

Meeting Date: 14th July 2020

Public/Private\*: Public

Title: **Environment & Transport Portfolio Holder's Report –  
Councillor Nigel Christian**

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### **NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES**

In the early days of lockdown, staffing levels in April across Neighbourhood Services were down by 50% through a mix of existing long-term sickness absence, new cases of staff isolating and due to the numbers of frontline staff identified as vulnerable and sent home unable to work. Where staff could work from home, for example the Civic Centre based Technical Services Team, all staff were set up with the necessary IT equipment to support this.

To support operational delivery, swift decisions were taken to suspend garden waste and bulky collections to divert staff, with the support of agency and casual workers, to support priority refuse and recycling collections. And, at the same time introducing a range of Covid-safe working practices such as staggering the start times, providing additional sanitisation and PPE, regular cleaning of the workplaces and vehicles, and very importantly ensuring that staff were able to maintain safe social distancing through the use of minibus shuttle transport and pool vehicles to ferry staff around with the service always operating in line with, and often ahead of, national industry best practice and guidance. As services settled down, and as staff returned from isolation, action was taken to fully reinstate bulky waste collections from the end of April. Action was also taken at this time to phase in garden waste collections at 50% levels with a view to reinstating full service from 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2020. As staffing levels settled, it was also possible to release staff back to their core roles, for example supporting street cleaning operations, driving sweepers etc.

The response of the staff at this time has been incredible with their efforts and commitment recognised with fantastic support and praise from residents, Elected Members and senior colleagues with our services featuring positively in the local press and TV reports. Council vehicles carried the high profile 'Stay At Home' messages into every street across Carlisle, later being updated to the revised 'Stay Alert' message a visible sign of support for the NHS.

As occupancy across car parks fell due to lockdown, parking charges were withdrawn across all Council car parks with free parking available to all. As the lockdown measures were eased, parking charges were reintroduced from 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020 but with the free parking offer continuing for key NHS and care sector staff eligible under the Government scheme. A reduced Enforcement Team continued to work investigating reports of fly-tipping which saw an increase in May reflecting trends nationally as local HWRCs were closed.

The fleet and garage team have also worked incredibly hard behind the scenes to keep our fleet moving during this time in support of the priority services. MOT's and taxi tests were suspended for customers with the team working towards their reinstatement from July.

Staff have also supported the mobile testing site operated by the Army working out of the Swifts car park across many weeks.

Neighbourhood Services is now supporting the city centre recovery from 15<sup>th</sup> June 2020, with the development of enhanced cleaning regime and the planned installation of hand sanitisers at key points in the City (including Longtown and Brampton) and in car parks supported by other measures to support social distancing and contact etc.

## **ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING POINTS**

The project to introduce charging points for electric vehicles, of which the City Council is one of three Local Authority partners, has made progress despite the restrictions of lockdown. The share offer, with the aim of raising private funds to match the Innovate UK contribution, has reached its £130,000 target. The first dummy chargepoint has been successfully tested and the system by which payments are collected is nearing completion. The project, known as SOSCI (Scaling Of Street Charging Infrastructure), has been hampered by the furloughing of contract staff who would install the cabling and street furniture. However, as restrictions are lifted, this work should be able to restart.

Innovate UK, the Government department sponsoring the project, has agreed a three-month extension as a result of Covid-19 restrictions.

## **GREEN SPACES**

**A big thank you to all the staff in the team for keeping services going during these difficult times.**

We have seen a big increase in numbers of people using our parks and green spaces during lockdown.

The Council followed Government guidance and signage was installed at all sites to promote social distancing and car parks closed for a short period to discourage travel.

The parks and green spaces have been a vital community asset during lockdown allowing people access for exercise and quiet recreation. Where the minority have caused issues for other users we have worked in partnership with the Police and Fire Service to tackle this.

The car parks at our open spaces that were closed were reopened as soon as Government guidelines allowed, including at Talkin Tarn.

Talkin Tarn Tearooms is reopening with the offer of a limited takeaway service. Since reopening Talkin Tarn car park after lockdown the site has seen a significant increase in the number of visitors enjoying this special place. The Talkin Tarn Water Sports Clubs are once again on the water, adhering to strict social distancing measures.

The Allotments have remained open throughout Covid-19 and provided a valuable resource for tenants. Twelve new plots were let out in May and we currently have over 80 people on the waiting list.

St. James' Park - Works are complete on a large-scale refurbishment of the paths and street furniture in St. James' Park, Denton Holme. All paths and steps within the park have been resurfaced and improved, together with installation of new seats and litter bins. A circular seat, with a centrally planted maple tree, has been installed in memory of former Denton Holme Councillor Hugh McDevitt as part of the scheme. The project has been funded by S106 contributions from a nearby residential development and was delivered on budget by local firm Kirkaldy & Roe Ltd.

A £6,000 investment in land drainage and the installation of an entrance track suitable for heavy vehicles has been made in Bitts Park. This is to support the ongoing use of the site as an events venue once this is safe to resume.

