



# Northumberland County Council

**Your ref:**

**Our ref:**

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**Tel direct:** 01670 622617

**Date:** Tuesday, 17 October 2023

Dear Sir or Madam,

Your attendance is requested at a meeting of the **COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OSC** to be held in **CONFERENCE ROOM 2 - COUNTY HALL** on **WEDNESDAY, 25 OCTOBER 2023** at **2.00 PM**.

Yours faithfully

Dr Helen Paterson  
Chief Executive

**To Communities and Place OSC members as follows:-**

**N Oliver (Chair), M Mather (Vice-Chair), D Carr, E Cartie, G Castle, A Dale, B Gallacher, N Morphet, J Lang and J Reid**



**Dr Helen Paterson, Chief Executive**  
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# AGENDA

## PART I

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

### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

### 2. MINUTES

(Pages 1  
- 12)

Minutes of the meeting of the Communities and Place OSC held on 27 September 2023, as circulated, to be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

### 3. DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Unless already entered in the Council's Register of Members' interests, members are required where a matter arises at a meeting;

- a) Which **directly relates to** Disclosable Pecuniary Interest ('DPI') as set out in Appendix B, Table 1 of the Code of Conduct, to disclose the interest, not participate in any discussion or vote and not to remain in room. Where members have a DPI or if the matter concerns an executive function and is being considered by a Cabinet Member with a DPI they must notify the Monitoring Officer and arrange for somebody else to deal with the matter.
- b) Which **directly relates to** the financial interest or well being of a Other Registrable Interest as set out in Appendix B, Table 2 of the Code of Conduct to disclose the interest and only speak on the matter if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting but otherwise must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain the room.
- c) Which **directly relates to** their financial interest or well-being (and is not DPI) or the financial well being of a relative or close associate, to declare the interest and members may only speak on the matter if members of the public are also allowed to speak. Otherwise, the member must not take part in discussion or vote on the matter and must leave the room.
- d) Which **affects** the financial well-being of the member, a relative or close associate or a body included under the Other Registrable Interests column in Table 2, to disclose the interest and apply the test set out at paragraph 9 of Appendix B before deciding whether they may remain in the meeting.
- e) Where Members have or a Cabinet Member has an Other Registerable Interest or Non Registerable Interest in a matter being considered in exercise of their executive function, they must notify the Monitoring

Officer and arrange for somebody else to deal with it.

NB Any member needing clarification must contact [monitoringofficer@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:monitoringofficer@northumberland.gov.uk). Members are referred to the Code of Conduct which contains the matters above in full. Please refer to the guidance on disclosures at the rear of this agenda letter.

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

(Pages  
13 - 16)

To note the schedule of decisions made by Cabinet since the last meeting together with latest Forward Plan of key decisions. Any further changes made to the Forward Plan will be reported to the Committee.

### **OVERVIEW**

*The Cabinet Member requested to attend for the following item is Councillor Colin Horncastle, Looking After Our Environment.*

#### **5.1 Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy for Northumberland 2022 - 2026 Action Plan Progression**

(Pages  
17 - 30)

*The Cabinet Member requested to attend for the following item is Councillor John Riddle, Improving Our Roads and Highways.*

#### **5.2 Update on Implementation of Fix My Street**

(Pages  
31 - 36)

To provide an update to the Committee on the implementation and operation of the Fix My Street public realm reporting system.

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

#### **6. COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MONITORING REPORT**

(Pages  
37 - 46)

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 2023/24 council year.

#### **7. 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 discussed or as soon as it becomes apparent to you.
- Complete this sheet and pass it to the Democratic Services Officer.

<b>Name:</b>		<b>Date of meeting:</b>	
<b>Meeting:</b>			
<b>Item to which your interest relates:</b>			
<b>Nature of Interest i.e. either disclosable pecuniary interest (as defined by Table 1 of Appendix B to the Code of Conduct, Other Registerable Interest or Non-Registerable Interest (as defined by Appendix B to Code of Conduct) (please give details):</b>			
<b>Are you intending to withdraw from the meeting?</b>		Yes - <input type="checkbox"/>	No - <input type="checkbox"/>

## Registering Interests

Within 28 days of becoming a member or your re-election or re-appointment to office you must register with the Monitoring Officer the interests which fall within the categories set out in **Table 1 (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests)** which are as described in "The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012". You should also register details of your other personal interests which fall within the categories set out in **Table 2 (Other Registerable Interests)**.

**"Disclosable Pecuniary Interest"** means an interest of yourself, or of your partner if you are aware of your partner's interest, within the descriptions set out in Table 1 below.

**"Partner"** means a spouse or civil partner, or a person with whom you are living as husband or wife, or a person with whom you are living as if you are civil partners.

1. You must ensure that your register of interests is kept up-to-date and within 28 days of becoming aware of any new interest, or of any change to a registered interest, notify the Monitoring Officer.
2. A 'sensitive interest' is as an interest which, if disclosed, could lead to the councillor, or a person connected with the councillor, being subject to violence or intimidation.
3. Where you have a 'sensitive interest' you must notify the Monitoring Officer with the reasons why you believe it is a sensitive interest. If the Monitoring Officer agrees they will withhold the interest from the public register.

### Non participation in case of disclosable pecuniary interest

4. Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to one of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interests as set out in **Table 1**, you must disclose the interest, not participate in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest, just that you have an interest.

Dispensation may be granted in limited circumstances, to enable you to participate and vote on a matter in which you have a disclosable pecuniary interest.

5. Where you have a disclosable pecuniary interest on a matter to be considered or is being considered by you as a Cabinet member in exercise of your executive function, you must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest and must not take any steps or further steps in the matter apart from arranging for someone else to deal with it.

### Disclosure of Other Registerable Interests

6. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **directly relates** to the financial interest or wellbeing of one of your Other Registerable Interests (as set out in **Table 2**), you must disclose the interest. You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting but otherwise must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.

### Disclosure of Non-Registerable Interests

7. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **directly relates** to your financial interest or well-being (and is not a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest set out in **Table 1**) or a financial interest or well-being of a relative or close associate, you must disclose the interest. You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.
8. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **affects** –
- a. your own financial interest or well-being;
  - b. a financial interest or well-being of a relative or close associate; or
  - c. a financial interest or wellbeing of a body included under Other Registrable Interests as set out in **Table 2** you must disclose the interest. In order to determine whether you can remain in the meeting after disclosing your interest the following test should be applied
9. Where a matter (referred to in paragraph 8 above) **affects** the financial interest or well- being:
- a. to a greater extent than it affects the financial interests of the majority of inhabitants of the ward affected by the decision and;
  - b. a reasonable member of the public knowing all the facts would believe that it would affect your view of the wider public interest

You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise, you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation.

If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.

Where you have an Other Registerable Interest or Non-Registerable Interest on a matter to be considered or is being considered by you as a Cabinet member in exercise of your executive function, you must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest and must not take any steps or further steps in the matter apart from arranging for someone else to deal with it.

## Table 1: Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

This table sets out the explanation of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests as set out in the [Relevant Authorities \(Disclosable Pecuniary Interests\) Regulations 2012](#).

