



Northumberland County Council

Your ref:

Our ref:

Enquiries to: Nichola Turnbull

Email: nichola.turnbull@northumberland.gov.uk

Tel direct: 01670 622617

Date: Tuesday, 23 May 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, 31 MAY 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. MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee are asked to note the following membership and terms of reference for the Communities and Place OSC which were agreed by Council on 17 May 2023.

10 Members (5:3:1 Ind Gp, 1 LD) (I Con place to GP)

Quorum – 3

Chair: N. Oliver

Vice Chair: M. Mather

Conservative	Labour	Independent Grouped	Liberal Democrats	Green Party	Ind Non-Grouped
D. Carr	E. Cartie	A. Dale	J. Reid	N. Morphet	
G. Castle	B. Gallacher				
M. Mather	J. Lang				
N. Oliver					

Terms of Reference

- a) To maintain an overview of the Management Agreements in place between the County Council and Active Northumberland, Woodhorn Museum Charitable Trust and Northumberland Tourism.
- b) 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 (NB see note below)
 - 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

NB CONTEST refers to the National Counter Terrorism Strategy which is split into four workstreams known as the 4Ps. This includes "Prevent" which is intended to stop individuals being drawn into, or supporting, terrorism and includes countering terrorist Northumberland County Council DRAFT Constitution – Part 05 V1 April 2023 Page 140 of 567 ideology and challenging those who promote it. A key element is "Channel" which is intended to protect the vulnerable being drawn into terrorism. The Council has the statutory responsibility to lead the Channel Panel, a multi-agency approach to protecting the vulnerable, by identifying those at risk, assessing the nature and extent of the risk and developing support plans for individuals. The Committee will also be responsible for scrutinising any similar policy initiatives.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

3. MINUTES

(Pages 1
- 22)

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

- 5 April 2023
- 26 April 2023

4. 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;

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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. 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.

5. FORWARD PLAN OF CABINET DECISIONS

(Pages
23 - 26)

To note the 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 Gordon Stewart, Portfolio Holder for Looking After Our Communities.

6.1 Firefighters Decontamination

(Pages
27 - 42)

To receive a presentation from James McNeil, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, to consider the measures that can be put in place to reduce the risk of contamination for firefighters.

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

6.2 Food Waste Recycling Pilot Update

(Pages
43 - 54)

To receive a presentation from Colin Curtis and / or David Groves, Commercial and Contracts Managers and Hannah Davidson, Assistant Project Manager, to consider the outcome of the pilot scheme and next steps.

REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATOR

7. COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME AND MONITORING REPORT

(Pages
55 - 58)

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.

8. URGENT BUSINESS

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

IF YOU HAVE AN INTEREST AT THIS MEETING, PLEASE:

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

Name:		Date of meeting:	
Meeting:			
Item to which your interest relates:			
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):			
Are you intending to withdraw from the meeting?		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
Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain. [Any unpaid directorship.]
Sponsorship	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.
Contracts	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.
Land and Property	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.
Licenses	Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the council for a month or longer
Corporate tenancies	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.
Securities	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"> i. the total nominal value of the securities* exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or 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.
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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, 5 April 2023 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor N. Oliver
(Chair, in the Chair)

MEMBERS

Cartie, E.	Gallacher, B.
Castle, G.	Lang, J.
Dale, A.	Morphet, N.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

R Murfin	Interim Executive Director of Planning & Local Services Regeneration, Commercial & Economy
S. Nicholson	Scrutiny Co-Ordinator
S. Ogle	Housing Operations Manager
P. Soderquest	Service Director - Housing and Public Protection
J. Stewart	Strategic Housing Manager
N. Turnbull	Democratic Services Officer

ALSO PRESENT

1 member of the press.

42. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Carr, Horncastle, Mather and Reid.

43. MINUTES

It was agreed that the following items referred to in the minutes would be followed up by the Scrutiny Coordinator:

- List of charges for street works permits
- Profile for applications for on-call firefighters

- Timescale for bus service improvement plan and list of the current subsidised bus services. An update was due to be considered by the OSC on 26 April 2023. A report was to be considered by Cabinet in May 2023.
- Clarification regarding the Council's Tree Management Policy and Tree & Woodland Strategy.

