

**NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**  
**ASHINGTON AND BLYTH LOCAL AREA COUNCIL**

At the meeting of the **Ashington and Blyth Local Area Council** held at Remotely on Wednesday, 10 March 2021 at 6.00 pm.

**PRESENT**

G Webb (Chair) (in the Chair)

**MEMBERS**

J Lang  
E Cartie  
S Davey  
J Gobin  
K Nisbet  
M Purvis  
E Simpson

D Campbell  
G Davey  
B Gallacher  
L Grimshaw  
K Parry  
J Reid

**OTHER COUNCILLORS**

**OFFICERS**

M Carle  
K Norris  
G Gavin  
R O'Farrell

L Dixon

Neighbourhood Services Area Manager  
Democratic Services Officer  
Head of Neighbourhood Services  
Executive Director - Corporate services -  
Planning & Economy  
Democratic Services Assistant

Around xxx members of the press and public were present.

**124 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L Rickerby and T Wilson.

**125 MINUTES 13 JANUARY 2021**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Ashington & Blyth Local Area Council held on Wednesday, 13 January 2021, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

**126 MINUTES 10 FEBRUARY 2021**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Ashington & Blyth Local Area

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Council held on Wednesday, 10 February 2021, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

## 127 **DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

Councillor Simpson declared an interest in item 5(b) – consider reports on petitions previously received, petition regarding Northumberland County Council asset transfer of redundant public toilet to Newbiggin Town Council at which time she would leave the meeting and take no part in the discussion or voting thereon.

At the Chair's request, and with the agreement of Members, the agenda was re-ordered to bring item 8 forward.

## 128 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

No questions from the public had been received in advance of the meeting.

## 129 **POLICING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY UPDATE**

The Chair had contacted Northumbria Police Inspectors of the Ashington and Blyth areas to attend the meeting to provide an update about policing and community safety. Inspector Patterson from the Ashington area had advised the Chair of a previous engagement but had agreed to attend on another occasion. Acting Neighbourhood Inspector Steven Nicklin had volunteered to attend for the Blyth area as a new Inspector had been appointed and had not yet taken up his position.

Inspector Nicklin provided an update as follows:

- John Caisley had been appointed as the new Inspector for the Blyth area and would take up his position within the next few weeks.
- Operational policing teams for Blyth responded from the Bedlington area but were deployed within the Blyth area for a quick time response. In addition, there was a Blyth Neighbourhood Team which currently consisted of one inspector, two sergeants, 12 police constables, 8 PCSO's and a number of special constables split over two operating teams.
- Key areas of vulnerability such as domestic violence and anti-social behaviour were being addressed.
- Operation Aurora continued with a multi-agency approach to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour in the Cowpen Quay area. This was a beneficial piece of work with vast success in supporting vulnerable people and improving hotspot areas. Some offenders had been given custodial sentences with others receiving low level intervention to deter them from becoming long term offenders.
- During lockdown speeding had been exacerbated and in response to concerns about this the Blyth area had taken receipt of a true speed gun which was ordinarily only held by traffic departments. This was a mobile handheld speed camera which could be operated by one officer and some of the team had been trained to use it, the benefits of which had already been seen.
- Enforcement was valid and crucial but there were many assets to it. Engagement and working with highways were ongoing and hopefully

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- benefits would soon be forthcoming.
- There were ongoing issues with off-road motorcycles which were being addressed by Operation Swift in which individuals were being proactively targeted.
- In terms of local initiatives, Operation Ages was looking at issues of domestic violence and identifying the most vulnerable through a multi-agency approach. This was a bespoke piece of work in addition to that done by other departments and was proving beneficial.
- Covid had brought many issues. Residents and members of the community in Blyth had mainly adhered to the public safety element but, as in other areas, some had been in breach of the guidelines. Most breaches had been within a domestic setting and although these were mainly addressed through engagement and education, enforcement was used when needed.
- Inspector Nicklin said members should be encouraged as there were many positive things happening in Blyth.

