

## **NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **ASHINGTON & BLYTH LOCAL AREA COUNCIL**

At a meeting of the **Ashington & Blyth Local Area Council** held in the Collingwood Suite, Newbiggin Sports and Community Centre, Woodhorn Road, Newbiggin by the Sea, NE64 6HG on Wednesday, 11 September 2019 at 4:30 pm.

#### **PRESENT**

Councillor E Simpson  
(Vice-Chair, in the chair for items 1-3 and 8-15)

Councillor J Lang  
(Planning Vice-Chair, in the chair for items 4-7)

#### **MEMBERS**

D Campbell  
E Cartie  
G Davey  
S Davey  
B Gallacher

J J Gobin  
K Nisbet  
K Parry  
M Purvis (part)  
T Wilson

#### **OFFICERS**

E Beniams  
M Bulman  
M Carle  
R Murfin  
J Murphy  
K Norris  
P Soderquest

Senior Community Safety Officer  
Lawyer  
Highways Delivery Area Manager  
Director of Planning Services  
Principal Planning Officer  
Democratic Services Officer  
Head of Housing

Also in attendance:

Inspectors S Nicklin, Phil Patterson - Northumbria Police  
Public: 75 (approx.)  
Press: 1

### **33. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Reid, Rickerby and Webb.

### **34. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Ashington & Blyth Local Area Council held on Wednesday, 10 July 2019, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

### **35. DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

Councillors J Gobin and K Parry declared an interest in planning application 18/03390/FUL and would withdraw from the meeting for that item.

### **DEVELOPMENT CONTROL**

Councillor Simpson vacated the Chair, for Planning Vice-Chair Councillor Lang to chair the development control section of the agenda, as was the arrangement for all Local Area Councils.

### **36. DETERMINATION OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

The Planning Vice Chair requested members to decide the planning applications attached to the report using the powers delegated to it. Members were reminded of the principles which should govern their consideration of the applications, the procedure for handling representations, the requirement of conditions and the need for justifiable reasons for the granting of permission or refusal of planning applications. The procedure at planning committees was appended for information. (Report attached to the signed Minutes as Appendix A.)

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

*Councillors Gobin and Parry left the meeting for the following item only, taking no part in the discussion or voting thereon.*

### **37. 18/03390/FUL**

**Construction of new two storey dwelling with detached garage, land to the south of Berristock, Cambois.**

Judith Murphy, Principal Planning Officer, introduced the above report with the aid of a slide presentation. She reminded members that the planning application had been considered by the Ashington and Blyth Local Area Council on 13 March at which time the officer's refusal recommendation had been overturned and members had approved the application. However, there were some outstanding issues in relation to ecology and contaminated land that had to be resolved before permission could be fully granted and it was agreed that the application be brought back to committee, once those matters had been resolved, for members to approve the suggested planning conditions.

With regard to the contaminated land matter, officers in public protection were now satisfied that any issues could be appropriately addressed and with regard to ecology, a

*Chair's Initials.....*

*Ashington and Blyth Local Area Council, 11 September 2019*

coastal mitigation financial contribution of £600 had been secured through a unilateral undertaking between the Council and the applicant.

An addendum report containing 12 suggested conditions had been circulated with the agenda papers which Members were being asked to approve or review. Attention was drawn to conditions 5 and 6 which related to contamination as members had shown a particular interest in the issue.

In response to a question the Principal Planning Officer confirmed that the applicant had agreed to the proposed conditions.

Councillor G Davey moved acceptance of the recommended conditions which was seconded by Councillor Nisbet.

A member welcomed the development stating it would make Cambois a better place. He asked that, if any contamination was identified, it should be dealt with as quickly as possible.

