

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

ASHINGTON & BLYTH LOCAL AREA COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Ashington & Blyth Local Area Council** held in the former Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Blyth, NE24 2BX on Wednesday, 15 January 2020 at 5:15 pm.

PRESENT

Councillor E Simpson
(Chair, in the chair for items 1-3 and 7-16)

Councillor B Gallacher
(in the chair for items 4-6)

MEMBERS

D Campbell (part)
E Cartie
G Davey
S Davey
J J Gobin
L Grimshaw

J A Lang
K Nisbet
K Parry
M Purvis
T S Wilson

OFFICERS

K Angus	Executive Director of HR and OD and Deputy Chief Executive
J Blenkinsopp	Lawyer
M Carle	Highways Delivery Area Manager
G Gavin	Head of Neighbourhood Services
J Gerard	Acting Manager, Learning and Skills service
A Kingham	Director Business Development, Children's Services
R Laughton	Planning Officer
D Lally	Chief Executive
J Murphy	Principal Planning Officer
K Norris	Democratic Services Officer
R Wealleans	Neighbourhood Services Area Manager

Also in attendance:

Councillor Wayne Daley - Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Children's Services
Councillor C Homer, Cabinet Member for Culture, Arts & Leisure
Councillor P Jackson, Leader of the Council
Councillor V Jones, Cabinet Member for Adult Wellbeing & Health
Councillor N Oliver, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services
Councillor J Riddle, Cabinet Member for Planning, Housing & Resilience

D Nugent, Project Coordinator, Healthwatch Northumberland

Public: 7

Press: 1

63. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Rickerby and Webb.

64. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Ashington & Blyth Local Area Council held on Wednesday, 13 November 2019, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

65. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Planning Vice Chair, Councillor Lang, declared an interest in planning application 19/00260/FUL due to him being a member of Newbiggin Football Club. He therefore withdrew from chairing the planning section of the meeting and would leave the meeting for that item, taking no part in the discussion or voting thereon.

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL

Councillor Simpson vacated the Chair and, further to the Planning Vice Chair's declaration of interest, it was moved and seconded that Councillor Gallacher would be appointed as temporary Planning Vice Chair for the development control section of the agenda. Members thanked him for doing so.

66. 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.

67. 19/00260/FUL - Proposal for the erection of a new single storey sports clubhouse for the use of AFC Newbiggin with associated car park, storage container, 3m high mesh fencing and full size football pitch on the field north of Central Parkway (as amended 25.07.2019), land east of Grace Darling Campus, Cleveland Avenue, Newbiggin by the Sea, Northumberland.

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Richard Laughton, Planning Officer, introduced the above report (attached to the signed Minutes as Appendix B) and said it had been brought to his attention that the application was on the boundary of wards Newbiggin Central and Seaton with Newbiggin West, not just the latter as stated in the report.

Mr Laughton then summarised the report with the aid of a slide presentation.

In response to questions the following information was provided:

- Funding was not a planning consideration.
- No activity currently took place on the site and, although it would become an enclosed space, it would not be a change of use, however, permission could be imposed for the public to use the space.
- In terms of open space, it could be debated and considered as a loss of open space but it was still a playing field.
- If the existing football pitch became redundant, that was not a planning consideration and as the emerging local plan had not yet been adopted, the application could not be considered against it.
- It was acknowledged that a new road may be in the pipeline but that was not part of the decision making process.
- The proposed car park met the standards required for the type of use and was based on an equation used as a model by the highways section. Cars could also park on the central road which was some distance away from nearby houses.
- Policy INF 5 quoted at paragraph 7.7b was for any development to be built on public space.

Councillor G Davey proposed a site visit so that members could assess for themselves if it would be a loss of open space and the parking situation in relation to nearby residential properties. This was seconded by Councillor Gobin.

A member commented that there used to be a railway station near the application site and any building on there could prevent a future train line into Newbiggin.

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

RESOLVED that a site visit be arranged, date and time to be confirmed.

68. 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 5:45pm, Councillor Gallacher 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 6.00 pm.

