

OPEN

Environment and Communities Committee

9 November 2023

2023/24 Mid Year Performance Review - Environment and Neighbourhood Services

Report of: Peter Skates, Acting Executive Director of Place

Report Reference No: EC/10/23-24

Ward(s) Affected: All

Purpose of Report

- 1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Committee with an update on the performance across Environment and Neighbourhood Services to the mid-point of the fiscal year 2023-24 against the relevant priorities, actions and measures of success within the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25.

Executive Summary

- 2 This report gives an update on performance at across Environment and Neighbourhood Services at mid-point of 2023-24

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Environment and Communities Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the performance of the department.

Background

- 3 Environment and Neighbourhood Services is responsible for delivering a range of Place based front line customer facing services and statutory functions. These include Waste and Recycling, Street Cleansing, Planning, Building Control, Environmental Health, Licensing, Trading Standards, Leisure Services, Libraries, Bereavement Services, Anti-social Behaviour, Community Enforcement, Parks, Play Areas, Playing Pitches and Green Spaces.
- 4 Several of our larger and public facing services are commissioned through the Council's wholly owned companies including Ansa Environmental Services Ltd and Orbitas Bereavement Services Ltd, and the independent leisure trust Everybody Health & Leisure.
- 5 The Cheshire East Council Corporate Plan 2021-25 sets out our vision for an open, fairer, greener Cheshire East with three broad aims to be an open and enabling organisation; a council which empowers and cares about people, and a thriving and sustainable place. The Environment and Neighbourhood Services department contributes to a number of the priorities under the aim of a thriving and sustainable place:
 - (a) A great place for people to live, work and visit
 - (b) Welcoming, safe, and clean neighbourhoods
 - (c) To reduce the impact on our environment
 - (d) To be carbon neutral by 2025
- 6 The department provides leadership and management for the Council's Environment Strategy and associated action plans, including the Carbon Neutral Action Plan to deliver the commitment to be a carbon neutral council by 2025. An update on delivery of the Carbon Neutral Action Plan will be presented to Committee in February 2024.
- 7 The department also contributes to the priority to be an open and enabling organisation, increasing transparency in decision-making through the Environment and Communities Committee during the year and undertaking borough wide consultations on draft policies and plans. We have also engaged with residents on projects and initiatives at a local level.

Environmental Services

Corporate Plan 2021-25: Key priorities	
Welcoming, safe, and clean neighbourhoods	Improved green spaces for all, enabling people to exercise and socialise in our parks and open spaces
To reduce our impact on our environment	To have minimised overall waste generated in the borough and maximised our levels of recycling To improve biodiversity and natural habitats in the borough
To be carbon neutral by 2025	Deliver actions in the Cheshire East Council Carbon Action Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of green vehicles across the fleet (including waste and highways) • Reduce use of Gas by decarbonising sources of heating for our buildings • Promote carbon neutrality and carbon zero development across Cheshire East, providing information, advice and guidance for householders and businesses to reduce their carbon use

Key Performance Indicators	2022/23 Outturn	2023/24 Mid-year	2023/24 Target
Fly Tipping No. of fly tipping incidents logged	4456	2021	NA
Tonnage of materials reused	771 tonnes	460* tonnes	1% per year
Residual household waste collected per household (kgs)	480kg	246kg*	<510kg
Increase the % of all waste collected sent for recycling, reuse	53%	55%*	>50%
Reported missed bin collections	NA	76	75 per 100,000
H&S Near misses	NA	6	NA
H&S Accidents	NA	11	0
H&S RIDDOR incidents	NA	2	0
Number of hours delivered by waste prevention volunteers	Approx. 100	105	100

(* pending approval by Defra)