A Councillor reported that training on the One Network system would be available after the Annual Council meeting.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Communities and Place OSC held on 8 March 2023, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

44. FORWARD PLAN OF CABINET DECISIONS

The Committee considered the Forward Plan of key decisions (April to July 2023). (Schedule enclosed with the signed minutes).

Members discussed proposed changes to the timing of scrutiny reports following the Caller Review to incorporate best practice. Members had differing opinions as to whether there should be pre or post scrutiny of Cabinet decisions. Some members held the view that OSCs should be able to pre-scrutinise reports prior to their consideration by Cabinet. A report was due to be considered by the Council at the annual meeting on 17 May 2023 when the issue would be discussed, and a decision taken. The Scrutiny Co-ordinator commented that preparations were being made should the proposals be agreed.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

45. OVERVIEW

45.1 S106 Infrastructure Funding Statement 2021-2022

The Committee were presented with the third Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) which was required to be published by all Local Planning Authorities which entered into Section 106 planning obligations. (A copy of the report is enclosed with the signed minutes.)

Rob Murfin, Interim Executive Director of Planning and Local Services, Regeneration, Commercial and Economy explained that the statement for 2021-2022 now included a breakdown of all Section 106 funds for each of the 5 Local Area Committees, following a request by members. The statement has been commended by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities as one of the best and clearest statements, and represents national good practice. He highlighted the following data from the Executive Summary:

- The total amount of additional money to be provided under any planning obligations entered during 2021-2022 was £13,674,343.51.
- The total amount of money received from planning obligations was £4.6 million.
- Nearly £3.5 million had been secured by s278 Highway agreements for highway improvement works.
- The total amount of money retained at the end of the reported year was £10.8 million.

He reported that the Government was consulting on the implementation of a tariff-based approach which would be based on the final sale price of a development. The amount per square metre would be set locally and subject to viability testing. A report on the implications on changes to funding levels would be brought to a future meeting of the committee.

In answer to questions, he explained that:

- Although legal agreements may have been signed during the year, work may not physically have started on a development during that year or reached a trigger point for payment of monies.
- Funds received could have included agreements from the current or previous year on attainment of a trigger point.
- Money retained by the Council included money which had been collected but not yet spent as it would be kept until there were sufficient funds to pay for a project, such as a school extension. The majority related to provision of affordable housing in a Housing Developer Fund.
- Payments to Parish and Town Councils were made in arrears when schemes, such as for a play area, were reimbursed when a project had been constructed.
- A potential total was provided within the breakdown for each Local Area Council. It was noted that not all developments proceeded to construction due to market conditions, and therefore this figure was not always realised.
- Trigger points could be subject to negotiation.
- More money was likely to be agreed by a developer if payable at phased trigger points during the construction of a development compared with amounts received upfront when building commenced at a development. A valuation-based decision would be made by officers as to which was more beneficial on a case-by-case basis.
- The current system required negotiations on every site whereas a tariff-based system paid on sales would be easier for administration. This would be particularly beneficial in high sales areas such as Southeast England.
- Sections 106 agreements were negotiated to address the impact of a developments and were based on evidence, such as a requirement for additional education places at a higher level. They could not normally be used to address existing maintenance problems at the local village school.
- The strength of a levy-based approach enabled the council to spend funds according to an Infrastructure Improvement and Delivery Strategy. The funds could be used for maintenance and to address existing problems.

- Parish and Town Parish Councils would potentially receive 15% or 25% if they had an adopted Neighbourhood Plan with an Investment Strategy.
- For the previous 10 years, Local Authorities could choose whether they used Section 106 agreements or Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). For most local authorities in the north of England, funds would be lower if CIL was used due to lower land values.
 - An audit of section 106 agreements had ensured that there were better processes in place to monitor historic agreements to ensure that monies were paid.
 - Agreements now included claw back if market sales were higher than a designated figure.
 - The LAC review included proposals for a sub report on developer contributions prior to completion of negotiations to ensure that the Chair and local member were satisfied with the approach adopted on the distribution of funds.
 - The total amount of money received was likely to be less than the total amount of money negotiated in a year, mainly due to the time lag between an agreement being negotiated and stage payments for large developments which could take 10 or more years before completion.
 - Some agreements included conditions restricting the geographic location of affordable housing which could take time to deliver following receipt of the funds.
 - More consistent wording was now used for section 106 agreements which was easier to monitor and report.
 - A Section 106 training course for members was to be arranged.
 - There could be a fluctuation of needs between areas, such as healthcare, so the amounts negotiated for infrastructure varied. The Infrastructure Delivery Plan underpinned the Local Plan and set out the assumptions and money needed to respond to the growth set out in the Local Plan.
 - Analysis of Section 278 highways agreements were more complex as sometimes the developer provided funding for work which was commissioned by the Council, or they could do the work themselves and this was not included within the figures for developer contribution.

