

TITLE OF REPORT: Review of Environment Services

REPORT OF: Paul Dowling, Strategic Director Communities and Environment

Purpose of the Report

1. Cabinet is asked to consider the recommendations resulting from a review of environment services. The recommendations aim to ensure that the services are able to respond to the challenges identified and meet the needs of residents. The proposals help to support the Council's aspirations for Gateshead the Place as set out in the Council Plan.

Background

2. In February 2016 Cabinet and Council approved the 2016/17 Budget. A proposal for budget reductions to environment services was removed following consultation results. It was agreed that these services would be subject to a review. The scope covered a range of services including: grounds maintenance; weed control; arboriculture; countryside, parks and open spaces; and street cleansing. The review examined how the service areas had changed in response to budget pressures, the impact, the potential for future change as well as the views of councillors and residents. The aim was to identify recommendations for the future activities of the services in scope, specifically relating to service standards.

Proposal

3. The review found that the services had undergone changes to mitigate the impacts of previous budget reductions. These changes included reducing standards, ceasing some provision, while introducing charges for others. These changes had resulted in some benefits, but there was also evidence that in some areas there had been an adverse impact. Steps had been taken to mitigate this impact where possible, although views sought during the review highlighted some specific issues around street cleansing and the need for greater enforcement, while standards were considered to already be at a minimum. There was also evidence of positive impact through greater working with communities, which had resulted in some local improvements. This could be developed further to identify ways to increase community responsibility and ownership of the local environment in support of Council Plan outcomes.
4. Following analysis of the evidence including the views of councillors and Residents Survey, it is proposed that standards for these service areas are not reduced any further at this stage, subject to budget decisions. The service would, however, seek to identify different ways of working in order to identify improvements in areas highlighted through the review. These are set out in Appendix 1 but also form recommendations outlined below.

5. There has been representations made from residents regarding extending the collection of garden waste into November. In 2016 the Council experienced an exceptionally late autumn with leaf and blossom fall and received fewer than 100 complaints from 30,000 scheme members. Consideration was given to an engagement exercise to extend the period of collection, but that would have meant a further increase in 2018 to the garden waste collection charge. The service will be reviewed at the end of the 2017 season, to determine if the seasonal variance experienced in 2016 was a one off.
6. It is proposed that greater focus is placed on areas of Behaviour Change, to help to develop greater individual responsibility, supported by a stronger approach to enforcement to permanently solve any issues. This would also include an awareness raising and promotional campaign work to complement the approach.
7. In addition greater effort is to be placed on community responsibility and ownership. The service already supports a number of communities in differing ways, but a greater shift to enable more communities to play a role in their local environment could be developed.
8. A different approach to arboriculture could involve adopting a zoning model to improve efficiency and longer term maintenance. A feasibility study would be required to support this change.
9. Approval of these proposals would help to maintain the current environment standards, but would also mean the service could seek to improve efficiency and outcomes through new ways of delivery, by working with communities in a more collaborative way, building capacity, raising awareness and using different operational approaches to support service delivery. This links to delivery of the Council Plan shared outcomes and policy directions that relate to Gateshead 'the Place'.

Recommendation

10. Cabinet is asked to:-
 - (i) Note the review and analysis of the evidence of impact as well as the views of councillors and residents on changes and standards for environment services and;
 - (ii) Agree the following recommendations.
 - That standards for grass cutting and street cleansing are maintained recognising the role of a quality environment to health and well being; in supporting economic growth; and for realising the Council's Place ambition
 - For a feasibility study to be completed on the Council's tree stock to inform potential capital investment for a one off arboricultural programme to reduce complaints, potential incidents, claims and improve access
 - Step up behavioural change, communication and awareness raising
 - To place greater emphasis on environmental enforcement – a separate report to be brought in due course
 - Explore opportunities for greater community involvement and ownership where this is appropriate.

For the following reasons:

- (i) To ensure that the Council is able to meet statutory duties and responsibilities.
- (ii) To support delivery of environment services at a level that helps to maintain standards but that contribute to the Council Plan priorities including the contribution to economic growth through Gateshead being an attractive place, and with greater community ownership and pride in the local area.

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Policy Context

1. The proposal supports Vision 2030 by contributing to City of Gateshead, Sustainable Gateshead and Gateshead Volunteers Big Ideas. The review also sought to consider the changes within the context of the Council Plan and the shared outcomes for Live Love Gateshead – a sense of pride and ownership by all. The proposals therefore support delivery of the outcomes and policy directions within the Council Plan.

