

<b>MEETING:</b>	Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Sustainable Barnsley Workstream
<b>DATE:</b>	Tuesday 4 February 2025
<b>TIME:</b>	2.00 pm
<b>VENUE:</b>	Council Chamber, Barnsley Town Hall

## MINUTES

**Present** Councillors Stowe (Chair), Barnard, Booker, Bowser, Denton, Fielding, Hayward, Holling, Hunt, Lodge, McCarthy, Murray, O'Donoghue, Osborne, Smith and P. Wright together with co-opted member and

**In attendance:** Councillor Franklin (Observer)

### 45 Apologies for Absence - Parent Governor Representatives

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs L Iles in accordance with Regulation 7(6) of the Parent Governor Representatives (England) Regulations 2001.

### 46 Declarations of Interests on matters contained within the Agenda

Councillor Bowser declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute 46 'Litter and Environmental Crime Plan 2024-30' in his capacity as Cabinet Support Member for Core Services.

Councillor Osborne declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute No 46 'Litter and Environmental Crime Plan 2024-30' in his capacity as Cabinet Support Member for Environment and Transport.

Councillor Smith declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute 46 'Litter and Environmental Crime Plan 2024-30' in his capacity as the Chair of the Police and Crime Panel.

### 47 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Due to the proximity of meetings, the minutes of the meeting of the Full Committee held on the 28<sup>th</sup> January, 2025 would be presented at the meeting scheduled for 4<sup>th</sup> March, 2025.

### 48 Litter and Environmental Crime Plan 2024-2030

The following witnesses were welcomed to the meeting:

- Paul Hollingsworth – Service Director Communities
- Paul Brannan - Head of Safer Barnsley, Safer Communities
- Gill Charters - Head of Waste, Recycling and Neighbourhood Services
- Rachel Payling – Head of Service, Stronger Communities
- Steph Lee – Communications and Marketing Manager
- Carolyn Nichols – Team Leader, Community Safety and Environment

- Martin Bibey – Assistant Service Manager, Waste, Recycling and Neighbourhood Services
- Paul Castle – Service Director, Environment and Transport
- Councillor Higginbottom – Cabinet Spokesperson for Environment and Transport

The Committee received a joint report of the Executive Director Core Services, the Executive Director Public Health and Communities and the Executive Director Growth and Sustainability on the Litter and Environmental Crime Plan for 2024-2030 and on the actions identified in order to deliver the Plan.

The report was introduced by Councillor Higginbottom, Cabinet Spokesperson for Environment and Transport. He stated that the Council had developed the Litter and Environmental Crime Plan to address the rising costs and impacts of litter and fly tipping in the borough. The Plan had been created in response to the high costs of litter and fly tipping and aligned with the National Litter Strategy for England. It aimed to reflect Barnsley's local ambitions for 2030.

He stated that litter and fly tipping cost the Council over £250,000 annually to clear and dispose of, which were considered avoidable costs. Environmental blight was a significant concern for residents and impacted upon their satisfaction with their living environment. Nationally, the government was also committed to reduce the costs and impacts of environmental blight through education, engagement, enforcement, and infrastructure. However, despite these efforts, the costs of clearing and disposing of illegal waste had continued to rise, with almost half a billion pounds spent annually.

Local volunteers played a significant role in maintaining clean environments, often dedicating many hours a week to litter collection and general maintenance. The Plan had been developed collaboratively with these volunteers to ensure joint ownership. Throughout 2023/24, Council Services had worked with local environmental volunteer groups to agree on priorities and actions for the Plan, which had been endorsed by the Cabinet in June 2024.

The Plan included five key commitments: behaviour change and education, community ownership, improving infrastructure, strengthening Council Services, and better enforcement. Progress had been made in several areas, including revising penalty tariffs, reviewing litter bin infrastructure, and publicising enforcement outcomes.

Specific actions taken included increasing fixed penalty tariffs for graffiti, household duty of care, and significant fly-tipping offenses. These increases aimed to reflect the financial cost and social impact of the offenses and act as a deterrent. The Council had also piloted a targeted approach to addressing environmental blight in a hotspot location, issued fixed penalties for fly-tipping offenses, and worked with schools to incorporate environmental pride and guardianship into their initiatives.

Whilst environmental blight remained a significant issue, the efforts of residents and officers were aimed at tackling the problem and keeping the borough looking its best.