Subject	Description
<b>Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation</b>	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain. [Any unpaid directorship.]
<b>Sponsorship</b>	Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the council) made to the councillor during the previous 12-month period for expenses incurred by him/her in carrying out his/her duties as a councillor, or towards his/her election expenses. This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.
<b>Contracts</b>	Any contract made between the councillor or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/civil partners (or a firm in which such person is a partner, or an incorporated body of which such person is a director* or a body that such person has a beneficial interest in the securities of*) and the council — (a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and (b) which has not been fully discharged.
<b>Land and Property</b>	Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the council. 'Land' excludes an easement, servitude, interest or right in or over land which does not give the councillor or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/ civil partners (alone or jointly with another) a right to occupy or to receive income.
<b>Licenses</b>	Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the council for a month or longer
<b>Corporate tenancies</b>	Any tenancy where (to the councillor's knowledge)— (a) the landlord is the council; and (b) the tenant is a body that the councillor, or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/ civil partners is a partner of or a director* of or has a beneficial interest in the securities* of.
<b>Securities</b>	Any beneficial interest in securities* of a body

	<p>where—</p> <p>(a) that body (to the councillor’s knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the council; and</p> <p>(b) either—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. the total nominal value of the securities* exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or</li> <li>ii. if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the councillor, or his/ her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/civil partners has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.</li> </ul>
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\* ‘director’ includes a member of the committee of management of an industrial and provident society.

\* ‘securities’ means shares, debentures, debenture stock, loan stock, bonds, units of a collective investment scheme within the meaning of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 and other securities of any description, other than money deposited with a building society.

## **Table 2: Other Registrable Interests**

You have a personal interest in any business of your authority where it relates to or is likely to affect:

- a) any body of which you are in general control or management and to which you are nominated or appointed by your authority
- b) any body
  - i. exercising functions of a public nature
  - ii. any body directed to charitable purposes or
  - iii. one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union)



## NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

### COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the **Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held at County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday, 27 September 2023 at 2.00 p.m.

#### PRESENT

Councillor N. Oliver  
(Chair, in the Chair)

#### MEMBERS

Cartie, E.	Mather, M.
Dale, A.	Morphet, N.
Gallacher, B.	Reid, J.

#### CABINET MEMBERS

C. Horncastle	Looking After Our Environment
G. Stewart	Looking After Our Communities
J. Watson	Promoting Healthy Lives

#### OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

L. Bankier	Senior Archivist - Berwick
G. Binning	Chief Fire Officer
D. Brown	Strategic Policy, Risk and Performance Officer
S. McMillan	Director of Economic Development and Growth
J. Murphy	Development Management Area Manager (South East)
C. McLaughlin	Interim Ceremonial Coordination Team Leader
S. Nicholson	Scrutiny Co-Ordinator
N. Turnbull	Democratic Services Officer
N. Walsh	Director of Stronger Communities
D. Wright	Senior Librarian - Children and Young People

#### 13. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Castle and Lang.

#### 14. MINUTES

An update on the Blyth to Bebside cycle corridor was requested.

In answer to a question, the Scrutiny Co-ordinator reported that the Leader had withdrawn his suggestion for an Environment Task and Finish Working Group.

There was a brief discussion regarding the budget setting process and whilst opposition group members did not set the budgets, they could highlight concerns and areas which they felt should be prioritised through the consultation process.

The Chair suggested that concerns regarding maintenance of cycle routes and trimming of branches next to street lighting columns should be raised with the officers and portfolio holders in the first instance and an opportunity given for them respond. If it was felt that there was a wider problem the committee would need to consider if there was an issue which required scrutiny.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Communities and Place OSC, held on 26 July 2023, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

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

The Committee considered the schedule of decisions made by Cabinet since the last meeting with the latest Forward Plan of key items (Schedule enclosed with the signed minutes).

A written response was to be circulated to the committee on the timing of the Food and Feed, Safety and Standards Service Plan 2023/24 which Cabinet was scheduled to consider on 10 October 2023, when the plan was mid-way through the period.

**RESOLVED** that the schedule of decisions made by Cabinet and the Forward Plan of key items be noted.

## **16. OVERVIEW**

The Chair commented that the following presentations by officers and portfolio holders were to inform the committee of key works streams and projects that would be taking place in the areas within the next 6-12 months.

It was not intended therefore that the individual issues be discussed in detail but to gain an understanding and identify areas which should be scrutinised. The timing of when items should be included would be discussed after the meeting between officers and the Scrutiny Co-ordinator.

### **16.1 Presentation by the Portfolio Holder for Promoting Healthy Lives**

Councillor Jeff Watson, Portfolio Holder for Promoting Healthy Lives, commented on the changes that had been made to the portfolio and a new improved way of working for the separate elements of health and well-being which had previously worked independently. He was extremely proud of the staff that were developing the service and highlighted the following:

- Leisure and Sports Development – increasing physical participation by residents and reducing inactivity to improve health and well-being.
- Reviewing management of community assets to see where they would be better managed.
- The Berwick Living Barracks project conversion to residential units and new archive facilities.
- Playzone funding to create outdoor facilities at 16 sites across the county.
- Libraries - commitment not to close any facilities; completion of mobile library pilot. Success of the summer reading challenge with 2,400 participants.
- Culture – new cultural attractions including the Berwick Culture and Creative Zone.

Nigel Walsh, Director of Stronger Communities, introduced Linda Bankier, Senior Archivist and Diane Wright, Senior Librarian. He explained that benefits of the restructure were being seen with the creation of the new directorate incorporating Public Health, Stronger Communities and Inequalities. He referred to:

- The progress made with Library Service re-design. The library strategy was due to be refreshed in 2024 to incorporate new government guidance. Area prospectus or delivery plans were to be developed to match resources with need in the 5 locality areas.
- More agile mobile library vehicles.
- Closer collaboration between customer facing services including customer services, libraries, tourist information, Northumberland Communities Together to maximise use of and investment in the Council's leisure facilities, address inequalities in alignment with the BEST programme.

Sarah McMillan, Director of Economic Development and Growth, referred to the powerpoint slides which had been circulated with the agenda papers (a copy of the presentation is enclosed with the signed minutes). She highlighted the following within Visitor Economy and Culture:

- The number of visitors to the county was increasing, although not yet at pre-Covid levels but with higher spending which was a positive impact on the visitor economy.
- Visit Northumberland had been designated as one of the first 15 Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEP), following a national review of destination management organisations.
- Participation in the Destination Development Partnership (DDP) with the NewcastleGateshead Initiative and Visit Durham, as part of the sole national pilot. To improve partnership working to support the visitor

economy including sustainability, skills, infrastructure to inform national arrangements in the future.

- Development of the Northumberland's Destination Management 10-year Plan (DMP) which set out the vision and actions for sustainable visitor economy. This included examples of business development.
- Culture – previously mentioned projects in Berwick, use of Borderlands funding for the Ad Gefrin distillery and visitor centre, Lilidorei at Alnwick Garden and Blyth Culture hub with Placemaking programme in development to support the use and bring visitors to the town centres. The world heritage status of Hadrian's Wall and importance to the county had also been recognized within the plan and included within the cultural events programme for the North of Tyne Combined Authority and Borderlands funding to maximise the asset in the county.

Linda Bankier commented on the cooperation and partnership working that was taking place to progress the projects in Berwick and gave a brief description of the connection between the Living Barracks and Maltings projects which would lead to a permanent home in the future for archives in Berwick.