The following issues were raised by members:

- Development was restricted in small villages in rural areas and therefore no funding available via section 106 agreements or affordable housing where there was less than 10 units. The Director agreed there was a mismatch and it was why the Council had its own building programme for community housing projects and explored other opportunities. He added that if there was a falling market, less homes got built but the demand for affordable housing increased in an inverse relationship.
- It would be desirable to receive feedback from the areas which benefitted from Section 106 payments including education, ecology and highways.
- It would be beneficial if the statement included dates of agreements, particularly where funds had not been spent.
- Some elements, such as play areas, needed to be delivered in a timely manner to enable young families with children to benefit. It was not helpful

to them if play areas were constructed on the completion of a large development which may take many years.

- It would be useful to have a cumulative position of outstanding monies. The Director suggested that members be provided with a spreadsheet which contained data regarding Section 106 agreements.

RESOLVED that the report and S106 Infrastructure Funding Statement for 2021-2022, be noted.

46. SCRUTINY

46.1 Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy for Northumberland 2022 - 2026

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy for Northumberland 2022 – 2026 was approved by Cabinet on 8 March 2023. (A copy of the report is enclosed with the signed minutes.)

Philip Soderquest, Service Director - Housing and Public Protection, explained that presentations on Homelessness and Rough Sleeping had been given to the 5 Local Area Councils between November 2022 and March 2023 to explain the statutory duties placed on local authorities by the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and had outlined the provision for residents who were homeless, or at risk of homelessness, in Northumberland. The strategy was a refresh of the previous policy and although the number of priorities had reduced, they were broadly similar and had been merged, except for welfare reform which was a transitional issue. Definitions for homelessness and rough sleeping were included in Appendix 1 of the strategy on page 33 of the papers.

He reported that any issues with host breakdown under Homes for residents from Ukraine was a separate issue. The Council had received monies from the Government LA Housing Fund to support the commitment to refugee's resettlement by acquiring additional homes and would be used as first allocation for guests who were at risk of homelessness. They were looking to purchase 8 properties by November 2023 in areas where the largest populations from Ukraine had settled.

Julie Stewart, Strategic Housing Manager, reported that the Homelessness Grant allocation in 2023/24 was £529,000 and £556,000 in 2024/25. Although this was lower than expected, amounts received had been halved at other local authorities. The grant was used to fund the existing housing service, which meant there was little flexibility to commission additional services. She explained that the team were dealing with consistent high levels of cases with no periods where lower numbers of applications were received. Managing expectations was challenging, with the profile of residents seeking assistance changing and more difficult for residents to obtain homes in the private rented sector, due to changes within that sector.

