

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL
CASTLE MORPETH LOCAL AREA COUNCIL

At the meeting of the **Castle Morpeth Local Area Council** held at Council Chamber - County Hall on Monday, 9 January 2023 at 4.00 pm.

PRESENT

J Beynon (Chair) (in the Chair)

MEMBERS

R Dodd
V Jones
G Sanderson

L Dunn
M Murphy
R Wearmouth

OFFICERS

L Little
S Wardle

Senior Democratic Services Officer
Neighbourhood Services Divisional Manager

Around 3 members of the press and public were present.

74 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Darwin, Dickinson and Foster.

75 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Castle Morpeth Local Area Council held on Monday 14 November 2022, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and be signed by the Chair.

76 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No questions had been submitted.

77 PETITIONS

(a) Receive New Petitions – No new petitions were received.

(b) Petitions Previously Received – There were no reports.

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(c) Updates on Petitions previously received – No updates were provided. questions had been submitted.

78 LOCAL POLICING UPDATE

Inspector John Swan 770 and Sergeant Les Robson 792 from the Morpeth Neighbourhood Policing Team were in attendance and provided an update on policing issues and crime statistics within the Morpeth area. There had been 7485 incidents reported which was a 5% reduction from the previous 12 months. There had been an increase in the number of thefts reported which included opportunist thefts from open motor vehicles, sheds and shoplifting however this was still in line with the rest of the Northern Command area. The team had worked night shifts to actively target those committing these crimes, with two arrested. The signing of an agreement to allow the sharing of information between organisations in relation to Shop Watch was awaited. The reduction of domestic violence was a continuing priority for Northumbria Police. There had been a 24% reduction in antisocial behaviour incidents, with 101 less incidents in the town centre than in the previous 12 month period and work undertaken with Karbon Homes and school engagement around factors which led to antisocial behaviour. There had been an increase in incidents in the more rural areas with off-road motorcycles and partnership working across different areas was now being undertaken to address this with the use of the British Transport Police drone being deployed to identify and track the motorcycles.

Councillors highlighted the issue of “boy racers” within Morpeth Town Centre who intimidated other road users by the way they drove and caused a noise nuisance with the sounds of their exhaust systems. Reports must be made to the Police in order for them to be aware. Warning notices could be issued with further offences resulting in vehicles being uplifted. Vehicles causing a nuisance due to noise would need to be examined to verify levels of noise. Details of vehicles should be passed to the Police if known.

Inspector Wayne Daniels and Inspector Gary Neil would also be invited to future meetings to provide updates in respect of areas not covered by the Morpeth Neighbourhood Policing Team. Requests for traffic speed interventions and locations for the use of hand held devices were discussed at monthly meeting and if the numbers necessitated further interventions then the road safety team would be asked to look at providing a camera van.

The reduction in the number of poaching incidents in rural areas was highlighted with Members being advised that the Rural Crime and Neighbourhood Teams worked with police trained volunteers, who were a massive asset in targeting these type of crimes as they could identify strange vehicles not linked to their own communities.

Inspector Swan and Sergeant Robson were thanked for their attendance.

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S Wardle, Neighbourhood Services Divisional Manager provided an update on both Highways and Neighbourhood Services.

Highways

- Over the recent period of bad weather 112 members of staff had worked over 3 shifts to provide 20 hours of cover in a 24 hour period for 11 days with a total of 4,212 hours worked. Over 41,000 miles of road had been gritted by 35 gritters with 5,679 tonnes of dry salt used.
- Teams were continuing with safety inspections, focusing on primary gritting routes as an increased deterioration of the road network was being seen due to the latest weather pattern before and over the Christmas period.
- Winter grit bins and heaps were being replenished as there was a significant demand during the weather event. All requests must go through the contact centre.
- Teams were continuing to complete gully cleansing operations.
- Goose Hill Car Park was now completed.
- Local Transport plan works were ongoing in the area.
- Works to start in the area- Ponteland to Callerton Cycleway

Members commended on the excellent work by staff throughout the period of bad weather. Clarification would be sought on the legal position on shop keepers clearing footpaths outside their properties. Members also requested that the criteria /assessment undertaken for the provision of additional grit bins be emailed to them so that they could advise residents of this when they approached Councillors with requests and also asked if information could be included on the Council's website on where grit could be purchased by individual householders for their own use. A lot of complaints had been received regarding icy footpaths, but it was recognised that there were priority areas for this type of gritting also.