Issues raised by members included:

- Annual Review by Active Northumberland and presentation by the successful organisation following the procurement process for leisure services and future plans for leisure services in the county. To be included within the work programme.
- Interaction between library services and local schools varied due to the diverse nature of library facilities across the county and proximity of schools. Those schools that were in close proximity to libraries worked closely with each other; initiatives such as reading facilitators targeted hard to reach communities to work with schools and support learning. It was suggested that ward councillors could visit their closest premises and advocate reading programmes through sharing newsletters on social media.
- Woodhorn Museum was managed by Museums Northumberland with elected member representation on the Board. Opportunities for external funding were explored to enhance services in the south-east of the county.
- Sustainability of projects was essential.
- Adjacent local authorities participated in regular meetings for the management of the Hadrian's Wall world heritage site with statutory partners and other local organisations. The Hadrian's Wall Partnership Board was responsible for the management of the trail. The DDP and DMP were to be included within the work programme.
- Reincorporation of services within facilities such as The Spetchells Centre, Prudhoe to provide 'one stop shops'. The service hoped that librarians would be able to provide such a service and answer simple questions from members of the public and direction to services such as the Fix My Street system. Larger facilities were likely to include an element of tourism.
- Information regarding the library service local areas prospectus could perhaps be provided to Local Area Committees.

- Whether a joint meeting should be held with the Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC to look at broadband and the impact on tourism businesses as well as residents. To be included within the work programme.

The Chair reminded members that the purpose of the presentations was to identify areas for inclusion in the work programme and not to discuss any workstreams or projects in detail.

**RESOLVED** that the items listed below be included within the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny work programme, following discussion between the Scrutiny Co-ordinator and officers, to determine their inclusion at the most appropriate time to enable an effective contribution:

- Annual Review by Active Northumberland
- Presentation by future leisure services provider
- DDP and DMP
- Joint review with CSEG ESC on broadband.

## **16.2 Presentation by the Portfolio Holder for Looking After Our Communities**

Councillor Gordon Stewart, Portfolio Holder for Looking After Our Communities referred to recent changes in personnel within the organisation and directorate. He looked forward to working with the new officers who were passionate, enthusiastic and knowledgeable for the benefits of residents and businesses in the county. All portfolios had regard to inadequacies and health. He reported that results were awaited from the recent inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS). He introduced Clare McLaughlin, Interim Ceremonial Coordination Team Leader and highlighted the following within his portfolio:

- Registration Service – impacts the lives of all residents through births, marriages and bereavement. Weddings in the county attracted visitors, jobs and income to the county. The workload could be a potential area for review. Implementation of the impact of death notification service 'Settld'.
- Coroner service - hospitals, prison and arterial routes A1, A19, A68, A69 impacted on the work of the service.
- Fire and Rescue Service – challenges included the increasing number of residents, homes and vehicles on the county's roads given the location of fire stations and use of retained firefighters in rural areas. Charging of electric vehicles including e-scooters and e-bikes within residential properties as well as the dangers of their use on roads. The impact of climate change and wildfires which NFRS officers had taken a leading role on the National Fire Chiefs Council. Protection of firefighters from contaminants was to be researched with financial support being agreed in principle by Cabinet.

Councillor Stewart was proud of the staff working within his portfolio who were extremely professional and a credit to the council. He introduced Deborah

Brown, Strategic Policy, Risk and Performance Officer and Graeme Binning, Chief Fire Officer to provide further information. Reference was made to the 4 year Community Risk Management Plan and the information on page 36 of the PowerPoint slides which the service would be focussing on in the next 12 months. (A copy of the presentation is enclosed with the signed minutes.)

### **a) Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service Annual Performance Report**

The Chief Fire Officer presented the Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service Annual Performance Report 2023/24. He hoped that the report could be presented on annual basis, to give assurance to residents and the Council that the service was delivering the service that was required. He drew the committee's attention to information on page 61 of the papers which detailed priorities and outcomes in the NCC Corporate Plan 2023-26 and the scale of work undertaken by the service.

The Strategic Policy, Risk and Performance Officer highlighted the following:

- The incident profile for the identification of risks for 2022/23 (page 50) – the total number of incidents had increased by 25% over the last 10 years, following the national trend. Two risks were being closely monitored due to rising numbers of incidences and to understand the possible implications on resource:
  - Effecting Entry/Exit – Support provided to North East Ambulance Services in 2017/18 to use powers of entry mainly where there was a medical emergency.
  - Assist of Agencies.
- Monitoring of 22 core measures was carried out by the management team on a monthly basis, a quarterly Strategic Performance Board and the Assurance and Challenge Panel to ensure regular review.
- Response standards (page 55) – provision of the service in a large rural county was challenging and review of the standards and particularly those below target were to be undertaken as a priority of the Community Risk Management Plan 2022-26. However, implementation of actions within fire control had resulted in an improvement in CM17 (page 56) from 64.98% to 78.63% in June 2023.
- Analysis of the economic and social value of the NFRS was being undertaken with Nottingham Trent University and the service was participating in a pilot to support community and risk management planning.

The Chief Fire Officer referred to his vision and value of the NFRS and contribution to services provided by the county council, with a high level of integration. He was participating in work on the Inequality Strategy and had been co-opted on the Health and Well-Being Board.

Members welcomed the information, layout of the annual performance report and excellent service provided by the NFRS. The following points were raised:

- The icons for road traffic collisions and rescues on page 51 needed to be swapped.

- Clarification to be provided within the report that the total number of incidents could include more than incident type and therefore totaling the individual incidents would not equate to the figure provided.
- Civil Contingencies - Further information be provided on the Stronger Local Resilience Forum pilot and COMAH exercise.
- Whether further scrutiny was required of the NFRS core measures and Economic and Social Values toolkit. Reference was made to the recent introduction of additional scrutiny of the core measures by the Assurance and Challenge Panel which included elected members. It was therefore agreed that a summary report on core measures and the E&SV toolkit be provided to the committee when the next annual performance report was considered.
- Clarification was provided on the dangers of charging mobile phones, e-scooters and e-bikes *within* residential dwellings, particularly when this took place overnight.
- Bereavement services (Settld) provided by the Registration Service was sympathetic and helpful. Weddings also aided the visitor economy, and it was suggested that the service did not require scrutiny.
- NFRS had employed a dedicated Communications Officer as a result of comments made after the 2018 inspection by HMICFRS. This had raised the level of communication of key messages on social media by NFRS with articles planned on a 4-week basis. The benefits of this had been seen with 2,000 visitors to the open day at West Hartford Fire Headquarters which had solely been promoted on social media. Articles had also aided the recruitment of retained firefighters. Use of 'local' social media pages could be beneficial for very local issues and work would be undertaken to assess how these could be identified and best used.
- The difficult work undertaken by the Coroner Service was acknowledged. It was agreed that information recently considered by the Health and Well-Being OSC would be circulated to committee members before consideration of whether any further scrutiny was required.

**RESOLVED** that

1. The contents of the NFRS Annual Performance Report be noted and its review be included in the work programme on an annual basis including information on the scrutiny of core measures and the E&SV toolkit.
2. The item listed below be included within the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny work programme, following discussion between the Scrutiny Co-ordinator and officers, to determine their inclusion at the most appropriate time to enable an effective contribution :
  - Stronger Local Resilience Forum pilot and COMAH exercise.

**17. LGSCO PUBLIC INTEREST REPORT**

The committee were informed that a Public Interest Report had been issued by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) in relation to a complaint raised by a neighbour of a residential property that had been

granted planning permission or a rear extension. (A copy of the report is enclosed with the signed minutes).

