

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

TYNEDALE LOCAL AREA COUNCIL

At a virtual meeting of the **Tynedale Local Area Council** held on Tuesday, 10 November 2020 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor T Cessford
(Chair, in the Chair)

MEMBERS

A Dale
R Gibson
CR Homer
I Hutchinson
D Kennedy
N Oliver (part)

KR Quinn (part)
JR Riddle
A Sharp
G Stewart
KG Stow

OFFICERS

Dr J Brown
A Olive
D Hunt

P Jones
R O'Farrell
N Turnbull

Consultant in Public Health
Highways Delivery Area Manager
Area Manager (West),
Neighbourhood Services
Service Director - Local Services
Executive Director
Democratic Services Officer

150. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Horncastle.

151. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Tynedale Local Area Council held on 13 October 2020, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

152. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions from members of the public.

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153. PETITIONS

This item was to:

a) Receive any new petitions:

There were none to consider.

b) Consider reports on petitions previously received:

There were none to consider.

c) To consider updates on petitions previously considered:

There were none to consider.

154. LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN 2020/21 – CAPITAL PROGRAM UPDATE

The Service Director – Local Services provided a detailed summary of the funding streams that made up the Local Transport Plan for the current financial year. This included:

- £18.591 million LTP Government grant.
- £10 million additional capital investment from the Council's reserves for highway maintenance of U and C roads and footways (with a further £5 million in 2021/22).
- £11.421 million capital grant fund from the Department of Transport (DfT).
- £3.7 million from a successful bid for (DfT) Challenge Funding towards an overall £4.8m scheme for the refurbishment of 8 steel bridges across the County.

He explained the Covid-19 pandemic had delayed the start of the LTP programme with focus initially on emergency and reactive repairs whilst safe methods of working were devised for staff and members of the public and adaption of plant and equipment. Some staff had also been undertaking additional duties to assist with delivery of food parcels, reopening of town centres and identification and establishment of mobile and local Covid-19 testing sites. Office based staff were working well at home after some initial teething problems which had been quickly resolved.

The programme included:

- 40 miles of road to be resurfaced. As at 30.09.20, 52 of 168 projects and over 12 miles had been completed. Work continued on the remainder, subject to no severe adverse weather it was anticipated the whole programme would be delivered this financial year.

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- £3.7 million surface dressing treatment had been completed on 48 miles of rural roads during the summer to seal the surface, protect it from frost and extend the lifespan.
- 10 miles of micro surfacing had been completed on urban roads.
- Improvements to footway and cycling networks at 34 locations were to be carried out over Autumn and Winter.
- The replacement of the Kirkhaugh footbridge which was damaged in storms in 2018 had now been completed.
- Bridge improvements. Separate Heritage Lottery Funding had been secured to repair and conserve the Union Chain Bridge at Horncliffe and was being undertaken in partnership with the Scottish Borders Council and others.
- Landslip repairs at Warden, Morpeth and Wylam / Ovingham riverbank had been undertaken and investigations into a solution at Todstead on the B6344 Weldon Bridge to Rothbury road were underway.
- Road safety improvements were on going with schemes in Prudhoe, Bedlington and Embleton all having been completed.
- Progression of work on a number of High-Risk Sites and Rural Road Safety schemes was going well, 2 had been completed, 8 were issued for delivery and waiting to be programmed and 10 were in the design phase.
- Introduction of 20 mph speed limits at schools at 4 locations had been completed, a further 8 to be programmed for delivery, with the remaining 40 schemes at various stages of design or consultation.
- Work at Callerton Lane, Ponteland had been completed as part of the major school and leisure project which incorporated Environment Agency improvements to surface water drainage to reduce flood risk.

The Chair, on behalf of all the Local Area Council members, thanked the Service Director – Local Services and all the staff for their continued hard work and contribution during the pandemic. Several members also expressed their appreciation for completion of projects within their wards or for the resolution of issues that arisen.

The Service Director – Local Services provided the following information in answer to questions from members:

- A restructure would be taking place within the Highways and Construction sections to create 10 additional posts to increase capacity and deliver the challenging LTP programme.
- The introduction of 20 mph speed limits adjacent to schools was a multi-year programme and schemes were at different stages between design, consultation, amendment and implementation. He was unable to provide updates on the stage of specific schemes at the meeting. A new Infrastructure Manager had been appointed following the retirement of the previous post holder and would be looking to improve communication and clarity regarding the status of schemes. A member suggested that an audit trail be provided to Councillors so they had a clear understanding of the process for the implementation of the project.