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

- 68% of homelessness cases were in the south east of the county, as expected due to the population cluster. This was highest in Blyth, Ashington, Newbiggin by the Sea and Bedlington. There were also high demand in Hexham, Haltwhistle and Berwick upon Tweed which was challenging as the Council had limited temporary accommodation in those areas. They recognised more options were needed for dispersed accommodation in other areas and had recently acquired an additional property in Berwick through Advance Northumberland.
- Data for Band P, the highest priority, had been checked for a LAC meeting in March. At that time there were 197 individuals in urgent housing need. During 2022/23, 2,491 housing applications had been received with 361 full applications which had led to placements in temporary accommodation. There were approximately 11,000 individuals on the housing register; 50% of which were in Band 3 with no identified housing need as they were currently adequately accommodated. It was also reported that many were not actively bidding under the choice-based lettings system and also that some of those who had registered lived outside of Northumberland.
- The private sector provided a greater percentage of housing than social housing. Some individuals were being made homeless due to being served with a Section 21 no fault eviction, where landlords in the private sector wished to put their properties to an alternative use. This included holiday accommodation which generated more income, or they wished to sell as the industry was concerned about regulation by the Government, including application of the decent homes standards, removal of the landlord's ability to serve a Section 21 no fault eviction notice, longer secured tenancies.
- Host families under the Homes for Ukraine scheme were expected to make their accommodation available for a minimum period of 6 months, although this could be extended if all parties were in agreement. It was initially expected the situation would be short lived, however, due to the ongoing war and cost of living concerns, goodwill payments had increased from £350 to £500 per month where sponsorship arrangements continued beyond 12 months.
- The Homes for Ukraine tariff payable to Local Authorities had reduced from £10,500 to £5,900 with effect from 1 January 2023 for any new families arriving in the UK.
- Anyone who was classed as Band P priority homeless was provided with temporary accommodation whilst bidding for properties. The Council's duty to provide accommodation was deemed to be discharged if a suitable property in reasonable travelling distance became available and was not taken.
- It was intended that monitoring of progress against the Action Plan with feedback to members on an agreed basis including production of an annual report of progress against the action plan. Development of a web-based housing advice platform would take place as part of improvements to the Council's updated main website. Information on housing matters was also available over the telephone via the Contact Centre or free telephone

number, face to face appointments in Blyth and perhaps also Ashington one day per week, depending on demand, and virtual calls.

- The Duty to Refer, had come into effect in 2019 under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Most referrals came via the Probation Service and had not significantly increased workload.
- Priority 1 referred to single homeless people in accordance with the terminology and definition used by Government in the Homelessness Reduction Act as they were more likely to be sleeping rough, with more complex needs perhaps with substance misuse issues and were more difficult to place in accommodation. The majority of temporary accommodation in Northumberland was shared accommodation which would not be suitable. There tended to be more options for homeless families than single homeless people.
- Some individuals declined assistance despite offers of help and referrals to other services for mental health or other complex issues. Changing Lives were commissioned to provide a Homeless Response Service who were trained to talk and direct support should it be needed, as well as the Traveller Liaison Officer.
- Other social housing providers did not have a statutory duty to assist with the provision of homeless accommodation. It was therefore difficult for the Council to meet demand in some areas, such as Berwick, where it did not hold housing stock. The Council were working with housing providers, such as Bernicia, who were providing some temporary accommodation in sheltered housing.
- Whilst there was a stereotype of people who found themselves homelessness, this was becoming a more varied mix of individuals for differing reasons.

Members raised the following points:

- Employment, education and work experience needed to be taken into account when looking at accommodation options for someone that was homeless.
- There should be support for all vulnerable residents.
- The work of the Housing Team was acknowledged having responded and adapted quickly to the Homes for Ukraine scheme helping scared and traumatised families and the assistance given to host families.
- There was concern that homeless figures may not be accurate with some families moving in with family and friends.

RESOLVED that:

- a) The Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy for Northumberland 2022-2026, be supported.
- b) The Strategic Housing Manager be invited to a meeting in approximately 6 months to discuss progress against the Action Plan.

47. OVERVIEW

47.1 Social Housing Regulations Bill

The report informed members of the impending Social Housing Regulations Bill and implications for housing and the introduction of a regulatory regime. (A copy of the report is enclosed with the signed minutes.)

Philip Soderquest, Service Director - Housing and Public Protection, explained that the Council owned approximately 8,500 homes in the former district areas of Alnwick District and Blyth Borough which had previously been managed by Homes for Northumberland, an Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO) which had ceased to exist in 2015.

Reform of social housing was proposed following the Grenfell Tower disaster to strengthen the voice of tenants and role of regulation. It was expected that there would be greater focus and regulation on mould and damp, following the death of a child in Rochdale, and that named senior officers would be required to have a formal qualification in a housing subject or be working towards a qualification.

He stressed the significance of this Bill and the powers of the new Regulator of Social Housing who would have powers to take action against housing providers, seek improvements, powers to name poorly performing organisations with the risk of intervention if a body did not deliver against consumer regulation standards. Amendments to the bill were awaited following the third reading of the bill by Parliament. The Bill was expected to come into force on 1 April 2024.

He reported that discussions were being held with the Regulator for Social Housing about participating in a pilot assessment process instead of a peer review exercise (recommendation 1).