Table 1: Key Performance Indicators

- 8 The Service continues to deliver on a number of large scale transformation activities, aligned to approved MTFs initiatives such as;
- Subscription charge for green waste – as approved at Committee in July 2023 for implementation and which has now gone live for payments, with paid for collections due to start in January 2024.
 - Green Spaces Maintenance Review – as approved at September Committee to undertake public consultation, now ongoing and in advance of a final decision in February 2024.
 - A review of the boroughs Household Waste Recycling Centre provision, again approved at September Committee for public consultation and to undertake operating contract procurement for a succinct list of options for future service delivery.
 - The delivery of a refreshed Cemeteries Strategy which now provides a robust framework for the future investment and management of the borough's cemetery sites. this is due to be presented at February committee.
- 9 In preparation for the changes set out in paragraph 8 the Service has also seen investment into the team to ensure it has adequate capacity to manage these changes, in particular from a customer service perspective.
- 10 A new contract governance and monthly reporting process has been installed with ANSA Environmental Services to ensure that this arrangement continues to deliver the required levels of performance. This has included the introduction of a number of additional key performance indicators which are summarised in Table 1. This new way of working will continue to evolve over the coming months, again aligned to driving the required service change and efficiencies.
- 11 The Council's official recycling rate for 2021-22 is 56.3%. This is a slight reduction from the 2020-21 at 57.5%. We expect to see this drop further with the introduction of the Councils Garden waste subscription charge in Q4 of this year. The Council will therefore need to look to additional measures to increase reuse and recycling in future years to achieve the current 50% target and the national recycling target of 60 % by 2035. To contribute to this for the first time the council is working with its contractor to offer mattress recycling as part of it household waste recycling centre service.
- 12 We will continue to monitor the key measure of 'kg residual waste per household'. It will be important to reduce residual waste per household to achieving recycling targets though continuing waste and recycling

education and campaigns as well as potential service changes. As part of this work the council though Ansa undertake a large scale waste prevention program with over 100 volunteer hours last quarter. Key highlights include Primary School Junior recycling officer of the year event held at Reaseheath College, attending talks and shows such as Refresh Knutsford, Nantwich show and ongoing programs such as textile workshops, 'Love Food, Hate Waste', Home Composting and 'Life with less plastic'.

- 13 The Council continues to inspect, repair and where investment is available improve our play areas and parks. A major project funded by the Crewe Towns Fund will refurbish 8 pocket parks as key green spaces amongst densely populated areas of Crewe. This quarter projects are underway to a value of £800k on four pocket parks located at McLaren Street Playing Fields; School Crescent; Derby Docks; and Queens Street Recreation Ground with works completing in quarter 4 of this year. The improved parks will offer health, wellbeing and amenity enhancement to these vibrant green spaces amidst densely populated areas of Crewe.
- 14 The Council is on track to be carbon neutral as an organisation by 2025, however, there remains a risk related to the delivery of our second solar insetting scheme. Gas use, particularly within leisure centres, and larger fleet vehicles continue to present areas of challenge for decarbonisation.
- 15 Carbon Action Plan priorities continue with work to decarbonise Council buildings. Seventeen solar installations have been completed, providing approximately 1GWh per year. The Council has also put in place a programme of replacing gas boilers with air source heat pumps with 15 installations underway. We continue to replace petrol and diesel vehicles with electric across our services and we have installed 26 new or upgraded electric vehicle charge points with more in plan for the second half of this year.
- 16 Wider Borough 2045 target: Base line modelling of Carbon emissions form the Borough is completed and approval has been granted by the Environment and Communities committee to develop a key priorities action plan. A consultant has been contracted and engagement with special interest groups and councillors is underway to produce a draft action plan which will then be subject to public consultation.

Planning

Corporate Plan 2021-25: Key priorities	
A great place for people to live, work and visit	Enable access to well designed, affordable, and safe homes for all residents New development to be appropriately controlled to protect and support our borough
To reduce our impact on our environment	To improve biodiversity and natural habitats in the borough
A transport network that is safe and promotes active travel	Improvements in the strategic infrastructure that support sustainable and inclusive growth across the borough Safer and well-maintained roads More residents to use walking routes
Thriving urban and rural economies with opportunities for all	Delivery of a strategic regeneration plan for Crewe Delivery of a strategic regeneration plan for Macclesfield Maximise the commercial and regeneration opportunities associated with HS2 for the whole borough

(*base date March 2022)

Key Performance Indicators	2022/23 Mid-year	2022/23 Outturn	2023/24 Mid-year	2022/23 Target
Number of major applications registered	55	115	37	-
Number of non-major applications registered	1,374	2,639	1190	-
Major applications determined within 13 weeks or agreed time	95%	97%	95%	>90%
Non-major applications determined within 8 weeks or agreed time	83%	84%	83%	>90%
% Planning appeals allowed	40%	38%	33%	<30%
Supply of deliverable housing land	-	11.6 years*	-	5 years