Neighbourhood Services

- Refuse collection services worked well over the Christmas period. Some incorrect dates had been published but a leaflet drop along with a targeted social media campaign providing correct information had been carried out. There had been extra tonnage collected.
- Winter grounds maintenance work was continuing and would be completed on schedule and some assistance had been provided to highways during the period of bad weather.
- Leaf clearance was nearly completed and any areas of concern should be reported.
- The recruitment of seasonal staff was about to commence.

The glass collection trial was continuing with some adjustments made to frequency of collections from 4 weekly to 6 weekly in the Hexham area and a 10 month food waste collection trial was also underway for 4,800 properties in the Morpeth area.

A presentation was provided by Councillor Sanderson, Leader and Councillor Wearmouth, Deputy Leader which gave information on the State of the County reflecting on the work the Council were undertaking based on the Council's priorities of providing value for money, tackling inequalities and delivering growth and jobs. A copy of the presentation would be filed with the signed minutes of the meeting and uploaded to the Committee papers on the Council's website.

Following consultation with residents a number of park commemoration schemes had been announced to form a countywide celebration of the life of the late Queen Elizabeth II. Information on what the Council was doing to help address inequalities in health and education, with the belief that all children should be offered the same opportunity in life to flourish, and the financial support being offered to those people most in need were outlined. The response by residents and communities to an appeal for donations to support Ukrainian nationals had been tremendous. The Council's current Capital Programme included over £806m investment in 2022-2026 to ensure that the infrastructure and facilities were provided to drive future growth and job creation within the County along with further investments through the Borderlands Partnership and North of Tyne Combined Authority.

The Council was continuing to invest in education and skills with a number of capital projects coming forward to in relation to schools within the Coquet, Berwick and Seaton Valley areas along with other educational facilities to grow the skills needed by local employers and industries. At the last focussed visit held in July 2022 in relation to children's social work Ofsted had found many positives in the Council's practice and procedures and in April 2022 88% of the County's schools were judged to be good or better.

The commitment to maintain frontline services had remained with increased funding for highway maintenance in 2022-23, however the recent bad weather had impacted on the number of defects on the road network being reported. The Council had been praised for its work in supporting people requiring care packages after being discharged from hospital and was grateful for staff who provided this service. There was always a need to attract more care workers and travel allowances had been increased to try to encourage more people into this sector.

A new Chief Executive was to start at the Council on 8 February 2023 and recruitment was also underway for a new Executive Team. The Corporate Plan was to be refreshed to drive improvements in all services and a Strategic Change Programme developed to deliver the things that were most important to residents in a cost-effective way. It was hoped that compulsory redundancies could be avoided, but this could not be guaranteed. The recently announced Government settlement had been better than expected and new legislation would give the Council more power to address issues related to second or vacant homes and the pressure this put on some communities. There would still be inflationary pressures on the budget going forward in relation to pay and other factors. Details of the proposed budget would be released at the beginning of February and all Members would be invited to the Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 13 February 2023.

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Members highlighted that the provision of free car parking in town centres, whilst not cheap for the Council to provide, helped sustain the town centres and small businesses. In response to questions in relation to the high number of excess school places within the County especially in the smaller rural areas where there was not a lot of housing investment, investments in solar panels and ash tree dieback, the Leader advised that he would like scrutiny to do a review and take learning from others and report back on ash tree dieback. There was £50m set aside to build affordable housing in areas where this was needed, however there were some issues with land availability in some areas. There was also a need for some communities to accept that some housing development was needed. In respect of solar power, there were a number of capital grants available from Government and the Council was investing in a solar car park at County Hall and permission had been granted for two solar farms. Issues with the grid connections were known and work with major employers and Governing was ongoing to ensure that the grid was fit for purpose.

Members in welcoming the improvements in schools and within Children's services, acknowledged that there was a national shortage of social workers and that the causes of inequalities were of a national and international making and could not be resolved by the work of one local authority, although the measures being undertaken by the Council to try to address these inequalities were supported. The ability to provide a good education and skills training linked to local employment in order to break the cycle of generational workless households was key and it was hoped that the proposed devolution deal would allow the authority to build on what was already being done. Members were encouraged to visit the new Seghill Training Centre where pupils were learning skills which would offer them the opportunity to have good jobs in the future.

81 LOCAL AREA COUNCIL WORK PROGRAMME

A copy of the work programme would be emailed to Members.

82 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The meeting of the Local Area Council was scheduled for 4.00 pm on Monday 13 February.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....

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