OTHER LOCAL AREA COUNCIL BUSINESS

69. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

David Mallon asked why Northumberland County Council found it acceptable to pay off bullied staff. Councillor Oliver, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, said he was not aware of bullied staff and could not comment on individual cases. However, in terms of compromise agreements, these were only used after a person had taken appropriate legal advice and was willing to sign.

With the agreement of the Chair, the agenda was re-ordered to discuss the following item next.

70. LOCAL SERVICES ISSUES

The Neighbourhood Services Area Manager and Highways Delivery Area Manager were 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.

Technical Services

M Carle, Highways Delivery Area Manager, provided a very brief update stating that winter services were ongoing with routes being upgraded and checked. It had been a mild winter so far and maintenance was on-going. He had no significant issues to report.

Neighbourhood Services

R Wealleans, Neighbourhood Services Area Manager, provided the following information:

Waste Service:

- Staff had picked up an extra 104 tons in the week following the holiday period. There had been a 17% increase from Stakeford Depot and 64 tons from Blyth Depot which was a 10% increase on a normal period. Staff had worked overtime shifts to catch up for the bank holidays.
- There had been capacity issues at some of the bottle bring sites, excess was cleared away and skips had been emptied. Officers were looking to increase capacity for the Christmas period next year at some locations with extra skips.
- Extra bulky waste slots had been made available to cover a rise in demand in the run up to Christmas and these had been taken by residents.

Grounds Maintenance:

- Leaf clearance was close to completion and if members had any areas of concern they should inform the Neighbourhood Services Area Manager.
- High winds had resulted in some areas which had been completed requiring extra attention.
- Cutting back of hedges and shrubs was ongoing in all areas with Newbiggin 90% complete, Ashington 75% complete and Blyth 60% complete. Officers

were confident that all core works would be completed and requests would be taken into consideration.

- The process of recruiting seasonal staff for the coming summer period had commenced.

Street Cleansing:

- Leaf clearance had been a priority and leaf hot spot areas had largely been addressed.
- Street cleansing teams had worked hard on the lead up to the Holiday period and over the Bank Holidays to ensure streets were up to standard.
- There was reactive work for the mechanical sweepers as a result of the high winds and heavy rains but planned work started last week within the area.

General:

- Staff from Stakeford Depot continued to work on the Highways operated winter services rota and would assist when needed for any footpath gritting within the areas.

In response to questions the following information was provided:

- The green machine used on Station Road in Ashington had been out of action for two months due to it requiring a part but it would be back on the street shortly.
- In terms of gullies being blocked by leaves, issues were addressed in line with reports of flooding and hotspots were prioritised.
- There would be an update about weed spraying at the next full meeting of the Local Area Council.

It was requested that conversations about community bins continue, especially in the colliery rows as burst bags could cause problems for front line services. This had been trialled in parts of Ashington and had been a success. Positive views were expressed about the partnership with Ashington Town Council.

Thanks were expressed to officers for the work carried out on potholes and it was queried if the roads around the St Johns area at Bedlington Station could be inspected. The Highways Delivery Area Manager said there was a 6 monthly inspection rota but he would put forward the request to the Area Inspector.

In response to a query about fly tipping, it was reported that this had gradually decreased over the last few months.

Members thanked officers for all of their hard work over the festive period and asked that their appreciation be conveyed to their teams.

71. PETITIONS

(a) Receive any new petitions: Request for Footpath from Seaton Vale to NCEA School

The Chair advised members that an e petition had been received requesting a footpath from Seaton Vale estate to the NCEA school. The petition had gone live the previous

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day and, in line with the petition protocol, 50 signatures were required before a report could be requested for a future meeting.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

(b) Consider reports on petitions previously received: None to consider.

(c) Receive any updates on petitions for which a report was previously considered: No reports to consider.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

72. BUDGET 2020-21 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Local Area Council received a presentation as part of the State of the Area Debate, which outlined the Council's strategy for the 2020-21 Budget, within the context of the Corporate Plan. It provided details of the approach to setting the budget for the next financial year and the broad impact it would have on the delivery of services. (A copy of the presentation is filed with the signed minutes.)