Whilst officers believed the Council delivered a good housing service, managing the estate and improvements, however, they were not complacent and were:

- Undertaking a self-assessment and developing improvement plans.
- Identifying named officers for compliance with health and safety and consumer standards,
- Making provision for growth in the service with some of the rental increase agreed by Council on 22 February 2022 to create additional salary capacity to be able to respond to the new requirements.
- Implementation of tenants' satisfaction measures which were required to be reported by 31 March 2024.

Susan Ogle, Housing Operations Manager, emphasised the importance of the Council's relationship with its tenants, to make sure that tenants were listened to and empowered in order that the housing service developed in a manner that they wanted. It was anticipated that inspections would be carried out on a 4 yearly basis, similar to the OFSTED inspection of education establishments. She stressed that this would be a significant change.

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

- It was expected that inspections would focus on current matters, including mould and damp, management of tenant's enquiries and complaints and tenant involvement.
- Regular meetings were held with tenants via a Tenants Alliance. It was acknowledged that it was important to ensure there was appropriate representation on any forum, depending on the type of engagement required. Other improvements proposed for engagement with tenants included collection of satisfaction surveys, the ability to interact via the tenant portal regarding rent account and repairs and well as being able to liaise with Tenant Involvement Coordinators to better understand their vulnerabilities.
- The Council had limited grounds to enter properties as a landlord without agreement. These included powers under anti-social behaviour or environmental health depending on the issue. Prior to the Covid Pandemic, estate officers undertook a tenancy audit of homes with consent and agreement on a 3 yearly cycle; this was to be recommenced. The Estates Officers also supported vulnerable residents to sustain their tenancies and prevent evictions with pre-tenancy assessments to ensure better maintained properties, higher rent collection levels and less anti-social behaviour. They had also recently assisted a number of tenants get back into employment through the North of Tyne Working Homes Scheme.
- It was intended that ward councillors should have knowledge and oversight to be able to assist tenants seek resolution of housing related matters and make a social landlord accountable.
- The Housing Ombudsman investigated individual complaints raised by tenants where there has been maladministration leading to injustice following a 2 stage internal complaints procedure. The Ombudsman would review how the complaint had been managed and whether there had been maladministration.
- The Social Housing Regulator would be looking at broader aspects of the operation of housing providers, their governance arrangements and whether tenants' satisfaction measures and compliance standards were being met.
- Annual gas safety inspections and servicing were carried out for approximately 99% of council properties with tenants not giving access for the remainder. The results would need to be reported to the Regulator. Other areas which needed to be strengthened included electrical safety inspections and capacity in this area had been identified as part of the planned growth of the service.
- Recruitment and retention of staff in all areas was challenging including housing trades due to the payment of higher wages in the private sector or lack of skilled staff. It was hoped that tenants could become involved in apprenticeships as an extension to the Working Homes scheme.
- Rent collection for 2022/23 was 100.62% as they actively worked with tenants to ensure tenancies were maintained and ensure the level of arrears was minimised, tackled early and assisted tenants to secure additional benefits.

Comments made by members included:

- The helpfulness of Estates Officers to resolve matters that had been brought to their attention.
- The necessity of supporting new tenants, particularly with the cost of living crisis.

In conclusion, the Service Director - Housing and Public Protection highlighted the importance of undertaking a critical assessment to form conclusions about the housing service and how this be used to inform the Regulator about the Council's housing service. The Council wanted to improve its visibility and accessibility to tenants and raise their customer's experience.

The Chair, on behalf of members of the committee, thanked the Service Director – Housing and Public Protection for his many years of service at Northumberland County Council and Tynedale Council, prior to his retirement in May 2023.

The Chair suggested that the implications of the Social Housing Regulations Bill needed to be raised with other departments, including the Contact Centre, Information Services etc to ensure resources were in place to meet requirements.

RESOLVED that:

- a) The contents of the report be noted.
- b) An update on the Council's preparations for the implementation of the Social Housing Regulations Bill preparations be received in approximately 6 months.

48. REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATOR

Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Monitoring Report

The Committee reviewed its work programme for the 2022/23 council year. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes).