The initial stages of a major S106 investment in site infrastructure, landscape improvements and play and recreation facilities in Hammonds Pond, Upperby are underway. Permits are being sought from the Environment Agency to complete dredging works to Wire Mire Beck, which flows through the park. The beck has become silted up over a number of years and requires clearance to increase flows and aid with the regulation of the water level of the pond. Further projects to improve paths, replace street furniture, install a CCTV system and refurbish play areas will follow.

## **GROUNDS MAINTENANCE**

Despite severe restrictions the Grounds Maintenance team have been working hard to keep our parks, cemeteries and open space maintained to a high standard over the past three months.

The team have had to prioritise the high use areas such as our cemeteries, parks and civic spaces and standards have been well maintained. Highway verges and less used areas

have been cut less frequently, which has allowed plants and grasses to flower which have had the added benefit of providing valuable food and habitat for bees and other insects. We are reviewing our mowing regime in order to strike an appropriate balance between biodiversity and amenity.

Litter and bin emptying have increased significantly in our parks due to the increase use and good weather. We have tried to prioritise the most used areas in good weather for example Rickerby Park. The amount of extra littering has been difficult to manage with reduced staff, but we have prioritised this when needed.

Summer bedding has arrived for our floral displays around the city. Flower beds and planted containers will be in place as usual which will be important as lockdown measures continue to ease and people are coming back to the City Centre. In total there are 37,000 bedding plants and over 150 baskets and containers to go out around our parks, cemeteries and City Centre areas.

We have placed orders for some battery powered machinery for our cemeteries. Battery powered trimmers and hedge cutters will significantly reduce noise in our cemeteries which will be beneficial to visitors and staff.

## **BEREAVEMENT SERVICES**

Despite needing to limit numbers of mourners and service times at Carlisle Crematorium to ensure a safe environment for the public and staff, the service has continued to be able to provide meaningful funerals throughout the pandemic for families at an extremely difficult time.

As Government guidance allows, we will be transitioning back to normal service provision.

All headstone inspections and make safes have been completed in our rural and City closed churchyards thus ending the first round of our 5-year testing programme. The Memorial Testing Programme will restart with Stanwix Cemetery and ensures that our cemeteries are safe environments to visit

## **REGULATORY SERVICES**

### **Private Water Supply update**

In April 2019, the new Private Water Supply Regulations 2018 came into force. These regulations added additional sampling parameters to those contained in the former 2016 Regulations. The 2018 Regulations apply to private water supplies where the water is intended for human consumption and all water used in any food-production for the manufacture, processing, preservation or marketing of products or substances intended for human consumption.

There are approximately 110 private water supplies in the District serving over 400 residential properties and commercial outlets.

The new regulations placed new standards for sampling on Carlisle City Council. Officers had expected to undertake the revised sampling training in early April however this was put on hold. Training is set to commence again in the coming months after which a sampling programme will resume, subject to confirmations from the Drinking Water Inspectorate. The sampling and risk assessment processes that are in place locally are very robust and there is no risk to the public.

### **Local Air Quality Network**

There are around 300 national air quality monitoring sites around the UK, which are managed by the Environment Agency on behalf of DEFRA. Carlisle City Council assists in the maintenance of one of these sites. The local site is in the centre of the City road network. Real time data and information is available on [Uk-air.defra.gov.uk](http://Uk-air.defra.gov.uk) The information shows us that there has been a dramatic improvement in air quality over the lockdown period.

The period from 23<sup>rd</sup> March to 20<sup>th</sup> April sees the most improvement across all pollution parameters, with levels gradually rising again at the start of May. Monday 12<sup>th</sup> June saw the biggest peak again with levels comparable to a Monday morning at the start of March, pre lockdown.

### **COVID19**

Officers have been heavily involved in the enforcement of the business restriction requirements introduced during the pandemic. Enforcement work has been undertaken on the principle of Engage; Explain and Encourage before Enforcement. Regulatory Services would like to compliment the business community with their compliance with the difficult lockdown restrictions. To date Regulatory Services have only had to take enforcement actions on three occasions, three Prohibition Notices have been served – a Public House allowing food and drink to be consumed on the premises; an indoor swimming pool being open to the public, and an AirBnB allowing visitor stays.

We are continuing to receive and respond to complaints. We are also providing advice to businesses on safety compliance with infection control.

### **Food Safety / Interventions**

On the advice and guidance of the Food Standards Agency, planned and reactive food safety interventions are being undertaken on a risk based approach during the COVID pandemic. Visits are being undertaken where significant food safety incidents are identified. Appropriate PPE and social distancing measures are in place where visits are required. Preparatory work is now being undertaken to reintroduce food interventions, focussing visits on those businesses identified as high risk or non-compliant.

The 2019/20 Food Safety Return for food activities was successfully submitted to the Food Standards Agency. A summary of the activities reported were contained in the Food Law

Enforcement Plan recently submitted to Executive with the recommendation for the Plan to be sent to Council for approval. Good progress was being made to achieve planned targets until inspection work ceased mid-March. The outstanding intervention work will be undertaken during this calendar year.