In accordance with Section 31(2) of the Local Government Act 1974, 'The report shall be laid before the authority concerned and it shall be the duty of that authority to consider the report and, within the period of three months beginning with the date on which they received the report, or such longer period as the Local Commissioner may agree in writing, to notify the Local Commissioner of the action which the authority have taken or propose to take.' Members were asked to consider recommendations made to rectify the situation in response to the Ombudsman's findings.

Judith Murphy, Development Management Area Manager (South East), provided a brief summary of the circumstances which had led to the complaint to the Ombudsman. She explained that a thorough assessment of the planning application had been carried out, but due to the number of householder planning applications, a very short report had been written which had not documented all of the material planning considerations that had been assessed. The Ombudsman had concluded that he was unable to determine whether those material considerations had been fully assessed as the report had not documented them all.

It was confirmed that revisions had been made to the Procedure Notes for Householder Applications to require within the documentation that the various elements of an application had been assessed, even if there were no concerns.

Members commented on the commitment required to take a complaint to the LGSCO as many were not progressed past the earlier stages. They welcomed the report; it was hoped that the actions that had been taken would lead to a reduction in complaints in the future.

It was suggested that the performance of the planning section should be reviewed, given the availability of staff, recruitment difficulties particularly with the numbers of planning applications as well as retrospective applications. It was recommended that a review should include development management, enforcement, legal and details of complaints at all stages of the process.

In answer to a question regarding recruitment on the fifth action on page 76 of the papers, the Development Management Area Manager, stated that the service had ran a number of recruitment exercises in recent months to address staffing vacancies with a limited number of applications. Consideration was being given to the reasons for this. The Chair referred to a workforce report considered by the Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC and an explanation given by the Director of Workforce and Organisational Development that additional payments could be made in some technical areas although posts were governed by local government pay scales.



It was confirmed that LGSCO decisions of this nature, where a fault had been found with the process, were rare, particularly as over 3,500 planning applications had been received in the current year to date. Many complaints were not investigated as the complaint related to a grievance against the outcome or no fault had been found with the process.

It was believed that if the revised process had been in place for this application, the complaint to the LGSCO would have been dismissed as the planning report would have documented the assessment of all of the material planning considerations. The committee also noted the size of the payment that the LGSCO had recommended be made. It was not known which budget this had been paid from but there would be more significant costs against the Council on other cases and it was requested that information on these should be included in the review.

An additional amendment to the planning process required case officers to upload reports to the system, which were checked by a senior officer before a decision could be issued by the Central Registry team. It was believed that the additional safeguards within the process prevented a decision being issued without a case officer report being uploaded to the system. It was also confirmed that presentation of the report to the committee was within the time specified; the date of the LGSCO's email could be circulated if this was required.

**RESOLVED** that:

1. The LGSCO's Public Interest report (at Appendix A), be received. (The LGSCO has confirmed via email on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2023 that it is satisfied that the Council has completed all remedy actions as set out above, and that a report is to be considered by Members of Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2023.)
2. The Communities and Place OSC noted that officers have acted on recommendations in the report in that:
  - a. Mr X has been sent a letter of apology and been paid the remedy of £300 in recognition of a degree of loss of his privacy, his time and trouble in bringing his complaint to our attention, and the disappointment and frustration caused by what has happened.
  - b. Discussed with the applicants the matter of attaching screening to the balcony, which has now been done. An offer of payment by the Council was made, however, the applicant had attached screening of their own volition;
  - c. Investigated the lack of response from enforcement and offered an apology for the delay. An enforcement officer met with the applicant to discuss the points of complaint made by Mr X around use of materials and concluded that whilst some materials used were slightly different to those approved, they were acceptable. Mr X was advised of this position;
  - d. Have reviewed the use of standard paragraphs within officer reports in line with the Ombudsman's recommendations and produced a revised procedure note;

- e. Recruitment and Retention has been a significant concern within the Planning Department for a long period of time. Recently, we have successfully recruited into a number of posts which is envisaged will assist with high workloads.
3. The revisions to the Council's policy (as set out at Appendix B), be noted.
4. A report on planning performance including numbers of applications, resourcing, enforcement including the legal process and costs of decisions against Council decisions.

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

The Committee reviewed its work programme for the 2023/24 council year. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes).

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator confirmed that he had been liaising with officers and Portfolio Holders regarding the presentations at the meeting in July and they would be scheduled at a time to when they would be most effective. An update on the Fix My Street system was to be considered at the next meeting in October.

The Chair reported that:

- A request had been received from Councillor Dodd, a former member of the committee, on a number of matters relating to resilience and these would be incorporated within the joint broadband review discussed earlier in the meeting.
- A response from Openreach to the report of the Storm Arwen Task and Finish Group sent to a dormant mailbox would be circulated to members of the committee.

In answer to a question, Councillor Mather, the Vice-Chair, agreed to raise the issue of contacting elected members in emergency situations when he met with the Business Resilience and Emergency Planning Lead to discuss rural communications.

Issues debated by members for possible inclusion in the work programme included:

- Issues with fleet services when a problem was discovered with a new vehicle had resulted in it being taken out of service for 14 weeks and returned to the manufacturer for modification works. Members had previously suggested the retention of older essential vehicles. Promotion of landowner responsibilities and the impact of fallen trees or lack of maintenance of private land which impacted on the highway network. It was agreed that a meeting would be arranged with the Director of Environment and Transport, Chair, Vice-Chair and Scrutiny Co-ordinator to consider the best way forward with details circulated to committee members by email in due course.

- Consideration be given to changes to policing arrangements when a response to correspondence to the Police and Crime Commissioner and Chief Constable for Northumbria Police was received.
- An update on progress of the Storm Arwen Action Plan. Feedback would be sought from members on the Openreach response, review of broadband and consideration be given to a standalone meeting.

**RESOLVED** that the work programme be noted.

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

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

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# Agenda Item 4

## DECISIONS TAKEN BY CABINET SINCE LAST OSC MEETING AND FORTHCOMING CABINET DECISIONS - SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER 2023

DECISION	CABINET DATE/DECISION
<b>Cabinet Papers – 10 October 2023</b>	<a href="https://northumberland.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=140&amp;MId=2257">https://northumberland.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=140&amp;MId=2257</a>
<b>Environmental Policy Statement</b>  To propose the adoption of an overarching Environmental Policy Statement by Northumberland County Council.	10 October 2023  <b>RESOLVED</b> that:  (a) Cabinet maintain its commitment to tackling climate change and to the development of a new Climate Change Action Plan which will set out the actions, work programme and targets that will be progressed over the period 2024 to 2026;  (b) Cabinet adopt the Environmental Policy Statement and continuously strive to meet the on-going commitments contained within the statement (see Appendix A) and the actions and targets (see Appendix B) to the report;  (c) the Environment Policy Statement be widely communicated and publicised to help raise public awareness, engagement and active participation on environmental matters across the county and  (d) Cabinet note the ‘Potential Areas of Additional Environmental Activity’ outlined in section 5.4 of the report. It is intended that these additional areas of activity will be subject to further development and, where appropriate, any associated budget implications will be considered as part of this year’s MTFP budget setting process.
<b>Building our Data Capability - Data Academy Pilot</b>  The purpose of this report was to outline the need to develop our data skills and capabilities and seek approval for the proposed establishment of a ‘Data Academy’ and associated use of unallocated Apprenticeship Levy to fund.	10 October 2023  <b>RESOLVED</b> that Cabinet approve the awarding of a pilot programme in data skill apprenticeships to the apprenticeship provider ‘Multiverse’ with a Government Levy spend of £0.6m (excluding VAT).
<b>Summary of New Capital Proposals considered by Officer Capital Strategy Group</b>	10 October 2023  <b>RESOLVED</b> that  <b>Ponteland to Callerton Phase 2</b>  (a) Cabinet approve the revised phase 2 approach and approve the additional funds of £0.518 million to deliver phase 2 and progress to scheme completion; and