Upon being put to the vote the motion was unanimously agreed and it was:

**RESOLVED** that conditions be added to the planning consent as per the officer's updated report.

*Councillors Gobin and Parry returned to the meeting.*

### **38. 19/00882/COU**

**Change of use from A1 retail to the rear area of the ground floor and upper floors to Sui Generis to accommodate a House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) comprising 19 residential units and ancillary communal areas with the front section of the ground floor to be retained in A1 retail use (as amended) - 27-29 Waterloo Road, Blyth.**

Judith Murphy, Principal Planning Officer, introduced the above application stating that, since the report was written, two petitions had been received and uploaded onto the public access system. Together, the petitions listed in excess of 2,000 signatures and she had been told signatures continued to be added. The reason for the petitions was stated as, and she quoted from the petition, *"we do not want a 17 resident bedsit right in the heart of the town centre. Crime, drugs and alcohol are rife. We have no good retail and we are driving residents away. People want to walk through the town safely. We do not want to give vulnerable people easy access to drugs and alcohol. We want our town back and it does not include turning our old beautiful buildings into glorified "hostels".*

Since the report was finalised a further 9 letters of objection had been received, all of which raised similar concerns to those listed in the report and to the reason of objection stated in the petition. The number of HMOs currently operating in Blyth had also been repeatedly cited as an objection. Members were advised of one additional condition to be attached, should planning permission be granted, as follows:

*No unit shall be occupied until full details of the windows on the side elevation have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Where necessary, the windows shall comprise of obscure glazing for the duration of the use of*

*Chair's Initials.....*

*the units for residential purposes. The windows shall be installed as approved thereafter.*

The Principal Planning Officer stated that a point worth addressing was the level of publicity carried out at the time the application was received. In line with the Development Management Procedure, which was part of the Town and Country Planning Order 2015, officers were only required to display a site notice for any planning application of this nature as a statutory duty, which was done on 3 April. However, as a matter of consistency and best practice they did, again on applications of this nature, consult neighbouring occupiers. In this particular case, with the site being in a conservation area, a site notice also triggered a press notice, which was done, and appeared in the News Post Leader on 4 April. She accepted that not all households around Blyth received a copy but officers could not account for that. Notwithstanding all of that, the fact remained, in terms of statutory duty, officers had over consulted on what was required.

*Councillor Purvis entered the meeting at 4:45 pm.*

The Principal Planning Officer then summarised the application with the aid of a slide presentation. The Officer also pointed out that she had just received word from the applicant that morning that the proposed number of units would be reduced from 19 to 17 and this may mean that the new windows on the side elevation would no longer be required.

Kayleigh McCulloch, objector, spoke against the application and her comments included the following points:

- She considered the following planning criteria to be of issue: Government policy; Noise; Proposals in the development plan.
- There had been a lack of transparency and consultation.
- Permission was requested by the applicant in March 2019. In May 2019 the Planning Officer had signed a report which stated she was in favour of planning permission being granted.
- The consultation was a tiny printed representation in a local newspaper, which not every Blyth resident received, and one printed sheet on a local lamppost.
- The report listed that 19 neighbours had been consulted and 17 had objected. She questioned this as not one person seemed to know who the 19 neighbours were.
- Until 31 August there were no objections published on the NCC website so she struggled to see where the number 17 had arisen from in regard to objections in May.
- This was against the requirement for an acceptable formal period of public consultation as described in article 15 of the Development Management Procedure Order.
- There had been no site notice and no neighbour consultations in Bondicar Terrace which was the closest residential street.
- Applications for major development, as defined in Article 2 of the Development Management Procedure Order, required a site notice and a neighbouring consultation or neighbouring notice letter.
- With regard to noise, it had been stated that it was the intention to house low income workers in order to manage staffing levels and maintain control over behaviours. Intention was not a word used to describe someone who was certain

what audience they were targeting, confirmed by the applicant stating in a residents meeting that she would be accepting referrals from local drug and alcohol abuse charities and ex offender rehabilitation charities.

- The applicant was expecting noise as she claimed she was going to try and manage staffing to maintain control over behaviours and that other issues such as antisocial behaviour would be dealt with by the Police, charities and homelessness teams.
- Because people of the HMO were likely to be residents with substance abuse issues, it was likely they would continue to make noise in the beer garden of the adjacent pub until they walked the 5 steps to their homes. This would have a negative impact on noise pollution in the area after acceptable hours and crime.
- Case Law, Cemex (UK Operations) Ltd v Richmondshire District & Anor (2018) EWHC 3526 stated Paragraph 123 of the 2012 NPPF provided that planning policies and decisions should aim to 1) avoid noise from giving rise to significant adverse impacts on health and quality of life as a result of a new development and 2) recognise that development will often create some noise and existing businesses wanting to develop in continuance of their business should not have unreasonable restrictions put on them because of changes in nearby land uses since they were established.