Background

2. The Council provides a range of services that help keep the environment in a clean, safe and attractive condition. In February 2016 Cabinet and Council approved the 2016/17 Budget. A proposal for budget reductions to environmental services was removed following the results of consultation. It was agreed that provision of environment services would be subject to a review. The scope covered a range of services including: grounds maintenance; weed control; arboriculture; countryside, parks and open spaces; and street cleansing, as well as some other related service areas which are picked up through these broad themes. The review was taken forward through the Clean Safe Attractive Environment theme of the Place Workstream within the Council's Change Programme.

Scope and aims of the review

3. The scope of the review focused on the activities of grounds maintenance; weed control; arboriculture; countryside, parks and open spaces; and street cleansing as well as some waste e.g. green waste and other related activities. The review examined how the service areas had changed in response to budget pressures, the impact this has made, the potential for future change as well as the views of councillors and residents.
4. The aim was to identify recommendations for the future activities of the services in scope, specifically considering the current standards and whether they were reasonable, any areas of change as well as how different approaches could be taken depending upon need and circumstance. Areas explored included
 - Ability to meet responsibilities of the local authority and Council ambitions
 - Impact – views of councillors and residents
 - Performance and standards
 - Opportunities for change

Methodology – how the review was carried out

5. A Working Group was set up to undertake the review. This was led by the Service Director, Waste Services, Grounds Maintenance and Fleet Management and was supported by and drew on officers from across the Council. In order to add pace and take a rounded approach, avoid duplication and ensure opportunities are not missed, the review formed part of the Clean, Safe Attractive Environment project which is part of the Place Workstream of the Council's Change Programme. Progress was reported through the Place Workstream governance arrangements.

6. A phased approach was used as follows:
- Evidence gathering on changes made across these areas in response to the financial challenges the Council has and continues to face. (July – August 2016)
 - Evidence of impact and actions to mitigate any negative impact (August - September 2016)
 - Opportunities and scenarios for further change (August – October 2016)
 - Views of councillors and residents (November – January 2017)
 - Analysis and recommendations (January – February 2017)

Evidence – Service change and impact

7. Evidence was gathered on the financial context; the changes made across the range of environment services and which was used to assess the impact. The budget for environment services (excluding crematoria and cemeteries) reduced from approximately £18million in 2012/13 to £13 million in 2016/17. In order to achieve these savings the following approach was taken:
- Changing the way services are provided - by sharing service provision, improved joint working and also enlisting greater support from the community
 - Reducing the level of service currently provided - rationalisation of facilities, reductions in service frequencies
 - Stop providing some services
 - Increasing the income that some services generate including further developing the trading of current services
8. Broadly services have changed both in how they are configured, the way they work including use of new technology and annualised working hours, as well as the quality of provision such as reduced frequency or grass cutting. In some areas service provision has ceased (floral bedding in public realm areas). Prioritisation of services has been important given the statutory nature of some, as well as the impact they could have on residents or potential claims made. The priorities are: Bereavement services; Garden Waste; Refuse Collection; and Winter Maintenance. The focus is then on other services that are important to local people and which contribute to the overall attractiveness of Gateshead the Place. These include Grounds Maintenance; Street Scene; and Arboriculture.
9. The service has also moved to a mixed economy of delivery which includes partnership working e.g. working with RSPB in Saltwell Park to promote the environment; transferral of sites to Durham Wildlife Trust; supporting communities or developed self-management arrangements with friends of groups; others delivering on the Council's behalf e.g. weed control and some fixed play.
10. There has been an increased focus on enlisting support from communities. This forms a key area for future work linking to Achieving More Together and behaviour change. Examples include:
- Litter picks at local parks co-ordinated with friends of groups
 - Virgin Media held an employee environmental volunteering day at Felling Park
 - Working with 'Wildground' and local community groups to carry out lake clearance sessions at Oliver Henderson Park
 - A new project being developed with Heworth Grange Comprehensive working with pupils as part of their curriculum to create a sustainable flower bed in Felling Park. This is also linking to the friends of group established there.
 - 'Brighten Ryton' group supported to make improvements such as flower planting and is seeking to link this to a community payback scheme for young offenders.