	(b) Cabinet approve the inclusion of £0.518 million to the Capital Programme in 2023-24.
<p><b>Corporate Performance – Quarter 4 2022/23 Outturn</b></p> <p>This report provides a summary of the progress against the Council's three Corporate Plan priorities using the Council's performance at the end of Quarter 4, 2022/23 (Q4)</p>	<p>10 October 2023</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b> that:</p> <p>(a) Cabinet note the progress against the three Corporate Priorities as summarised in the report; and</p> <p>(b) Cabinet agree to progress against the three Corporate Priorities at end of Quarter 4 2022/23 being reported to Full Council at its November meeting.</p>
<p><b>Food &amp; Feed, Safety &amp; Standards Service Plan 2023/24</b></p> <p>The purpose of this report was to present to the Cabinet, for its consideration the Food and Feed, Safety and Standards Service Plan for 2023/24</p>	<p>10 October 2023</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b> that Cabinet receives and adopts the Food and Feed, Safety and Standards Service Plan for 2023/24.</p>

## FORTHCOMING CABINET DECISIONS

<p><b>Strengthened Biodiversity Duty and Reporting Obligations</b></p> <p>The legal duty imposed on public bodies since 2006 to have regard to the purpose of conserving biodiversity has been significantly strengthened through a legislative amendment to a requirement to take action to conserve and enhance biodiversity, with a planning and reporting framework that has to be complied with. This report sets out the implications of this duty for the Council and sets out the actions that need to be taken over the next year to comply with it.</p>	7 November 2023
<p><b>Approval of the Council Tax Support Scheme 2024-25</b></p> <p>The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2024-25 to continue to provide support at a maximum level of 92% of council tax liability.</p>	7 November 2023
<p><b>Corporate Feedback Annual Report 2022-23</b></p> <p>The purpose of the Annual Report is to review the operation of the complaints process over twelve months (01.04.2022 to 31.03.2023), including statistical data, and to provide the local authority with how it keeps itself informed about how effective its current arrangements are for handling customer complaints.</p>	7 November 2023
<p><b>Delegate Authority to Award Leisure Contract</b></p> <p>The purpose of this report is to seek permission to delegate authority to enable the contract award of the Northumberland Community Leisure and Well-being Service.</p>	7 November 2023
<p><b>North East Devolution</b></p> <p>The purpose of this report is to consider and determine if consent should be given to the making of an Order that would abolish the North East and North of Tyne Combined Authorities, whilst at the same time establishing a new North East Mayoral Combined Authority.</p>	7 November 2023
<p><b>Summary of New Capital Proposals considered by Officer Capital Strategy Group</b></p> <p>This is a report of the Capital Proposals received and considered by the Capital Strategy Group.</p>	7 November 2023
<p><b>Adaptions for Disabled People</b></p> <p>To report on additional Disabled Facilities Grant funding received from Government, and to ask the Cabinet to consider the case for revisions to the Council's discretionary grants policy.</p>	12 December 2023
<p><b>Financial Performance 2023-24 – Position at End of September 2023</b></p>	12 December 2023

The report will provide Cabinet with the revenue and capital financial performance against budget as at 30 September 2023.	
<p><b>Outcomes of the Tender for New School Buildings for Astley High and Whytrigg Middle Schools</b></p> <p>Update Cabinet on the outcomes of the tender process for the construction of new school buildings for Astley High School and Whytrigg Middle School and seek the delegated approval to award the construction contract.</p>	12 December 2023
<p><b>Leisure Programme Update</b></p> <p>To update Cabinet with progress on the Leisure programme</p>	12 December 2023
<p><b>Budget 2024-25, Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-28 and 30 Year Business Plan for the Housing Revenue Account</b></p> <p>The report presents to Cabinet, the updated Budget 2024-25, Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-28 and 30 year Business plan for the Housing Revenue Account</p>	<p>16 January 2024</p> <p>Council</p> <p>17 January 2024</p> <p>21 February 2024</p>
<p><b>Leisure Programme Update</b></p> <p>To update Cabinet with progress on the Leisure programme</p>	9 April 2024





# Northumberland County Council

Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 25<sup>th</sup> October 2023

## **HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPER STRATEGY FOR NORTHUMBERLAND 2022 – 2026 ACTION PLAN PROGRESSION**

**Report of Councillor(s)** Colin Horncastle, Cabinet Member for Looking After our Environment

**Responsible Officer(s):** Simon Neilson, Executive Director - Place and Regeneration

### **1. Link to Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan**

This report is relevant to the **People First** value and the **Driving Economic Growth and Tackling Inequalities** priorities included in the NCC Corporate Plan 2023 - 2026 which states:

*PEOPLE FIRST - We provide services to our people (residents, colleagues, members, partners, visitors and businesses) through lasting, genuine, relationships that make a positive difference to their lives and their communities. We listen and understand our people's needs and put them at the heart of our decision making.*

*DRIVING ECONOMIC GROWTH - We will deliver a mix of quality housing across the county to meet the needs of the community and our changing population.*

*TACKLING INEQUALITIES - All Adults Living Well, Regardless of Age, Background, Illness or Disability - Everyone should have the opportunity to have a good life and play a part in creating strong communities.*

### **2. Purpose of report**

The following report presents members with an update of the progression against the Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy for Northumberland 2022 – 2026 action plan.

### **3. Recommendations**

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Committee note the contents of the report and the updates regarding actions that have been taken to meet the priorities identified to supports our residents who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

### **4. Forward plan date and reason for urgency if applicable**

Report requested by the Communities and Place Scrutiny Committee as a follow up to a previous report, presented on the 5<sup>th</sup> April 2023, detailing the updated Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy 2022-2026. The Scrutiny Committee have requested an update outlining the progression against the priorities identified.