Rob Wilson, objector, also spoke against the application:

- Countrywide concern for the homeless was understandable but did the figures support any suggestion that Blyth had enough homeless to warrant another HMO of this type?
- Would the homeless not be more proportionately and better served if HMOs were evenly distributed rather than earmarking entire towns for their purpose?
- What was Northumberland's strategy for homelessness? They could not all come to live in Blyth.
- What about highways access for staff and emergency services? The other Blyth HMOs were plagued by constant attendance of emergency services. There were parking restrictions both at the front and rear.
- Without exact knowledge of who would reside in the facility they might reasonably assume that 50% would have vehicles. Where would they park? Parking provision must surely be a requirement? The town centre car parks were neither safe nor secure.
- The report dated 29 May, and not updated since most objections had been submitted, stated the facility was for low income workers yet the applicant stated in a residents meeting that it was for the homeless who would be referred by agencies.
- Nationally there was a prevent strategy for counter terrorism and also one for county lines. How did installing numerous groups of this nature fit with those strategies, especially county lines?
- Blyth was documented as being in the Region's top 10 for reported crimes and drug related deaths, up 40 in Northumberland in the past year. Why were authorities making decisions to turn the town into an open prison or human dumping ground?
- The landlord would be unable to vet who was referred so paedophiles, rapists, murderers could end up there. Who would take responsibility when someone was attacked, or even killed, would the report say the HMO was in the wrong location?
- Councillors had a duty of care for any tenants to ensure they were not exploited or enlisted into a life of crime.

- Councillors had a duty of care for Blyth residents, who were already afraid to shop in the town centre, how did they propose to keep them safe and allay their fears?
- Councillors had a duty of care to the public purse. Most of the tenants would probably be on universal credit, would the landlord be means tested or would rents just be paid without scrutiny?
- Would this establishment be inspected regularly or left like the facility on Union Street and purely a cash cow for the owner who clearly did not have the clients interest at heart?
- The Authority could now apply for Blyth Town Centre Regeneration funding. If the facility was approved a precedent would be set so it was up to the panel to reject this application and show that they did want to regenerate Blyth town shopping centre.

Councillor John Potts, Blyth Town Council, also spoke against the application:

- He was speaking on behalf of the Town Council who agreed with many of the points already made but which he would not repeat.
- He had only seen the plans for 19 rooms so he was not sure about the amendments made to the original application.
- Everyone wanted to see Blyth developed and improved but they wanted to see good quality development and commercial premises.
- Blyth had hosted the Tall Ships and other events such as the Christmas lights which showcased how good it could be.
- More people could be attracted into Blyth with the right kind of development.
- Blyth Town Forum had secured a starter grant of £150,000 from the high street fund and from 28 September the public would be able to have their say as to how they wished to see the town developed.
- They acknowledged that all premises could not be returned to retail use and the Town Council was not opposed to town centre residential development so long as it was of high quality.
- Some of the units in this development would only be 9 sq metres. There would be no problems regarding loss of light because there would be no light to lose.
- At least 12 of the homes would have the view of a brick wall so in no way could that be called quality living space.
- The proposed development was not what the Town Council wanted, it would deter people from coming into Blyth and would create problems.
- Had the developer considered other locations?
- There was a previous HMO at Bondicar Terrace where there had been a serious fire resulting in a fatality.
- He urged the committee to listen to the concerns raised and refuse the application.

Holy Eagle, the applicant, then spoke in support of her application and her comments included the following points:

- She was aware there had been a lot of unrest, concerns and protests about the application.
- She did not blame people at all for signing up and speaking for what was right, however, people had been listening to rumours which were not true. She had heard about paedophiles, convicts and individuals not wanted in other parts of the country coming to this accommodation and she hoped that she could put minds to rest that this was not the case.