In the ensuing discussion and in response to detailed questioning and challenge, the following matters were highlighted:

Questions were asked about how the recent inclement weather and subsequent disruption of the waste collection service had impacted on litter and environmental crime, on how these issues had been addressed and what more needed to be done. The Service Director Environment and Transport responded by outlining the need to ensure safety of all staff during such periods and to Member briefings that had taken place. Ten days or sub-zero temperatures could not have been anticipated and, therefore, the service had taken an unprecedented step of stopping all collections. Since that time, a recovery plan had been implemented and as of last Friday, the grey bin (general waste) collection was back on schedule. A 'rebalancing' of the remaining recycling collections was also taking place. A great deal of litter had been identified following the recent windy weather and resources had been utilised as appropriate in order for this to be collected.

It was noted that during 2023/24 there had been 1,225 fixed penalty notices issued, there had been 7 prosecuted for fly-tipping and duty of care offences, 11 vehicles had been seized and 1 had been crushed. Questions were asked, therefore, about what the remainder of the offences had been for. It was reported that the majority of these were for littering which was, of course, a statutory offence, however, there were difficulties in bringing about successful prosecutions due to the need to build up a case and prove, beyond reasonable doubt, that the person to be prosecuted had actually committed the littering offence. It was pointed out that there had been an increase in fixed penalties and prosecutions over the last 18 months to 2 years. The majority of fines levied were for littering offences and this approach appeared to be working. The Service was committed to this Plan and for ensuring better enforcement with more targeted training so that those causing most concern could be tackled.

In response to detailed questioning, the Committee was informed that detailed records were kept of the kind of fly tipping that occurred. There was also a national database which, amongst other things, allowed the volume and type of such waste to be recorded and this also then allowed the authority to benchmark itself and the service performance against other similar authorities.

Questions were asked about what action was taken to identify who was responsible for fly tipping and if information was gathered in order to understand why this took place. It was noted that officers would always try to find evidence of where the waste had originated. There was a need for greater education so that individuals knew they had a duty of care in ensuring that their waste was being disposed of correctly. This was particularly important if residents were using third parties to collect and dispose of their waste. The Chair suggested that the Chamber of Commerce could play a part in promoting this Plan given that they had the 'eyes and ears' of the commercial community as they could promote good practice in relation to waste disposal.

Reference was made to small amounts of domestic waste (which did not fit in the refuse or recycling bins) which was then fly tipped. It was noted that the Council took a targeted approach and made interventions were possible in accordance with its responsibilities under Section 46 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. It was also noted that a bulk waste collections service was available for items that would not fit in the general or recycling bins or could not be taken to Waste Disposal Sites.

Arising out of the above, Service Director Communities referred to the commitments in the Plan. He made reference to the forensic examination of the challenges being faced and to the examination of the approaches to be adopted, some of which were around enforcement and some of which were about trying to change behaviours. A piece of work was currently being undertaken in order to identify the highest priorities and to look at lessons being learned that could be used elsewhere.

Questions were asked whether an analysis had been undertaken of the proportion of fly tipping by business versus household waste. It was noted that this was a difficult question to answer given that some commercial fly tipping could have originally emanated from domestic premises. On balance, however, the vast majority of fly tipping was household waste.

Arising out of the above, the Service Director Environment and Transport commented on the new contractor who was now running the Household Waste Recycling Centres. The new contract was based on lessons learned from the previous contract and it was also intended to increase the various waste streams. He then went on to outline the capital expenditure to be spent on improving the sites and commented on the new accessibility arrangements that required cars entering the site to be registered with the service. This was a common approach of many Local Authorities. It was noted that there was not a significant issue of 'cross border' use of Recycling Centres and that the new registration arrangements should significantly reduce this.

Questions were asked about the time taken for Bulky Waste to be collected. It was noted that the Service had been going through a change of arrangements and new software had been introduced. There had been a backlog through the Christmas period and because of the inclement weather and work was ongoing to get this back on track.

Reference was made to the need to have smaller type 'bottle and can banks' in more areas, however, it was acknowledged that this was not currently possible due to resource issues. It was pointed out, however, that Environmental regulations were changing and from 2027 and that the deposit return scheme was to be reintroduced. This should have a significant impact on littering given that there would be a financial incentive to return containers to a place of purchase.

In response to questioning, the Committee was informed of the rationale for the charging for the collection of bulky waste, which, in the main, was in relation to the costs of collection.