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator reported that the Northumberland Infrastructure Funding Statement had been re-scheduled to this earlier meeting in order to allow consideration of a report on the North East Bus Service Improvement Plan at the meeting of the committee on 26 April 2023. A Task and Finish Working Group on open land had also been requested.

At the final meeting of the year, members would be requested to consider if there were any matters that had been considered during 2022/23 that needed to be revisited in the programme for 2023/24. Items already identified included:

- Tree and Woodland Strategy
- Food Waste Recycling Pilot
- Fire and Rescue Service - Safety and Contamination
- Bus Services
- Homelessness Strategy Action Plan
- Social Housing Regulations Bill Progress Update

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____

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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, 26 April 2023 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor N. Oliver
(Chair, in the Chair)

MEMBERS

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

CABINET MEMBER

Riddle, J.	Local Services
Watson, J.	Healthy Lives

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

N Easton	Public Transport Manager
K. Lounton	Interim Head of Service
K. Marynissen	Public Health Trainee
S. Nielson	Executive Director – Place and Regeneration
S. Nicholson	Scrutiny Co-Ordinator
S. Ogle	Housing Operations Manager
A. Peaden	Library services Manager
J. Rose	Interim Director of Regeneration
N. Turnbull	Democratic Services Officer

ALSO PRESENT

1 member of the press.

49. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from N Walsh and Councillors Carr, Castle, Mather and Horncastle.

50. FORWARD PLAN OF CABINET DECISIONS

The Committee considered the Forward Plan of key decisions (May to August 2023). (Schedule enclosed with the signed minutes).

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

51. REVIEW OF THE USE, OWNERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF OPEN LAND HELD WITHIN THE HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT

Susan Ogle, Housing operations Manager, explained that agreement was sought to establish a Task and Finish Group to examine current issues associated with “open land”, to contribute to the development of a policy to guide future decision making on the use, ownership disposal of such land and enforcement, when development is undertaken without consent. (A copy of the report is enclosed with the signed minutes.)

Members were in agreement that this would be useful, as ownership of land was confusing with previous stock transfers and uncertainty regarding the formalisation of arrangements with some areas of green space which were not well maintained.

Officers from Housing Services, Strategic Estates, Legal Services and Neighbourhood Services would be asked to participate. It was suggested that three or four meetings would be held over the next few months prior to submission of a report to Cabinet, hopefully in November.

RESOLVED that:

- a) The Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that an Open Land Task and Finish Group be established.
- b) The Task and Finish Group be Chaired by Councillor Mather with Councillors Dale, Lang and Reid being nominated.

SCRUTINY

52.1 North East Bus Service Improvement Plan

The Committee received a report which outlined the implications of the Bus Service Improvement Plan for Northumberland bus services and infrastructure. (A copy of the report and presentation is enclosed with the signed minutes.)

Councillor John Riddle, Portfolio Holder for Local Services was delighted to report that the 7 North East Councils had been awarded £163 million from the Department of Transport’s (DfT) Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding. This had been the largest award in the country. The money would in part be used to improve rural bus services and double the current allocation of £2.2 million for supported bus in Northumberland.

Neil Easton, Public Transport Manager, gave a PowerPoint presentation which:

- Explained the strategic importance of buses in the region.
- Displayed maps which depicted fully commercial bus services in Northumberland and those that were partly or fully subsidised by the Council.
- Outlined the requirements for the BSIP Funding which was split between £73.5 million for capital schemes and £90 million for revenue schemes.
- A £6.8 million indicative allocation to improve services in Northumberland by supporting the existing network including changes to frequencies and hours, reinstatement of services, provision of new services and fares initiatives.
- Establishment of a Local Bus Board to oversee implementation of proposals with representation from the five Local Area Councils, NALC, VCS and the bus operators.

It was noted that initially the funding had been expected in 2022 but had been delayed due to a Cabinet Office review of ministerial budgets. Officers were therefore lobbying for the period in which the money should be spent over three years, the original period, which would enable service enhancements to become established and commercially viable.

He expected that bus operators were likely to propose further changes to services following the cessation of DfT funding at the end of June 2023. This funding had allowed bus operators to claim the difference in revenue shortfall as there currently had only been an 84% return of patronage when compared with pre-pandemic levels.