The Leader of the Council introduced Cabinet Members and thanked them for attending. He said he would recap on what had taken place over the last year and expressed the administration's ambitions to make Northumberland a place where people would love to live, work and have careers.

His presentation covered the following:

- The Administration's Core beliefs to guide how they believed the Council should serve the community.
- Delivery of manifesto pledges, completion of projects and other key achievements since 2017.
- Living - residents to feel safe, valued and part of their community.
Commitment to deliver 1,000 Council owned houses, improve 2,000 Council owned properties, develop a Northumberland Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for the next 10 years, training in health, social care and voluntary sectors, supporting vulnerable residents, achieving high levels of satisfaction (91% of people surveyed said they were very satisfied with the care and support they received, 90% of residents said the services they used made them feel safe and secure), excellent services for young people.
- Enjoying - residents to live in distinctive, vibrant places, which they valued and in which they felt proud.
Campaign to promote county positively, winning gold in 2018 and silver in the 2019 British Travel Awards UK, achieving a tourism spend of over £1 bn for the first time ever, tourism one of the most important industries for creating employment, integrating services such as libraries and creating community hubs, cultural programme, investing in parks and green spaces, green flag awards, Hirst Park refurbishment in Ashington, valuing partnership agreements with Town and Parish Councils.
- Connecting - residents to get to work easily, learn and have access to various facilities and services they want to use.

Scrapped travel fares for post 16 travel and providing free transport for students, nearer to securing the Northumberland to Newcastle rail line, significant road improvements, additional £7.7m for highway maintenance, identified preferred route for Blyth Relief Road, improved digital connectivity and improved that in rural areas.

- Learning - residents regardless of their age, to have the right qualifications and skills to ensure a good job that paid well, and the prospect of a rewarding career. Invested £130 m in schools development across the County, school performance improving, 90% of primary schools good or outstanding, 66% secondary schools, good or outstanding, ambition for 100% on both. High emphasis on special educational needs, developed a North of England Education Challenge fund to ensure people have better jobs to build their careers and a thriving local economy.
- Thriving - businesses booming with the Council doing everything in its power to create the right connections for economic growth.

Securing significant funding for the regeneration of town centres, huge investments in the Portland Park area of Ashington, investment in Bedlington and town centre funding for Blyth, investment in leisure services. Through partnership with Advance Northumberland, significant progress with Northumberland Energy Park, 660 new jobs created on former Blyth Power Station site, working actively with businesses for expansion plans based around renewable energy, new training centre at Port of Blyth. The purchase of Ashwood Business Park and plans to develop jobs there.

- Future priorities - aim for people to stay in Northumberland and work in Northumberland. Put customers at the heart of everything, deliver on commitments.

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services said the budget would be presented to full Council in February. He thanked senior officers in all departments for the work they had done on the budget and the contributions they had made. All savings for the next year had been identified and the approach was to drive efficiency where possible with as little impact on front line services as possible. He then went through the budget as follows:

- Budget Context - the budget was for 2 years. To date no long term funding plan from the Government had been received due to the December election.
- Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement - NCC proposed a council tax increase of 1.99%, £2.6m social care support grant, £1.5m winter pressures grant, £5.8m social care funding.
- Capital Programme 2019-2022.
- Next steps - questions were invited. There would be an opportunity for all to read the published document and the final version would be considered by full Council in February.

Following the presentation, members raised the following issues:

- There were a number of vacant flats in Blyth which people did not want to rent and concerns were raised as to what might happen to those properties.
- It was confirmed that the 1,000 planned new homes would be social housing and would be spread across the county with an emphasis on starter homes for the young and elderly people's accommodation.
- Some sites owned by Advance Northumberland were specified for employment use but the Leader confirmed that all possible sites would be considered for affordable housing.

