

# Public Document Pack



## Northumberland County Council

**Your ref:**

**Our ref:**

**Enquiries to:** Nichola Turnbull

**Email:** nichola.turnbull@northumberland.gov.uk

**Tel direct:** 01670 622617

**Date:** Tuesday, 22 June 2021

Dear Sir or Madam,

Your attendance is requested at a meeting of the **COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OSC** to be held in the Meeting Space - Block 2, Floor 2 - County Hall, Morpeth on **WEDNESDAY, 30 JUNE 2021 at 10.00 AM.**

Yours faithfully

Daljit Lally  
Chief Executive

**Any member of the press or public may view the proceedings of this meeting live on our YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/NorthumberlandTV>. Members of the press and public may tweet, blog etc during the live broadcast as they would be able to during a regular Committee meeting.**

**To: Members of the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

***Please refer to the Risk Assessment circulated for attending meetings at County Hall and the advice contained therein including:***

***Members are requested to self-test twice a week at home, in line with government guidelines; social distancing should be maintained; masks should be worn when moving around but can be removed when seated; hand sanitiser is to be used regularly.***



**Daljit Lally, Chief Executive**  
County Hall, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 2EF  
T: 0345 600 6400  
[www.northumberland.gov.uk](http://www.northumberland.gov.uk)



## AGENDA

### PART I

It is expected that the matters included in this part of the agenda will be dealt with in public.

#### 1. MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee are asked to note the following membership and terms of reference for the Communities and Place OSC which were agreed by Council on 26 May 2021.

**10 Members (4:3:1:1:1) (1 Con place to Ind)**

**Quorum – 3**

**Chair: N. Oliver**

**Vice Chair: M. Mather**

<b>Conservative</b>	<b>Labour</b>	<b>Independent Group</b>	<b>Liberal Democrats</b>	<b>Green Party</b>	<b>Ind Non Grouped</b>
G. Castle	E. Cartie	S. Bridgett		N. Morphet	M. Robinson
C. Hardy	B. Gallacher				
M. Mather	M. Richardson				
N. Oliver					

#### **Terms of reference:**

- (1) To maintain an overview of the Management Agreements in place between the County Council and Active Northumberland, Woodhorn Museum Charitable Trust and Northumberland Tourism.
- (2) To monitor, review and make recommendations about:
  - Development planning
  - Neighbourhood Planning
  - Conservation
  - Housing
  - Climate Change
  - Countryside, Biodiversity and landscape quality
  - Waste Management and Energy Use
  - Public and community transport network and travel to school
  - Highway maintenance, Streetscape and the local environment
  - Local and Neighbourhood services
  - Crime, Community Safety, and fear of crime, including CONTEST, Prevent and Channel
  - Antisocial behaviour and domestic violence

- Fire and rescue
- Emergency services and Emergency planning
- Customer Services
- Provision of cultural and leisure facilities
- Improving quality of life through access to culture and leisure;
- Supporting economic growth in the arts, culture and leisure sectors

## 2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

## 3. MINUTES

(Pages 1  
- 18)

Minutes of the following meetings of the Communities and Place OSC, as circulated, to be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

- a) 3 February 2021
- b) 3 March 2021

## 4. DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Unless already entered in the Council's Register of Members' interests, members are required to disclose any personal interest (which includes any disclosable pecuniary interest) they may have in any of the items included on the agenda for the meeting in accordance with the Code of Conduct adopted by the Council on 4 July 2012, and are reminded that if they have any personal interests of a prejudicial nature (as defined under paragraph 17 of the Code Conduct) they must not participate in any discussion or vote on the matter and must leave the room.

NB Any member needing clarification must contact the Legal Services Manager at [monitoringofficer@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:monitoringofficer@northumberland.gov.uk). Please refer to the guidance on disclosures at the rear of this Agenda letter.

## 5. FORWARD PLAN OF CABINET DECISIONS

(Pages  
19 - 22)

To note the latest Forward Plan of key decisions. Any further changes made to the Forward Plan will be reported to the Committee. (Schedule enclosed as **Appendix A**).

## SCRUTINY OF CABINET REPORTS

The following reports will be considered by the Cabinet on 13 July 2021. The Committee's comments will be presented to the Cabinet by the Chair when it determines the report. The Committee is requested to consider issues arising from the report.

## THE CABINET MEMBER REQUESTED TO ATTEND FOR THE FOLLOWING ITEM IS COUNCILLOR COLIN HORNCastle, PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES

### 6.1 AONB

(Pages  
23 - 28)

To seek approval for funding from NCC for the next three years. Current

funding arrangements for the Northumberland Coast AONB Partnership and the North Pennines AONB Partnership ended at the end of the last financial year. Ongoing funding is available from Defra, but this is conditional on at least 25% match funding being secured from local authorities. (Report enclosed as **Appendix B**).

**THE CABINET MEMBER REQUESTED TO ATTEND FOR THE FOLLOWING ITEM IS COUNCILLOR RICHARD WEARMOUTH, PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CORPORATE RESOURCES**

**6.2 UNREASONABLY PERSISTENT AND VEXATIOUS CONTACT POLICY (Pages 29 - 42)**

To consider and approve adoption of an updated Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Contact Policy, which is necessary to allow Northumberland County Council to operate a fair, effective, and efficient complaints process, and also to reflect good practice advocated by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. (Report enclosed as **Appendix C**).

**REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATOR**

**7. COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME AND MONITORING REPORT (Pages 43 - 54)**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee operates within a work programme which is agreed at the start of the Council year. The programme is reviewed at each meeting so that it can be adjusted to reflect the wishes of the Committee and take account of any changes to the latest Forward Plan (which outlines decisions to be taken by the Cabinet). The Committee is asked to review and note its work programme for the 2021/22 council year. (Report enclosed as **Appendix D**).

**8. URGENT BUSINESS**

To consider such other business as, in the opinion of the Chair, should, by reason of special circumstances, be considered as a matter of urgency.

**IF YOU HAVE AN INTEREST AT THIS MEETING, PLEASE:**

- Declare it and give details of its nature before the matter is discussion or as soon as it becomes apparent to you.
- Complete this sheet and pass it to the Democratic Services Officer.

<b>Name (please print):</b>
<b>Meeting:</b>
<b>Date:</b>
<b>Item to which your interest relates:</b>
<b>Nature of Registerable Personal Interest i.e either disclosable pecuniary interest (as defined by Annex 2 to Code of Conduct or other interest (as defined by Annex 3 to Code of Conduct) (please give details):</b>
<b>Nature of Non-registerable Personal Interest (please give details):</b>
<b>Are you intending to withdraw from the meeting?</b>

**1. Registerable Personal Interests** – You may have a Registerable Personal Interest if the issue being discussed in the meeting:

a) relates to any Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (as defined by Annex 1 to the Code of Conduct); or

b) any other interest (as defined by Annex 2 to the Code of Conduct)

The following interests are Disclosable Pecuniary Interests if they are an interest of either you or your spouse or civil partner:

(1) Employment, Office, Companies, Profession or vocation; (2) Sponsorship; (3) Contracts with the Council; (4) Land in the County; (5) Licences in the County; (6) Corporate Tenancies with the Council; or (7) Securities - interests in Companies trading with the Council.

The following are other Registerable Personal Interests:

(1) any body of which you are a member (or in a position of general control or management) to which you are appointed or nominated by the Council; (2) any body which (i) exercises functions of a public nature or (ii) has charitable purposes or (iii) one of whose principal purpose includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union) of which you are a member (or in a position of general control or management); or (3) any person from whom you have received within the previous three years a gift or hospitality with an estimated value of more than £50 which is attributable to your position as an elected or co-opted member of the Council.

**2. Non-registerable personal interests** - You may have a non-registerable personal interest when you attend a meeting of the Council or Cabinet, or one of their committees or sub-committees, and you are, or ought reasonably to be, aware that a decision in relation to an item of business which is to be transacted might reasonably be regarded as affecting your well being or financial position, or the well being or financial position of a person described below to a greater extent than most inhabitants of the area affected by the decision.

The persons referred to above are: (a) a member of your family; (b) any person with whom you have a close association; or (c) in relation to persons described in (a) and (b), their employer, any firm in which they are a partner, or company of which they are a director or shareholder.

### **3. Non-participation in Council Business**

When you attend a meeting of the Council or Cabinet, or one of their committees or sub-committees, and you are aware that the criteria set out below are satisfied in relation to any matter to be considered, or being considered at that meeting, you must : (a) Declare that fact to the meeting; (b) Not participate (or further participate) in any discussion of the matter at the meeting; (c) Not participate in any vote (or further vote) taken on the matter at the meeting; and (d) Leave the room whilst the matter is being discussed.

The criteria for the purposes of the above paragraph are that: (a) You have a registerable or non-registerable personal interest in the matter which is such that a member of the public knowing the relevant facts would reasonably think it so significant that it is likely to prejudice your judgement of the public interest; **and either** (b) the matter will affect the financial position of yourself or one of the persons or bodies referred to above or in any of your register entries; **or** (c) the matter concerns a request for any permission, licence, consent or registration sought by yourself or any of the persons referred to above or in any of your register entries.

**This guidance is not a complete statement of the rules on declaration of interests which are contained in the Members' Code of Conduct. If in any doubt, please consult the Monitoring Officer or relevant Democratic Services Officer before the meeting.**

## NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

### COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a virtual meeting of the **Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee** on Wednesday, 3 February 2021 at 2.00 p.m.

#### PRESENT

Councillor J. Reid  
(Chair, in the Chair)

#### MEMBERS

Cartie, E.	Gibson, R.
Dunbar, C.	Hepple, A.
Dunn, E.	Horncastle, C.
Gallacher, B.	Stow, K.

#### CABINET MEMBER

Riddle, J.R.	Planning, Housing & Resilience
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#### OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

J. Dennitts-Seal	Corporate Complaints Manager
R. O'Farrell	Executive Director of Corporate Resources - Planning & Economy
A. Mitchell	Director of Corporate Governance
S. Nicholson	Scrutiny Co-Ordinator
P. Soderquest	Head of Housing and Public Protection
N. Turnbull	Democratic Services Officer

#### 75. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Armstrong.

#### 76. FORWARD PLAN OF CABINET DECISIONS

The Committee considered the Forward Plan of key decisions (February to May 2021). (Schedule enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix A).