11. A number of changes to the way in which services are delivered and operated have also been implemented, including:
- Service teams have been re-aligned into a new structure including combined area working and zonal working for front line staff. These improvements have led to more efficient ways of delivering services with reduced resources.
 - Annualised hours have been introduced to assist in meeting peak service demands during the growing season.
 - Reducing mechanical sweepers from 9 machines to 6. Sweeping routes were revised to ensure the remaining resource is targeted as effectively as possible.
 - The number of depots has been significantly reduced where operationally effective. This has reduced the cost of maintaining the facilities and improved management of equipment, resources and staff.
 - Training requirements from annual appraisals are collated in a combined training plan. This ensures a coordinated approach where resources are allocated where needed including additional safety training to reduce the risk of accidents and associated costs.
 - There is improved communication and face to face discussions with front line staff to seek views and ideas on how the services can be improved.
 - Overtime work and standby arrangements have been significantly reduced to further reduce the cost of the services.
12. Changes have resulted in the following standards being adopted:
- Refuse collection – alternative weekly collections
 - Grounds maintenance – 15 working day cycle (though 12 days on occasion)
 - Trees – criteria used to determine response based on policy set
 - Charges for some service e.g. Green Waste Collection; Replacement Bins
13. The activities are currently continuing to meet statutory requirements. The range of duties varies but in the main relate to public safety issues such as ensuring hedge ways do not obstruct the highways or in response to fallen trees.

Consultation and engagement

14. Due to the in scope areas being some of the most visible services the Council provides, and ones which most if not all residents as well as stakeholders and visitors will be aware of, it was decided that consultation to obtain views about the environment was important. There were two elements to this. The first being extensive engagement of councillors. This took place in the form of a Corporate Resources Advisory Group meeting in September 2016. In response to comments made here and due to a need to understand variations in service needs across communities in Gateshead, a series of ward meetings were held to which all 66 councillors were invited.
15. The second element of the consultation took the form of the Residents Survey. This was undertaken during summer to autumn 2016 and the opportunity was taken to obtain views on the service as well as overall views of Gateshead. The Budget 2017/18 consultation also sought views on some specific proposals.

Analysis and issues emerging from the review

Grass cutting

16. Overall councillors thought the policy of cutting every 15 days (previously every 10 days) was working as well as could be expected given the resources available. A lot of work has been undertaken over the last year to revise working practices which has increased cutting frequencies bringing some additional capacity. Some areas, however, remained uncut. Councillors did not want standards to reduce further
17. The level of recorded resident complaints had reduced to 523 over 2015/16, but this could link to the ability to cut grass more often, the weather, which affects the growth, or whether residents have become accustomed to the current standards. Some councillors requested that consideration be given to whether the additional capacity could be deployed on other grounds maintenance areas such as tackling weeds/ trimming hedges. This will be considered and accommodated where possible, though the tasks are not currently performed by the same employees.

Floral displays

18. Floral displays had been a particular strength for Gateshead in the past. Currently floral bedding is only provided in Saltwell Park, cemeteries and crematoria. It was generally recognised that the Council could not return to providing the level of floral displays it had in the past, because of the significantly reduced resource and the need to prioritise across all Council services. The impact this could have on the attractiveness of Gateshead was also highlighted by councillors, particularly as other local authorities in the area were still maintaining attractive displays.
19. The Council is providing support to a range of small and local community groups to plant and maintain bedding. For example, as part of the bid for Heritage Lottery Funding, flower beds will be reinstated in Chase Park, with volunteers taking over their management following an initial officer-led role. The Friends of Ferndene Park carryout flower bed maintenance in the park and also grow plants for use there. Local councillors are providing proactive support for flower bed maintenance for example in Rowlands Gill, Winlaton and Blaydon.
20. Alternative ways of improving floral displays were suggested including greater community group involvement; engaging businesses and local sponsorship, award schemes as well as linking different groups together. Some local groups were already seeking to improve the appearance of local environmental areas such as at Ryton and at Blaydon. Consideration could be given as to how to engage, support and build capacity amongst more community groups, schools, the College and businesses to improve the attractiveness of their local areas.