### **5. Background**

- 5.1 The Council's Homelessness Strategy for Northumberland 2022-2026 detailed 5 key strategic priorities for the delivery of homelessness and housing options support for Northumberland residents. Since that strategy was published in March 2023 an Action Plan has been developed to identify the key actions that need to be implemented to help us achieve the identified priorities.
- 5.2 This strategy supports the Council's priorities for the delivery of our statutory obligations to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness whilst also supporting the delivery of the Council's Corporate Priorities and the delivery of the principle within the Housing Strategy for Northumberland that having a decent home is fundamental to the health and wellbeing of everyone living in Northumberland.
- 5.3 The priorities within this strategy have been identified as follows;
- a) Priority 1 - Improve services and accommodation options for rough sleepers and single homeless people
  - b) Priority 2 - Provide early intervention, prevention, and relief of homelessness through effective partnership working
  - c) Priority 3 - Improve access to suitable, affordable, and quality permanent, temporary, and emergency accommodation across all sectors
  - d) Priority 4 - Link health, well-being, and housing together to improve the life chances and aspirations of those affected by homelessness
  - e) Priority 5 - Develop homelessness pathways for specific groups including victims of domestic abuse, young people, prison leavers and armed forces veterans
- 5.4 The Council's Homelessness and Housing Options Team have been working proactively with colleagues and external partners and stakeholders to progress the actions plan. So far to date we have
- a) Brought forward an additional 14 properties for temporary accommodation, which include accommodation for single homeless people with complex needs
  - b) Commissioned an outreach service to work with rough sleepers
  - c) Established a rough sleeper action group bringing together multiple agencies to support work with complex and/or high-risk rough sleepers

- d) Begun working with the Northumbria Specialist Emergency Care Hospital to develop discharge protocols for homeless people
- e) Worked in partnership with external partners and council services to develop, staff training, policies and procedures to implement the duties of the Domestic Abuse Act (2021)

5.5 We will continue to ensure services are delivered with a focus on preventing homelessness and rough sleeping, through the implementation of the strategy and associated action plan, which identifies opportunities for effective use of existing resources as well as sourcing new, as well as prevention and relief activity and the supply of settled and temporary accommodation to help meet local needs.

## **6. Options open to the Council and reasons for the recommendations**

6.1 The council's Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy 2022–2026 was adopted by Cabinet on 14th March 2023 and reflects the needs and demands for homelessness service and housing options advice and support across the county.

Five key priorities were identified within the strategy, namely

- Priority 1 - Improve services and accommodation options for rough sleepers and single homeless people
- Priority 2 - Provide early intervention, prevention, and relief of homelessness through effective partnership working
- Priority 3 - Improve access to suitable, affordable, and quality permanent, temporary, and emergency accommodation across all sectors
- Priority 4 - Link health, well-being, and housing together to improve the life chances and aspirations of those affected by homelessness
- Priority 5 - Develop homelessness pathways for specific groups including victims of domestic abuse, young people, prison leavers and armed forces veterans

6.2 Following adoption of the Strategy an action plan was developed reflecting the actions that were to be completed to deliver against each priority.

6.3 This action plan has been updated and is now presented to members for their information and comment.

## **7. Implications**

<b>Policy</b>	Supports the delivery of the Corporate Plan and the priorities within the Homelessness Strategy for Northumberland 2022-2026
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Sustaining tenancies and reducing homelessness has a positive impact on the budget.

<b>Legal</b>	The Homelessness service is a Statutory Service and is delivered in line with requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
<b>Procurement</b>	There are no direct implications arising from this report.
<b>Human resources</b>	There are no direct implications arising from this report.
<b>Property</b>	Details the council’s ambitions for homelessness & housing options services This is likely to lead to an increase in council-owned stock being used as temporary accommodation.
<b>The Equalities Act: is a full impact assessment required and attached?</b>	No - not required at this point An updated EIA will be completed as part of any specific actions identified to ensure that fair access to housing for all residents is considered.
<b>Risk assessment</b>	There are no direct implications arising from this report.
<b>Crime and disorder</b>	Rough sleepers are far more likely to be victims of crime, including violent assault, abuse and intimidation, compared to the general public. Homelessness is a major factor which influences criminal activity amongst, particularly young people facing housing insecurity and the inability to access suitable and stable housing can force them toward a cycle of homelessness and offending behaviours.
<b>Customer considerations</b>	Enables provision of suitable accommodation for all residents
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	There are no direct implications arising from this report.
<b>Health and wellbeing</b>	Sustaining tenancies and reducing homelessness & rough sleeping will have a positive impact upon the health & wellbeing of residents.
<b>Wards</b>	(All Wards);

**8. Background papers**

[Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy for Northumberland 2022-2026](#)

**9. Links to other key reports already published**

Not applicable

**10. Author and Contact Details**

Julie Stewart, Strategic Housing Manager  
Email: [Julie.Stewart@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:Julie.Stewart@northumberland.gov.uk)

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# Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2022-2026

## Action Plan

Priority 1				
Improve services and accommodation options for rough sleepers and single homeless people				
Key Tasks	Key activities/Milestones	Responsible Dept./Agency	Progression	Date for completion
Increase accommodation options for clients with complex multiple needs where the use of shared accommodation is not appropriate	Increase the amount of flexible emergency accommodation options for homeless people, including those with pets by exploring availability of housing with both social and private landlords.	Homelessness Service	3 units	
	Ensuring people with lived experience of homelessness are at the heart of finding solutions			
	Work across the region to establish reconnection policies and develop cross boundary services and policies		Discussed at Northeast Regional Meetings – to be agreed by all 12 local authorities	March 2024
Develop opportunities with partners to engage with Clients with complex needs, including those people sleeping rough, to more	Ensure appropriate safeguarding practices are embedded across the Homelessness Partnership, inclusive of further developing a robust multi-agency safeguarding approach for rough sleeping			

easily access services and support.	Ensure that support is offered or provided to rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping that meets their needs, identifying strengths and goals that the person wishes to work towards and placing the individual at the heart of the process.			
	Continue to ensure a rapid response to rough sleeping reports across Northumberland, ensuring that any opportunities for grant-funding of services is maximised.		Outreach team now in place and responding to all cases of rough sleeping; Monthly Contract meetings completed with Changing Lives; Service to be re-commissioned in 2024.	August 2024
	Develop partnerships to tackle rough sleeping and target known rough sleepers	Homelessness Service	Rough Sleeper Action Group established and targeting assistance to known rough sleepers	Complete/Ongoing
Collaborate with health, mental health, and substance abuse service providers to address underlying issues	OC DHR Recommendation to be fulfilled			



contributing to homelessness				
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Priority 2				
Provide early intervention, prevention, and relief of homelessness through effective partnership working				
Key Tasks	Key activities/Milestones	Responsible Dept./Agency	Progression	Date for completion
Develop opportunities to be notified earlier that someone is at risk of homelessness from any tenure to help prevent homelessness	Work alongside landlords to create robust early alert systems and ensure protocols are in place for tenancies at risk or when properties are going to be removed from the market			
	Develop a web-based housing advice platform for anyone seeking advice, guidance, and support if homeless or threatened with homelessness			
	Work in partnership with other organisations such as health services (including mental health and drug and alcohol services); advice agencies; money advice; voluntary and community sector groups; the Police and other emergency services; and domestic abuse services to set up an early warning system to identify those at risk of homelessness			
Use data, feedback, and evidence to understand ways to work smarter to manage	Complete ongoing analysis of data and performance to ensure that working practices reflect service demand.		Team sessions completed to review working practices based on statistical	

demand and to inform how we improve prevention and relief intervention services			information. Pilot implemented to be reviewed January 2024	
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Priority 3				
Improve access to suitable, affordable, and quality permanent, temporary, and emergency accommodation across all sectors				
Key Tasks	Key activities/Milestones	Responsible Dept./Agency	Progression	Date for completion
Develop an increased number of opportunities to enable clients with complex needs or criminal behaviour to access suitable temporary or permanent accommodation.	Increase the amount of flexible emergency accommodation options for homeless people, including those with pets by exploring availability of housing with both social and private landlords.			
	Develop the incentives available to private landlords, such as rent deposit, bond or insurance product, to encourage			

	them to accommodate someone who is homeless.			
	Work with Adult Social Care to explore more accommodation options through the Complex Housing Panel			

Priority 4				
Link health, well-being, and housing together to improve the life chances and aspirations of those affected by homelessness				
Key Tasks	Key activities/Milestones	Responsible Dept./Agency	Progression	Date for completion
Explore opportunities with Public Health and other Health partners to support the improvements to the health & wellbeing of Rough Sleepers, homeless clients and those at risk of homelessness.	Understand the existing partnerships and how they can support current demand for services			
	OC DHR – shared commissioning of services for people with mental health issues			
	Domestic Abuse services			
Develop options with local hospitals to explore safe discharge to help prevent homelessness	Meet with the NSECH Home Safe team to discuss protocols for discharge		Meeting booked for 28 <sup>th</sup> November 2023.	