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

## 77. OVERVIEW

### 77.1 Customer Corporate Complaints

The report provided an overview of Customer Complaints for the last financial year, 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. Additionally, the report covered some of the findings of the review of the Council's current Corporate Complaints reporting mechanisms and provided reassurance around future improvement plans. (A copy of the report is attached to the signed minutes as Appendix D).

Julie-Dennitts-Seal, Corporate Complaints Manager, explained that she had been in post approximately 12 months and outlined the key findings of the review that had been taking place under the Complaints Improvement Framework and Ombudsman guidance. These included:

- The current software system was outdated and inappropriate for case management with many staff managing caseloads using spreadsheets. It was therefore unreliable for performance data. It was proposed that a new system be procured.
- Staff were engaged, attempted to resolve issues at a local level, acknowledgements were issued within 3 working days and forms were compliant with the Complaints Handling Procedure model.
- Proposals for a centralised complaints team.
- Refresh the suite of complaint policies.

Information was provided of the number of stage 1 and stage 2 complaints and numbers closed within timescale, as well as a comparison with data for 2018/19.

Brief details were also given of the 9 cases that had been upheld by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. This equated to 35% of the complaints accepted for investigation (25) and was significantly lower than the 56% average for similar authorities.

Whilst she acknowledged that more complaints had been received during the previous year, this could be viewed in a positive manner in that the Council was more active on social media, it was more accessible and that residents understood how to contact the council and make a complaint.

The following information was provided in response to questions:

- Information be circulated by email to all committee members regarding periods where there was a spike in numbers and relating to a particular area.
- She had many years' experience of systems used in other organisations including another local authority and a NHS trust. Comparison was also being made with neighboring councils, including Newcastle City Council and North Tyneside Council.
- Recruitment of the right individuals and a change of culture, to be proactive and learn from feedback, was key to successful resolution of complaints.

- The data excluded complaints regarding Town and Parish Councils, which were dealt with separately by the Monitoring Officer.
- The service plan included a satisfaction check. Surveys previously used by the Ombudsman had been revoked due to the possibility of skewed results depending on the actual outcome of a complaint.
- It was not unexpected that the Ombudsman's complaints related to some of the largest departments including planning, local services, education and children's services. It was hoped that these cases had led to a review of systems and change of process or policies, if required. No large sums of financial redress had been required. Compensation was paid from the department's budget.
- There should be sufficient progress to be able to give a meaningful update in 6 months or more, depending on the timing of local government elections. These were currently expected in May 2021 and would require the agreement of future committee members.

Members welcomed the fresh and positive approach to dealing with complaints and hoped that this could be spread across the organisation.

**RESOLVED** that:

1. The information be noted.
2. An update be provided to the Communities and Place OSC in approximately 6 months, depending on the timing of local government elections and the agreement of future members of the committee.

## **77.2 The Council's Response to Anti-Social Behaviour in 2020**

The report informed the Committee of the approaches adopted by the Council and partners in response to reports of anti-social behaviour (ASB) during 2020. (A copy of the report is attached to the signed minutes as Appendix C).

Philip Soderquest, Head of Housing and Public Protection, gave a detailed summary of the report which included the legal definition of anti-social behaviour, as set out in the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, how the service was delivered, composition of the team, application of powers, partnership working, use of Victim Offender Location (VOL) meetings with escalation to Anti-Social behaviour Risk Assessment Conference (ASBRAC), if required.

The report compared the numbers of complaints in the different categories for 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20 and 01.04.20 – 31.10.20. It was recognised that, although the latest figures were only for the first 7-month period of 2020/21, they were relatively high when compared with the figures for previous years. It was expected that there would be a significant increase in the numbers of complaints for 2020/21.

Categories where a lot of complaints had been made included: intimidation or harassment, rowdy or inconsiderate behaviour and noise nuisance. It was believed that this was partly down to people spending more time in their own homes and being less tolerant, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and national

lockdown restrictions. The increase in numbers of complaints being experienced in other areas.

The Head of Housing and Public Protection explained how the restrictions arising from the first national lockdown on 23 March 2020 until July 2020, when staff had been working from home, had impacted on the normal physical delivery of the service. This had changed when national guidance had been released and enabled some aspects of service provision to be re-introduced, including; placement of noise equipment in residents homes, site visits for high risk cases, supporting resolution of complaints by telephone discussion and mediation to prevent escalation of community tension.

Other activity during 2020 had included a three-yearly review of Public Space Protection Orders concerning consumption of alcohol in public places which might lead to anti-social behaviour, nuisance or annoyance. Two new areas had been included, Ponteland and Wylam, whilst two areas previously covered had been removed.

The report also included information on performance indicators, response to youth disorder and targeting and intervention with lead individuals, work in relation to the Violence Reduction Unit, and nitrous oxide substance misuse, responsibility for which rested with the Police and Crime Commissioner and police, with the Council working in partnership, where appropriate.

He provided the following clarification in response to questions from members:

- Issues regarding NCC housing were dealt with by the Council's Housing team, with referrals being made to other housing providers, until their powers were exhausted, whilst the Community Safety Team responded to other housing complaints.
- The Council's housing service had obtained Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation which had meant that all staff had received training to recognise signs of domestic abuse and know when to make a referral.
- Different issues had emerged during the latest lockdown, compared to the first. Many businesses initially had not been prepared to provide a click and collect service and had since made changes to their operating models. In March 2020 there were hardly many businesses open and far less movements by residents, compared with the latest position. Businesses were mainly compliant with lockdown rules. There was a high level of compliance with restrictions by members of the public, but the level of weariness and frustration had increased with a small minority of residents creating issues and challenges.
- The report had initially been prepared for a meeting before Christmas, which was why figures were only included up to 31 October 2020. It was not anticipated that the increase in the number of complaints, believed to be attributable to the pandemic, would continue as an increasing trend in future years, beyond the pandemic.
- Complaints regarding speeding vehicles were referred to the Police.
- Further information on an instance of inappropriate sexual behaviour would be obtained and investigated outside of the meeting.

- CCTV was a useful tool, although there were limitations on when this could be deployed, requiring a level of evidence and availability of staff resources. There were concerns that, anti-social behaviour arising from the consumption of alcohol was displaced elsewhere.
- Designated Public Places Orders (DPPOs) were superseded by PSPOs, a broadly similar mechanism to deal with anti-social behaviour arising from alcohol consumption.
- The report covered the period 1 April 2020 to 31 October 2020 and therefore complaints regarding inappropriate use of fireworks fell outside the reporting period.
- Incidents of fly tipping were recorded elsewhere.
- Category 1 incidents were of high priority and determined by national guidance with a target being that they should be responded to within 3 working days.

Members expressed their appreciation to the Community Safety Team for their continued hard work during the pandemic, and positive outcomes. However, they were concerned that there were no age restrictions for the sale of nitrous oxide. The Head of Housing and Public Protection suggested that members comments be forwarded to the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS).

**RESOLVED** that:

1. The report be received.
2. The concerns of the Communities and Place OSC on the sale of nitrous oxide and the introduction of an age restriction, be referred to the Office for Product Safety and Standards.

### **77.3 Environmental enforcement and public engagement activities in 2020**

The report informed the Committee of environmental enforcement and associated public engagement activities during 2020, including headline statistics. A copy of the report is attached to the signed minutes as Appendix E).

Philip Soderquest, Head of Housing and Public Protection, outlined the report, emphasising the use of the four 'E's': engagement, education, encouragement and enforcement, to seek behavioural change.

Activities during the year had been limited by the Covid 19 pandemic which had meant that educational visits to schools and the Green Dog Walker programme had been unable to take place. There was also a backlog of prosecutions, with courts not having reopened until September 2020. Investigations had also been delayed by the lack of a Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) interview room which met Covid Safe requirements. This had now been constructed in October 2020.

Data was provided for 2020 in the following categories for each of the five local area councils:

- New Green Dog Walker members
- Dog fouling, dog control and animal welfare complaints.
- Enforcement actions for dog/animal control.
- Fly tipping incidents, investigations, and enforcement statistics.
- Targeted waste control action campaigns including advice and warning letters.
- Accumulations on private land.
- Littering enforcement.

The Head of Housing and Public Protection reported that vacant posts had recently been filled so the team was now working to full capacity. An additional 3 posts were funded by service level agreements (SLA) with Town and Parish Council's to enhance activity in those locations. Some of the successful prosecutions which had taken place, were highlighted.

Members made the following comments:

- Dog fouling continued to be an issue in certain areas, such as Lynemouth and Allendale; they enquired if the Green Dog Walker membership numbers could be provided at ward level.
- Lack of engagement between Town Councils with SLAs and Enforcement Officers would be followed up.
- Successful prosecutions should be promoted in as many ways as possible, including on local noticeboards.
- Fines and victim surcharges should be maximised where possible. Whilst it was frustrating that small fines appeared to be issued for in respect of successful prosecutions, magistrates had to work within sentencing guidelines and comparison made against other, more serious, offences.

The following information was provided in response to questions from members:

- 80% of the population followed the rules and behaved correctly whilst a small minority did not. The Green Dog Walker numbers were very good given the size of the population in Northumberland. More frustrating was the small number of dog owners, which bagged their dog's faeces, but did not dispose of the bags correctly.
- Members were invited to email details of times, days and locations which required targeted enforcement action where there were ongoing and persistent problems. Witness statements and evidence were required to progress incidents to a prosecution; these were sometimes difficult to obtain from residents who were reluctant to provide them.
- Whilst it was frustrating that small fines were issued for successful prosecutions, magistrates had to work within sentencing guidelines and comparison made against other, more serious, offences.

Officers were thanked for the clear and concise report. Members requested that an update be received on an annual basis or a frequency determined by a future Committee, for clarity and to provide assurance.

**RESOLVED** that:

1. The report be received.
2. An update be provided to the Communities and Place OSC in approximately 12 months, depending on the agreement of future members of the committee.

## **78. REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATOR**

### **Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Monitoring Report**

The Committee reviewed its work programme for the 2019/20 council year. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix E).

Proposed changes to the Committee's terms of reference had been circulated to Committee members prior to the meeting as they were due to be considered by the Constitution Working Group and then Council. The changes proposed were highlighted in bold below.