- She had been a landlord for 7 years and had run houses of multi occupation for 4 years.
- Her intention had been to convert the upper floors of the property to residential accommodation and the front of the ground floor for retail.
- There had been no interest in this which could have been due to high business rates so, whilst in the process, had considered relocating their Guide Post lettings office to the ground floor.
- However, her social conscience had made her look at people on housing benefit who deserved to have a place of their own and a better quality of life but objections had been received.
- She worried that people would act on unfounded rumours and felt that housing people on benefits may put tenants at risk and would probably result in them being called names.
- Not everyone who was homeless or on benefits was involved with substance abuse.
- She was sad that they could not help the homeless and had decided, if granted, they would only house working people.
- They owned another property nearby which they had been running for two years. It only housed working people and had a waiting list.
- There would be a management presence at the HMO every day.

Members then asked a number of questions regarding:

- Fire regulations and the number of exits required;
- Thermal heating and how low income people would afford to heat their home;
- There were a number of empty properties in Blyth so why did the applicant feel there was a great need for this type of accommodation in Blyth?
- The building was on a busy main road with double yellow lines and a junction. How would emergency services get to it?
- There were highways issues;
- It was near to the market place frequented by a lot of elderly people;
- Security cameras - the amount suggested that problems were expected;
- If occupants owned a car, where would they park?
- How would Blyth be regenerated if properties were converted into bedsits?
- Some rooms were only 9 sq metres, could it be demonstrated how big that was?

In response the Director of Planning said that officers shared some of the public's concerns and would advise members how to consider them when making their decision. Big cities, such as Newcastle, had too many HMOs and had policies in place to say that they should not dominate. Northumberland did not have policies in place to control the number of HMOs. There were 25 HMOs in Northumberland, 50% of which were in the South East of the county, 5 being in the area of Blyth. Given that the South East of the County was more urban, it was to be expected it would have more HMOs.

Retail was changing, up and down the country, successful towns were losing 30% of retail floor space with 70% in less successful towns. To help town centres in the future, there should be more residences in town centres. The point had been well made about the benefits of having more flats above shops. Questions had been raised about fire security and these would be covered by Building Regulations and Licensing law. There was a higher test for HMOs and this would have to be complied with before occupation but it was a licensing issue.

Planning law had no control about who would live in the accommodation. The applicant could change what she had said at any time which was why it was not a planning consideration.

Given that the Council was actively supporting residential developments in town centres elsewhere, did members believe there should be flats above shops? If they did but did not believe the same benefits would be seen by having bedsits then that could be a reason for refusal. In the Local Plan it stated that the Council would try to support homes for all of society including the most vulnerable. Everybody in society deserves a house and somewhere to live. The question faced by members was if it was the right location. HMOs filled a need for people on very low salaries and it was a reasonable question facing members and their conclusion should be on what they saw for the future of Blyth.

Councillor G Davey moved refusal and quoted emerging policy TCS3 of the Local Plan which related to maintaining and enhancing the role of town centres. He stated that 2,000 people who currently shopped in Blyth had signed the petition against this development and if it went ahead it would seriously affect Blyth Town Centre. The applicant's statement did not outline what would happen in the future and the Council could not control the type of resident coming into the properties. He was not anti HMO but they should not be located in the town centre. There was no core strategy in place to address fear of crime which could have also been a reason for refusal.

Councillor Davey also referred to emerging policy HOU9 of the Local Plan which related to residential development management. The objectors and the Town Council had stated they wanted quality residences and the HMO proposal was in the wrong place and would bring no pride.

Discussion took place about the reasons for refusal. In summary it had been stated that residential use of the first floor was not rejected but it was the wrong location for an HMO. It was agreed that exact wording be delegated to the Director of Planning Services.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Campbell.

Councillor Campbell stated that Blyth had improved greatly over the years but it had taken time. All of the public in attendance cared about the town and it was time other areas had their share of HMOs. Business owners in Blyth were deeply concerned about this proposal which would affect their business. The applicant may be very well intentioned but she should take her proposal elsewhere.

### Members' Comments

- Concerns were expressed that there was no policy in place to protect town centres from this sort of development. If approved this would open the floodgates for similar proposals.
- All members were concerned about the regeneration of town centres. If this proposal was approved small retailers would go out of business.
- There was no disrespect to the applicant for trying to help people but her proposal was in the wrong location.