Priority 5				
Develop homelessness pathways for specific groups including victims of domestic abuse, young people, prison leavers and armed forces veterans				
Key Tasks	Key activities/Milestones	Responsible Dept./Agency	Progression	Date for completion
Work with partners to prevent homelessness due to domestic abuse and ensure rapid rehousing for people who are made homeless due to domestic abuse	Contribute to the discussion regarding the options available as part of the implementation of the DA Act duties			
Develop options with local organisations including the prison, hospitals, and other Local Authority departments to explore safe discharge to help prevent homelessness				
Provide early advice and housing options services to people leaving the armed forces and prioritise veterans for housing and support				
Improve our understanding and service offer to ethnic minorities, the LGBT+ community and other minority groups.				



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## Northumberland County Council

Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 25 October 2023

### Update on Implementation of Fix My Street

**Report of Councillor(s)** John Riddle, Cabinet Member for Improving Roads and Highways

**Responsible Officer(s):** Simon Neilson, Executive Director - Place and Regeneration

#### 1. **Link to Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan**

Achieving Value for Money – Residents receive the best customer experience; Working better, more efficiently; Making a difference with digital.  
Driving Economic Growth – Thriving places and culture; A connected County

#### 2. **Purpose of report**

To provide an update to the Committee on the implementation and operation of the Fix My Street public realm reporting system.

#### 3. **Recommendations**

- 3.1 The Committee are recommended to note the progress that has been made on the development and implementation of the Fix My Street system.

#### 4. **Background**

- 4.1 The County Council had ambitions to streamline reporting processes both for the benefit of residents / the wider community and for internal staff efficiency, and hence was looking for a public realm reporting service that would help achieve the following aims:-

- Meet the expectations of residents for a modern, map-based tool to report public realm issues such as fly tipping, graffiti, highway defects, abandoned vehicles and trees/grounds maintenance and to provide timely feedback on close out / completion.
- Help reinforce the good reputation of the County Council to deliver an excellent service by being more transparent around public realm issues and actions being taken in response to issues raised in accordance with service standards.

- Integrating with existing systems such as the Lagan / PlaceCube customer case management systems and Mayrise / Alloy highway management systems to increase internal efficiencies, as well as offering residents/users a more user friendly experience.
  - Through integration provide efficiency in these systems and opportunities for continuous improvement.
- 4.2 The FixMyStreet Pro system was identified as a street and environment fault reporting service which was designed to be intuitive and accessible for residents to use across all mobile devices of choice. It had been successfully implemented in a number of local authorities across the country and offered opportunities to integrate with other NCC systems, bringing efficiencies through channel shift and by reducing duplicate reports of issues.
- 4.3 A basic trial of FixMyStreet using My Society's Open Source code was undertaken and established that the product worked successfully. In October 2022 it was therefore decided to implement the FixMyStreet system using the full FixMyStreet Pro Gold Package. This full package allowed integration with existing systems and access to the FixMyStreet Pro reporting features such as internal dashboards and visual heatmaps for public realm issues raised across Northumberland. The procurement process was initiated, and contracts drafted within the G-Cloud procurement framework in November 2022. The contract was awarded in December 2022 with the project start and initiation programmed for January 2023.
- 4.4 In February 2023 the initial scoping of the detailed project was mapped out. This involved a business readiness interview followed by a 14-week implementation process. The business readiness process was undertaken with My Society and an internal Council stakeholders group consisting of representatives of customer services, neighbourhood services, local services business support, highways, corporate complaints and information technology. The business readiness process was carried out to :-
- understand the Council's current systems and organisational structures,
  - visualise the current and future service delivery incorporating Fix My Street,
  - explore the consequences of roll-out,
  - identify areas of opportunity or concern across all stakeholder departments and
  - consider future opportunities for system integration across the Council's systems.
- 4.5 As well as developing the systems, a key element of implementing a system such as this relates to training the staff who will be involved in receiving the service requests, resolving the issues and providing the feedback information on actions taken that will then be available to the public. A significant programme of training was undertaken with staff across the key services areas including highways and transport, neighbourhood services, customer services, fire and rescue and I.T. This ensured that they were all both familiar with the proposed system and able to action any service requests that they received.
- 4.6 As part of the development of the system a suite of feedback messages were developed across the wide variety of issues that were likely to be reported so that



staff could provide feedback on the stage that an individual response to a request had reached. Where possible this was integrated into the back office systems so that once the back office system was updated it would automatically update the Fix My Street system and provide feedback to the person who had reported the issue.

- 4.7 After system development and testing, a soft launch of the Fix My Street system was undertaken for use by internal staff on the 24<sup>th</sup> April 2023. The full launch to the public was implemented on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2023. As well as staff training, information on use of the system was provided to Members and to Town and Parish Councils. The launch of the system was also covered through print media and social media communications. Training in relation to the system was also offered to Members and Town and Parish Councillors in May. A Virtual training session was held with the NALC group members on the 6<sup>th</sup> of July 2023

Since its launch in May 2023 the Council have received over 17000 reports from over 6,000 different users.

The status of the reports received up to 27<sup>th</sup> September was as follows:-

<b>Status</b>	<b>Number</b>
Open / In Progress	7647
Complete	6609
No further action required	898
Duplicate request	1359
Not NCC responsibility	663
<b>Total</b>	<b>17176</b>

Of the reports received 55% have been completed/closed with 45% still being 'open/in progress' – the latter includes reports just received that still need to be reviewed and for those in progress this normally entails inspection to determine whether the reported issue meets agreed intervention criteria and if so, scheduling and then completion of the works in accordance with service standards.

As noted at the time, it was expected that the launch of the system would generate reports over and above expected 'normal' volumes; this has since proven to be the case. This is testament to the ease of reporting and publicity associated with the system's launch. It should be noted that this experience is typical of comparator councils who have introduced the same or similar reporting tools.

Northumberland County Councils own experience shows that we have seen a +143% increase in the number of reports made compared to previous similar periods. It is expected that the number of future reports made will reduce from this peak over time.

Latest statistics will be shared with the scrutiny committee at its 25 October 2023 meeting.

- 4.8 The key benefits identified from implementing the system to date are as follows :-
- Improved process for the public to report issues, including locations, photographs and asset based reporting.
    - Reports of issues automatically integrated into back office systems such as Alloy for highways

- Person reporting issues provided with feedback on actions taken at key stages.
- Mapping system identifies issues that have already been reported, preventing duplication of reporting.
- Staff across the Council, including customer services staff, able to see current status of any reported issue
- Improved data allowing clearer analysis of issues being reported.