'To monitor, review and make recommendations about: ...Crime, Community Safety, and fear of crime, **including CONTEST, Prevent and Channel.**'

The Head of Housing and Public Protection gave a summary of the arrangements for counter terrorism and new terminology and the requirement that the Council's Constitution be updated to recognise it's additional duties and responsibilities. It had been agreed that the most appropriate place was within the terms of reference for the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee were in agreement with the proposals and suggested that explanations of terminology and acronyms be included within any future reports. They also enquired about training for all members on their responsibilities and it was agreed that this would be arranged.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

**CHAIR** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE** \_\_\_\_\_

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## NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

### COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a virtual meeting of the **Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee** on Wednesday, 3 March 2021 at 2.00 p.m.

#### PRESENT

Councillor J. Reid  
(Chair, in the Chair)

#### MEMBERS

Cartie, E.	Gibson, R.
Dunn, E.	Horncastle, C.
Gallacher, B.	Stow, K.

#### CABINET MEMBER

Riddle, J.R.	Planning, Housing & Resilience
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#### OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

G. Binning	Deputy Chief Fire Officer
M. Dixon	Contracts Officer
G. Gavin	Head of Neighbourhood Services
P. Jones	Service Director – Local Services
J. McLoughlin	Executive Director of Regeneration, Commercial and Economy
R. O’Farrell	Executive Director of Corporate Resources - Planning & Economy
R. Murfin	Director of Planning
S. Nicholson	Scrutiny Co-Ordinator
A. Peadar	Library Service Manager
N. Turnbull	Democratic Services Officer
N. Walsh	Head of Cultural Services
S. Wardle	Neighbourhood Services Divisional Manager

#### 79. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Armstrong, Dunbar and Hepple.

#### 80. MINUTES

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of Communities & Place OSC held on 13 January 2021, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

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

The following Councillors disclosed an interest in agenda item 6.3, Review of Summer Grounds Maintenance, due to their position on Town or Parish Councils, who had partnership agreements with the County Council:

Councillor Gallagher – Ashington Town Council – involved with partnership discussions.

Councillor Reid – Blyth Town Council, not involved with partnership discussions.

Councillor Stow – Prudhoe Town Council involved with partnership discussions.

## **82. FORWARD PLAN OF CABINET DECISIONS**

The Committee considered the Forward Plan of key decisions (February to May 2021). (Schedule enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix A).

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

## **83. SCRUTINY OF CABINET REPORTS**

The Committee were advised that the following reports would be considered by the Cabinet on 9 March 2021. Members were requested to comment on the proposals in the report.

### **83.1 Northumberland Sports Facility Strategy 2019-2031 & Northumberland Playing Pitch Strategy 2019-2031**

The report presented the Northumberland Indoor Sports Facility Strategy (IFS) and Northumberland Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) completed in accordance with the study briefs. (A copy of the report is attached to the signed minutes as Appendix B).

Nigel Walsh, Head of Cultural Services commented on the importance of physical activity and outlined the vision, key issues and priority investment needs for the future provision of sport and leisure in Northumberland. The recommendations for Cabinet were to:

- Note the completion of the Northumberland Indoor Sports Facility Strategy, and Northumberland Playing Pitch Strategy, in accordance with the agreed study brief.
- Note the Vision and Aims of the Strategies.
- Note the Priority Investment Needs identified from the research informing the Strategies.
- Agree the Principles for future provision of Indoor and Outdoor Sports Facilities across the County.

- Note the Recommendations and Action Plan underpinning delivery of the Strategies.
- Agree that the Strategies provide an evidence base to support the implementation of the Northumberland Local Plan and other local development documents, as a material consideration for the determination of relevant planning applications, and provide an evidence base for use by other Council Services.

The review of existing indoor facilities was very positive with most residents being able to access facilities within 20 minutes' drive, with some exceptions in the North and West, as experienced in other nearby rural counties.

The Playing Pitch Strategy analysed the supply and demand of playing pitches for football, rugby, cricket, hockey, tennis, bowls and athletics to produce an evidence base on which future planning and investment decisions could be made. The assessment had been undertaken following guidance from Sport England and had engaged with national governing bodies, representatives of which sat on the Project Steering Group to review and verify data. It was intended that the Project Steering Group would continue to meet to keep the strategy under review.

The following comments were made by Members:

- Whether dogs could be banned from using fenced in spaces, such as the tennis courts at Ridley Park, in Blyth, as not all owners cleared up after their dogs.
- Whether an annual update could be given as the strategies progressed.
- Further information to be provided on developments with the voluntary sector and opportunities for apprenticeships.
- Whether 'ensure' could be used instead of 'aim'?
- The strategies made no mention of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was reported that work on the documents had finished approximately 11 months ago and the sign off by governing bodies had been delayed by the pandemic and furloughing of staff. Covid audits had been undertaken of new facilities to ensure they were future proofed. It was believed that exercise habits, particularly indoors, had changed and a separate report could be submitted.

**RESOLVED** that the Cabinet be advised that the Committee supported the recommendations in the report.

### **83.2 Northumberland Public Library Service Consultation**

The report provided members with an overview of the key findings from the Library Service public consultation completed in June 2020. (A copy of the report is attached to the signed minutes as Appendix C).

The Head of Cultural Services gave a brief overview of the library service which was a statutory function under the Public Libraries and Museums Act

1964. The service had been subject to a number of structural and leadership changes since 2015.

He referred members to the 7 outcomes, highlighted by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) that library services were critical to individuals and communities in their areas. DCLG guidance and case law suggested that consultation was required to ensure that a comprehensive and efficient library service continued to be provided, if significant changes were proposed. A summary of the consultation and engagement activities undertaken during 2020 were detailed on page 3 of the report.

The report also identified the capacity and accessibility improvement measures introduced to the Service during 2020 and outlined a three-stage approach to Service redesign based on evident need.

Alison Peaden, Library Service Manager, gave a detailed overview of changes that had taken place within the Library Service, particularly with regard to digital access of books and magazines through BorrowBox and Press Reader and online activities such as reading groups, creative writing, family history, storytime and craft sessions, which enabled people to participate across the county. It was hoped that these would continue in a hybrid format, when allowed.

Other activities had included a digital helpline, select and collect, befriending calls, desktop refresh, staff restructure, service redesign and relocation of libraries and investment in new stock in Alnwick, Ponteland and Cramlington, involvement in pop up initiatives and summer camps. They intended to continue marketing the service and the offer available.

The Head of Cultural Services referred to the creation of 5 hubs in Berwick, Morpeth, Blyth, Hexham and Cramlington and development of the services based on the needs of each locality and delivery of priorities identified in the consultation. He was very proud of the service and what they had achieved during the pandemic.

Several Members also expressed their thanks to all of the library service staff on the way they had adapted and responded during the crisis. They made the following comments:

- Digital connectivity was an issue in many areas. The model to be adopted prioritised services according to local need and would enable areas with connectivity issues to be identified and addressed.
- The strategy covered the period 2021 – 26 and it was suggested that Members be given a yearly update.
- The hubs had been identified following assessment against criteria. Ashington was a highly valued and well used facility but flexibility and access to space was better in Blyth.
- There had not been a huge response from library users under the age of 16, however 25% of respondents had replied on their use as a family,

work had been undertaken with the Youth Council and all schools had also been invited to participate.

- Concern regarding a reduction in posts. The staffing structure had not resulted in job losses. The number of professional librarian posts had increased and some fixed term posts had been made permanent.
- The mobile library service was highly valued, but following changes implemented during the pandemic, consideration would be given into sustainability along with doorstep delivery, befriending and outreach work with Northumberland Communities Together.

**RESOLVED** that the Cabinet be advised that the Committee supported the recommendations in the report.

## **84. OVERVIEW**

### **84.1 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Covid-19 Inspection: Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service**

The purpose of the report was to provide an overview of the HMICFRS COVID-19 response inspection for Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service. (A copy of the report is attached to the signed minutes as Appendix D).

John Riddle, Portfolio Folder for Community Services, explained that this had been a thematic inspection to review how fire and rescue services were responding during the Covid-19 pandemic. He reminded members that the service was the smallest brigade in mainland UK and had a large area to cover, a small budget, but dedicated staff. He was pleased to introduce, Graeme Binning who had recently commenced in post as the Deputy Chief Fire Officer.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer reported that Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service had been inspected in October 2020 and the results were generally very positive; the service had adapted and responded to the pandemic very well, had been effective and had provided support to NCC and the Local Resilience Forum.

Areas of recommendation had been considered carefully with comments at prepublication regarding:

- Protection and prevention activity remained focused on areas of highest risk but, in line with HMI recommendations, they were forward looking and adaptive of improvements that could be made.
- Comments had been accepted and narrative changed regarding speed of response to National Fire Chiefs Council guidance.
- Whole time fire-fighter productivity, comments had been submitted on the reflect to protect the ability to respond to emergency incidents given the lean nature of the Northumberland service.

The report also highlighted areas of notable practice, staff well-being, the active engagement of the CFO and service to discharge statutory functions, the speed at developing new ways of working.

As a new principle officer, he recognised the work, commitment and dedication that had taken place since the HMI inspection in 2019 and the support that the service received from colleagues in Internal Audit, Improvement and Innovation, Communications and Adults and Children's Services.

The Chair thanked Graeme and was pleased that confirmation had been received that the Fire and Rescue Service was well run and that the staff did an excellent job in difficult circumstances.

**RESOLVED** that:

- a) The contents of the report be noted.
- b) Further reports on progress against the recommendations provided by the HMICFRS be provided in due course.

## **84.2 Northumberland Infrastructure Funding Statement**

The Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) provided a summary of all financial and non-financial developer contributions, within Northumberland, for the financial year 2019/2020. (A copy of the report is attached to the signed minutes as Appendix E).

Rob Murfin, the Director of Planning explained that historically the approach adopted with regard to monies from Section 106 agreements and Section 278 (Highway Agreements) had been inconsistent and therefore the process had been reviewed and research undertaken to learn from good practice at other local authorities.

The Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations had introduced a requirement to publish an annual Infrastructure Funding Statement. It was viewed as a positive tool to improve the transparency, accountability and monitoring of developer contributions for both Councillors and members of the public. Further improvements to the Section 106 collection process would also be made with progress on the Northumberland Local Plan.

Members welcomed the report and review of the Section 106 process and made the following comments:

- Inaccurate records and poor monitoring arrangements had meant it likely that insufficient funds had been collected previously.
- Agreements should not be changed, nor amounts reduced, if developers changed their plans, particularly on large schemes.
- Improved enforcement.
- Community Infrastructure Levy system (CIL) was not currently used in Northumberland. Implementation of a tariff-based system would need to

be subject to review to see whether it was viable and could be supported in the county. An examination by the Planning Inspectorate would also be required.