Shrubs and Hedges and Arboriculture

21. The overall number of rose and shrub beds has been decreased although there are no plans to reduce this further. Response times to requests to cut back hedges and trees have also increased. No major issues were identified with the current standards being acceptable. There were some concerns around hedges on private land that could be obstructing the highway. One suggestion was around whether any additional capacity that could be available on an ad hoc basis could be re-directed to trimming of hedge ways/ shrubs where they were an issue. The more flexible approach would be explored, although a temporary redeployment may be possible depending upon weather patterns. The Council is identifying landowners of overgrown roadside hedges where these are privately owned, to work with them to ensure that they maintain these rather than the Council.

22. Maintenance of trees was an issue highlighted by both councillors and through residents by way of complaints. It should be noted that there are differing views on trees with some concerned about obstructions to light, or the leaves that drop to the ground, while others do not like to see trees cut down because of appearance and wildlife. The current service tended to be responsive, rather than planned, seeking to deal with trees causing immediate concern. The nature of this approach may not be the most efficient way of providing the service.
23. Improvements could be made through introducing a zonal working arrangement to carry out priority maintenance works within a set area. Areas would be timetabled to improve efficiency and effectiveness. A more strategic approach in this regard is likely to be required, though the work would need to be informed by a feasibility study to understand the issues as well as the best approach to implement change, recognising that some areas would be tackled sooner than others.

Weed control

24. Frequency of treatment has reduced for many areas from twice a year to once a year, though herbicide applications on roads and paths takes place twice a year. A contractor was employed to undertake paths and highways herbicide applications in 2016. There was a borough wide treatment in June and then in August /September although the timing can vary depending upon weather conditions and weed growth. It can take several weeks for the herbicide to act fully and for the weed to die back.
25. A number of councillors did not want to see a reduction in weed control activities. The Budget consultation exercise also identified that a proposal to reduce weed control treatment to once per year, followed by cessation of the service in year 2 was not generally supported (24 responses: 84% no, 16% yes). Most comments highlighted that there would be an obvious deterioration of the environment across the borough. Options to maintain the current level of weed control would be identified in response to the issues highlighted. This would mean redirection of resources, or income generated for environmental purposes.
26. It is well understood that regular weed control makes a significant contribution to maintaining the integrity of the highway assets, reducing damage and deterioration and reducing expensive repairs needed to footpaths and highways.

Street scene

27. Standards on street scene activities had reduced in order to focus on statutory areas. The ceasing/ reduction in flower beds and barrier baskets was an area where mitigation had focused on community engagement. Other changes included replacing litter bins with larger containers, new mechanical sweepers and revision of routes. 3 weekly cleansing of estates has continued, although resources are targeted where most required. The Dog warden continues to work with groups and respond to complaints, though their focus has been on stray dogs.
28. There was evidence that some communities were seeking to tackle dog fouling issues. A pilot scheme led held by the Crawcrook and Greenside Environment Group to highlight and combat dog fouling in their area could be expanded. Utilising armbands to ensure that they are more visible within the community, the volunteers have used spray paint to highlight incidents of dog fouling and distributed promotional leaflets to encourage residents to be responsible pet- owners.

29. Enforcement was a recurring theme with issues of littering, fly tipping and graffiti highlighted. This could be linked to behaviour change by reinforcing good environmental behaviour and tackling instances where this is an issue. In response to concerns that some standards have reduced below acceptable levels in some areas of Gateshead, the service is seeking redirect resources into Street Scene from other activities to address this using a more flexible approach.

Countryside, parks and open spaces

30. A reduction in standards was now noticeable in some of the parks and open spaces. The Budget Consultation also found that local people did not want to see a reduction in this with views on reducing countryside rangers and maintenance of public rights of way (20 responses 75% no, 15% yes, 10% don't know), There is a statutory duty to maintain rights of way and further reduction in standards could place the Council at risk. Changes had included more grassed areas left uncut or 'flailed' 3 times per year; reduced cutting on open spaces in parks; and a reduced edging of grassed areas.
31. Communities are being supported to enhance parks for example Volunteer Countryside Rangers are carrying out at least five litter picks every week, at least two of which are in the Derwent Valley, plus litter picks on each of the two practical task days per week.
32. The Crawcrook and Greenside Environment Group have held at least three 'big tidy-ups' and a number of individuals collect and bag rubbish on a weekly basis as part of an agreed collection arrangement, while the Jewish community carried out a litter pick in Saltwell Park, and further discussions with the Council about other similar exercises have taken place. In addition the Friends of Oliver Henderson/Lingley House School have received funding from Tesco and the Council to work with an environmental artist/blacksmith to design and install new seating and sculpture.
33. Further work to develop the approach to parks and open spaces could be taken forward being clear about prioritisation, opportunities for community engagement and involvement as well as ways to enable community / interest groups to take on greater responsibility for local areas. Some groups may also be able to access funding to support their work.