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

- At the present time, it was unknown the extent of unprofitable services in Northumberland and what changes might be proposed by the bus operators. It was not anticipated that these would be extreme in Northumberland, however, no decisions could be made until receipt of registration documents.
- Bus operators would be required to supply patronage numbers and costing data to provide evidence that a route was loss making. This had been previously provided voluntarily but was now a requirement of the Enhanced Bus Partnership.
- Bus services were subject to a competitive tendering process. If a price for a service was not believed to be fair, the market would be tested.
- 25% of the funding could be used for de minimus awards with 75% awarded following a procurement process.
- The capital funding would primarily be used in Tyne and Wear to alleviate pinch points and delays in the highway network. Residents in Northumberland travelling to Newcastle would benefit from improvements places such as Gosforth. A number of smaller schemes were planned in Northumberland for intelligent traffic light systems, road widening schemes in Blyth and Cramlington, and some infrastructure such as bus shelters and improvements to transport interchanges.

- A further report could be brought to the committee when details of capital schemes were finalised.
- The available technology did not currently support long distance electric bus journeys. However, minimum vehicle specifications in the tender documentation required a Euro 6 standard vehicle with reduced diesel emissions.
- Separate funding had been secured to purchase 60 electric vehicles, some of which would be based at the Arriva depot in Blyth. The funding would also be used to pay for infrastructure upgrades which would assist the commercial case for investment by the bus operators. Exploration of opportunity charging at interchanges would enable the use of electric vehicles on longer routes although the increasing cost of electricity was also an influencing factor.
- As the period in which the funding could be utilised had been reduced from 3 to 2 years, it was hoped that the commissioning of the service before the end of 2024/25 would allowed the benefits of the funding to be extended into a third year. Supporting services for a longer period, would be desirable, particularly given that the commercial position regarding existing bus services would not be known before June 2023.
- 2 of 4 Adapt services were operated without support by the Council. Members of the public had been encouraged to 'use it or lose it'. Councillors asked to be kept updated so they could help promote use of services.
- The Council reimbursed bus companies a proportion of an adult fare of journeys made by elderly or disabled passengers who used a concessionary or free bus pass.
- Fewer journeys were being made by older residents, when compared with pre-Covid levels. Older residents generally used daytime services. It was recognised that this would need to be addressed with some specific promotion and marketing to encourage use of the bus network.
- Continuation of services at the end of the 2-year period would depend on whether the costs of services were covered.
- The 'take the kids for free' school holiday initiative had been extended to being accompanied by an adult this year, whereas it had been a fare paying adult previously.
- The impact of the pandemic would have had a small impact on the figures in Appendix 1 for the period at the end of 2019/20 and potentially the reduction in numbers could be worse. However, this would be offset by contraction of the network on services and frequency as network mileage was at 90% pre-Covid as a result of operators seeking efficiencies.
- Further information would be sought on the use of bio-gas busses for journeys where electric busses were not currently suitable.
- Bicycles could be used on vehicles in the same space utilised by disabled users or passengers with prams, on a first come first served basis. Rear bike racks had been trialed in the past along some of the tourist routes.
- Officers did not have figures for the number of applications for free bus passes annually. Whilst take-up was excellent, they were aware that only 50% of free bus passes were used each year.

- Officers could provide boarding data on the use of concessionary fares at specific bus stops. Any requests were to be emailed to the officer after the meeting. Generally, commuters and young people tended to use the service at the start of the day and teatime with senior residents using services mid-day. They hoped to increase use by all throughout the day.
- It would be more difficult for the Government to refuse a request to extend the funding period, if this was evidenced by a substantial rise in patronage.
- The reluctance to use services post pandemic could potentially be an opportunity for further research.
- Devolution deals elsewhere in the country had found it useful to mix funds on projects for the benefits of communities and residents, such as improved vehicles and connections between Northumberland and Newcastle.
- Discussions would be held with Town or Parish Councils regarding taking over responsibility for new or replacement infrastructure, such as bus shelters.