### **Pest Control**

Following the announcement of lockdown measures in March, the Pest Control Service was temporarily suspended. Following an assessment of risk and appropriate controls implemented, a reduced service for outdoor treatments of Rats and Wasp was introduced early April. Due to one Officer being clinically vulnerable, the Pest Control Service is currently operating at 50% capacity. The introduction of treatments within enclosed areas will be introduced when the risk to Officers is deemed safe and with added controls in place.

### **Notice of Motion - Flood Protection and Resilience**

Further to the Notice of Motion agreed by the Council at its meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2020, I wish to update Members on the issues raised and will take each one in turn.

Firstly

1. Work with Cumbria County Council, the Environment Agency, emergency services, businesses/local people of affected areas and Flood Action Groups(s) seeking the support of our local MPs urban/rural to accelerate delivery of flood protection projects across all phases of the planned work and call on the Government to increase funding to the Environment Agency to enable them to meet the increasing challenges of managing flood risk in the affected vulnerable rural and urban areas of Carlisle.

The Council continues to work with the Environment Agency (EA) on flood protection projects and resilience measures and support any business cases which have been submitted to Government for funding where necessary. As a result of the motion I have written to DEFRA and BEIS expressing our continued support for the EA and the need for funding for initiatives which will manage flood risk in those areas affected by flooding in Carlisle.

2. Work with our City Council Officers, Environment Agency, Cumbria County Council, emergency services, Carlisle Flood Action Group, residents and MPs to give all assistance needed for any business cases that the Environment Agency need to prepare in order to draw down funds and call on central government to look at supporting further flood management work as part of future proofing against changing climate conditions.

Following the floods as a result of Storm Desmond in 2015, the Council has worked closely with the Environment Agency (EA) on flood protection projects which would add to those put in place following the 2005 floods.

Following the floods in 2015, £25m was ring fenced for flood defences in Carlisle and a Strategic Flood Liaison Panel was established to oversee the projects, support business cases and advise on any planning and development issues.

These works are split into 3 phases:

Phase 1 – Warwick Road area defence raising and lengthening: Melbourne Park and Tesco. Bridge work and River Petteril channel modifications at Botcherby Bridge.

Phase 2 – City Centre defence raising Swifts, Sands Centre and Bitts Park to Dacre Road.

Phase 3 – Lower River Caldew within influence of River Eden, River Caldew and Upper Caldew.

The phase I works will be largely complete by Autumn 2020. Phase 2 of the programme has commenced with early work on the Sands centre now completed. Phase 3 is at design stage and Council Officers are working with the EA to support the outline business case and any planning requirements.

In addition, the EA have been working on the following schemes:

- Low Crosby
- Warwick Bridge
- Rickerby
- Etterby Terrace
- Harraby Green

3. Work with the above engaging with the affected urban and rural ward areas and call on Government through our MPs urban and rural to review the Flood Re scheme to include homes that are part of a management company (e.g. apartments in Willowholme) and also businesses, to enable them to access affordable insurance.

This is an issue that has been raised by this Council and the MP a number of times with Government following Storm Desmond and we continue to press for a scheme which will help people not able to access insurance. I raised this in my letter to DEFRA.

4. Work with everyone mentioned to collate risk implications, responsibilities, costs funding and assist in looking at organising a volunteer floor warden scheme to provide practical help to residents to protect their property at times of risk.

Flood Wardens were raised as a potential way forward after the Desmond Flood Event 2015, there are examples of schemes elsewhere in the UK.

Once residents and businesses began to recover and return, the Council embarked on a Community Emergency Planning Project called 'Rebuilding Together', this was funded by National Lottery and delivered by CVS, CAfS and ACTCumbria.

A summary of the work of the 3-year £1million project is available on the ACT Cumbria website. This project closed this year with an event at the Racecourse to mark the end. The project found that the Community Emergency Planning approach did not work as well in the City as in distinct rural areas, such as Stockdalewath, who do have a plan, and Brampton who have recently developed a plan. The focus from the 'Rebuilding Together Project' switched to Household and Individual Flood Planning, which the Council has actively promoted.

As a result of Covid-19, Carlisle Community Resilience Group (CaCRG) was set-up. Cllr E. Mallinson's Portfolio Report provides more detail on this, but there is an opportunity through this to bring together the role of Community and Flood Warden.

### **CLIMATE CHANGE**

Work has resumed on the Draft Local Environment (Climate Change) Strategy, the next step is to finalise a consultation document that can be the basis for engagement work, this will be a user-friendly version of the Draft Strategy.

The proposal is to reform the Member Working Group as a Member Advisory Group to sign off this document and consider the feedback prior to drafting the Executive Report.

The countywide Climate Change Working Group has continued to meet, finalising the Cumbria Baseline Report and progressing the Cumbria Action for Sustainability (CAfS) bid for National Lottery Funding.

The work on the Council's carbon footprint has been further developed and subject to an internal audit to ensure that the data is robust.

The Covid-19 recovery planning work has reaffirmed the commitment to a zero carbon UK.