Waste and recycling

34. Recycling rates had stagnated / declined in recent years, though current figures show a slight increase to 37.6%. The Residents Survey highlighted that while 94.3% of respondees said they recycled all or most of the time, there were issues around how much was being recycled as some were confused or unaware of all the materials that could be recycled. This was also identified as a reason for not fully recycling in the work of the Council's Behavioural Change Team.
35. The survey also demonstrated an increase in satisfaction with both household waste (63% in 2012 compared to 78.1% in 2016) and the recycling service (69% in 2012 compared to 84% in 2016). Satisfaction with Garden Waste was found to be lower at 56.2%. Proposals to increase the charge for Garden Waste received 43 responses in the recent Budget Consultation with 56% against an increase and 44% in favour.

36. Complaints received about the service tended to be around the charging proposals as well as fewer than 100 complaints from customers wanting the collection period to be extended into November (there are 30,000 service users). Some residents also indicated through the Budget Consultation that they would be willing to pay more if the service was extended. The extension possibility was also highlighted by councillors during the ward based discussions.
37. The costs of extending the Garden Waste service into November could be explored, though it is recognised that the current operations would mean any change would likely to be costly. This is because the employees delivering the service are deployed onto Winter Maintenance from the first week in November, though options could be identified with customers being consulted on these in order to understand viability and inform a decision.

Challenges

38. Analysis highlighted the main future challenges for the service area:
- Manging impact of further budget reductions
 - Expectations and demand from local people for what is a very visible service and is one of great public interest
 - Increases in fly tipping, littering and other forms of poor environmental behaviour
 - Resources required to support communities to be more responsible
 - Ageing workforce in a service area that is manual labour based
 - Broader strategic impact of further reductions, quality of life; health and fitness, well-being
 - Attractiveness of Gateshead to potential investors, businesses or those wanting to visit or live in the area.

Impact

39. Analysis of the impact has shown both positive and negative aspects, which demonstrate the shift that has taken place and suggests how the challenges could be met in some way in the future.
40. The changes have reduced revenue or increased income to enable a contribution to the funding gap. The Council has still been able to meet statutory requirements as well as deliver services that are important to residents and are in line with the priorities set out in the Council Plan, though this has not been easy to achieve and has resulted in some services stopping altogether with noticeable impact e.g. floral displays.
41. There have also been some efficiency improvements. The leaner working arrangements have enabled some services to continue albeit with a reduced resource. Mechanical brush sweeping on footpaths, roads and car parks reduced to help maintain a focus on higher profile areas such as shops and tourist locations. In some areas smaller litter bins have been replaced with larger wheeled bin litter bins to provide greater capacity and facilitate reduced emptying frequencies.
42. In terms of enforcement the team of 4.5 FTE now covers all environmental enforcement complaints from planning, highways and flytipping. This is much smaller team than any comparable council but piloting a new way of working around flytipping complaints has shown that a more effective way of working could make a big difference in future if an additional 2 members of staff were employed.

43. There is currently very little action in respect of litter, graffiti and dog fouling due to reduced resources but Cabinet have recently approved a proposal to increase the fine limits of fixed penalty notices which will enable a new approach to progress which should help in terms of deterrent and future funding of the service and enable the Council to deal much more effectively with these issues. Public Space Protection Orders have also been progressed to tackle some of the issues identified as problems throughout the Borough.
44. A further impact is the increased engagement with communities, which has been very positive. Some have stepped up where they have felt they could make a difference, for example friends of groups and these have been supported by the Council to become established. Flower beds are being reinstated in Chase Park, with volunteers taking over their future management, while the Council continues to support community groups, schools and volunteers who wish to provide and maintain floral bedding in parks and open spaces. Ways to encourage floral displays with the Council taking on a different role could be explored further.
45. There has been increased diversion and loss of staff from services such as litter picking to support priority services such as waste collection, winter services. At the same time there has been an increase in complaints over the past few years, though these appear to have reduced more recently.
46. The 2016 residents survey highlighted the importance of the environment to local people. Clean streets was the second most important factor cited by residents (after good schools) when they considered what makes somewhere a good place to live. It was also the second highest area that most required improving according to residents (44.4%), after street and pavement repairs. This represented an increase from the 2012 survey (41%). In addition to redirecting resource to street cleaning and doing more to promote cleaner streets with residents taking more responsibility, enforcement could also play an important role. There had been a decrease in complaints in 2015/16 (latest figures) though the views of councillors and residents survey suggest that clean streets required improvement. This decrease could be because people were becoming accustomed to lower standards.