- Concerns were raised about the derelict site behind the coastline restaurant in Blyth. The Leader responded that the site was privately owned but he believed a proposal was in the pipeline.
- Extra funding was requested for Newsham Park in Blyth which now had a national bowling club. Grass cutting and maintenance was not carried out to an acceptable standard and residents were relied upon to keep the park tidy.
- In response to comments that work on the Northumberland to Newcastle rail link had been on-going for a number of years, the Leader said the £3 ½ m investment study had made a huge impact.
- It was queried if NCC employed any apprentices with special educational needs and it was stated that schools were not performing well enough in deprived areas. In response the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services said there were employees working on the county coffee kiosk with special educational needs and from the care system. He said that, morally, the Council had an obligation to look at this and education should be provided in-house. There were special schools in Ashington and Hexham and there was to be a new free school in Blyth for children with special educational needs. In terms of education performance, there had been issues for a number of years but the number of permanent exclusions had decreased by 27% . He agreed, however, that performance in the South East of the county needed to improve and believed the Education Challenge would show significant improvements.
- Concerns were raised about the support given by NCC to maintain town centres in Ashington, Blyth and Newbiggin and it was suggested this should be reviewed.
- In response to queries about the Portland Park development and the lack of information provided, the Leader referred to commercial issues and said they had been unable to have open discussions until the business case had been signed off. He advised that the cinema should be delivered in around a year's time and he was happy to discuss the details with local councils.
- For the last two years weed control had been diabolical.
- The proposal for Ashwood Business Park was welcomed. Could times and deadlines be provided?
- With regard to climate change, figures quoted were from 2010 and had cross-party involvement.
- At Scrutiny meetings lots of questions were raised but reports did not highlight any of the discussion so how could they be reviewed? In response the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services said the administration welcomed scrutiny at a local level but reports were brief for a reason and were a list of what had been agreed, they were not minutes.
- Partnerships with local councils were paramount.
- In response to a request for more measures to be in place to aid disabled people to be more independent, the Leader agreed there was always more to be done. There were a number of projects in place throughout the Council and work was taking place with Town Councils on access plans for town centres. There was a budget in the Local Plan for improvements for disabled people and Members could also use their local improvement scheme budget.
- Reference was made to untidy gardens at Council properties and how officers should be reminded that tenants had a duty to maintain them. Dog fouling did not seem to be as much of a problem as it used to be. The Cabinet Member for Planning, Housing and Resilience said he had attended walk-about around Blyth with a local member in the past and had taken on board the points raised. He had been in discussions with the Head of Housing that week and they were going to

review what was required of Estate Management Officers in their reports. He agreed that improvements were needed and gave a commitment that this was a priority.

- There were major problems for Councillors trying to engage with officers at Bernicia and it was queried if the Cabinet could do anything about that? The Cabinet Member for Planning, Housing and Resilience said they had a good relationship with senior officers at Bernicia and Karbon Homes and would take this up.
- A request was put forward to raise the £15,000 allocated to Members' Improvement Schemes and to remove the £2,000 minimum for each project. In response the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services said some members used this scheme more efficiently than others. It had been decided not to increase the figure this year but it would be looked at again next year. It was noted that a dispensation could be requested for special projects; the Community Chest was another option and the Northumberland Lottery would soon be launched.

RESOLVED that the presentation be received.

73. NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL'S ADULT SOCIAL CARE APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMME 'CARE FOR LIFE'

The Local Area Council received a presentation about the Social Care Apprenticeship programme and opportunities, for existing social care staff and/or new talented individuals, to enter social care as potential future managers and leaders. (A copy of the presentation is enclosed with the signed minutes of the meeting.)

Audrey Kingham, Director Business Development, Children's Services and Janice Gerard, Acting Manager, Learning and Skills Service were in attendance to provide the presentation and answer questions. The key points of the presentation were as follows:

- The Care for Life campaign had come about when adult social care teams had identified they had an ageing workforce.
- The campaign was commissioned to recruit 16-25 year olds to allow succession planning and improve perception by raising the profile of adult social care generally.
- Teams went out and talked to 'real' members of staff in Northumberland and found they loved their jobs and were enthusiastic about how helping others enriched their lives. This was the backbone of all marketing materials, the experience of 'real' colleagues to take this forward.
- Development of a website, replication of materials and partnership working gave the opportunity to showcase the investment the Council had made in young people and also provide a career changing direction for people of all ages.
- A 30 second video advertisement, radio advert, A5 leaflets and screensavers/posters were referred to.
- A brief overview of the communications plan was provided with the aim of targeting a wider audience. Face to face interaction and pop up engagements had worked particularly well and would be replicated in the future.
- In terms of budget considerations, a lot of work had been undertaken internally and Council owned centres and facilities were used to minimise costs. ITV hub adverts played around 'Love Island' for maximum exposure and to target a young audience.

