

## **AGENDA ITEM**

### **REPORT TO EXECUTIVE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**15 NOVEMBER 2022**

### **REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

## **SCRUTINY OF CRUSTACEAN DEATHS**

### **SUMMARY**

The report presents an update on the Redcar & Cleveland Council motion concerning crustacean deaths off the North East Coast.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Executive Scrutiny Committee are asked to indicate if they wish to participate in the informal joint arrangement set out at paragraph 6 below and, if so, appoint the Place Select Committee Chair to attend meetings of the informal Group with appropriate officer support.

### **DETAIL**

1. At the Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council meeting held on the 14 July 2022, a motion was passed regarding the mass mortality crustacean event that occurred along the length of the Tees coastline. The motion was as follows:

*MOVED by Councillor Carl Quartermain and duly seconded by Councillor Thomson:-*

*“Redcar & Cleveland Council believes that much more needs to be done to investigate the reasons for the mass death of sea creatures found on our coast in the latter part of 2021 and more recently.*

*Redcar & Cleveland Council also believes much more support should be given to our local fishing industry which has been adversely affected by the consequent radical reduction in fishing stock.*

*Since October last year dead crustaceans have been found on our beaches along with, the possibly associated, deaths of seal pups and porpoises.*

*The report of the Government Joint agency investigation into Teesside and Yorkshire Coast Crab and Lobster mortalities was published in May 2022 and concluded that as healthy crabs and lobsters were now being found the investigation was closed.*

*Redcar & Cleveland Council believes:*

1. *The decision to close the investigation was premature and demands that the Government re-open it as a matter of urgency to consider why the crustacean deaths.*
2. *The Tees Valley local authorities should work together in expressing concern to central government and commission a new independent report in the light of the inconclusive evidence. In addition, the ongoing situation should be monitored by a special Scrutiny Committee from each local authority.*

3. *That the Government proposal to give support to the local fishing industry via the existing Seafood Fund is inadequate and calls on them to provide proper compensation for the lost income and livelihoods caused by this crisis.*
4. *That the possibility of creating a coastal hatchery to replenish crustacean stocks should be investigated.”*
2. Section 2 called for the establishment of a special scrutiny committee from all the Tees Authorities to monitor the ongoing situation.
3. Both Middlesbrough and Hartlepool Borough Councils also approved motions on the subject, although these motions were subtly different in terms of any proposed joint working arrangement moving forward.
4. At the meeting of Executive Scrutiny Committee on 20 September 2022, views were invited from Members about the possibility of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council participating in a joint scrutiny exercise. Members requested more information from Redcar and Cleveland Council about the scope and terms of reference of a joint scrutiny prior to making a decision. A further update was reported to Executive Scrutiny Committee at the meeting on 25 October and it was noted that confirmation was still being sought from Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council who were expected to confirm their proposal at a meeting of their Adults, Wellbeing and Health Scrutiny & Improvement Committee being held 31 October 2022.
5. Middlesbrough Borough Council has expressed a willingness to work in partnership. Similar to Stockton, Hartlepool Borough Council has indicated that they would potentially consider a joint working arrangement on the issue, subject to any decision taken as to how this would operate.
6. On 31 October 2022, Redcar and Cleveland’s Adults, Wellbeing and Health Scrutiny & Improvement Committee considered an update on the progress in implementing their Council motion which also sought clarification about how a joint working arrangement might operate. Three possible options were put forward:
  - A formal joint Scrutiny arrangement – this would require a decision to be made by each Borough Council meeting of those wishing to participate, which would create some delay to the arrangement being established and require resource for support
  - Each Council monitor the arrangement through their own Scrutiny arrangements. This would avoid the time delays of the first option, but would potentially leave each Council duplicating effort and we may not benefit from the gains made by a collective response
  - An informal joint arrangement, whereby political and officer representatives from each Council meet. This would provide an opportunity to share our collective insight and evidence and pool our resources in terms of taking the issue forward. The progress of the joint arrangement could then be fed back into each Council’s own formal governance arrangements
7. The Committee decided to pursue the third option, at least initially, as this would allow all interested Councils to come together to collectively agree a way forward. Potential areas for cooperation could potentially include:
  - Joint lobbying of government on the issue
  - Sharing of expertise and knowledge
  - Collective gathering of evidence from stakeholders e.g., the fishing industry

- Jointly commissioning any agreed further research or evidence gathering on the subject
8. In addition, the Environment Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee conducted a hearing on 25 October 2022 in response to conflicting theories about the reason for the deaths of the crabs and lobsters. The Government had attributed the cause to a marine 'algal bloom', while other scientists had argued that the phenomenon was caused by pollution linked to dredging. The session examined evidence on the different explanations for the cause of the deaths, the impact on local communities and what could be done to prevent a recurrence. Recordings and transcripts of the evidence sessions can be found at <https://committees.parliament.uk/event/15058/formal-meeting-oral-evidence-session/>
  9. Following the hearing, on 1 November 2022, the Rt Hon Sir Robert Goodwill MP, Chairman of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, wrote to Secretary of State, Thérèse Coffey, setting out the Committee's recommendations. A copy of the letter is attached as Appendix 1.

### **FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

10. No financial and legal implications are identified at this stage.

### **RISK ASSESSMENT**

11. This report is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

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<u>Background Papers:</u>	None
<u>Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:</u>	Not Ward Specific
<u>Property Implications:</u>	None