(*base date March 2022)

- 17 The Planning Service remains under pressure from continuing high workloads and high demands across the whole Service, as well implementing significant service change and improvement. Planning application performance against statutory performance measures (including agreed extensions to time) is above target for major applications at 95% but below for minors at 83% which reflects some of the current challenges.
- 18 The 'backlog' of planning applications has continued to reduce to approximately 1750 applications against a normal live workload level of 1300-1400. (This figure was 2504 at the end of September 2022 and had reduced significantly). Some applications are still taking 3-6 months to determine, however an increased number are now being determined within the normal statutory timeframes. In particular newer applications are now being determined in much shorter timeframes as a result of measures that have been implemented as part of the service review. Fast track days continue for applications and are also planned for consultees to help manage delays and backlogs that consultees are facing. These improvements have resulted in a noticeable decrease in complaints about delays in decision making and positive impacts of this progress are being felt by customers.
- 19 Application numbers in general have followed the national trend and dropped from this time last year (along with income levels), albeit the above application numbers are the statutory returns which do not include all application types which total 2435 applications. Cheshire East continues to be the busiest Planning Authority in the North West and in the top ten nationally for planning applications.
- 20 Pre-application services have continued for major applications, but normal pre-application services have so far remained suspended to enable a focus on delivery of the core statutory requirements. It is proposed to re introduce a pre application service for non major applications in the new year to positively influence planning applications before they are submitted to help satisfy policy requirements and to once again provide this service that customers expect. The team has also started to progress a Local Validation Checklist for adoption in the early 2024 to further support applicants and agents and provide clarity of expectations regarding planning application submissions in Cheshire East.
- 21 The number of allowed appeals has reduced to 33% which demonstrates a consistent level of good decision making and is a measure of quality planning decisions. Scrutiny of those appeals that have been allowed

does not raise any significant trends of concern at this time but will always be a source of future learning.

- 22 Despite the above challenges the team have continued to assist in delivering significant major development schemes on identified allocated sites across the Borough, including employment and residential schemes across North Congleton while also seeking to protect sensitive environments from unacceptable development and poor design.
- 23 Enforcement complaints have increased to 515 in comparison with 440 for the same period last year. However, the planning enforcement team have been very active with the serving of 15 Enforcement Notices, 15 Planning Contravention Notices and 3 Temporary Stop Notices – a significant increase in the previous period. There are also a number of pending prosecutions. Recent recruitment to two enforcement posts in the service will help to better manage high workloads and provide a better resourced team - and therefore more responsive enforcement services.
- 24 In respect of planning policy, a number of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) are also in progress to adoption showing a commitment to improving local guidance on a range of planning matters to better inform applications and impact development positively in our communities. These cover a number of themes including Sustainable Drainage (SUDS) SPD out for final consultation and two further SPDs on this same agenda are to be progressed. The service has also committed to a review of the Local Plan and whilst this will be dependent upon national legislative changes some early work to prepare the foundations for a new plan can be commenced now. A separate report on this agenda provides a full update on this review.
- 25 Building Control is continuing to adapt and change to the new legislative framework. Formal registration of all individuals for professional competency is required by April next year and a new suite of Building Regulations has just been introduced. The team continue to provide 24/7 stand by response for dangerous structures and have managed 628 applications with 5400 site visits over the 6 months period.
- 26 The Service continues to progress the recommendations of the Service Modernisation Plan with a continued focus on four main areas, the application backlog; customer service and communications; implementation of the new Planning and Land Charges IT system; and the service restructure. A focus on s106 legal agreements process, governance and procedures is also now prioritised. Separate reports on this agenda provides more information on these two areas. Clear and positive progress can be seen across a wide range of recommendations coming out of the service review with positive impacts for staff and customers.