- Analysis of campaign statistics showed that in excess of 150,000 people had seen the campaign through the ITV hub, the click through rate from the video advert was 4 times higher than similar campaigns and the website had received over 7000 hits.
- Web analytics were provided and with regard to geographical spread this included many locations outside Northumberland and the North East area.
- Recruitment impact - Over 150,000 people had seen the campaign, over 7,000 visited the website, 78 provided personal data, 40 were called for interviews, 31 attended interviews, 19 were offered apprenticeships and 14 new apprentices were in post.
- Interview demographics were provided - most candidates were in the 16 - 25 age bracket and included looked after children, school leavers and individuals who had experience of caring for a family member. Candidates had been chosen for their caring and compassionate nature and not dependent on previous experience or academic qualifications.
- The next campaign was to begin again in Spring 2020 to capture college student progression.
- There would be continued engagement with apprentices and they would be used as case studies for the next cohort.
- Two award nominations had been submitted for which the outcome was awaited.

Members then asked questions and the following information was provided:

- For the first year apprentices were employed on the Council's apprenticeship wage and thereafter, depending on age, the appropriate minimum wage. Details would be forwarded to Councillor Purvis as requested.
- It was suggested that other incentives could be offered as an inducement, for example driving lessons. It was acknowledged that this was a good idea and it would be beneficial to invest in individuals as it was hoped that they would be employed for the long term.
- At the first level apprenticeships were generic and at the next level became more specialised. Apprentices would be moving around different points of social care in order to gain more experience.
- Qualifications would be transportable and were part of the recruitment policy.

Members thanked the officers for their presentation stating social care work was a vocation and needed dedicated staff. They were particularly pleased that recruitment had included looked after children and they hoped apprenticeships would increase the following year.

RESOLVED that the presentation be received.

74. HEALTHWATCH, NORTHUMBERLAND

Members received a presentation that covered current work and feedback received by Healthwatch Northumberland from health and social care service users and sought member's insights into current health and social care issues within their communities. (A copy of Healthwatch Northumberland's Quarterly Report for July – September 2019/20 is enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix D.)

Derry Nugent, Project Coordinator for Healthwatch Northumberland, thanked members for inviting her to the meeting. She said many of them would know that Healthwatch was an independent champion for people who used health and social care services across Northumberland. They collected evidence and summarised feedback and concerns to those who were in a position to make decisions.

The quarterly report for July to September had been circulated to members and the next report was now in production.

Ms Nugent referred to Healthwatch’s annual survey which had been distributed in many formats to ask people about their experiences in the last 12 months. Last year over 800 responses were received and it was hoped that participation would increase in 2020. Councillors were valued as a main source of help in achieving a good response rate through their networks and contacts in communities.

Details of scheduled engagement events to be held at various locations across Ashington and Blyth between 3 February 2020 and 18 March 2020 were circulated. Members were asked if they could promote the dates and times of these events and if they had any suggestions for improving the response rate, these would be gratefully received.

A copy of the Northumberland Healthwatch feedback form was circulated at the meeting and further copies were available for Members’ surgeries and other community groups. Copies were also available in a variety of locations including libraries, GP surgeries, pharmacies, community halls etc.

The Chair thanked Ms Nugent for attending and praised the work of Healthwatch, encouraging all carers to register with them.

RESOLVED that the presentation be received.

INFORMATION ITEMS

75. MEMBERS’ LOCAL IMPROVEMENT SCHEMES 2017/20 - PROGRESS REPORT

The report provided a progress update on Members’ Local Improvement Schemes for 2017/20 as at 1 January 2020 (attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix E**).

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

76. 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 F**).

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

77. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

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It was noted that the next meeting would take place on Wednesday, 12 February 2020 at Ashington YMCA - time to be confirmed.

The meeting closed at 7:52 pm

Chair _____

Date _____