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- Councillor Kennedy would be sent a copy of recent correspondence on the safe routes to school planning in Hexham.

RESOLVED that the report be received.

155. COVID-19 UPDATE

Dr Jim Brown, Consultant in Public Health, attended the meeting to give an update to members on the current position of the Covid-19 pandemic.

He reported that:

- Following the joint announcement and introduction of restrictions by the 7 North East Local Authorities (LA7), Durham County Council, Gateshead Council, Newcastle City Council, Northumberland County Council, North Tyneside Council, South Tyneside Council, Sunderland City Council in September, there had been a rapid increase in the number of positive cases and then infection rates had remained between 180 – 190 positive cases per 100,000 population over 7 days during October. Unfortunately, this had increased during the previous week and the infection rate per 100,000 population was now at 259 with 829 positive cases in the 7 days up to 8 November 2020.
- The rates in Northumberland were still the lowest in the North East, but there was increasing concern about behaviours during half term and prior to the second national lockdown.
- The rates in the Tynedale areas were lower than the county average with a rate of positive cases per 100,000 population of 114. The highest numbers in the area were adjacent to Tyneside, in Bywell, Prudhoe and Stocksfield although cases were spread across all areas.
- The number of tests had reduced in the previous three weeks due to rewording of advice and discouraging those without symptoms requesting tests. Previously half of all tests were among individuals showing no symptoms of the virus.
- The rate of positive tests in Northumberland was increasing slightly at 9.1% which was lower than the north east average of 12.9% and national average of 9.8%. The age group with the highest rate of positive cases in the last 7 days in Northumberland was 16-29 years, however in Tynedale it was 50-59 year olds and 10-19 year old age groups. The most harmful effects of the virus were experienced by those aged 65 years and over, the number of which had increased slightly.
- Testing was being undertaken regularly in care homes with most having small numbers of staff receiving positive results who were asymptomatic. There had been a small number of care homes with large outbreaks.
- Four teams were providing wrap around support to: work places and businesses, schools and education settings, care homes and domiciliary staff, hybrid high risk groups and settings which included adults with learning difficulties, people in prisons, individuals with drug and alcohol

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problems, people living within hostels. There was a current outbreak of the virus in HMP Northumberland.

- A new testing site was in the process of being established in Hexham, with measures in place to ensure safety, and locations had been identified for new mobile testing units if needed.
- New guidance had been issued regarding individuals classified as clinically extremely vulnerable.
- The Council had recently issued a guidance letter regarding visiting at care homes, which was broadly in line with the newly issued national guidance.
- Plans and communications were being developed for after 2 December, when the current national lockdown was due to end. 'Hands, space, face' continued to be promoted as the best method to reduce transmission of the virus.
- A regional covid hub was proposed to be established in Newcastle for 80,000 tests in December and it was hoped that test and trace could be undertaken locally which would improve understanding of the geography and population, with the aim to increase the proportion of contacts traced.
- Implementation of mass rapid testing in the region was awaited with priority to be given to designated visitors to care homes and domiciliary care.
- Mass vaccination was unlikely to take place before Spring 2021 at the earliest.

The Chair thanked Dr Brown for attending the meeting and sharing the latest Public health information.

The following information was provided in response to comments and questions made by members of the Local Area Council:

- Members of the public should only arrange a Covid test if they were showing symptoms (a new continuous cough, a high temperature, loss of taste or smell), or if directed by a healthcare professional, Public Health England or local council.
- Nearby businesses had expressed concerns regarding the new test site at the former fire station on the Tyne Mills Industrial Estate, Hexham. It was confirmed that the facility was accessible by car and there would be adequate parking (although the aim of local testing sites is to enable people to access on foot). The Chair read out an extract from a recent letter which had been issued to all Councillors from the Department of Health, to assist them in answering queries from residents. Similar concerns had been expressed in advance of the testing sites that had been established in Ashington and Blyth. It was suggested that letters be sent to businesses adjacent to the site to allay fears of potential customers. The risk of transmission at the site was very low and there had been no reports of a positive case transmitted through a business's close proximity to a testing site. Security was extremely high and access restricted.