27 Work on these areas continues to be resourced from within the service which creates particular challenge for senior members of the team who are diverted from day-to-day oversight and management. Work continues with the full service restructure and following JDQ assessment a staff consultation will follow in the coming months. It will be necessary to balance the requirements of the service review and expectations for a transformed planning service that is adequately resourced, with the current financial situation of the Council. Any restructure will need to be affordable. Implementation of the new IT system is unfortunately further delayed due to supplier issues. We continue to escalate our concerns and take appropriate actions to resolve this issue. This delay is however having real impacts on the team resource and delivery of some service improvements which are dependent upon implementation of the new system.

Regulatory Services

Corporate Plan 2021-25: Key priorities	
Welcoming, safe, and clean neighbourhoods	Crime and anti-social activity and anti-social behaviour to be reduced Victims of crime and exploitation to be supported effectively by the council and partners through collaboration To protect residents and improve our environment

28 The implementation of the new wireless CCTV network continues across the Borough. To date the towns of Disley, Alsager, Holmes Chapel, Middlewich, Sandbach and Congleton are complete and there is a programme for our remaining towns with a target for completion of the whole project of November 2023. In parallel we are stepping down our fibre requirements with BT in line with contractual obligations.

29 The CCTV service has also procured a new maintenance contract for the incoming wireless system that will offer an enhanced 24/7/365 service for general maintenance, repairs and updates and provide cost savings in future years.

30 The 2023 Annual Air Quality Status Report (ASR) has been submitted to, and approved by, Defra. The ASR is the 'go to' document to understand the up-to-date situation with air quality across the whole borough and contains monitoring results, data trends, updates on progress against our Air Quality Action Plan objectives and our priorities for the coming year.

- 31 Following grant funding by Defra an extensive education and awareness campaign has been undertaken highlighting the impact of vehicle engine idling and domestic fuel burning. Plans are underway for the use of residual funding for further activities which meet the brief of the original grant objectives, focussed particularly with our schools. Having responded to requests for 'anti-idling' signage, 35 schools now have specific signs for use around their school grounds and child pick up points with the next tranche of schools set to follow suit in the coming months.
- 32 The Trading Standards Team have recently reviewed and updated signage for the existing No Cold Calling Zones (NCCZ) across the whole Borough by applying a cost-effective replacement sticker for the existing metal signs. NCCZ signs provide a deterrent to would-be rogue traders and our protocol with the Citizens Advice Consumer Service means that if we can any calls from residents within an NCCZ then they are diverted to the rapid response officer on duty that day.
- 33 The Trading Standards Team scooped a national award in recognition of their efforts to raise awareness of the dangers of using loan sharks. This is the second time that the team have won the award, and, on this occasion, we have also had the 'Partner Recognition' accreditation from the Illegal Money Lending Team for organisations that go above and beyond in their awareness raising and protection of the local community.
- 34 Concerns over the purchase and use of vaping products by young people is of increasing concern nationally. To identify the extent of underage sales our Trading Standards Team are participating in a funded project during October 2023 to 'test purchase' vapes from online suppliers. The aim of the project is to understand current controls in place by suppliers to prevent illegal sales either online and/or at the point of delivery. It is expected that the results of this work will help shape further enforcement related projects around vape sales and protect our young people.
- 35 Our annual audit by the Sports Ground Safety Authority recognised the work that has been done to improve the approach to our sports ground safety function in the last twelve months. This has included the appointment of a deputy within the team to support our existing experienced officer, improved certification information and the completion of all recommended actions identified in the previous 2022 audit.
- 36 Senior officers met with representatives of the Food Standards Agency (FSA) to discuss the Food Law Enforcement Plan for 2023-2024. The Plan sets out how the authority will deliver on the statutory requirements for food hygiene and food standards activity each year including inspection and intervention work, dealing with complaints, and responding to allegations of food poisoning. Overall, the FSA were satisfied with our approach to food safety matters, particularly given the

pressures of Covid-19 and were encouraged by our approach of dealing with higher risk premises as a priority. They were however keen to understand how we are seeking to address the backlog of low-risk premises either through direct inspection or alternative strategy work and a further plan has been developed and shared.