Opportunities for further change

47. Options and scenarios identified for future change following analysis of the evidence are outlined below:

Standards

48. Reducing standards further such as reducing the frequency of grounds maintenance activity; reducing or ceasing weed control activities; and reducing Winter Maintenance. While this would make a greater contribution to the funding gap, it would have a series of adverse impacts on the attractiveness of Gateshead as services would be focused on statutory requirements.
49. Councillors have been clear that the current standards are at the minimum level and should not be reduced further because of the detrimental impact this could have on communities and Gateshead as a whole. A more strategic site approach could also be taken on service standards and where the Council should prioritise effort, for example on arboriculture issues.

Community volunteering and ownership

50. The Council currently has around 480 active volunteers in the environment, though many require support to enable them to play a greater role. Area Co-ordinators engage and work with local communities, partners within geographic areas across the borough. Councillors also play an important community champion role and work with communities as well as officers to develop community schemes and identifying ways to mitigate adverse impacts.
51. There are over 23 groups including friends of groups, Crawcrook and Greenside Environment Group, Ryton Litter Action, Countryside Volunteers and ad hoc project groups carrying out a range of environmental improvements. Community environmental projects, initiatives and campaigns have been successfully progressed in a number of areas:
- The Thrive charitable organisation, run a gardening programme in Saltwell Park designed to help disabled ex-service people to get back to work.
 - The Saltwell Park Users Group (SPUG) was established to enlist support by main user groups in the park.
 - Sessions with Lingley House Primary School about wildlife-friendly food and litter issues in Oliver Henderson Park include building bird and bat boxes, which will be monitored as part of an ongoing school project.
52. The 2016 residents survey also asked if residents voluntarily help to improve their local area by litter picking, removing weeds etc. but not as part of a formal group. Around a fifth (19.6%) do so monthly, increasing to just under half (47.3%) who have done something to improve their local area either regularly or less often. This suggests there could be some untapped potential in communities.
53. The survey also asked for ideas from residents on how to get more people to take more responsibility for their environment. The ideas varied in nature and also in the extent to which local people and communities were prepared to be directly involved. The main method was improved education and better campaigns leading to changes in behaviour around littering and recycling. The other main groups of ideas included more (larger and better located) waste/dog waste bins emptied more often, more enforcement action, more community involvement in managing and developing areas of land, for example parks and green spaces.
54. To really make a step change and expand our volunteering offer further, a more targeted strategic approach is required with new structures and resources assigned accordingly. This could involve the strategic identification of key sites/groups to develop – for example Chase Park, Saltwell Park approach as well as considering the appetite for and feasibility of community asset transfers.
55. There would also be a need for greater publicity/promotion of volunteering opportunities and environmental initiatives. It could also involve different ways to collaborate on common environmental issues and facilitate new more sustainable models that reduce demand on Council services.

Behaviour change

56. Behaviour change has been a key area of focus in helping to reduce overall demand. This has ranged from ad hoc communication campaigns and publicity such as focusing on responsible dog owners, fly tipping and environmental projects to a more targeted approach through the Behavioural Change Team for waste.

57. The Behavioural Change Team began operating from April 2016. The purpose of the Team is to improve the recycling and waste disposal activities of local people using a targeted approach identifying areas with lower recycling levels. The team comprises 3 full time officers, though they work on a flexible basis in order to target homes. Key aims are to: Increase profile and awareness of recycling services with more waste being diverted from residual bins to blue bins and reducing contamination and increase overall recycling performance.
58. As well as dealing with issues and resident queries on the doorstep they undertake other activities such as recording bins without their inner boxes, issuing inner boxes directly to the public where appropriate and repairing bins (mainly lids). Performance in areas targeted had shown an increase in recycling, and follow up work is needed to ascertain if this increased level has been maintained. The work has also identified some particular issues around awareness of recyclable materials, and attitudes to recycling that could inform future work.
59. Behaviour Change is seen as being important and consideration is needed as to how best take this forward in the future. Further analysis of the cost benefits is also being undertaken to understand the potential This could include taking a more strategic approach to behaviour shift and identifying key areas for promotion.