Reference was made to situations where residents had shared bins (such as in flats), to any difficulties that might be experienced in residents segregating waste and to instances where management companies were in place to deal with residents' waste in shared large containers. Questions were asked as to whether or not this could lead to an increase in fly tipping. It was noted that there were only a small number of flats in the area where such arrangements were in place. It was acknowledged that there had been a small number of issues in relation to the segregation of waste and reference was again made to the disruption of the service due to the bad weather. The Service had encountered an element of abuse from a small number of residents which was unpleasant, however, work had been undertaken to clear the backlog.

Work was undertaken with third parties and with management organisations to remind tenants and residents of the duty to segregate waste.

Arising out of the above discussion, reference was made to the ways in which the Service made contact with individual tenants/residents and landlords if specific problems were identified. As a last resort, the Service could take action remembering, of course, the difficulties of identifying where waste was coming from.

Reference was made, within the context of available resources, to the way in which the Service identified if larger litter bins were required in certain locations.

Questions were asked as to whether or not the waste collection service would ever reach a zero net cost position. It was noted that the Service was not currently at that position. The Environment Strategy was looking at reducing the amount of waste and increasing the streams of material that could be collected. The revenue received from collected waste varied as prices fluctuated based on demand. However, more waste was being collected than ever before.

In response to questioning, mention was made to the intention to take holistic approach to the environment. Communal areas would form part of that, and a targeted approach would be taken to identify who was responsible for certain areas, be that private rented, social housing providers or individual tenants. There was a need to understand where waste was coming from and then to work with all landlords, Berneslai Homes and social providers to provide solutions to problems identified. The Service currently worked closely with Berneslai Homes and in terms of the wider strategy, their voice was in there. There were areas where Berneslai Homes managed the housing stock and others where there were independent living schemes and flats. Engagement had been ongoing which had resulted in Community Clean Up Days. Work was also ongoing and it was felt that these kind of actions demonstrated a whole community approach.

Reference was made to the tremendous impact volunteers had on improving the environment and to the invaluable contribution such volunteers made. Indeed, some Local Authorities were envious of the approach Barnsley had and the benefits gained through the use of volunteers.

Reference was made to the work of Area Councils in supporting environmental improvements and questions were asked as to what support could be provided. The Head of Service, Stronger Communities then outlined the support that was currently provided and to the invaluable assistance of volunteers and dedicated individuals. Reference was also then made to the volunteers' involvement in the development of the strategy and to the ways in which volunteer views were sought. Councillor Higginbottom also made reference to the success of a particular volunteer, to the training that was provided and to the way in which volunteer involvement was celebrated.

Questions were asked in relation to new working practices, the issues waste collection had had recently, the 'red tagging' of bins, the impact of the budget on charging for the delivery of new bins and the potential impact these issues might have on the Plan. The Service Director Environment and Transport outlined the varying reasons for the red tagging bins, the potential health and safety issues

associated with this together with the ways in which complaints about such issue were dealt with. He also made reference to the charging arrangements for new bin delivery as outlined within the budget which had been made due to the costs of providing and delivering bins to properties. Councillor Higginbottom commented that he had asked the Service to have a look at how the financial implications of this were managed. Various options were being examined but he could not give a commitment at this stage that there would be any changes. The matter was, however, being kept under active consideration.

Questions were asked as to whether or not the public were incentivised to report fly tipping if this led to a conviction. The Head of Safer Barnsley, Safer Communities stated that whilst this had been done on occasions, it was not something that was done universally.

Reference was made to the age of bins and to whether there was a programme of bin replacement for those that were getting old and were, therefore, brittle and liable to split. It was noted that there had been no changes to the standard bin manufacture. They were produced to a national standard. The Council had a consistent approach to bins and indeed the average life of bins would vary. Some were still being used that dated back to the 1990's.

Reference was made to a government statement that had implied that fly-tippers would be forced to work in 'clean up squads' through issuing Fixed Penalty Cleaning Notices and Respect Orders and questions were asked about how this would impact upon the Council and partners in implementing this and to what the challenges would be. The Head of Safer Barnsley, Safer Communities stated that he was not in a position to be able to comment on this at the meeting but would circulate a response to all Members.

In response to detailed questioning, the Committee was informed of the engagement had had with businesses in developing the Plan. Reference was particularly made to the involvement of McDonalds, Morrisons, GXO Logistics Company and with schools.