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- The data on the council's website was updated daily. It was acknowledged that this may differ to information on other Government websites, such as Public Health England, due to a time lag in data being received and updated, and also earlier cut off dates for inclusion in website updates. Relevant departments had the most up to date information for making decision on the appropriate category to assign to the county at the end of the national lockdown.
- Whilst some members were disappointed that a second national lockdown had been implemented, as the levels in Tynedale were low in comparison to rates elsewhere across the country and businesses had implemented the necessary controls. Others made reference to the close proximity to Tyneside and the crossing of borders for work and education.
- All residents were urged to follow the guidance to reduce transmission and the number of positive cases to ensure the county was placed in the lowest category at the end of the national lockdown. Dr Brown referred to the 5-day average incubation period from exposure to the virus and development of symptoms with a range between 2 to 14 days. Individuals were contagious up to 2 days before symptoms appeared and for 10 days after, if they no longer had a high temperature.
- It would take at least 2 weeks from the start of the national lockdown for figures to reduce, following a further spike, due to behaviors between the announcement and implementation. Figures in Liverpool had significantly reduced following the Tier 3 categorisation and implementation of mass testing. It was unknown whether the national lockdown would be extended, as the decision would be made on data nearer the 2 December, when it was due to end.
- Information and advice was not yet available if proof of inoculation would permit travel to other countries. Preparation was focused on the NHS and plans to enable mass vaccination as soon as it was available.

RESOLVED that the update be received.

156. LOCAL SERVICES UPDATE

Members received the following updates and explanation of the impact of Covid-19 on front line services from the Area Managers from Neighbourhood Services and Technical Services:

Neighbourhood Services:

- Non-essential services had ceased during the initial period of lockdown including closure of public toilets and play areas. Grounds maintenance has been suspended for a short period in March 2020 and then had recommenced. The refuse service had continued throughout the whole period. All operational staff were thanked for their work through a very challenging period.
- 10 out of 60 staff had been unable to work due to health conditions and requirement to shield or isolate due to underlying health conditions.

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Currently 7 staff were shielding and 2 staff were required to self-isolate. Agency staff had been used to bolster the workforce when required.

- Risk assessments and safe systems of work had been developed for every activity including signage, installation of wall mounted sanitisers, desks taken out of use, introduction of maximum room occupancy, face coverings, staggered start and finish times, hire of additional vehicles to ensure social distancing, installation of screens within vehicles.
- Due to increased tonnage with large numbers of residents working from home, it had been necessary to hire in additional refuse collection vehicles to cope with the volumes.
- Grass had been cut 11 times during the season with very little down time due to wet weather. All core and additional cuts had been achieved
- Leaf clearance was currently being prioritised, particularly in known hotspot areas, although members were encouraged to email the locations of other areas requiring attention, as well as requests for hedge and shrub trimming, which was about to commence.
- Residual, recycling and garden waste collection services had been operating well with a few minor breakdowns, staffing shortages and Covid restrictions.
- Garden waste collections would cease within the next few weeks and had exceeded income targets. Income for commercial waste and bulk collections were below target due to Covid restrictions.
- Bottle recycling facilities had been receiving extra collections due to increased use.
- A trial kerbside glass recycling collection scheme was due to commence mid-November and included 1,000 households in Hexham. Collections of a small wheeled bin would take place monthly; its effectiveness was to be monitored.
- Work had taken place to tidy ears around war memorials despite restrictions limiting numbers being able to attend. Judging had not taken place for the 'In Bloom' awards, however 11 Northumberland parks had received Green Flag awards including Eastwood Park in Prudhoe at the first attempt and retention of Green Flag status for Hexham Park.

In answer to a question from the Chair, the Interim Executive Director confirmed that a thorough review of the glass recycling collection trial would take place after 9 months of operation. The first collection was scheduled to take place on Friday 13 November 2020. Monitoring would also take place during the trial of: collection rates, use of nearby bring facilities, feedback from residents, noise impact and any operational difficulties encountered.

Technical Services:

- LTP items had been reported earlier in the meeting.
- The surface dressing programme had been completed in 34 locations across 71km of road.
- The micro surfacing program work had also been successfully completed across 33 locations and a coverage of 100,000m², despite a delay of several months due to the pandemic.