*Chair's Initials.....*

- The attendance of the public to support refusal of this application was commended.
- The right sort of development would bring Blyth alive and quality accommodation was needed.

Upon being put to the vote the motion was unanimously agreed and it was therefore:

**RESOLVED** that the application be refused, wording to be delegated to the Director of Planning Services based around regeneration and that Blyth would be undermined by the vision of an HMO in this visible location. He would also look at the issue of fear of crime.

### 39. PLANNING APPEALS UPDATE

Members received information on the progress of planning appeals. (Report attached to the signed Minutes as Appendix C.)

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

On the conclusion of the development control business at 5:50 pm, Councillor Lang vacated the Chair and the meeting was adjourned as the remainder of the agenda consisted of other Local Area Council business scheduled to begin at 6.00 pm. Councillor Simpson resumed the Chair and continued the meeting at 6.03 pm.

## OTHER LOCAL AREA COUNCIL BUSINESS

### 40. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

**Bob Parker, Blyth Town Council** referred to problems with a taxi company in Blyth, which also brought in taxis from other areas, and instances of taxis driving the wrong way down a one way street. He had contacted the NCC Licensing Section but had been advised that he should contact the authority from which the taxis came.

Philip Soderquest, Head of Housing and Public Protection, was in attendance and advised Mr Parker that, in general terms, officers would try and work across other licensing authorities. He asked Mr Parker to provide him with details after the meeting and he would ensure that he received a response.

### 41. PETITIONS

**(a) Receive any new petitions:** E Petition - 'Please help us improve Seaton Vale roundabout.'

The Chair advised members that the above e petition had been received and was worded as follows:

*As residents of Seaton Vale we are disgusted by the appearance of the roundabout at the junction with Harrington Way as you come to enter the estate. Ashington has some*

*Chair's Initials.....*

*Ashington and Blyth Local Area Council, 11 September 2019*

*beautiful roundabouts but this one is not only unsightly, it is dangerous and overgrown. We have discussed this issue with Persimmon and I know our local Councillor, Jim Lang, was trying to resolve this for us. We are proud of our community and, as residents, we have purchased planters to sit under our street signs and, as a community, we come together to try to make the estate a better and prettier place to live. We would love some support to help develop our roundabout, to make it look more inviting and in keeping with others in Ashington. We do feel it is a health and safety hazard. It is overgrown and we have seen children playing in it. It is also so overgrown it is difficult to see what is coming. Many thanks for your help.*

The petition currently had 98 signatures and was still live. A report would be produced for November's meeting.

**(b) Consider reports on petitions previously received:** No reports to consider;

**(c) Receive any updates on petitions for which a report was previously considered:** None.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

## **42. LOCAL SERVICES ISSUES**

The Highways Delivery Area Manager was in attendance to provide verbal updates about any key recent, ongoing and/or future planned Local Services work and to respond to issues raised by members.

Issues raised and responses were as follows:

- A response to an issue raised by a member was reported in the News Post Leader before it was provided to him. Members should be given information before it went to press.  
*This should not have happened and the Highways Delivery Area Manager had spoken to the officer responsible to ensure that it would not happen again.*
- There were a number of overgrown trees in and around Elliott Street, Blyth, the grass had not been cut to a good standard and the street was in need of a thorough clean. There were two bowling greens, one had been cut and one had not. Clarification was requested about the lease, who paid for the grass to be cut and why both bowling greens had not been cut.  
*This would be referred to the Neighbourhood Services Area Manager for a response to Councillor Campbell.*
- A different strategy was needed for weed spraying across all of the area, the blue dye was so diluted it was difficult to tell if weeds had been sprayed or not.
- The back streets from Milburn Road to Hawthorn Road and from 6th Avenue to 3rd Avenue were overgrown with weeds.  
*These issues would be referred to the Neighbourhood Services Area Manager.*
- The team was commended for the good work carried out cutting back weeds on the spine road.
- There were highways issues in the home zone area of Blyth. Could 'Give Way' lines be added to the road?