Questions were asked about engagement and whether or not the Service had looked at best practice in other areas. It was noted that there had been an examination of what was happening at a national level, however, it was pleasing to note that Barnsley was at the forefront of this kind of initiative as not many other authorities had gone to the lengths that Barnsley had in promoting strategies to combat litter and environmental crime. In addition, officers were part of a Yorkshire Improvement Group where Local Authorities met once a quarter to discuss best practice and these meetings had been useful in identifying varying approaches during the development of the Plan.

Commitment 1 Changing Behaviours and Education was seen to be key in driving forward improvements and questions were asked as to how the service would work with schools, youth groups and young people in order to change such behaviours. Councillor Higginbottom agreed that this was a key issue to address and there was indeed a need to change attitudes. Education was an important part and everyone could make their own contribution to this. Many councillors, for example were involved with schools and could, therefore help drive changes forward. Reference

was also made in this context to the Great Childhood Ambition. There were, of course, challenges around what engagement looked like and how consistency of approach was achieved.

Arising out of the above, reference was made to the Youth Council and Youth Parliament and the various young people's commission and to schools and to the ways in which they could all be involved. It was noted that for the Holocaust Memorial event, schools had been asked to produce posters, some of which had been about environmental crime. It was important, particularly for children and young people, to recognise the need to adhere to the arrangements for the correct disposal of litter and waste but recognising at the same time, that some individuals would fail to comply with these requirements.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) That the report be noted;
- (ii) That the witnesses be thanked for attending this meeting and for answering Members questions; and
- (iii) That the Head of Safer Barnsley, Safer Communities be requested to circulate to all Members information on the position with regard to the Governments statement that implied that fly-tippers would be forced to work in 'clean up squads' through the issuing of Fixed Penalty Cleaning Notices and Respect orders, on the potential impact on the Council and its Partners of this together with the challenges likely to be faced.

**49 Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025-2028**

The following witnesses were welcomed to the meeting:

- Neil Copley – Director of Finance
- Steve Loach – Head of Corporate Finance and Business Partnering
- Wendy Popplewell – Executive Director Core Services
- Councillor Frost – Cabinet Spokesperson for Core Services

The Committee received a joint report of the Executive Director Core Services and the Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy including a suite of papers which provided full oversight of the financial position of the Council over the period 2025/26 through to 2027/28.

The report was introduced by Councillor Frost, Cabinet Spokesperson for Core Services, who explained that the Council continued to face significant financial challenges in providing day-to-day services, largely due to national issues beyond its control. Despite preventive and mitigating efforts over the past year, the high demand and cost of delivering frontline services still persisted. An additional £34m was required next year to maintain current service levels, leading to the proposal of a 4.9% increase in Council Tax to balance the budget. These decisions were difficult but were made in the long-term best interests of the communities and people served by the Council.

However, the recent local government finance settlement by the new Labour Government was better than expected and represented a positive step after 15 years of austerity.

The Council was set to receive a new Recovery Grant, targeted at the most deprived areas like Barnsley, following years of lobbying. This one-off grant, pending the outcome of the Government's Spending Review and Finance Reforms, provided an opportunity to invest in key priorities.

The Council proposed to invest in the Great Childhood Ambition and Community Enhancement programs. Specifically, a £3.5m investment was proposed to enhance local communities, with £1.5m allocated for day-to-day services such as street cleaning, weed control, and improving the aesthetics of key routes and areas. An additional £2m was available for small infrastructure projects to tackle blight in local communities, such as replacing broken seats and benches, new flower planters, and new litter bins.

Furthermore, £1.5m was allocated to scale up the Great Childhood Ambition, which invested in the skills, qualifications, and experiences of all young people across the borough.

Recognizing that travel was a significant barrier for young people, the budget also proposed a two-year pilot for free bus travel for all young people under the age of 18. The Council had also allocated a further £12m for investment in the highway infrastructure.

Whilst the outlook for next year was more positive, the Council's financial challenges were not over. The financial outlook remained uncertain, with a full Public Sector Spending Review in March set against a fragile economy.

The outcome of long-awaited funding reforms was also not expected until later in 2025. Therefore, the budget recommendation was to prepare for all eventualities by undertaking a spending and prioritization review later in the year.