- 37 There is significant enforcement activity across team with ongoing investigations into airport parking, illegal dog breeding and counterfeit goods. More recently the service has successfully challenged a Judicial Review into prosecution proceedings. The Licensing Team continue to deal with licence reviews where responsible authorities and/or the public challenge the ability of a premises to manage their activities in accordance with the licensing objectives.
- 38 The Council's Taxi Licensing Policy was approved in November 2022 leading to a significant change in processes. Some of the changes implemented were staggered to mitigate any burdens on the existing trade and the Licensing Team is continuing to implement these changes as they take effect. To support those changes in policy, and to help reduce the administrative pressures on both applicants and the Licensing Team, new online intelligent forms are being created for all application process.
- 39 Pressures following the Covid pandemic continue to impact the taxi trade and the numbers of applicants for new licenses have not significantly increased. This is having a direct impact upon income levels for the service.
- 40 The Team has also successfully reprocured contracts for the provision of taxi licensing plates and the testing of licensed vehicles. Both contracts were awarded to existing suppliers and build on value for money, quality of service and the good working practices that are in place.
- 41 Following the election in May, the membership of the Licensing Committee changed. As a result, the Team have been liaising with colleagues in Democratic Services and Legal Services to ensure new members receive specific licensing training to help them in their statutory role.
- 42 Satisfaction with the Pest Control service remains extremely high with regular positive feedback received from our domestic and business customers.
- 43 Juggling work and study is difficult enough at the best of times but to do this during a pandemic is even more difficult. So, it is all credit to our two environmental health students who have passed their Environmental Health degree and can now start their practical portfolio whilst moving to

full time roles within the Commercial Services Team. Similarly, our Regulatory Compliance Apprentice moves from their Stage 1 qualification to Stage 2 in the Trading Standards Team. Our Business and Administration apprentice has also moved into a full-time permanent role within the service providing the necessary support to allow our inspecting officers to be out and about. In professions where there is a national decline in available qualified officers, this approach to training and the mentoring provided by the officers across the team is vital.

- 44 World Environmental Health Day took place on 26 September 2023 and this year we decided to use this opportunity to raise the profile of environmental health in a few small but hopefully effective ways. Alongside daily social media posts we organised a pop-up stall in Crewe Market where we challenged residents on the effectiveness of their handwashing using our special hand gel and light box as well as providing general information on our roles and responsibilities. We also provided a shortened version of the Food Hygiene Training Course to a small group of Members from our Environment and Communities Committee.

Neighbourhood Services

Corporate Plan 2021-25: Key priorities	
A great place for people to live, work and visit	A high-quality accessible library service that remains relevant to the changing needs of Cheshire East residents and delivers value for money High quality leisure and sports provision across the borough that delivers good value for money
Welcoming, safe, and clean neighbourhoods	Crime and anti-social activity and anti-social behaviour to be reduced Victims of crime and exploitation to be supported effectively by the council and partners through collaboration To protect residents and improve our environment

Key Performance Indicators	2022/23 Outturn	2023/24 Mid-year (end of September)	2023/24 Target
Number of visitors to libraries	684,574	552,332	NA
Number of visitors to leisure centres	2,600,000	1,204,086	2,300,000

Libraries

Performance Indicators	2023/24 Mid-year (end of September)
Newsletter subscribers	22,370
New members	10,310
Number of PC sessions	27,999
Book loans/issues	877,406
E-book loans	45,206
E-magazine downloads	41,602
Council enquiries handled	9,940

- 45 In July Committee approved a set of revised opening hours for the libraries service and provided delegations to officers to implement those changes. Following that approval the following actions have been undertaken;
- Continued staff engagement immediately post the decision;
 - Development of a final revised team structure to meet the opening hours now approved and;
 - Formal consultation with Trade Unions and staff affected by the changes to opening hours which has now concluded and with the final solution due to be implemented by early December.
- 46 In parallel with those discussions the team has also been proactively engaging with Town and Parish Councils around top up for library services and can confirm that the following local councils have now entered formal agreements to fund these services for the next 3 years;
- Crewe Town Council – top up to maintain opening hours of 9.30am – 6pm each weekday (7.5 hours per week)
 - Nantwich Town Council – top up to maintain opening hours of 9.30am – 6pm each weekday (4 hours per week)
- 47 The above levels of service provision will be maintained between the new Cheshire East funded hours being implemented, target for late November, and the start of top up funded services (1st April 2024).
- 48 In total the top up offer has generated an additional 598 hours of time into the library service each year, to the value of c. £60k per annum. This has also helped to limit the impact on staff in the service. The scheme remains open to other Town or Parish Councils who may wish to sign up.
- 49 Works to optimise immediately available income opportunities have also progressed with the following now in place;
- (a) Alexander clinic- Health and wellbeing
 - (b) Barclays Bank – Macclesfield, Wilmslow and Holmes Chapel
 - (c) NatWest bank Popup service- Knutsford
 - (d) Weight watchers- Holmes Chapel