Approach to enforcement

60. The low levels of enforcement currently in operation were a common theme highlighted by councillors. There appeared to be a view that more was needed to be done to tackle issues of fly tipping, littering, graffiti, dog fouling and other forms of poor environmental behaviour. A new approach could be explored further. This included increasing fines as well as a different approach to enforcement looking to get to the root causes of the issue and adopting a more comprehensive approach to enforcement action, using all powers available to the Council, piloting new approaches and greater publicity of successful enforcement action. This could also be supported through greater use of digital solutions to improve timeliness of accurate information and to improve how local people access services such as bulky waste permits.

Income generation

61. Work continues on promoting services to the commercial sector or public to generate income through trading and offset the cost of the service e.g. providing cleansing services for events or private car parks, roundabout sponsorship etc. It is clear that income generation would need to be within values and ethos of the Council. Self sustainable models of delivery such as Green Waste Collection and how this approach could be used elsewhere to cover costs and reduce the need to revenue support. While it is unlikely that income generation would remove the need for revenue support the Council could seek to identify ways to reduce the gap where this is appropriate.

Arboriculture

62. Tree maintenance was a further issue that was identified during the consultation. The current approach could be revisited to have a more streamlined and efficient service. This could involve 'zoning' areas with work on trees being concentrated on all issues in one geographical location, before moving to another zone. Such an approach could mean greater use of capacity and resources so that more work is able to be completed at pace, because of the more planned approach and the ability to reduce travelling times. A feasibility study would be required to inform and implement the change.

Consultation

63. Consultation and engagement with councillors has formed a key part of this review. A Corporate Resources Advisory Group meeting was held in September 2017 (Note attached at Appendix 2). All councillors were contacted and invited to ward based meetings to discuss views in more detail. Most councillors participated in these meetings. The views from these meetings have informed the recommendations in the report. The Cabinet members for Environment and Transport and Communities and Volunteering have been consulted in preparation of this report.
64. The review drew on the residents survey undertaken in 2016 which received over 900 responses. This included some specific questions relating to environment services. The 2017/18 Budget Consultation was also used to ascertain residents' views on the environment. These have been used to inform the findings of the review.
65. Further briefings will be arranged with councillors as the recommendations are progressed.

Alternative Options

66. The main alternative option would be to reduce standards further which would result in a budget saving to the Council, but would likely result in an increase in complaints, as well as the potential cost of responding to problem areas rather than maintaining them, which would be more costly in the longer term. Reduction in standards was not supported by the consultation with councillors. It could also impact upon the attractiveness of Gateshead as a place to live, visit and invest.
67. The recommendations aim to find a solution to ensuring the environment is maintained and where possible enhanced but using a variety of different methods and models to achieve this, This includes generating income, supporting communities to take greater ownership, for individuals to be more responsible and instilling greater pride in the environment through involvement and encouraging behaviour change.

Implications of Recommended Option

68. **Resources:**
 - a) **Financial Implications** - The Strategic Director, Corporate Resources confirms that the implementation of the recommendations will be managed within the Council's proposed 2017/18 budget. Any financial implications that may arise from the outcomes of the recommendations will be the subject of further reports to Cabinet if necessary.
 - b) **Human Resources Implications** – There are no direct human resource implications arising from this report.
 - c) **Property Implications** – There are no direct implications arising from this report.

69. **Risk Management Implication** – There are no implications arising from this recommendation, though the recommendations aim to mitigate adverse impacts and therefore reduce risks.
70. **Equality and Diversity Implications** – There are no direct implications arising as result of the proposals described in the report as all residents will still have the opportunity to access leisure facilities.
71. **Crime and Disorder Implications** – There are no direct implications arising as a result of this report, though a greater focus on enforcement could result in more people receiving fines for dropping litter etc. through this aims to contribute to having a cleaner, safer environment.
72. **Health Implications** – There are no direct health implications resulting from this report, though having a clean environment contributes positively to health and wellbeing.
73. **Sustainability Implications** – The proposals aim to support a more sustainable environment.
74. **Human Rights Implications** - There are no implications arising from this report .
75. **Area and Ward Implications** – the proposals affect all wards

Corporate Resources Advisory Group

20 September 2016

Report to Cabinet

Environmental Services

Purpose of the Meeting

This Advisory Group was asked for views on the options for change in respect of Environmental Services. Views were also sought on the standards required and the impact of changes to date.