In the ensuing discussion and in response to detailed questioning and challenge, the following matters were highlighted:

Questions were asked whether there was a need to look more radically at what the Council did in order to align scarce finance to those priorities. The Director of Finance commented that these issues had been looked at before and, of course certain reductions had been held in reserve to bring forward if needed. In addition to the Public Spending Review, the Council was also committed to its own Spending and Prioritisation Review later in the year. This would ensure that any finance available was targeted to the appropriate priorities of the Council.

Questions were asked about the energy costs of the Council and how this was impacted by proposals to move to net zero particularly in the light of the various schemes introduced and being introduced. The Director of Finance would provide a written response on this; however, he anticipated that the energy bill was likely to be less than in previous years. Strategies being considered were part of the asset management strategy. Measures were also to be introduced in relation to street lighting.



Arising out of this discussion, reference was made to the potential impact of an increase in anti-social behaviour as a result of dimming streetlights. The Director of Finance stated that such action had taken place in many areas of the country without any adverse impact. Such a strategy would be implemented taking account of members views and would be undertaken in a managed way.

Questions were asked about the Recovery Grant and the Director of Finance commented that the late announcement of this had made things difficult in terms of allocating finance to specific areas which in some cases still needed to be worked through. There would be specific consultation if and when appropriate.

Whilst the transport pilot for 18-year-olds was welcomed, there was, nevertheless, concern that bus services were not currently effective. There was some concern, however, that money could be seen to be going to private sector operators. In addition, services were not running at times needed. It was thought, however, that on balance there would potential for significant benefits to be achieved. Consultation was taking place with the South Yorkshire Mayor on bus travel, and it was hoped that improvements could be made. The concerns raised were noted but it was thought that this pilot may initiate further discussion about where investment was made, and finance was allocated.

Questions were asked about the Council's Reserve Strategy. Finance had been used from this pot for at least two years in a row and questions were asked about when further funds could be added to reserves. The Director of Finance stated that in accordance with the Reserves Policy, finance could only be used for one off expenditure and that it was hoped that in the following year there would be no need to use any reserves. In terms of reserves, Barnsley had the highest of all the Metropolitan Authorities which was why the Council was renowned for its sound financial management.

Arising out of the above, it was reported that the Council had to have a minimum working balance for emergency situations, and this was included within the £38m that was currently uncommitted. Information was then provided of the makeup of the £38m - £20m minimum working balance and £18m allocated to alleviate risks. Information was also provided about the insurance fund which was held for uninsurable risks.

Questions were asked about the interest rates and whether or not this information was up to date as it looked as though this information could do with refreshing. The Director of Finance stated that this information would be updated if required. He did, however, anticipate that interest rates would remain higher for longer and this did not change the information he had previously reported and advised upon. Councillor Frost stated that he attended Treasury Management meetings every quarter and information was kept up to date.

In relation to Risk Management, questions were asked about the single biggest risk facing the Council. The Director of Finance stated that there was not one single issue of concern but a combination. The economy was in a fragile state that the outcome of the Government Spending Review was due in March. These issues, together with the reform agenda and the increasing expenditure required in relation

to social care could have significant implications for the Authority and the finance that was available to it.

Arising out of the above, the Director further commented that in relation to social care, it was difficult to predict the level of demand based on the data available. This, as evidenced over the last couple of years, meant that there could be budget overspends that were not planned because of unanticipated issues or demands. Added to this, the Authority was seeing an increase in the number of children with complex needs that were not previously known about. Mitigating factors were in place to ameliorate such issues and reference was made to the sustainability plan for children's services, however, issues of a national nature could also have implications for the budget and in such circumstances the Authority would have to make very difficult decisions about future service provision and levels of expenditure.

In response to questioning, the Director of Finance stated that there were no organisational barriers that would prevent him from protecting Barnsley's interests.

Questions were asked as to whether Neighbourhood Services were getting additional staff to deal with the environmental issues identified as priorities within the budget. Councillor Frost confirmed that additional Teams were to be allocated to such work. If the Councillor raising the question wanted to receive more information on this, the Chair stated that a written response could be provided.

It was noted that Area Councils delivered a lot under the Clean and Green agenda and questions were raised, therefore, as to if there was any scope to devolve additional finance so that Area Councils had more control of such issues at a local level. The Director of Finance stated that this was an area of expenditure that had yet to be determined.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) That the report be noted;
- (ii) That the witnesses be thanked for attending this meeting and for answering Members questions; and
- (iii) That the Director of Finance provide Members with additional information on energy consumptions and prices.

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Chair