- Inconsistencies had arisen due to the different approaches adopted by the former district councils. The system could be improved from looking at good practice elsewhere and case law.
- It would be beneficial for local councillors to be made aware of Section 106 agreements and involved in the determination of local priorities.

In answer to a question, the Director of Planning expressed caution regarding introduction of CIL in Northumberland as it was based on land values and probably better suited to areas in the South East of England. However, a proper assessment needed to be carried out, although he speculated that under a CIL based system, the total amount of money received would be lower than using Section 106 agreements.

**RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Northumberland Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS), be received.
- b) The Northumberland IFS be presented to the Communities and Place OSC on an annual basis.

### **84.3 Review of Summer Grounds Maintenance Programme**

The report reviewed the performance of the summer grounds maintenance programme undertaken during 2020/21, in order to seek continuous improvements to service delivery and ensure that the best possible outcomes for our communities were achieved from the resources available. (A copy of the report is attached to the signed minutes as Appendix F).

Paul Jones, Service Director – Local Services outlined the report which covered:

- The benefits of seasonal working hours for staff and in terms of efficiency savings.
- Core grass cuts had been achieved despite a short suspension at the start of the pandemic to review safe working practices and hire additional vehicles.
- Cramlington Town Council were withdrawing from the environmental partnership on 31 March due to concerns regarding performance.
- Target met for highway verge cutting on strategic and non-strategic rural roads between June and July. Some verges with plants of high conservation value were undertaken later in the season following discussions with ecology and community groups.
- Weed control had been challenging due to warm, wet and windy conditions. It had also been hampered by cars parked in residential streets due to residents working from home.
- Priority 1 urgent tree works were routinely completed within 7 days. A backlog of non-essential, but desirable work remained outstanding and

addressed when permitted. The Tree Strategy was to be reviewed during 2021.

- 14,621 (67.6%) of the free trees had been distributed to residents but the national lockdown had meant that the remaining events had to be cancelled. The undistributed trees were to be planted by NCC at a variety of sites.
- Floral displays by Town and Parish Councils had continued to be supported although the Northumbria in Bloom competition had not taken place.
- Delivery of effective grounds and site maintenance had never been more important to ensure residents could enjoy their local space given national restrictions. The number of parks achieving Green Flag accreditation had increased from 9 to 11, and for the first time included Eastwood Park, Prudhoe.
- Grounds maintenance staff were redeployed to winter service duties in periods of severe winter weather, taking priority over their normal ground's maintenance duties.
- Trials of electric powered hand tools had been well received by staff. These aimed to reduce the carbon footprint and level of hand arm vibration.
- Alternative methods of weed control (hot water, thermal and mechanical removal) were to be trialed during 2021/22 as the license for glyphosate was due to end in December 2022.

The following issues were raised by Councillors:

- Use of wildflower planting be increased on roadside verges, particularly use of flowers that self-seeded. Alternative approaches were adopted when requested by town and parish councils. Different arrangements for maintenance were required in these areas as they needed to be cut, removed and reseeded; it was not a cheaper option to traditional roadside verge maintenance.
- Residents be encouraged to maintain the areas in the immediate vicinity of their properties. Individuals had never been prevented from keeping areas clean and tidy. Volunteers were welcomed and opportunities promoted wherever possible.
- Use of brushes to remove dust and soil would assist with the removal of weeds. Use of road sweepers to remove weeds was effective with use of an alternative wire brush heads which tore and shred vegetation. However, this was resource intensive in a large county.
- Advance notification of activity in urban areas would enable residents' vehicles to be moved to enable the activity to be undertaken more effectively.
- Consideration be given to ensure that the right tree was planted in the right location.
- Use of blue dye be reconsidered when applying herbicides.
- Whether tree surveys continued to be undertaken at school premises following the very sad death of a young school child in Newcastle. A review of arrangements had been undertaken by the Corporate Health and

Safety and Estate Teams, who had responsibility for inspections of school properties and specialist support was brought in when required. Arrangements for tree surveys had also been refined for areas such as public parks to avoid the risk to the public of falling branches.

- The ethics and impact of alternative powered hand tools.
- The importance of nurturing good working relationships with the town and parish councils and the value of the environmental partnerships. This was not financially viable for some of the smaller councils.

Members expressed their appreciation to the front-line teams for the work that had been undertaken during a difficult 12-month period.

**RESOLVED** that:

- a) The achievement of all core grounds maintenance service standards this year, be noted, during what has been an exceptionally challenging year.
- b) The record number of Green Flag awards achieved this year, be noted.
- c) The comprehensive additional Covid control measures put in place to protect staff and the public, be noted.
- d) The continued high performance of verge cutting, be noted.
- e) The enhanced service standards achieved jointly with Town and Parish Councils that we have partnership agreements with, be noted.
- f) Future developments for the service relating to planned trials for an evaluation of alternative methods of weed control to the current application of chemical herbicide, be noted.
- g) The decision of Cramlington Town Council to withdraw from its partnership with NCC, be noted.

## **85. REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATOR**

### **Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Monitoring Report**

The Committee reviewed its work programme for the 2019/20 council year. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix E).

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

**CHAIR** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE** \_\_\_\_\_

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# Agenda Item 5

## FORWARD PLAN FORTHCOMING CABINET DECISIONS JULY TO OCTOBER 2021

DECISION	PROPOSED SCRUTINY DATE	CABINET DATE
<p><b>Funding for the North Pennines and Northumberland Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty</b>                      NCC's current funding agreements with the North Pennines AONB Partnership and Northumberland Coast AONB Partnership expired at the end of March 2021. This report requests that current funding continues, so that the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty staff teams can continue to receive funding from Defra, on the basis of 75% Defra funding to 25% local authority funding.                      (J. Riddle/ D. Feige - 01670 622653)</p>	C&P 30 June 2021	13 July 2021
<p><b>NE Enhanced Bus Partnership</b>                      The report will set out the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Bus Strategy context - building on the Strategic Transport update we took to Execs/IC in March</li> <li>• Timeline for establishing an Enhanced Bus Partnership in NE by March 2022 as prescribed in the national strategy</li> <li>• Resourcing implications - confirming our financial contribution to the centralised team to be managed by Nexus and highlighting the role of NCC in directly contributing to this work and thereby having a clear influence from a rural perspective</li> <li>• Emerging issue for bus services in the county as a result of the creation of the partnership - and to confirm that regular updates on progress will be fed through to the portfolio holder and Informal Cabinet in tandem with forthcoming NE Joint Transport Committee meetings.</li> </ul> <p>(W. Ploszaj/N. Easton – 07979 233477)</p>	N/A	13 July 2021
<p><b>Write Offs 2020-21</b>                      To report on debt written off during the 2020-21 financial year.                      (R. Wearmouth/S. Mounsey – 01670 624285)</p>	CSEG 12 July 2021	13 July 2021
<p><b>Draft Private Housing Sector Strategy 2020-23</b>                      The report provides Members with the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy 2020-2023 for review and agreement.                      (C. Horncastle/ J. Stewart 01670 623076 / 07771 974 112)</p>	C&P 30 June 2021	13 July 2021

<p><b>Borderlands Place Programme: Town Selection &amp; Delivery Plan</b></p> <p>This report seeks to update Cabinet and seek approval of the Borderlands Place Programme and in particular the selection of Towns that will participate in the Programme and note the contents of the Delivery Plan. This programme is a key element of the Borderlands Growth Deal (W. Ploszaj/T. Kirsop,- 07917 266864)</p>	<p>CSEG 12 July 2021</p>	<p>13 July 2021</p>
<p><b>Energising Blyth Programme (Energy Central Campus)</b></p> <p>This report seeks to update Cabinet and seek key decisions regarding arrangements to support the development and establishment of the Energy Central Campus. This project is one of the priority schemes in the Energising Blyth Regeneration Programme including projects supported by the Future High Streets Fund and Blyth Town Deal. (W. Ploszaj /R. Strettle – 07770642773)</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>13 July 2021</p>
<p><b>Energising Blyth Programme (Future High Streets Fund and Town Deal)</b></p> <p>This report updates Cabinet and seeks approval and key decisions regarding the development and delivery of the Energising Blyth Regeneration Programme including projects supported by the Future High Streets Fund and Blyth Town Deal. (W. Ploszaj /R. Strettle – 07770642773)</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>13 July 2021</p>
<p><b>The Northumberland Line</b></p> <p>To provide members with an update on the scheme development and approvals process for the Northumberland Line project. Members will be asked to confirm elements of project scope and the anticipated spend profile (inc. NCC and external funding). (W. Ploszaj / Stuart McNaughton - 07827 873139)</p>	<p>CSEG 12 July 2021</p>	<p>13 July 2021</p>
<p><b>Alnmouth Neighbourhood Plan</b></p> <p>To seek approval to formally ‘make’ the Alnmouth Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan passed independent examination in December 2020. A local referendum held in the Parish of Alnmouth on 10 June 2021 returned a majority vote in favour of using the Plan to make decisions on planning applications. The Council is now obliged by statute to make the Neighbourhood Plan unless it considers that doing so would breach European Union obligations. (C. Horncastle/S. Brannigan 07966 335508)</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>13 July 2021</p>

<p><b>Craster Neighbourhood Plan</b> To seek approval to formally ‘make’ the Craster Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan passed independent examination in October 2020. A local referendum held in the Parish of Craster on 10 June 2021 returned a majority vote in favour of using the Plan to make decisions on planning applications. The Council is now obliged by statute to make the Neighbourhood Plan unless it considers that doing so would breach European Union obligations. (C. Horncastle/S. Brannigan 07966 335508)</p>	N/A	13 July 2021
<p><b>Embleton Neighbourhood Plan</b> To seek approval to formally ‘make’ the Embleton Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan passed independent examination in March 2020. A local referendum held in the Parish of Embleton on 10 June 2021 returned a majority vote in favour of using the Plan to make decisions on planning applications. The Council is now obliged by statute to make the Neighbourhood Plan unless it considers that doing so would breach European Union obligations. (C. Horncastle/S. Brannigan 07966 335508)</p>	N/A	13 July 2021
<p><b>Hexham Neighbourhood Plan</b> To seek approval to formally ‘make’ the Hexham Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan passed independent examination in January 2020. A local referendum held in the Parish of Hexham on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2021 returned a majority vote in favour of using the Plan to make decisions on planning applications. The Council is now obliged by statute to make the Neighbourhood Plan unless it considers that doing so would breach European Union obligations. (C. Horncastle/ C. Anderson - 07966 329338)</p>	N/A	13 July 2021
<p><b>Lesbury Neighbourhood Plan</b> To seek approval to formally ‘make’ the Lesbury Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan passed independent examination in June 2020. A local referendum held in the Parish of Lesbury on 10 June 2021 returned a majority vote in favour of using the Plan to make decisions on planning applications. The Council is now obliged by statute to make the Neighbourhood Plan unless it considers that doing so would breach European Union obligations. (C. Horncastle/S. Brannigan 07966 335508)</p>	N/A	13 July 2021
<p><b>Wooler Neighbourhood Plan</b> To seek approval to formally ‘make’ the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan passed independent examination in May 2020. A local referendum held in</p>	N/A	13 July 2021