4.9 The implementation of the system has been very successfully, but as with any wide-ranging system of this type there are still a number of improvements that can be made, and these are being actively worked on. Staff training is continuing to ensure that the responses to reported issues provide sufficient and appropriate information regarding the status of the report and any actions that have been taken. Responses given are being actively reviewed as part of implementation and specific training given where it is felt necessary. The menu of available pre-prepared responses is also being added to where gaps are found, or new situations occur. The data available from the system is also starting to be used to further analyse trends and to share with service managers.

4.10 Once these initial improvements are made, it is intended to consider what further enhancements can be made in the use of the system. This could include integrating the system with Town and Parish Councils and other bodies such as National Parks, so that if a report made by the public onto Fix My Street relates to an asset which is owned by those bodies, then that could be reported directly to the Town and Parishes through the system. Similarly, there may be opportunities to link with organised volunteer groups such as for litter picking and winter wardens to record activities they have undertaken or issues they have resolved. As the Council’s new Place Cube system is developed and integrated there may be further opportunities for integration of systems, whilst further work will also be undertaken using Power BI or other systems to analyse detailed performance information and data, to drive further service improvement.

## 5. Implications

<b>Policy</b>	The implementation of the Fix My Street system supports the Policies set out in the Council’s Corporate Plan to ensure residents receive the best customer experience and that the Council’s services work better and more efficiently through use of digital systems
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	The initial cost of implementation involved expenditure on a £12k business readiness programme and £38k system set up and integration and on-going licence fees for the system of £38k per annum. It is expected these will be partially offset by a £12k per annum reduction in costs in Customer Services as use of the system reduces and channel shift reduces the volume of telephone interactions.
<b>Legal</b>	None

<b>Procurement</b>	The system was procured through the G Cloud framework
<b>Human resources</b>	None
<b>Property</b>	None
<b>The Equalities Act: is a full impact assessment required and attached?</b>	No - not required at this point All existing channels for reporting issues remain open, with Fix My Street enhancing on line reporting channels
<b>Risk assessment</b>	The key risks that were identified in the business case for the implementation (system integration difficulties, availability of staff to implement system and procurement) were overcome during the implementation process.
<b>Crime and disorder</b>	None
<b>Customer considerations</b>	Significant improvement in on line customer reporting capabilities and ability to provide feedback to residents and customers on the response to the issues they have reported
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	None
<b>Health and wellbeing</b>	Improved reporting of environmental issues and defects that could be detrimental to wellbeing
<b>Wards</b>	(All Wards);

**6. Background papers**

Not Applicable

**7. Links to other key reports already published**

None

**8. Author and Contact Details**

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Northumberland County Council

Communities and Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Work Programme 2023-2024

## 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

This will include work that the OSC can be more proactive in early stage development work in formulating new policies and strategies; to investigate matters of interest and concern to the wider community, and to keep under review the performance and financial position of the Council. Issues identified by the Committee for inclusion on the work programme are:

- North East Transport Plan
- Local Cycling Walking Investment Plans – development of the programme

- Northumberland Road Safety Strategy – use of members scheme funds and costings.
- Northumberland Rights of Way Improvement Plan
- New Section 106 system
- Green / Open spaces review
- Local Nature Reserve Strategy





Northumberland County Council  
Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2023-2024

**29 November 2023**

**Social Housing**

To consider the implications of the new Social Housing Regulations.

**Northumberland Destination Management Plan**

To examine and consider plans and initiatives to improve the visitor experience in Northumberland. (This report is prepared annually for Cabinet and therefore treated as post scrutiny so can be fluid in the programme).

**Planning Services - Performance**

To consider performance issues arising from the LGSCO report presented to by the OSC in September.

**30 January 2024**

**Library Service Strategy 2021-26**

To update the Committee on the implementation of the Strategy.

**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.

**28 February 2024**

**27 March 2024**

**Northumberland Infrastructure Funding Statement**

To consider the annual Infrastructure Funding Statement in respect of Section 106 Agreements

**24 April 2024**

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Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Monitoring Report 2023-2024

Ref	Date	Report	Decision	Outcome
1.	31 May 2023	<b>Fire and Rescue – Contamination</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that Cabinet be recommended to agree that financial support for the recommendations made by the fire and rescue service be provided to ensure that Northumberland was leading to reduce the risk of contamination and supporting fire and rescue personnel.	Recommendation was agreed by Cabinet on 11 July 2023.
2.	31 May 2023	<b>Food Waste Recycling Pilot</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that the presentation be received and food waste trial results to date be noted.	The OSC to receive further updates as appropriate.
Page 43	27 July 2023	<b>Presentation by the Portfolio Holder for Improving Our Roads and Highways</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that the items listed below be included within the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny work programme, following discussion between the Scrutiny Co-ordinator and officers, to determine their inclusion at the most appropriate time to enable an effective contribution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fix My Street (with links to Network Management Plan / road hierarchy)</li> <li>• North East Transport Plan</li> <li>• Local Cycling Walking Investment Plans – development of the programme</li> <li>• Northumberland Road Safety Strategy – use of members scheme funds and costings.</li> <li>• Northumberland Rights of Way Improvement Plan</li> </ul>	The issues identified by the Committee will be integrated into the work programme.
	4.	27 July 2023	<b>Presentation by the Portfolio Holder for Looking After Our Environment</b>	<b>RESOLVED</b> that the items listed below be included within the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny work programme, following discussion between the Scrutiny Co-ordinator and officers, to determine their inclusion at the most appropriate time to enable an effective contribution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Housing Regulation Bill</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Section 106 system</li> <li>• Green / Open spaces review</li> <li>• Local Nature Reserve Strategy</li> <li>• A task and finish group on the environment</li> </ul>	
5.	27 July 2023	<b>Update on the Development of a Tree Management Policy</b>	<p><b>RESOLVED</b> that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The progress made on developing the Tree Management Policy be noted.</li> <li>2. The draft structure of the Tree Management Policy was supported with comments made as above.</li> </ol>	The Committee will continue to monitor this issue as appropriate.
6.	27 September 2023	<b>Presentation by the Portfolio Holder for Promoting Healthy Lives</b>	<p><b>RESOLVED</b> that the items listed below be included within the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny work programme, following discussion between the Scrutiny Co-ordinator and officers, to determine their inclusion at the most appropriate time to enable an effective contribution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual Review by Active Northumberland</li> <li>• Presentation by future leisure services provider</li> <li>• DDP and DMP</li> <li>• Joint review with CSEG ESC on broadband.</li> </ul>	The issues identified by the Committee will be integrated into the work programme.
7.	27 September 2023	<p><b>Presentation by the Portfolio Holder for Looking After Our Communities</b></p> <p><b>Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service Annual Performance Report</b></p>	<p><b>RESOLVED</b> that</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The contents of the NFRS Annual Performance Report be noted and its review be included in the work programme on an annual basis including information on the scrutiny of core measures and the E&amp;SV toolkit.</li> <li>2. The item listed below be included within the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny work programme, following discussion between the Scrutiny Co-ordinator and officers, to determine their inclusion at the most appropriate time to enable an effective contribution:</li> </ol> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stronger Local Resilience Forum pilot and COMAH exercise.</li> </ul>	The issues identified by the Committee will be integrated into the work programme.
8.	27 September 2023	Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Public Interest Report	<p><b>RESOLVED</b> that</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) the report be agreed, and</li> <li>(b) a report on planning performance including numbers of applications, resourcing, enforcement</li> </ol>	A report on Planning performance be added to the OSC's work programme.

		including the legal process and costs of decisions against Council decisions.	
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