In response to questions the following information was provided:

- Following the traffic accident at St Wilfred's Church, Blyth, Inspector Nicklin was not aware of any fatalities but could not comment on injuries sustained by the driver.
- Funding for the true speed gun had been provided by interested parties and contributions from local members. Ordinarily the device was only operated by motor patrols, so officers had needed specific training to use it.
- Following comments about a speed gun for use in the Ashington area, a member provided some background information and offered to discuss this further with Councillor Gallacher outside of the meeting.

The Chair thanked Inspector Nicklin for attending the meeting and for providing a comprehensive report. In turn, Inspector Nicklin thanked Councillors for their support which was much appreciated.

## 130 PETITIONS

**(a) Receive any new petitions** – details about a petition relating to planning enforcement procedures in Lynemouth had been circulated with the agenda in error as it was not under the remit of this committee. The Director of Planning had been advised accordingly and his response would be provided to a future meeting of the Castle Morpeth Local Area Council.

**(b) Consider reports on petitions previously received:**

### **Northumberland County Council Asset Transfer of Redundant Public Toilet to Newbiggin Town Council**

*Councillor Simpson left the meeting for this item only taking no part in the discussion or voting thereon*

A statement to introduce the petition had been received from Mr J Armstrong, local resident and petitioner, and was read out by the Democratic Services Officer

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as follows:

As a resident and Council Tax payer of Newbiggin by the Sea, I wish to submit my objection to and concerns with regard to Northumberland County Council transferring their derelict, redundant public toilets to the Town Council.

### **Financial implications for the residents.**

1. Newbiggin by the Sea residents have for the last two years paid the highest Council Tax, per equivalent band, in Northumberland. Due to double figure percentage rises in each of the two years.
2. Newbiggin Town Council previously contributed £100,000 towards the Front Street development, enabling an additional Town Council office and a new public toilet block.
3. The Town Council pay NCC through the service agreement to maintain the Front St public toilets.
4. The additional public toilet being owned by NTC will be an additional financial burden to the residents, for refurbishment, maintenance and other overheads.
5. The Town Council balances accumulated to date have been as a result of an underspending on the essential basic services in the Town over previous years. The residents now live in a neglected place as evidenced by inadequate litter bins, neglected public seats, not fit for purpose bus shelter at Woodlea and play parks falling into disrepair.

### **Safety, design and other concerns.**

1. The position of the toilets is at the edge of a busy turnaround for traffic and adjacent to six road junctions with no dedicated pedestrian access.
2. The proposed entrance to the toilets opens directly onto the turnaround, posing a huge risk to those exiting with small children.
3. No adjacent parking available for disabled people.
4. Inadequate or dedicated facilities for the disabled. Insufficient area for two support carers or a full size changing table.
5. Proposed use of Windfarm regeneration monies accumulated from previous years.
6. Little signage for the new public toilets on Front Street.

The long term financial burden for the residents this asset transfer will bring, is unacceptable and will cause many families hardship. A decision made by three Town Councillors without any opportunity given for the residents to voice their concerns.

Following receipt of the officer's report, the petitioner made the following comments:

The only thing I have to say after reading the officer's report is, when is anyone going to listen to the residents of Newbiggin by the Sea? The residents have made it quite clear that they do not want the refurbishment of the toilet block to go ahead, how many times do we have to go over this? Does our opinion count for nothing?

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Mr Greg Gavin, Head of Neighbourhood Services then presented the officer's report in response to the petition, a copy of which was circulated with the agenda.

Mr Gavin said the petitioner had raised some issues which were more relevant to Newbiggin Town Council (NTC) and his report set out the position and recommendations from the perspective of Northumberland County Council (NCC) only.

The public convenience building in Prospect Place had been operated and maintained by NCC until 2016 when it closed. It closed because it was heavily vandalised and, due to a new facility opening on Front Street, the cost of repair was prohibitive. NCC and NTC invested jointly in the new modern public facility on Front Street which opened in December 2017.