<p>the Parish of Wooler on 10 June 2021 returned a majority vote in favour of using the Plan to make decisions on planning applications. The Council is now obliged by statute to make the Neighbourhood Plan unless it considers that doing so would breach European Union obligations. (C. Horncastle/S. Brannigan 07966 335508)</p>		
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## Northumberland County Council

COMMITTEE: CABINET

DATE: 13 JULY 2021

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TITLE OF REPORT: FUNDING FOR AREAS OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

### **Report of Director of Planning**

**Cabinet Member:** Colin Horncastle, Cabinet Member for Community Services

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#### **Purpose of report**

Current funding arrangements for the Northumberland Coast AONB Partnership and the North Pennines AONB Partnership ended at the end of the last financial year. Ongoing funding is available from Defra, but this is conditional on at least 25% match funding being secured from local authorities. The purpose of this report is to seek approval for funding from NCC for the next three years.

#### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Council's annual funding contribution towards the Northumberland Coast AONB and the North Pennines AONB is maintained over the next three years, to enable the funding contribution from Defra to continue to be obtained and to enable the important work of the AONB Staff Units to be continued. The Council's contributions to the two AONBs has not increased since 2007 and so it is recommended that it is increased by 10% this year, taking the contribution to the Northumberland Coast AONB from £33,700 to £37,070 per year, and the contribution to the North Pennines AONB from £22,660, to £24,926.

#### **Link to Corporate Plan**

The work of the AONB Partnerships will contribute to the achievement of a range of aims in the Corporate Plan:

##### Living

The AONB Partnerships engage with local communities, for example through the Coast Care volunteering programme which improves mental and physical health by reducing social isolation and providing physical exercise while undertaking environmentally valuable tasks.

##### Enjoying

The AONB Partnerships help to look after some of the most important and valued landscapes in the county, drawing in significant levels of external funding to do so.

### Connecting

The AONB Partnerships work with public transport providers; for example, the Northumberland Coast AONB staff have worked with Arriva to increase the frequency of the X18 Coast and Castles service and the length of season over which it runs.

### Thriving

The AONB Partnerships bring significant amounts of external funding into rural areas of the county, support farming and tourism businesses, and are working at scale to restore habitats that sequester carbon.

### Key issues

1. Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a statutory designation established by the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 and given further impetus by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Together with National Parks, AONBs represent the nation's finest landscapes, and the primary purpose of the AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty. There are 34 AONBs in England, covering 14% of the country.
2. Defra funds up to 75% of the cost of AONB Staff Units in England, on condition that local authorities fund at least 25%. In 2018 Northumberland County Council's Policy Board agreed funding contributions for the North Pennines and Northumberland Coast AONBs for the three years 2018-19 to 2020-21. Therefore, it is necessary to agree the Council's funding contribution for the next financial year and beyond.
3. Northumberland County Council currently contributes £22,660 per annum to the North Pennines AONB, as part of the overall contribution from the five local authorities whose areas fall partly within the AONB area, with Durham County Council contributing £36,050, Eden District Council £7,025, Carlisle City Council £7,235 and Cumbria County Council £14,470. Defra currently contributes £330,050 per annum. The Council currently contributes £33,700 plus recharges to the Northumberland Coast AONB as match-funding for the Defra grant which is currently £142,845.
4. Given that the local authority funding to the two AONBs has not increased since 2007, it is recommended that this now be increased by 10%, a proposal that has been accepted by the other local authorities contributing to the North Pennines AONB. This would take the Council's contribution to the Northumberland Coast AONB to £37,070 per year, and the contribution to the North Pennines AONB to £24,926 per year.
5. To enable financial planning to be undertaken, it is recommended that this level of contribution from the Council to the two AONBs be continued for the next three years.

It is recognised that maintaining this level of contribution may be challenging in the current financial climate; however, it is important to recognise that there is a substantial return on this investment, firstly in terms of the 75% Defra funding contribution that is secured by the 25% Council contribution, and secondly in terms of the considerable project funding that is invested in the County through the work of AONB Staff Units.

6. In addition to the core and project funding being provided by Defra, the AONB Staff Units are successful in drawing funding into the area from a wide range of sources including the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Green Recovery Challenge Fund and INTERREG. The Northumberland Coast AONB is currently engaged in the NHLF-funded Coast Care volunteering project and Bamburgh Bones public engagement and education project, both of which have brought about half a million pounds of funding into the area. The North Pennines AONB has a peatland programme that has led the restoration of over 30,000ha of blanket bog over the past 15 years and is running several large scale NHLF Landscape Partnership Schemes, each bringing several million pounds of funding into the area.
7. Both AONB Partnerships have been involved in the test and trial projects that Defra has commissioned as part of the transition from Common Agricultural Policy support for farmers to a post-Brexit UK support scheme, and Defra is currently finalising the details of the Farming in protected Landscapes scheme that will enable National Park Authorities and AONB Partnerships play an active role in providing both advice and financial support to farmers as part of Defra's Agricultural Transition Plan. This will become a major area of work for the AONBs over the next few years.
8. Work to tackle climate change is also likely to accelerate in both AONBs through the restoration of carbon-sequestering habitats such as peat bog, woodland, freshwater wetlands and saltmarsh as new funding streams such as the Nature for Climate Fund become available, to support the Government's peat and tree strategies.
9. In addition to the considerable financial return on the Council's funding contribution, contributing to the funding of AONB staff teams also enables the Council to discharge its obligations in terms of review and delivery of the statutory AONB Management Plans and the legal duty to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of AONBs. To do this, the Staff Units work closely with colleagues within a range of services in the Council, especially Development Management, Strategic Planning, Tourism, Rights of Way, Highways and Public Transport. Having helped to lead the Coastal Summits that the Council organised to discuss the unprecedented visitor pressure experienced on the coast last summer, the Northumberland Coast AONB Staff Unit has been working closely with Neighbourhood Services to prepare for this year's tourism season.

## **Background**

1. Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a statutory designation established by the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 and given further impetus by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Together with National Parks, AONBs represent the nation's finest landscapes, and the primary purpose of the AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty. There are 34 AONBs in England, covering 14% of the country.
2. The Northumberland Coast AONB was designated in 1958 and covers an area of 138 square km along 64km of coastline from just south of Berwick-upon-Tweed to the Coquet Estuary. The AONB is only 2.5km wide at its widest point, but contains a tremendous variety of features of natural, historical and cultural value. The North Pennines AONB was designated in 1988 and covers just under 2,000 square km of uplands across south-west Northumberland, west Durham and east Cumbria.
3. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 imposed new duties on Local Authorities in relation to AONBs, including the preparation and review of AONB Management Plans and a duty imposed on all public bodies to conserve and enhance AONBs. To assist local authorities in the implementation of these duties, Defra provided funding to enable AONB staff units to be established and Management Plans to be prepared and implemented. This funding is conditional on 25% of core costs being contributed by local authorities.
4. The Staff Units and Partnerships for the two AONBs were formed in 2003, with their first Management Plans being produced in 2004. Since then, they have developed diverse work streams to conserve and enhance the special qualities of the AONBs, especially the conservation of the natural and historic environment and the development of sustainable tourism.

## **Implications**

<b>Policy</b>	AONB Staff Units lead and facilitate the implementation of the Council's statutory AONB Management Plans
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	Providing 25% of the AONB core funding requirement enables 75% to be obtained from Defra. AONB Staff Units also secure considerable project funding from external funders, which is invested in and around the AONBs.
<b>Legal</b>	The Council has legal obligations to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of AONBs, and to prepare Management Plans setting out the Council's policies for the management of the AONBs.
<b>Procurement</b>	No implications

<b>Human Resources</b>	Continuation of funding is required to ensure that existing AONB staff remain in post.
<b>Property</b>	No implications
<b>Equalities</b> (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A /	
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	The Council has a range of legal duties towards AONBs, and the work of AONB Staff Units ensures that these duties are fulfilled. Consequently, providing a funding contribution towards the Staff Units mitigates the risk of legal challenge.
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	None
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	The work of the AONB Staff Units benefits a range of customers, including local businesses who benefit from their work on sustainable tourism and from investment in project work, and local people who benefit from recreational and educational activities organised or promoted by the staff units.
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	The work of the Staff Units will assist in carbon reduction in a number of ways. Project work will restore and create habitats such as peatlands and wetlands that remove and store carbon from atmospheric sources, and advocacy will promote reduction of emissions through increased use of public transport as an alternative to private car use.
<b>Wards</b>	<u>Northumberland Coast AONB</u> Berwick West with Ord, Norham and Islandshires, Bamburgh, Longhoughton, Alnwick, Amble and Amble West with Warkworth  <u>North Pennines AONB</u> Haltwhistle, Haydon and Hadrian, South Tynedale

**Background papers:**

[Northumberland Coast AONB Management Plan](#)

[North Pennines AONB Management Plan](#)

**Report sign off.**

**Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:**

	Full name of officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	
Relevant Executive Director	
Chief Executive	
Portfolio Holder(s)	

**Author and Contact Details**

David Feige, Environment & Design Team Manager and County Ecologist  
Tel 622653, [david.feige@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:david.feige@northumberland.gov.uk)



## Northumberland County Council

CABINET

DATE: 13<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2021

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### **Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Contact Policy**

**Report of** Julie Dennitts-Seal, Corporate Complaints Manager

**Cabinet Member:** Richard Wearmouth

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#### **Purpose of report**

1. The purpose of this report is to propose the adoption of an updated Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Contact Policy, which is necessary to allow Northumberland County Council to operate a fair, effective, and efficient complaints process, and also to reflect good practice advocated by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.
2. Following review of existing arrangements, it has been identified that the current policy in place to manage challenging behaviour exhibited by a small minority of customers (the Habitual or Vexatious Complainants Policy 2010) has been in place for some time and would benefit from updating. The changes proposed are set out in a newly updated 'Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Contact Policy', which if adopted will allow the Authority to deliver its complaints processes as effectively as possible to all users of our services.