- Highways Investment Programme – 31 out of 49 footway and carriageway schemes had been completed in Tynedale with the remaining schemes programmed for delivery during the current financial year, subject to no adverse weather conditions.
- 20 large LTP projects in the Tynedale area were programmed for the current financial year and a sample of completed schemes were identified.
- Funding from the Department of Transport had enabled work identified by Councillors and Highways Inspectors to be carried out. Tynedale staff had also been involved in the sizeable projects at Warden slip, Kirkhaugh footbridge and the work adjacent to Ponteland High School at Callerton Lane encompassing Environment Agency flood improvements.
- A list of work to be undertaken during the next month was provided.
- A new hedge-to-hedge approach had commenced during the previous month in areas identified by the Highways Inspectors for all work requiring attention. The team included a tractor a flail, JCB, operatives, extra gully wagon if required and sweeper to renew ditches, signs, widen the carriageway if encroached by vegetation which was cut back. Areas where work was being carried out included Bardon Mill and Melkridge before moving to higher ground.
- Highways Inspectors and operatives had continued to ensure statutory responsibilities had been fulfilled and actionable defects repaired during the pandemic. Staff had also carried out other duties including delivery of food parcels, placed signage on the network and around schools and had filled roles as Town Ambassadors.
- The gully wagon had been operational throughout the period working at different locations around the Tynedale area.
- Work had commenced on Members' Schemes in a number of areas, signs had been ordered for other locations and would be programmed in.

Winter Service Preparedness and Resilience Report

Winter services activities were undertaken to ensure that, as far as practical, the highway was maintained in a safe condition, in accordance with legal obligations under the Highways Act 1980. They planned to respond appropriately to forecast weather conditions and have sufficient manpower and resources available. For the 2020/21 season there were:

- 3 winter services delivery managers operating a 3 weekly rota working with 103 other staff including supervisors, drivers and operatives.
- Officers should only be contacted in an emergency situation and other situations reported through the Council's contact centre or out of hours arrangements.
- Processes had been brought into line with current Covid-19 guidance.
- The weather and forecasts were regularly monitored throughout the day using the Vaisala and MeteoGroup systems.
- New specialist equipment was to be used for specialist winter maintenance route management and automated salt spreading technology across the gritter fleet. It provided enhanced vehicle tracking, route management, automated navigation, automated gritting patterns, improved data collection, recording and live monitoring of operations.

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- The fleet included 28 multi-purpose gritting vehicles including 4 new replacement vehicles, 2 purpose-built snow blowers and 4 gulley tankers, if required for rapid snow melt and flooding. 5 smaller additional vehicles were made available by Northumberland Fire and rescue Service, if required.
- There were 28 primary gritting routes and 28 secondary gritting routes.
- 42,000 tonnes of salt were held in stock. A new salt barn was about to be constructed in Otterburn and further locations were being explored for Bellingham and Morpeth which would enable all salt stock to be covered.
- 1,600 grit bins / heaps had been replenished; town and parish councils were responsible for green bins although this was often undertaken by NCC and recharged.
- The 'Highway Services in Winter' leaflet would be shared electronically with County Councillors and Town and Parish Councils. It contained details of policies, maps of the primary gritting routes and the strategic footpath network to be treated.
- Daily alerts would be issued during the winter using social media.
- Checks and visits had taken place to farmers and sub-contractors who assisted with remote roads in rural Northumberland.
- Cross boundary arrangements were in place with Newcastle City Council, Durham County Council, Cumbria County Council, Scottish Borders Councils, Colas and Highways England to aid each other in periods of heavy snow, to ensure that strategic routes were kept clear as far as possible. A management service was provided by NCC to Newcastle City Council to determine when precautionary salting was required in their area.

He ended his update by expressing his appreciation to the Highway Services team, as he was proud of what they had delivered in 2020.

Councillor Riddle declared that he undertook ad-hoc snow clearance.

Issues raised by Councillors included:

- The height of vegetation clearance be checked, particularly on timber routes which used large vehicles.
- The recent sad death of a child due to a falling tree. It was confirmed that any trees identified as hazardous were passed to the Tree Officer for work to be undertaken urgently.
- Closer working with Cumbria County Council to improve gritting on the Northumberland side of the A689. This would be investigated.

The Chair and several members of the Local Area Council expressed their appreciation to the Area Managers and their teams for their continued excellent work during difficult and challenging circumstances in 2020.

RESOLVED that the updates be noted.

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

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157. LOCAL AREA COUNCIL WORK PROGRAMME

A list of agreed items for future Local Area Council meetings was circulated.
(A copy is enclosed with the minutes as Appendix C.)

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

158. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on Tuesday 8 December 2020 at 2.00 p.m.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____

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