Officers would only investigate cases where a successful prosecution was likely, which usually required the offender and/or their vehicle to be identified, a process which is often hampered by the restrictions imposed by GDPR in terms of releasing vehicle keeper details;
- Re-cycling bins were emptied at variable time's dependent on content and ownership. Glass bins were emptied by the Council contractor every Wednesday. Textile re-cycling banks were usually owned by charities and sited next to roads which fell within the jurisdiction of KCC Highways not the Council. SCOPE at Wilmington collected clothing contributions fortnightly, and the British Heart Foundation had maintained its collection service throughout the pandemic, but other smaller charities had been severally impacted by COVID-19 and Government 'lockdown' measures.

The Chairman sought confirmation that appropriate punishments were being meted out to EC offenders.

The EARS Manager believed that this was the case. The Council had been instrumental in the formation of a 'Pan Kent' intelligence network to prevent and deter fly tipping, and to bring successful prosecutions through enhanced information sharing and combined operations. Council Environment Enforcement officers now accompanied Kent Police on random vehicle stoppage operations, with any unlicensed waste carriers apprehended prosecuted by the Council. On a related note; the recent BBC and ITV coverage of the Council's new fly tip CCTV camera operation [still available to view on YouTube], had enhanced the Council's reputation and acted as a genuine deterrent to potential offenders. That publicity had also enhanced the Council's reputation with other Kent and local authorities nationally, several of whom now regularly sought advice from the Enforcement Manager to help guide their own EC operations. A further and increasing deterrent to offenders, was the Council's development of a 'Publicising Environmental Crime, Criminal Behaviour Orders, Verdicts and Sentences Policy' [Cabinet Min. No. 46 refers], which enabled the Council's Media & Communications team to publicise successful enforcement outcomes and prosecutions, including 'naming and shaming' prolific offenders where appropriate.

The Chairman and several individual Members, congratulated the EARS Manager on an excellent report, and the Enforcement Manager and his team, together with LA Support (Kingdom) operatives, on a highly successful performance to combat environmental crime, deploying all available powers, to achieve an exceptional outcome for the Council and Dartford residents in the period under review.

RESOLVED:

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1. That Members note the report.

27. FOOD SECURITY POLICY

The report from the Community Services Manager (CSM) presented for Member comment and approval, the Council's Food Security Action Plan 2022-2025 document (attached as Appendix A to the report).

In general discussion Members noted the very low take-up rate in the Dartford community for Healthy Start Vouchers [only 54%], and agreed the need to better publicise their availability going forward, in a renewed outreach programme in the community to include:

- Leaflet drops at GP Surgeries;
- Verbal promotion by Councillors in their Wards;
- The Council's Healthy Living Co-ordinator to target new Groups and Walk-In programmes;
- Leafletting Churches and Food Banks;
- Advertising at the Sikh Temple Ladies Group (Wednesdays in the New Year) and the regular Sunday 'Feed the Homeless' Sikh Temple event;
- Consideration of a Parish Council Leader's Initiative programme.

The Community Services Manager advised Members that he and the Lead Member held regular meetings every 2 months with the voluntary sector, the DWP and Food Banks, to help formulate an overall Food Policy for the Borough. Engagement with these sectors and potential partners had been poor to date but would continue to be pursued, together with an increased publicity drive to advertise Healthy Start Vouchers as proposed by the Committee.

RESOLVED:

1. That Members note the report;
2. That the Lead Member and the Community Services Manager take forward an enhanced publicity campaign to improve the present take-up rate of Healthy Start Vouchers.

28. 2021-22 WORK PLAN UPDATE

The report from the Committee Co-ordinator enclosed an updated Work Plan for the remainder of the 2021-22 municipal cycle.

The Chairman advised Members that he intended to call for update reports on Adult Social Care and new GP provision across the Borough at the next meeting of the Committee in March 2022 which, by tradition, considered the various health services provided to Dartford residents by NHS bodies and their partners.

RESOLVED:

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1. That Members note the contents of the report and Appendix.

The meeting closed at 8.15 pm

Councillor M J Davis
CHAIRMAN

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