#### **Recommendations**

Cabinet is recommended to consider and approve the updated Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Contact Policy attached as **Appendix A** to this report.

#### **Link to Corporate Plan**

The Council is committed to dealing with all complaints equitably, comprehensively and in a timely manner. The proposed Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Contact Policy is aligned to all the priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan 2018-21 "A Council that Works for Everyone".

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## **Key issues**

1. Dealing with a complaint is generally a straightforward process. However in a small number of cases, complainants can sometimes pursue their complaints in a way which can either impede the investigation of the complaint or can have significant (and disproportionate) resource issues for the Council - to the point where conduct can be described as vexatious or unreasonably persistent. This can happen while the complaint is being investigated, or once the Council has finished dealing with the complaint.
2. The existing policy to manage these matters, adopted by the County Council in 2010, no longer meets the needs of the organisation or reflects good practice guidance issued by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. To operate our complaints processes as efficiently as possible, adoption of an updated Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Contact Policy is therefore recommended.

## **Background**

1. The Corporate Complaints Team has reviewed all aspects of the current complaint and feedback handling practice against six themes of good practice, derived mainly from the requirements of Local Government Ombudsman's Model Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP). The themes help organisations identify the extent to which they effectively manage complaints.
2. This has helped us to understand and clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of the current corporate complaints and feedback handling in different key areas, and also to identify areas in which improvements would be beneficial. A key outcome from this work is identifying that our current policy relating to vexatious complaint management would benefit from being refreshed, in particular to ensure that the Local Government Ombudsman's guidance on vexatious and unreasonably persistent complainants is reflected. This will also allow the County Council to demonstrate delivery of best practice principles of Good Complaint Handling.
3. The existing policy (Habitual or Vexatious Complainants Policy 2010) is outdated and does not place an emphasis on getting the most appropriate outcome for our customers. We want to ensure that when our customers are telling us that they have an issue regarding our service we respond in a timely and sensitive way which takes account of the customer's experience of dealing with us. However, there is also a need to ensure that in the small number of cases when a customer's conduct around their complaint becomes unreasonably persistent or vexatious, and impedes the effective functioning of the complaints procedure, that the Council can act appropriately to manage this.

4. An updated Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Contact Policy has therefore been prepared, and is attached for Cabinet's consideration at **Appendix A**. The updates within the policy are based on good practice advocated by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.
  
5. It is recommended that the revised Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Contact Policy is adopted forthwith, to help the County Council better manage its approach to all complaints, including those in which unreasonably persistent or vexatious behaviour is demonstrated.

### **Implications**

<b>Policy</b>	This report recommends adoption of a new policy on vexatious and unreasonably persistent contact regarding complaints. Adoption of the policy will enable the better use of County Council resources, and allow a more customer focused approach across all complaints received.
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	There are no specific Finance implications within this report.
<b>Legal</b>	There are no specific implications within this report.
<b>Procurement</b>	There are no specific implications within this report.
<b>Human Resources</b>	Whilst there are no specific HR implications, it could help when dealing with broader behaviour or engagement issues.
<b>Property</b>	There are no specific implications within this report.
<b>Equalities</b> (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	There are no specific Equalities implications within this report.
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	Whilst there are no implications arising directly from this Policy, it could help when dealing with broader behaviour or engagement issues.
<b>Crime Disorder &amp;</b>	Whilst there are no implications arising directly from this Policy, it could help when dealing with broader behaviour or engagement issues.
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	Adoption of the Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Contact Policy will allow the Authority to provide a fairer and more

	customer focused approach to the managements of all complaints received, and an appropriate deployment of resource to those complaints.
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	There are no specific Carbon Reduction implications within this report.
<b>Health and Wellbeing</b>	Whilst there are no Health & Wellbeing implications arising directly from this Policy, it could help when dealing with broader behaviour or engagement issues.
<b>Wards</b>	All wards

**Background papers:**

Habitual or Vexatious Complainants Policy 2010

**Report sign off.**

***Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:***

	Full Name of Officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	
Relevant Executive Director	
Chief Executive	
Portfolio Holder(s)	

**Author and Contact Details**

Julie Dennitts-Seal, Corporate Complaints Manager  
07870 365966



Northumberland  
County Council

# Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Contact Policy

<b>Version</b>	1.1
<b>Policy Sub-Group approval date</b>	
<b>Date ratified by Joint Consultative Committee</b>	
<b>Name of policy author</b>	Julie Dennitts-Seal
<b>Date issued</b>	
<b>Review date</b>	
<b>Target audience</b>	All Employees

## History of previous versions of this document:

Policy Title: Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Contact Policy  
Version 1.0  
Policy Author: Julie Dennitts-Seal

Approved Where	Approved When	Version	Issue Date	Review Date	Contact Person
		1.0			Julie Dennitts-Seal

**Statement of changes made in most recent version:**

Version	Date	Description
<b>1.0</b>	<b>April 2020</b>	Policy updated to reflect a more robust and cohesive process, to include additional roles which may not have previously been included within the policy scope.

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Appendix 1 Unreasonably Persistent or Vexatious Checklist

Appendix 2 Unreasonably Persistent or Vexatious Template

**1. Introduction**

Dealing with a complaint is generally a straightforward process. In a small number of cases, people pursue their complaints in a way which can either impede the investigation of their complaint or can have significant resource issues for the Council. This can happen while the complaint is being investigated, or once the Council has finished dealing with the complaint.

It is important to distinguish between:

- People who make several complaints because they really think things have gone wrong.
- People who make unreasonably persistent complaints.

If the complainant is persisting because his complaints have not been considered in full, then we must address this (usually by invoking the next stage of the complaints procedure). However, if the Council has considered that matter fully and has demonstrated this to the complainant, then we need to consider whether the complainant is now unreasonably persistent.

## **2. Principles**

The Council is committed to dealing with all complaints equitably, comprehensively and in a timely manner. It does not usually limit the contact which complainants have with Council staff and offices. The Council does not expect staff to tolerate behaviour, which is abusive, offensive, or threatening and will take action to protect staff from such situations.

The principles and guidance contained in this policy should not be limited to complainants. The term 'complainant' is employed in its widest sense within this policy to encompass people or organisations who use any of our services, whether writing, emailing, telephoning, or accessing Northumberland County Council Services.

## **3. Aim of Guidance**

The objective of this guidance is to contribute to the Council's overall aim of dealing with all complainants in ways which are consistent and equitable.

It sets out how the Council will decide which complainants will be treated as vexatious or unreasonably persistent, and what the Council will do in those circumstances.

This guidance runs alongside existing corporate policies and guidance relating to equalities, health and safety, and dignity and respect at work, and should only be pursued where absolutely necessary.

## **4. Definition of Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Complainants**

The Council defines unreasonably persistent and vexatious complainants as those complainants who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the Council, hinder the Council's consideration of their or other people's complaints. The

descriptions 'unreasonably persistent' and 'vexatious' may apply separately or jointly to a particular complainant.

There is a difference between 'unreasonably persistent' and 'vexatious' complainants. A vexatious person in this context is someone who is not seeking to resolve a dispute between themselves and the Council but is seeking to cause unnecessary aggravation or annoyance to the Council.

Unreasonably persistent complainants or vexatious complainants may have justified complaints or grievances but are pursuing them in inappropriate ways. Alternatively, they may be intent on pursuing complaints which appear to have no substance, or which have already been investigated and settled. Their contacts with the Council may be amicable but still place very heavy demands on staff time, or they may be distressing for all involved. Demands on staff time need to be assessed appropriately - on occasion, a little more time upfront to understand the issue may lead to less time being spent on the subject in total.

## **5. Actions and Behaviours**

Below are some of the actions and behaviours of unreasonably persistent complainants and vexatious complainants which the Council may experience. This policy should be invoked if one or more of the following triggers occur and depending on the individual merit of the case. This list is not exhaustive, and one single feature on its own will not necessarily imply that a person will be considered persistent and/or vexatious:

1. Refusing to specify the grounds of a complaint, despite offers of assistance with this from staff.
2. Refusing to cooperate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved.
3. Refusing to accept that issues are not within the remit of a complaints procedure despite having been provided with information about the procedure's scope.
4. Refusing to accept that issues are not within the power of the Council to investigate, change or influence (examples could be the responsibility of another organisation).
5. Making what appear to be groundless complaints about the staff dealing with the complaints and seeking to have them replaced.
6. Changing the basis of a complaint as the investigation proceeds and/or denying statements he or she made at an earlier stage.
7. Introducing trivial or irrelevant new information which the complainant expects to be considered and commented on or raising large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions and insisting they are all fully answered.
8. Electronically recording meetings and conversations without the prior knowledge and consent of the other persons involved.
9. Persistently approaching the Council through different routes about the same issue.
10. Adopting a 'scattergun' approach; pursuing a complaint(s) with the Council and at the same time with a department, the Chief Executive, an M.P. Councillor,

Auditor, Standards Board, Police, Solicitors, or the Local Government Ombudsman.

11. Making unnecessarily excessive demands on the time and resources of staff while a complaint is being investigated, by for example excessive telephoning or sending emails to numerous council staff, writing lengthy complicated letters every few days and expecting immediate responses.
12. Submitting repeat complaints after the complaints process has been completed, essentially about the same issues, with additions/variations which the complainant insists make these 'new' complaints which should be put through the full complaint's procedure.
13. Refusing to accept the decision - repeatedly arguing the point and complaining about the decision.

## **6. Being Reasonable**

Raising legitimate queries or criticisms of a Complaints Procedure as it progresses, for example, if agreed timescales are not met, should not in itself lead to someone being regarded as a vexatious or an unreasonably persistent complainant.

Similarly, the fact that a complainant is unhappy with the outcome of a complaint and seeks to challenge it once, or more than once, should not necessarily cause him or her to be labelled vexatious or unreasonably persistent.

The Council will offer the complainant appropriate support, as it would any other customer.

It may be helpful to both parties if the complainant has an advocate. If the complainant feels that they would like an advocate, the Council must consider offering to help find an independent one. If the complainant has specific needs, the Council will offer relevant support. Specialist bodies such as the Royal National Institute for the Blind and Age Concern provide help and advice.