*Required work would need to be included on the LTP Programme and, at present, operatives could only react to defects due to the restricted budget available. Give way lines could only be added as part of a Traffic Regulation Order but this suggestion would be passed on.*

- Cars were double parking at Plessey Road playing field, could a single yellow line be painted on the road?

*The query would be passed on.*

- Since the cctv camera had been removed from Delaval Gardens a bag containing discarded items had been found and a bungalow had been broken into. Why was the camera removed?

*The Head of Housing and Public Protection replied that, historically, when problems arose in an area, a number of tests were applied to see if it was appropriate to deploy a camera. If, after a period of time, the deployed camera had not captured information, a decision would be taken to have it removed as there must be grounds and reasons to have it there. It was no longer policy to have fixed cameras. However, if problems continued, this would be revisited and he and the Community Safety Officer would look into it.*

- Members had been advised that, after years of requesting a speed camera on Laverock Hall Road, permission had been given but it would not be sited until the end of the year. Why would it take so long?

*The Highways Delivery Area Manager said his department was responsible for delivery and construction but he would need to consult the Infrastructure Manager with regards to timescale.*

- Block paving in Station Road, Ashington needed attention and was becoming unsafe.

*Some of it was becoming dislodged and officers were looking into costs for replacement with printed concrete. The maintenance team would be asked to look into safety issues.*

- Taxis at the rank outside of Aaron's opticians, Ashington were often seen doing dangerous manoeuvres and causing queues which held up traffic.

*The Head of Housing and Public Protection said policing taxis across Northumberland was very challenging. Licensing Officers would look into it and consider whether it was an illegal activity.*

- Was there any possibility of having cctv cameras at People's Park, Ashington? Since the new play equipment had been installed there was a certain element of youths repeatedly offending and they needed to be identified.

*Cameras were deployed in response to need and any permanent cameras were funded by Parish and Town Councils. Unfortunately, such activity was not uncommon when new equipment was installed but it had to be demonstrated that damage was proportionate as footage around children needed justification in the longer term.*

The Highways Delivery Area Manager then gave his update as follows:

- Tarmac patching had been carried out in the Blyth area at Blyth Links Cemetery, Prestdale Avenue, Maple Crescent and Bebside Road, Blyth.
- Due to a heavy workload, drainage works were put on hold for six weeks and were expected to start again in two weeks. Drainage work was programmed for Aldborough Street, Alexandra Road, Keel Row Car Park, Plessey Road, Warkworth Avenue and Keelmans Terrace, Blyth.

- Major construction work was currently taking place at Cramlington\Manor Walks/Westmorland Way and the road into Cambois. As a result other works, outside of day to day maintenance, had temporarily been reduced.
- Tarmac Resurfacing works had now been completed at Josephine Butler Campus, Alexandra Road, Manley View, North Seaton Road, Ashington and Sea Crest Road, Newbiggin.
- Upcoming tarmac patching was scheduled for Tynedale Drive, Devonworth Place, Ennerdale Road, Blyth, Park Road and Castle Terrace, Ashington.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted and issues raised by members needing resolution be followed up after the meeting.

## **DISCUSSION ITEMS**

### **43. POLICING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY UPDATE**

Inspectors Phil Patterson and Steve Nicklin were in attendance to give an overview and answer questions about policing in the Ashington and Blyth areas. Inspector Patterson said he had only been in post for two weeks in the Ashington, Bedlington and Newbiggin area but had served 22 years in the police force. He highlighted the following:

- Crime rates had reduced in Ashington by 12% overall.
- Assault, robbery and common assault were down by 12%, burglary was down by 19% and antisocial behaviour was down by 32%.
- Operation Respect which was about truancy and antisocial behaviour in young people, looking at why they did this and the support mechanisms in place.
- Operation Dignity which was about working with children who were criminalised by the system and identifying other children who may be at risk. Persuading them away from that lifestyle through successful engagement and taking part in activities to encourage a good relationship with the Police.
- Drugs were a real issue, crack cocaine being particularly addictive. A number of individuals had been identified as drug dealers and arrests were imminent.
- A number of burglaries in Newbiggin and Lynemouth had been carried out by two individuals addicted to cocaine. Information received from the public had resulted in them being identified and arrested, resulting in a significant decrease in burglaries in those areas.
- There had been an increase in commercial burglaries in Newbiggin. Again, as a result of information received from the public, an arrest had been made and it transpired that one individual had committed six of the seven burglaries.
- Those examples demonstrated the benefits of targeting the right people through shared information.
- There was no significant knife crime to report.
- Northumbria Police had lost a third of their officers over the last seven years and had to work in a smarter way. Difficult decisions were being taken and there had been changes made. For example, a Police Officer would no longer attend if a car was stolen but a crime number would be issued.
- Work included safeguarding issues around slavery and sexual crimes against children.
- Mental health issues were significant and a new operating model would start in November whereby 24/7 Police would deal with an incident but would no longer investigate it. This would be passed to an investigation team which in turn would result

in quicker response times and free up Neighbourhood Teams to focus on their local area.

- With regard to antisocial behaviour (ASB) in young people, funding had been received for high quality hand held cameras which would be of real benefit. Officers would be able to video from a distance and identify the individuals concerned. They would then visit the parents of first time offenders whilst, for repeat offenders, intervention methods would be used.
- In terms of road safety, proposals were being discussed about making changes on how to tackle speeding vehicles by using existing legislation on antisocial behaviour to give the Police the power to remove vehicles.
- Inspector Pattison reiterated that he had only been in post for 2 weeks but said he was thinking outside of the box to target criminals and hoped to make a difference to the area moving forward.

Inspector Steve Nicklin then spoke about the Blyth area and highlighted the following:

- A new operating model was in place for neighbourhood teams. Trevor Oakley was leaving in November and would be replaced by Neil Hall as Inspector.
- The makeup of the teams would change, there would be a dedicated team of two sergeants and seventeen officers. Shift patterns would change to provide extra cover at key times and allow officers to be more focussed to deal with local issues.
- For the second year in Blyth there had been a reduction in crime, however, with regard to serious crime there had been two murders, which were horrific but isolated incidents, with no wider risk to the community.
- There had been a reduction in robbery by 20%, a reduction in burglary by 18% and a reduction in theft by 17%.
- Burglary had a huge impact on victims. Through proactive work it was often seen that a number of crimes were committed by the same individuals and focussing on targeting the right people would greatly reduce crime. This was the case in Blyth and recently three prolific burglars had been convicted and sent to prison.
- There had been a reduction in knife crime and the use of weapons which were not on the same scale as problems seen in other areas. However, there were dedicated tactics in place to address this and Operation Divan was a programme designed to educate the younger generation about knife crime.
- ASB was an emerging issue in Blyth both for youths and non youths and also neighbourhood disputes. This remained a priority and, with regard to perceived disorder, work was being done around intervention.
- There was a darker nights campaign in place to take a proactive approach to tackling problems and members were urged to support this by providing information and reporting any instances of ASB.

Members thanked both officers for the information they had provided and congratulated them on their approach to reducing crime.

A member stated that, with regard to information, it worked both ways and the Police should keep Town Councils updated. He also referred to the percentages provided and felt they should have been backed up with figures.

Discussion took place about speeding being a major problem in the area and how it could be addressed. The Police acknowledged the schemes in place and measures taken through the Council's Local Transport Programme (LTP) and Members' Improvement

Schemes but said that, realistically, it could never be eradicated all together and it was about targeting the right people. It may have been a one off offence and Police would speak to those guilty with a view to educating them. However, with regard to the proposed changes referred to earlier, officers would have no qualms about removing vehicles from people driving illegally or persistent offenders.

In response to a query about boy racers at Blyth Beach, Inspector Nicklin said he was not aware of any problems currently as there had been a multi agency approach and a number of arrests had been made.

In terms of punishment, road safety was taken very seriously. In order to have valid insurance to drive again after conviction, criminals would need to declare their conviction. If they did not, and were on license, they would be sent back to jail for committing an offence. Police could check this and it was a case of using legislation carefully.