In reviewing this petition and the proposed asset transfer, the key issue for officers to consider was the Northumberland Town and Parish Council Charter which set out the commitment of NCC to support Parish and Town Councils to maintain their own local services and assets should they wish to do so. NTC had made a formal resolution to declare that it did wish to maintain this asset. As part of an asset transfer NCC would make available the avoided demolition costs which were estimated at around £20,000 and that would be cost neutral to NCC.

The petition, as outlined, opened on 3 December 2020 and when it closed on 3 February it was supported by 185 signatories.

Transferring public conveniences under the Town and Parish Council Charter had taken place in other towns and it was proposed that NCC be consistent and support NTC's resolution that it wished to maintain the asset and have it transferred on the same basis as others had been transferred over the years.

The recommendation of officers was for members to consider the report and note that the asset transfer of the public conveniences from NCC to NTC was in accordance with the provisions of the Town and Parish Council Charter.

Debate followed and members comments included the following:

- In the past these public conveniences had been subject to continuous repairs.
- The petition had been signed by 3% of the population of the town which was an amazing number of people so it must be a huge issue for the town of Newbiggin.
- The toilets were in a dangerous place, it was a bus turning circle and a roundabout.
- Wansbeck District Council had closed this building down for many years.
- The toilets had been disgusting with an obnoxious smell and filled with rubbish.
- There were other adequate facilities within Newbiggin which were looked after.
- These were in the wrong position, they were old and should be demolished with something nice put in their place.
- Vandalism would continue if they were not looked after 24/7.
- This was an online petition and the number of signatures did not guarantee

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signatories were from Newbiggin by the Sea.

- Did the committee have delegated authority to make a decision on this or would it ultimately be a Cabinet decision?
- The petition had put members in a difficult position, they were only being asked to transfer the toilet block and if they did not it would deteriorate further.
- It had not been said that NCC would spend any money on refurbishment.
- There was an election in 8 weeks so residents had an opportunity to stand or replace the current Town Council to decide the way forward.
- The petition should be sent back to the Town Council for a response to see if there was any middle ground.
- Decisions should be made locally.

Mr Rick O'Farrell, Interim Executive Director of Place said that within the two-tier system NCC had developed a policy with Town and Parish Councils to establish a Charter stating that assets would be transferred to those bodies when they so desired and if NCC had decided they were surplus. It would have therefore been more appropriate for this petition to have been directed to the Town Council as it was their decision whether to spend funds on the refurbishment of these toilets. Although he was not certain, Mr O'Farrell thought officers were bound by Council policy and the committee could not reverse the decision. The request had been made by a democratically elected body, the assets were surplus to requirements, and he felt that officer's had no option other than to transfer the asset. These comments were reiterated by Councillor Reid who said the committee was not in a position to change policy.

The Chair asked for a recommendation.

Councillor Davey said NCC had set aside £20,000 to demolish the toilet block and said it would give that £20,000 to NTC when transferring the asset. It had been suggested that the committee could not stop the asset transfer but Councillor Davey said the committee could retain and save the £20,000.

Councillor Davey moved that the asset be transferred to Newbiggin by the Sea Town Council and the £20,000, which had been set aside for demolition, be retained by Northumberland County Council to do good work either on the highways or at other public toilets. The motion was seconded by Councillor Reid.

Mr O'Farrell said if this was the final decision of the committee, officers would take it away for consideration but it may not be the final outcome as he did not believe the committee had the authority to direct how the budget was used.

Councillor Davey disagreed, stating that the Council constitution set out that councillors could steer the budget and therefore the motion would stand.

Mr O'Farrell agreed to take advice on this if it was the wish of the committee. He advised, however, that there were no further meetings of Cabinet before the May election so this would defer the decision and, as funding was from this year's budget, it might result in further complications.

Upon being put to the vote the motion was unanimously agreed.

**RESOLVED** that it be recommended to Cabinet that the public conveniences in Prospect Place, Newbiggin by the Sea adjacent to the Cresswell Arms Public House be transferred to Newbiggin by the Sea Town Council and the £20,000, which had been set aside for demolition, be retained by Northumberland County Council within Local Services for future spending.