## **7. The Decision**

Before making the decision, some or all the following steps need to be taken:

- The Council will ensure that the complaint is being, or has been, appropriately investigated according to the Council's Complaints Procedure.
- Although each complaint is unique, the Council will deal with the complaint in line with other complaints of a similar nature to apply a consistent approach.
- The Council will contact the complainant to:
  - i. Discuss his or her behaviour.
  - ii. Explain why this behaviour is causing the Council concern.
  - iii. Ask him or her to change this behaviour.
  - iv. Explain about the actions that the Council may take if his or her behaviour does not change.
- If the complainant has not already had a meeting with a member or members of staff and provided that the Council knows nothing about the complainant which

would make this inadvisable, the Council will consider offering the complainant a meeting with a senior member of staff. Sometimes such meetings can dispel misunderstandings and move matters towards a resolution.

**The decision to declare a complainant as unreasonably persistent and/or vexatious will be an exceptional step.** It should be made by an Executive Director or Head of Service who has not been directly involved in the complaint or with the complainant. For example, if the Service Executive Director has been previously involved, this must be escalated to an alternative Executive Director. Using **APPENDIX 1 Unreasonably Persistent or Vexatious Checklist**, they should make a written note of the considerations and decisions.

Using **APPENDIX 2 Unreasonably Persistent or Vexatious Template**, the complainant should be told in writing:

- Why we believe their behaviour falls into that category.
- What action we are taking.
- The duration of that action.
- How the complainant can challenge the decision if they disagree with it (this should typically include information regarding the Local Government Ombudsman).

## **8. Taking Action**

The precise nature of the action should be appropriate and proportionate to the nature and frequency of the complainant's contacts with the Council at that time.

The following is a list of possible options:

- Placing time limits on telephone conversations and personal contacts.
- Restricting the number of telephone calls that will be taken (for example, one call on one specified morning/afternoon of any week).
- Limiting the complainant to one medium of contact (telephone, letter, email etc.) and/or requiring the complainant to communicate only with one named member of staff.
- Requiring any fact to face contact to take place in the presence of a witness.
- Refusing to register and process further complaints about the same matter.
- Banning a complainant from one or more Council premises.
- Where a decision on the complaint has been made, informing the complainant that future correspondence will be read and placed on the file but not acknowledged. A designated officer should be identified who will read future correspondence.
- Where a complaint is closed, and the complainant persists in communicating about the same issue, it may be decided to terminate contact with that complainant.

These options are not exhaustive, and there may be other factors that will be relevant in deciding what might be an appropriate action. For instance, any arrangements for limiting a complainant's contact must take account of the complainant's circumstances, bearing in mind such issues as age, disability, gender, race and religion or belief.

Where the behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of staff, the Council will consider other options, for example, reporting the matter to the police or taking legal action. In such cases, the Council may not give the complainant prior warning of that action.

## **9. Further Action**

Detailed records of all contacts with unreasonable persistent and vexatious complainants must be kept on a centralised register and monitored by the Complaints Manager with oversight from the Monitoring Officer. The Monitoring Officer must approve all decisions taken.

Information should only be shared with staff who need this information to carry out their role at work.

Personal details about the complainant and the complaint will be managed and stored appropriately in line with the Data Protection Act and record management principles and procedures. This will be the responsibility of the appropriate Complaints Manager.

When unreasonable complainants make complaints about new issues, these should be treated on their merits and decisions should be taken on whether any restrictions that have been applied before are still appropriate and necessary.

Reviews of decisions to restrict a complainant's contacts or the Council's responses to them should be taken by the Complaints Manager/ Legal Manager/ Head of Service.

### **Source Documents:**

**LGO Guidance on persistent and unreasonably persistent complainants  
Information Commissioner's guidance on vexatious requests**

## **APPENDIX 1 Unreasonably Persistent or Vexatious Checklist**



Checklist of Issues for Head of Service/Executive Director/Chief Executive to take into consideration when considering whether complainant's actions are unreasonably persistent or vexatious. The decision to designate

someone's behaviour as unreasonable, and restrict their access to the council, could have serious consequences for the individual.

• **Please ensure you are thoroughly satisfied that:**

Consideration	Evidence	sign off
Has the person's complaint been investigated properly?		
Has communication with the complainant been adequate?		
Is the complainant now providing any significant new information that might affect the council's view on the complaint?		
Have any equalities issues been considered?		
That any decision to restrict access is, based on the above evidence, the right course of action?		

• **Have you considered the following actions?**

Action	Yes	No	Rationale
Offering the complainant, a meeting with an officer of appropriate seniority to explore scope for a resolution of the complaint and explain why their current behaviour is seen as unreasonable.			
Sharing your policy with the complainant and warning them that restrictive actions may need to be applied if their behaviour continues			
Liaising with all relevant services, staff, Councillors, shared or externalised services to discuss suggested approaches to restricting access to services.			
Designating a key officer to coordinate the organisation's response(s).			
Helping the complainant to find a suitable independent advocate especially if the complainant has different needs.			
Are there any aggravating matters which suggest that the case should be reported to the police?			
Are there any other reasonable actions you could consider in line with the policy			

Please continue a separate page if additional space is required

**APPENDIX 2 Unreasonably Persistent or Vexatious Template**



**Northumberland**  
County Council

A N Other  
Street name  
Town or city  
County  
POSTCODE

**Our ref:** [Enter case reference]  
**Enquiries to:** [Enter name]  
**Email:** [Enter email]  
**Tel direct:** [Enter telephone number]  
**Date:** [Enter Date]

Dear [Enter Name],

Re: Your contact With Northumberland County Council

I write in connection with your recent communications with Northumberland Council which I consider to be unreasonably persistent [and/or] vexatious. I will detail the action that we will take because of that decision.

I have reviewed the [considerable amount/nature of communications] and have summarised events in the attached document. It is my decision that you should now be considered a vexatious complainant for the following reasons: [delete as required]

- You have made groundless complaints and claims against the Council and its officers
- You have made an unreasonable amount of contacts with the Council in relation to matters which have their origin in events of XXXXX
- You make the same complaints repeatedly
- You continually raise subsidiary issues / complaints
- Your complaints are often vague, not backed by evidence and / or difficult to comprehend
- You contact many officers within the Council
- You refuse to accept the outcome of the complaints process
- You refuse to accept documentary evidence
- Your repeated contacts with Council officers are placing unreasonable demands on staff time and resources
- You have threatened legal proceedings against the Council on several occasions, but we have not been served with any court papers
- Your communication has included use of threats, intimidation, or violence
- Your communication has included use of abusive, offensive, or discriminatory language

Please note that in future Northumberland Council will now take the following action [Delete as required - These could include but are not limited to]:

- Placing time limits on telephone conversations and personal contacts.
- Restricting the number of telephone calls that will be taken (for example, one call on one specified morning/afternoon of any week).
- Limiting the complainant to one medium of contact (telephone, letter, email etc.) and/or requiring the complainant to communicate only with one named member of staff.
- Requiring any personal contacts to take place in the presence of a witness.
- Refusing to register and process further complaints about the same matter.
- Banning a complainant from one or more Council premises.
- Where a decision on the complaint has been made, informing the complainant that future correspondence will be read and placed on the file but not

acknowledged. A designated officer should be identified who will read future correspondence.

- Where a complaint is closed and the complainant persists in communicating about the same issue, it may be decided to terminate contact with that complainant..

I will review this decision in [Enter timeframe] and you will be informed of the outcome of that review.

When making this decision I have considered the Local Government Ombudsman's Guidance note on management of unreasonable complaint behaviour issued in July 2014 and I consider this to be a just and proportionate response. However, if you submit any further complaints not related directly or indirectly to matters referred to above those complaints will be considered on their merits according to the appropriate process.

If you are unhappy with the decision the Council has taken under this policy, you may make a complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman who can be contacted as follows:

The Local Government Ombudsman  
PO Box 4771  
Coventry  
CV4 0EH

Tel: 0300 061 0614

Text 'call back' to Tel: 0762 481 1595.

You may be charged by your provider for sending the text message.

[www.lgo.org.uk](http://www.lgo.org.uk)

Yours sincerely,

# Northumberland County Council

## Communities and Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee

### Work Programme 2021-2022

## 1. Terms of reference:

- (1) To maintain an overview of the Management Agreements in place between the County Council and Active Northumberland, Woodhorn Museum Charitable Trust and Northumberland Tourism.
- (2) To monitor, review and make recommendations about:
  - Development Planning
  - Neighbourhood Planning
  - Conservation
  - Housing
  - Climate Change
  - Countryside, Biodiversity and Landscape Quality
  - Waste Management and Energy Use
  - Public and Community Transport Network and Travel to School
  - Highway Maintenance, Streetscape and the Local Environment
  - Local and Neighbourhood services
  - Crime, Community Safety, and Fear of Crime, including CONTEST, Prevent and Channel
  - Antisocial Behaviour and Domestic Violence
  - Fire and Rescue
  - Emergency Services and Emergency Planning
  - Customer Services
  - Provision of Cultural and Leisure Facilities
  - Improving Quality of Life through Access to Culture and Leisure;
  - Supporting Economic Growth in the Arts, Culture and Leisure Sectors

## 2. Issues to be Timetabled/Considered

Northumberland County Council  
Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2021-2022

**30 June 2021**

**Funding for the North Pennines and Northumberland Coast AONB**

To comment on a proposal to Cabinet that the funding agreements with the North Pennines AONB Partnership and Northumberland Coast AONB Partnership continues, so that the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty staff teams can continue to receive funding from Defra, on the basis of 75% Defra funding to 25% local authority funding.

**Vexacious Policy**

Pre-Scrutiny. To propose the adoption of an updated Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Contact Policy, which is considered necessary to allow Northumberland County Council to operate a fair, effective, and efficient complaints process, and also to reflect good practice advocated by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman .

**4 August 2021**

**Draft Private Sector Housing Strategy 2020-23**

Pre-Scrutiny. To comment on a report to Cabinet which provides Members with the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy 2020-2023 for review and agreement.

**Fleet Replacement Programme**

To consider this annual report which will provide an update on the Council's Fleet Replacement Programme.

**Active Northumberland Annual Outcome Report**

The Annual Outcome Report will contain a review on how the Active Northumberland Service Plan had been delivered for the previous financial year.

**Active Northumberland Service Plan**

To consider Active Northumberland's Service Plan 2021/22.