Emma Beniams, Senior Community Safety Officer, reported that the single points of contact for the Ashington and Blyth area were Ross McLeod and Darren Dougan but members were also welcome to contact her at any time and feedback was welcome.

Local Multi Agency Problem Solving (LMAPS) meetings had previously been held every month in all of the county areas. In January those meetings had been reviewed and some changes were implemented to improve partnership involvement and consistency across all areas. As a result Victim Offender Location (VOL) meetings now took place and she chaired all 7 of those to ensure an overview of all issues across the county, sharing of best practice and efficient use of resources. Membership of the VOL meetings had been expanded and included representatives from adults and children's services which allowed for a more holistic approach to issues affecting the local community.

In terms of statistics, there was an increase in reports of ASB this year to date and overall Ashington and Blyth were the busiest sectors with most complaints being about rowdy and inconsiderate behaviour. This could relate to behaviour around home addresses spilling out and affecting neighbours or by groups or individuals in public places. There had been 86 complaints last year with 63 complaints so far this year.

The main issue in Blyth last year was youth disorder and an Adolescent Partnership Group had been established with multi agencies to tackle this. There had been a significant increase this year in Ashington around Hirst Park, McDonalds and Paddock Woods. There were three levels of offenders - top end (those who were already known), lower level hangers on and the middle group where there was an opportunity to divert behaviour. Sixteen young people had been identified as being regularly involved in ASB and in need of further intervention.

A significant number of young people had also been travelling from Ashington and Blyth into the Bedlington area and causing problems there but this had recently reduced.

There had been sporadic reports of mini motos in Newbiggin due to the wide open spaces and difficulty identifying those responsible. Similar issues had occurred in Newsham.

In 2018/19 there were ten CCTV deployments in Blyth, eight in Ashington and three in Newbiggin. To date in 2019/20 there had been one additional deployment in Blyth and one in Ashington.

*Chair's Initials.....*

There had been two Community Trigger Activations in the Blyth area. The Community Trigger enabled members of the community to take officers to task if they felt appropriate action had not been taken. One person had reported the same incident more than three times in 2018 and felt that nothing had been done. An ASB review was undertaken and additional actions identified that Police, Housing and NCC could do more to improve the response and this had resolved the matter. In March 2019, five separate people had reported the same incident but it was found that no action had been taken because the reports were new and still under investigation.

A member referred to problems with boy racers in the car park at People's Park in Ashington and racing down Institute Road. The Senior Community Safety Officer said that sporadic complaints had been received. She acknowledged that potentially cameras, bollards or cordoning off was required and ultimately the power for the Police to uplift vehicles but emphasised the need for incidents to be reported whilst they were happening.

The Head of Housing and Public Protection agreed and said the Police needed the public to report incidents and take car registrations. Officers could not react to comments made on social media but direct reports were ideal. A member suggested that adjacent residents should be contacted to advise them of this.

A member stated that Ashington Town Council had purchased two covert cameras for Ashington and the Police should use these to help with their investigations. They should then report back to Ashington Town Council as it needed feedback and reassurance that they were being used.

The Head of Housing and Public Protection said there was a clear reduction in crime but there was a bigger fear of crime. There should be a better way of reporting what was being done and for emphasising the need of partnership work. Society had changed, tolerance levels had changed and ways of dealing with hardened, persistent criminals/offenders needed to be looked at across the whole partnership. It was about communities providing the right level of information as resources and action were based on evidence.

**RESOLVED** that the update be received and comments of members noted.

## **INFORMATION ITEMS**

### **44. MEMBERS' LOCAL IMPROVEMENT SCHEMES 2017/20 - PROGRESS REPORT**

The report provided a progress update on Members' Local Improvement Schemes for 2017/19 as at 1 September 2019 (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix D**).

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

### **45. LOCAL AREA COUNCIL WORK PROGRAMME**

Members received the latest version of agreed items for future Local Area Council meetings (attached to the signed minutes as Appendix E).

*Chair's Initials.....*

*Ashington and Blyth Local Area Council, 11 September 2019*

15

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

**46. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on Wednesday, 9 October 2019 at Blyth Civic Centre - time to be confirmed.

The meeting closed at 7:33 pm

**Chair** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_