- 50 As per the Committee resolution at the point that the current review is fully implemented work will commence on a Library Strategy which will focus on how the Library Service becomes more financially self sustaining via a medium to long term view on income generation opportunities. It is expected that this will be presented to committee later in 2024/25.
- 51 The summer reading challenge which is annual event to encourage children under 12 to maintain their reading during the school summer holidays, this year was a sporting theme, where in collaboration with our Leisure Trust provider Everybody Health and Leisure, each child that was given a free swimming voucher, this year 6,360 children participated which was a raise of 13% on previous year.
- 52 Library staff undertook assemblies at 89 out 130 schools as part of the reading challenge and digital resources were sent to all schools and 103 volunteers helped with the challenge, which resulted in nearly a 1000 new children becoming members of the library.

Leisure

- 53 Strategic Leisure Review – officers working with Everybody Health and Leisure have continued to bring forward the review which is the subject of a separate report on the same committee agenda.
- 54 The redevelopment of Congleton Leisure Centre now been completed with an official opening ceremony held in late June. Initial monitoring of use suggests that the investment will as planned achieve a wide range of benefits.
- 55 The Learn to Swim scheme has grown to 9,700 swimmers participating in weekly lessons and leisure memberships have exceed 20,000 for the first time, with over 2.5 million individual visits to our leisure centre sites.

Community Enforcement & Anti-Social Behaviour Team

- 56 Our community enforcement team continues to make a significant impact in and around the alleyways in Crewe, under the banner of the Cleaner Crewe Project. This project is working in conjunction with Crewe Town Council as well as local resident groups.
- 57 Committee recently approved the extension and variation of the current Public Space Protection Orders which will allow the continued enforcement around dog fouling and responsible dog owners, alongside the continue use of alley gates across the borough.
- 58 The Multi Agency Action Group (MAGG) continues to meet on a bi-monthly based. Two new Nominations have been received for Hibal

road underpass in Macclesfield and Leighton Brook Park in Crewe. Through collaboration with partners, mitigation measures have been instigated which will reduce the significant levels of ASB that has been affecting the lives of the residents.

59 The ASB team continues to address areas of anti-social behaviour with Community Protection Notice legislation from prevention through to enforcement.

60 The ASB team in collaboration with Cheshire Police have been able to address issues associated with young people engaging in ASB at Crewe Alex Football club and Macclesfield Town Centre.

Consultation and Engagement

61 No specific consultation or engagement is required in support of this report.

Reasons for Recommendations

62 The Environment and Communities Committee is responsible for reviewing and scrutinising the performance of the Environment and Neighbourhood Services department.

Other Options Considered

63 Not applicable.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

64 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

65 The financial implications of changes in performance requirements or responding to current performance levels is provided in separate Finance Review reports to the Committee.

Policy

- 66 The report sets out how the department is contributing to the Cheshire East Council Corporate Plan 2021-25.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 67 There are no equalities implications arising from this report.

Human Resources

- 68 There are no human resources implications arising from this report.

Risk Management

- 69 The performance reporting process provides opportunities for the Council to identify and focus on areas for improvement to support achievement of its strategic ambitions. Timely performance reporting mitigates risk of the Council not achieving its outcomes by providing the opportunity to review outputs, identify trends and areas for improvement, and introduce corrective and/or preventative actions wherever necessary to address areas of poor - or under – performance.

Rural Communities

- 70 There are no implications for rural communities arising from this report.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- 71 There are no implications for children and young people arising from this report.

Public Health

- 72 There are no implications for public health arising from this report.

Climate Change

- 73 An update on delivery of the Carbon Neutral Action Plan will be provided in a separate report to the Committee in due course.

Access to Information	
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Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	None

Approvals trail: to be removed before Committee

Name	Title	Comments	Date
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