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

## 131 **LOCAL SERVICES ISSUES**

The Head of Neighbourhood Services 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.

### **Neighbourhood Services**

Mr G Gavin, Head of Neighbourhood Services provided an update as follows:

- Since the last meeting there had been some challenging weather conditions with ice and snow. From a grounds maintenance perspective winter maintenance had continued at the expected rate despite bad weather and teams had coped very well.
- NEAT operatives were diverted to support colleagues in highways and deployed to grit and clear footpaths in high footfall areas and to ensure access to the vaccination and testing centres was maintained to support NHS colleagues.
- In terms of transitioning from the winter season to the summer season, when ground conditions were suitable, grass cutting would commence in either late March or early April depending on those ground conditions.
- The Neighbourhood Services Area Manager was in the process of finalising recruitment for seasonal staff who were brought in each year to support activities.
- The weed control programme would be undertaken in-house this year. It had been particularly challenging last year due to people working from home and parked cars. This year some alternatives to glyphosate weed treatment traditionally used would be trialed and although most research indicated that alternatives were more costly and slower, these would be tested throughout the summer season in local settings.
- From a street cleansing point of view, in line with usual practice, mechanical sweepers were temporarily stood down.
- It was anticipated there would be an increase in footfall throughout all of Northumberland's parks, open spaces and coastal areas again this year and proposals were being pulled together for an enhanced street cleansing service with extra maintenance of public conveniences throughout the summer season.
- In terms of waste collection, despite the snow and the ice, almost all collections in this area were complete with very few bins missed in some of the more rural areas.
- Garden waste collections had started this week and people were reminded to renew their subscriptions. The cost remained the same as last year at £43 per bin.

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- Despite the challenges, teams had continued to do an excellent job and managers were very proud of them.

Members expressed thanks to the teams for the excellent service they had continued to provide throughout the challenging conditions.

In response to questions the following information was provided:

- Bowling greens would be maintained in the same way this year as they had been last year with no changes.
- In response to a request for information about the ownership of railings which had blown over on the path between Tomlea Avenue and Waverley Avenue, Bedlington Station, Mr Gavin said officers would look into this and provide information to Councillor Gobin as requested.
- Mr Gavin could not confirm if wet play facilities within parks would be allowed to open this summer but, as it was a possibility, funding had been commissioned to have everything ready in anticipation of being given the go ahead to open.
- Concerns were raised about fly tipping in the Cowpen Quay area and the costs incurred by the Council, Mr Gavin agreed this area, along with the Hirst area in Ashington, was a hotspot for fly tipping and said a lot of work had been carried out to tackle this through communications and enforcement activity. There were further activities planned to help resolve the issue as most of the fly tipping was small amounts of household rubbish being dumped from local households. Actions taken this year had seen an 8% reduction across the county from the same period last year but it was not a good situation and needed to be reduced further.
- A member referred to the difficulties around weed control and suggested this should be carried out in a different way. He said in the past the Council had used lower cost sprays and should pay more for a better quality weed spray.
- In terms of public parks, people were walking more, and the cleaning of these areas should be more flexible to avoid overflowing rubbish bins.
- Regarding enforcement, this should be more robust with fines issued and publicised.
- A member requested support regarding litter around the SITA site near the Portland estate. She asked if officers could work with the Environment Agency in this regard. Mr Gavin confirmed that officers were working on this and he would follow this up.

The Chair expressed his personal gratitude and reiterated the thanks of members to the teams involved for the excellent work done.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted and issues set out in the bullet points above be followed up.

### Technical Services

M Carle, Highways Delivery Area Manager, provided an update on highways as follows:

Following the recent severe weather, there had been numerous pothole reports

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received on top of additional carriageway Inspections. All maintenance crews had been working tirelessly fixing potholes and category one defects across the South East area making the roads safe.