**Kerbside Glass Recycling Trial Update**

To update the Committee on the trial following consideration of the proposals at its meeting in October 2020.

<b>25 August 2021</b>	
<b>Customer Complaints Update</b>	To receive an update on Customer Complaints since the annual report was presented to the OSC in February.
<b>6 October 2021</b>	
<b>Domestic Violence and Abuse</b>	To consider the implications of the Domestic Abuse Bill which is expected to receive Royal Assent in the summer on the Council's Strategy for dealing with domestic abuse and violence.
<b>27 October 2021</b>	
<b>Northumberland Infrastructure Funding Statement</b>	To consider the annual Infrastructure Funding Statement in respect of Section 106 Agreements.
<b>1 December 2021</b>	
<b>21 December 2021</b>	
<b>12 January 2022</b>	
<b>2 February 2022</b>	

**2 March 2022**

**Library Service Strategy 2021-26**

To update the Committee on the implementation of the Strategy.

**6 April 2022**

**27 April 2022**

Northumberland County Council  
Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Monitoring Report 2019-2021

Ref	Date	Report	Decision	Outcome
1.	5 June 2019	<b>Market Strategy</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that (a) progress made against the strategy action plan be noted, and (b) a review of alternative operating arrangements that could be adopted for all markets currently managed by the County Council's Neighbourhood Services team, be supported.	The Committee will continue to monitor this issue.
2.	5 June 2019	<b>Additional LTP Capital</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that the programme of schemes undertaken through the additional £7.732m of capital maintenance funding and progress in delivering the programme, be noted.	No further action required.
3.	5 June 2019	<b>Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Support Services Commission Update</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that (a) the report be noted, and (b) a further update be provided to the Committee at a time when a meaningful assessment of progress can be made.	A further update will be presented to the Committee in due course.
4.	5 June 2019	<b>Domestic Violence and Abuse</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that (a) the update be noted, and (b) a further report on the outcome of the Government's consultation on domestic violence and abuse, be presented to the Committee in due course.	A further update will be presented to the Committee in due course.
5.	3 July 2019	<b>Housing Strategy for Northumberland 2019-21</b>	It was <b>RESOLVED</b> that:- (a) Cabinet be informed of the divided view of the Committee regarding whether the Strategy should have a three or five year term, and that Cabinet should consider which was more appropriate; and	The Cabinet considered the Committee's comments when it determined the report on 6 August 2019.

			(b) a request be made to Chairmen's Group for a report to a future meeting of the Committee on EMDOs and the empty property list.	A further report on Empty Dwellings Management Orders be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.
6.	3 July 2019	<b>Public Protection Service Requests 2018-19</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that the content of the report, and the member comments made above, be noted.	No further action is required at this stage.
7.	30 August 2019	<b>Food and Feed, Safety and Standards Service Plan 2019/20</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that (a) subject to the comments above, the Cabinet be advised that the Committee supported the recommendation in the report, and (b) the Committee's thanks be conveyed to staff for all their hard work as set out in the report.	The Cabinet considered the Committee's comments when it determined the report on 10 September 2019.
8.	30 August 2019	<b>Northumberland County Council Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy 2019</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that, subject to the comments above, the Cabinet be advised that the Committee supported the recommendation in the report.	The Cabinet considered the Committee's comments when it determined the report on 10 September 2019.  A further update on the implementation of the Policy be provided to the Committee in the New Year.
9.	2 October 2019	<b>The proposed implementation of the Northumberland Street Works Permit Scheme</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that, subject to the comments above, the Cabinet be advised that the Committee supported the recommendation in the report.	The Cabinet will consider the final report which will include consultation responses on 12 November 2019.
10.	30 October 2019	<b>Northumberland Inshore Fisheries &amp; Conservation Authority (NIFCA) Annual Plan 2019-20</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that the information provided be noted.	No further action during the term of the current Council.
11.	4 December 2019	<b>Empty Homes in Northumberland</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that (1) the report be noted. (2) Council be recommended to ring fence the additional Council Tax raised on empty properties as agreed at Council on 6 November 2019 for use in bringing empty properties back into use.	Recommendation to be considered by Council on 8 January 2020.

12.	4 December 2019	<b>Northumberland Homefinder Common Allocation Policy</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that the report be noted.	No further action required at this stage.
13.	5 February 2020	<b>Fleet Replacement Programme</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that the report be noted.	The Committee will continue to receive this report annually.
14.	4 March 2020	<b>Street Lighting LED Project</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that the contents of the report be noted.	No further action required at this stage.
15.	4 March 2020	<b>Community Safety and Anti-Social Behaviour Control</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that: (a) The report be received. (b) The email containing the Single Point of Contact details be recirculated to all Members with the report and minutes from the meeting.	A copy of the original email, together with the minutes and report from this meeting be circulated to members.
16.	4 March 2020	<b>Environmental Enforcement Website</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that the presentation be received.	No further action required at this stage.
17.	3 June 2020	<b>Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2020-24</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that, subject to the comments above, the Cabinet be advised that the Committee supported the recommendation in the report for the adoption of the Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan for 2020-24.	The Cabinet considered the Committee's comments when it determined the report on 9 June 2020.
18.	3 June 2020	<b>Update concerning a potential boundary review for the Northumberland Coast AONB</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that a review of the Northumberland AONB be postponed until DEFRA's response to the Glover Review is published and certainty regarding the review process in the future is known.	The Committee be updated on any further progress.
19.	3 June 2020	<b>'Our Way' Vision for Cycling and Walking in Northumberland</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that, subject to the comments above, the Cabinet be advised that the Committee supported the recommendation in the report.	The Cabinet considered the Committee's comments when it determined the report on 9 June 2020.
20.	15 July 2020	<b>Covid-19 - Northumberland County Council Response</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that the reports be noted and the issue identified by members be included in the work programme.	The issues raised will be considered by Chairmen's Group for inclusion on the work programmes of the relevant OSC.
21.	15 July 2020	<b>Covid-19 - Planning for Recovery in Northumberland</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that the reports be noted and the issue identified by members be included in the work programme.	The issues raised will be considered by Chairmen's Group for inclusion on

				the work programmes of the relevant OSC.
22.	16 September 2020	<b>Fly-Tipping</b>	<p><b>RESOLVED</b> that the Committee noted:</p> <p>(a) The report and options for reducing fly tipping in Northumberland.</p> <p>(b) That the majority of the increased incidents of flytipping relate to items of household waste that have been encountered in Ashington and Blyth and that these areas will be prioritised when taking actions to reduce fly tipping.</p> <p>(c) The enforcement and collection staffing resources deployed to prevent and remove fly tipping have increased in the last 18 months, so the increase in fly tipping is not a result of reduced investment, be noted.</p> <p>(d) There are a range of options available for households to dispose of their bulky household waste legally and that demand for these services remains at a high level and there is no evidence of a link between the increase in flytipping incidents and the introduction or increase in charges for waste services.</p> <p>(e) That overall bulky waste service performance in terms of availability of collection slots and undertaking collections on the agreed date is good and improving, so focusing on enhancing education and enforcement messages and activity is likely to have a bigger impact on this problem than further improvements in service performance.</p> <p>(f) Officers engage as actively as possible with officers in other departments, local members, Town and Parish Councils, community associations and other groups to tackle the issue of fly tipping.</p>	The Committee will continue to monitor this issue as appropriate.
23.	7 October 2020	<b>Northumberland Waste Management Strategy Proposed Trial of Kerbside Glass Collections</b>	<p><b>RESOLVED</b> that, subject to the comments as set out above, the Cabinet be advised that the Committee supports the recommendations in the report.</p>	The Chairman presented the Committee's comments when the report was determined by the Cabinet on 13 October 2020.

				The Committee requested a further update around the end of the trial period.
24	7 October 2020	<b>Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service Improvement Action Plan Update</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that: (a) the contents of the report be noted. (b) further reports be provided to the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee to provide assurance on the progress of the Improvement Action Plan, and (c) an update be provided to the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee following receipt of the formal letter following the second inspection.	The Committee will receive an update following receipt of the formal letter on the second inspection.
25.	28 October 2020	<b>COVID-19 : Response and Recovery Update</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that the information be noted	The Committee will continue to receive updates on the Council's response to the Covid 19 Pandemic as appropriate.
26	28 October 2020	<b>Local Transport Plan 2020/21 – Capital Programme Update</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that the report be noted.	The Committee will continue to monitor this issue as appropriate.
27.	13 January 2021	<b>Active Northumberland</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that the report be noted.	The Committee will continue to receive updates annually.
28.	3 February 2021	<b>Customer Corporate Complaints</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that: (a) The information be noted. (b) An update be provided to the Communities and Place OSC in approximately 6 months, depending on the timing of local government elections and the agreement of future members of the committee.	To receive an Annual Report in six months.
29.	3 February 2021	<b>The Council's Response to Anti-Social Behaviour in 2020</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that: (a) the report be received, and (b) the concerns of the Communities and Place OSC on the introduction of an age restriction on the sale of nitrous oxide be referred to the Office for Product Safety and Standards.	No further action is required at this stage.

30.	3 February 2021	<b>Environmental Enforcement and Public Engagement Activities in 2020</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that: 1. the report be received, and 2. an update be provided to the Communities and Place OSC in approximately 12 months, depending on the agreement of future members of the committee.	The Committee will receive annual updates on enforcement activities.
31.	3 March 2021	<b>Northumberland Sports Facility Strategy 2019-2031 &amp; Northumberland Playing Pitch Strategy 2019-2031</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that, subject to the comments above, the Cabinet be advised that the Committee supported the recommendations in the report.	The Chairman presented the Committee's comments when the report was determined by the Cabinet on 9 March 2021
32.	3 March 2021	<b>Northumberland Public Library Service Consultation</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that, subject to the comments above, the Cabinet be advised that the Committee supported the recommendations in the report.	The Chairman presented the Committee's comments when the report was determined by the Cabinet on 9 March 2021.
33.	3 March 2021	<b>Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire &amp; Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Covid-19 Inspection: Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that: (a) the contents of the report be noted, and (b) further reports on progress against the recommendations provided by the HMICFRS be provided in due course.	The Committee will continue to monitor this issue as appropriate.
34.	3 March 2021	<b>Northumberland Infrastructure Funding Statement</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that: (a) the Northumberland Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS), be received, and (b) the Northumberland IFS be presented to the Communities and Place OSC on an annual basis.	The Committee will continue to receive updates annually

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