The group was taken through a PowerPoint presentation which set the context for change, outlined the financial position and highlighted the views of residents.

Summary of Advice

The Group:

- Requested that the current standards of service in respect of grounds maintenance be maintained or improved upon.
- Would welcome increased enforcement activity but acknowledged that making this a priority may require the redirection of some income or direct investment.
- Noted that enforcement activity has significantly reduced whilst requests have increased. It was agreed that increased enforcement activity would support behavioural change.
- Requested that further opportunities for sponsorship be explored, including advertising on fleet vehicles. It was noted that sponsorship of grounds maintenance in some locations could result in different standards across Gateshead.
- Queried whether the introduction of communal bins in some locations would prove more efficient. It was acknowledged that this would require investment and other issues could arise from communal bins, including the inappropriate disposal of waste and difficulty identifying its origin.
- Welcomed the full use of powers available to the Council (as part of wider enforcement) to change behaviour and reduce anti-social behaviour.
- Requested a breakdown of the costs attributed to fleet vehicles along with options for reducing spend in this area. It was noted that waste and winter maintenance vehicles are particularly expensive

and depreciation is an issue. The fleet also includes vans and busses used by the Library Service and Schools. The group was pleased to note the measures to reduce costs including; the use of hire vehicles where appropriate, warranties, sourcing the best deals for fuel and use of route optimisation technology.

- Requested a breakdown of the costs attributed to cemeteries and crematoria.
- Queried whether there is scope to charge for funeral planning or insurance packages as part of the Bereavement Service.
- Was pleased to note that there are currently 480 active environmental volunteers and queried whether the volunteers receive recognition or qualifications.
- Suggested that the Council works with more young people, in particular the Scouts and Guides groups on environmental activities. The group was pleased to note that advice and equipment is provided to support groups undertake their own grounds maintenance and other activities that benefit the wider community.
- Noted the issues relating to the aging workforce and queried whether the recruitment of apprentices would help to address the issues. It was acknowledged that this would require budget provision as there are currently no positions.
- Agreed that stepping up behaviour change initiatives would contribute to the achievement of significant savings.
- Suggested that careful consideration be given to proposals concerning assisted bin collections as the service supports the elderly and disabled. The group noted that the cost of assisted bin collections to the Council is £45k per annum.
- Sought clarification on the value of the Green Waste collection service. It was noted that the scheme generates approximately £800k income per annum and it is a potential growth area.
- Suggested that the Council charges for garden maintenance.
- Highlighted that established practice has resulted in some residents' lawns being maintained free of charge (where open plan streets were once made up of Council properties). It was requested that this practice be reviewed, now that the streets are of mixed ownership.
- Requested details on the resource requirement of implementing Controlled Street Orders and/or re-establishing an awards scheme for business premises to maintain cleanliness.
- Requested details on the potential savings of £150k for 2017/18, identified by the Change Programme Team.

- Stressed that the service is universal and is of importance to all residents therefore communities should be engaged to establish their priorities for this service.
- Stated that in addition to the negative economic impact of failure to maintain the environment to an appropriate standard, there will be long-term cost implications of failing to maintain weeds and trees as they will undermine the integrity of footpaths and roads.
- Commented that residents should be able to pay for a bigger recycling bin or a different coloured bin. It was noted that the caddies may need to be altered to sit within a bigger bin. It was commented that less frequent paper collections could be considered.
- Recommended that Christmas tree disposal schemes be explored as there is evidence of this being successful in some areas.
- Proposed that clothing collections be considered. The group noted that the value of textiles has reduced and that consideration would need to be given as to whether to enter a market dominated by charities.
- Agreed that a series of separate meetings between officers and Councillors be arranged to discuss priority issues.

Chair: C Donovan (In the Chair)

Councillors Present: M Brain, K Dodds, M Foy, L Green, S Green, M Hall, M Hood, P Mole, J Simpson and L Twist.

Officers Present: Paul Dowling - Communities and Environment
 Colin Huntington – Communities and Environment
 Anneliese Hutchinson – Communities and Environment
 Kate Bond – Office of the Chief Executive
 Neil Porteous – Corporate Service and Governance