- Larger Tarmac Patching has been carried out in: Avondale Avenue, Druridge Drive and Solingen Estate, Blyth; Bothal Village; A197 Ashington to Pegswood; Park View, Ashington
- Tarmac patching was programmed for: Woodhorn Road, Newbiggin; Avondale Gardens and the Northern Relief Road, Ashington; Teal Avenue and Amble Close, Blyth

#### **Drainage Improvements:**

- **A189 Spine Road** - Investigation work following water overflowing onto the A189 Spine Road between the Three Horseshoes and Bebside Blyth. A new ditch and bund had been created to hold the large volume water before it was discharged into the drainage system. The drainage network from Heathery Lonnen down to the A189 had been cleansed and new manholes had been installed and ditches cleaned.
- **Horton Road** - Investigation work followed recent floods along the Horton Road. Damaged pipework in the farmers' fields had been identified and permission granted to fix these once the fields dried up. The existing drainage network had also been cleansed.

#### **Flags to Flex**

As part of the additional funding received this year, flags to flex work had been completed at Fulmar Drive, Blyth and College Road Ashington. There was further footpath work to complete at Beatrice Street, Blyth which was expected to start in early April.

#### **Tarmac Resurfacing Work**

- Malvins Road, Blyth - civils preparation work for resurfacing work had been underway for the last 6 weeks and additional gullies and improved the drainage systems had been added. Resurfacing work was programmed for Monday 22 March 2021 for 5 days.
- Maple Crescent - Civils preparation was programmed to begin in early April for 4-5 weeks and resurfacing work was programmed for early June.
- North Seaton Church - Preparation work for some of the footpaths in North Seaton Church, Ashington had recently been completed and resurfacing was programmed for Tuesday 30 March 2021.
- Titchfield Terrace, Ashington – work was programmed to start on 6 April 2021 for two weeks. Concrete carriageway would be replaced with a flexible tarmac surface.

#### **Micro Surfacing Preparation Work.**

Tarmac patching preparation work had been completed at Bywell Road, Ashington.

Preparation work was programmed for: William Street, Blyth - programmed to start 27 March 2021 for one day; Jubilee Terrace, Blyth - programmed to start on Monday 15 March 2021 for 3 days.

#### **Winter Services LAC's Update**

Since the last meeting there had been a significant snow event in February effecting the entire county. Teams had worked constantly around the clock and snow blowers had been out all week on higher ground. Feedback was very positive during and after the event. Any issues during these events had to go through the contact center to allow operatives to log, manage and follow issues through.

- Approximately 4,160 hours were worked gritting the network between all

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- shifts within the two weeks of prolonged weather.
- Approximately 11,872 Tonnes of salt was used on the Northumberland road network.
- Approximately 14,372 in total salt usage including gritting, bin refills, footways, farmers, re - visits to sites.

Mr Carle expressed thanks to his colleagues for the excellent work carried out and to Neighbourhood Services colleagues, farmers and contractors for their assistance. He said it had been a busier winter than usual with 110 runs across the county and the effects of the snow and flooding in February were ongoing.

- Members expressed their appreciation for works programmed in Beatrice Avenue, Blyth and Titchfield Terrace, Ashington which were long coming.
- Repairs to the Northern by-pass road were welcomed as it was not up to standard which was not encouraging in attracting new businesses.
- Concerns about the roundabout at Briardene, Ashington which was crumbling away – this was on a strategic route and should be looked at as a matter of urgency.

Members expressed their gratitude to the Highways Team for their excellent work under difficult circumstances including reduced funding, extreme weather conditions and COVID 19. On a personal note, the Chair added his thanks to the Team and to the Committee for all the work done.

The Highways Delivery Area Manager said he would pass on the feedback which was much appreciated.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

#### 132 **MEMBERS' LOCAL IMPROVEMENT SCHEMES 2017/21**

A progress report had been circulated for information.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

#### 133 **LOCAL AREA COUNCIL WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20**

Members received the latest version of agreed items for future Local Area Council meetings.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

#### 134 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting was for planning items only and, subject to there being any planning business, would take place on Wednesday, 14 April 2021, time to be confirmed.

**CHAIR**.....

**DATE**.....

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