

Appendix C

Report of the Town Clerk

Litter

Background

1. The facts concerning litter speak for themselves:
 - Street cleaning cost local government £778m in 2015/16. A significant portion of this will have been avoidable litter clear-up and the money could have been better spent on vital public services
 - The National Crime Survey has found that 28-30% of people perceive “litter and rubbish lying around” to be a problem in their area
 - 81% of people are angry and frustrated by the amount of litter lying all over the country
 - In the 2016 Great British Beach Clean 802 litter items were collected per 100 metres of beach in England
2. Government strategy announced in April 2017 it is to apply best practice in education, enforcement and infrastructure to deliver a substantial reduction in litter and littering behaviour. The strategy is built strategy on three broad themes of “education, enforcement and infrastructure”.
3. Within Berwick upon Tweed each of these strands merits re-appraisal. Do we do enough to educate, is there sufficient enforcement, and do we have the right infrastructure?
4. Good, robust quantitative data on litter is hard to find, and harder still to interpret. Appendix 1 illustrates the problem nicely. The number of bags of litter collected by NCC and BTC funded staff may give us an idea of the volume of litter, but not the number of incidents. Qualitative data is more common, but assessing the efficacy of interventions based upon qualitative data runs up against, again, the issue of the lack of quantitative data.

Issues

5. The majority of respondents to our recent Local Services survey reported that streets in Berwick were not clean, both in the area where they lived and overall.
6. Resident perception data is one measure of the impact of litter, provided the use of the same questions repeatedly does not condition residents to provide differing responses to the same panel of questions and experiences.
7. The key issue is how council addresses the problem of litter before it has an impact. Work on education and prevention of litter is regularly undertaken by Northumberland County Council, but there is no reliable evidence as to the impact of presentations and ad hoc lessons on young people’s attitudes.

Solutions

8. Community clean ups, as a form of learning by doing, are another tool in the educational toolkit, and council may wish to consider whether it wishes to sponsor community cleanups in litter hotspots outside the town centre, such as open spaces, housing estates and beaches. Investment would be required in publicity, litter-pickers, bags, and NCC staff to collect and take away the litter collected.
9. Council has a substantial investment in binrastructure; both your officers and NCC officers have expressed concerns that the distribution of bins may not be optimal, and that costs may be incurred visiting and maintaining bins that are not having any impact on the litter problem. It is also noticeable that council does not appear to have engaged with traders supplying hot food in terms of their responsibility for waste that arises from their businesses.
10. The issue of litter enforcement is always thorny; privatized litter enforcement is controversial, and the perception that services are profit driven always leads to negative perceptions of officer behaviour. Nevertheless, it remains a significant strand of anti-litter work in some areas, and has potential to make impacts on resident perceptions and behaviours. The likely cost per FTE of an enforcement officer, even if more neutrally badged as a 'ranger' or 'environmental officer' is £25k per annum.

Implications

11. All of the above solutions will have some impact on your budget, and will require either compensatory savings or an increase in base budget to enable this work to be undertaken.

Recommendations

1. Councillors are recommended to indicate their preferred options from paras 8-10 above.

Appendix 1

Bags of litter collected	April	May	June
Town centre	33	43	52
Prior Park	11	11	16
East/Highcliffe	9	14	7
Spittal	14	21	12
Tweedmouth	1	9	7
Berwick north	10	3	2
Outer town Centre	3	8	3
Other	10	76	20