Members welcomed the additional funding and were particularly pleased with proposals to increase the age of reduced fares for young people. They also commented that:

- It would be beneficial for the revenue money to be spent wisely and not rushed.
- Communities in the southeast of the county could also be classed as rural and had reduced services in some areas.
- Whether car ownership data could be broken down across rural and urban areas.
- There were few residents in some rural areas which could use bus services to access employment.
- More funding was required to support a viable and sustainable bus network, given that the funding was much higher per head of population in London.
- There should be exploration of how bicycles were accommodated on busses in other parts of the country to enable multi modal journeys.
- The older generation were also not participating in community projects, compared to pre-pandemic levels. It was believed that there was still a fear factor and that they had found different ways to live.
- Reference was made to a situation where a parish council had invested in new bus shelters, which had been a significant investment for a small body, with the later cessation of the service on that route. It was hoped that following investment infrastructure this would not be repeated.

RESOLVED that:

- a) The recommendations in the report be supported.
- b) Cabinet be recommended to consider
 - i) Supporting the Council's efforts in lobbying the Government to extend the funding period beyond 2024/25.
 - ii) Including reference to the relevant portfolio holder within the delegated authority, in recommendation 2.

- iii) The representation from the Local Area Councils should reflect the political balance of the Council in the composition of the Northumberland Local Bus Board, in recommendation 3.
- iv) Encouraging service providers to create additional space on vehicles to carry bicycles.

OVERVIEW

53.1 Update on Library Service Redesign and Development

The Committee received an update on the status of the agreed Library Service redesign programme and the continued development of the Service. (A copy of the report and presentation is enclosed with the signed minutes.)

Councillor Jeff Watson, Portfolio Holder for Healthy Lives, introduced the item. He was extremely proud of the Library Services and the services that Northumberland provided, particularly following discussions at a recent Local Government Association conference. The service included 30 libraries, a mobile library service, school library service and prison library. He referred to the development of the Hub libraries and the partnership working with Northumberland Communities Together. He confirmed the Council's commitment that no libraries would be closed and made reference to new facilities at Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, Ponteland and Morpeth and the re-opening of the library at Blyth South Beach.

Karen Lounton, Interim Head of Service and Alison Peaden, Library Service Manager, gave a PowerPoint presentation which outlined:

- The journey of the Library Services which had been transferred to a charitable leisure trust in 2015 before being returned to the Council's control in 2016 and commencement of a transformation programme.
- Establishment of the following priorities following a resident's survey in 2020:
 - Strengthening the core service.
 - Establishment of hub libraries within each locality area.
 - Extending reach and partnerships.
- Links to the Corporate Plan.
- The progress to date.
- Service user feedback and testimonials.
- The Department for Culture, Media and Sport Library Service Strategy.
- Service Priorities for 2023/24.
 - Developing the role of the established hubs.
 - Outreach and partnership working

It was stressed that libraries were the original community hubs since the Public Libraries Act 1850 and provided warm hubs in the cost-of-living crisis, social networks, provided opportunities for learning and advice guidance companionship and support.

The success of the Reading for Wellbeing programme was highlighted which was alleviating social isolation post Covid. It provided an alternative route to wellbeing and health via social prescribing and connection to reading companionship groups hosted in libraries across the county. Reference was also made to partnership work with other bodies such as Hexham Town Council which had welcomed Ukrainian refugees with English classes in the library.

In answer to questions, it was explained that:

- Quarter 3 data for 2021 on page 24 of the agenda papers would likely have been impacted by the pandemic lockdown and opening restrictions, in categories such as footfall and in person activities, although digital events would likely be positively affected. It was agreed that information for Quarter 3 2019 would be shared with Members after the meeting to give a clearer comparison.
- Resources were to be deployed as efficiently as possible and they did not wish to compete with existing voluntary networks. Their aim was to provide complimentary or contrasting events or services.
- They hoped to attend future meetings of the Local Area Councils to consult with members on the local area prospectus development and implementation.
- The service had provided support to apprentices to alleviate financial pressures if this was required.
- The service offered information and signposting to the warm spaces initiative, with all library users being made welcome.
- They worked with JobCentre Plus who directed claimants without facilities at home to undertake job searches on the public access IT equipment within libraries. Individuals who were not confident with information technology were offered 1 to 1 support.
- Councillors were encouraged to share the Library Service monthly newsletter as widely as possible. Local members were also often asked to help promote events in their wards.
- The library services was used as a source for information. A pilot scheme was being held at Hexham Library to see how library staff and customer service colleagues could support each other in their roles to grow knowledge and skills, this had recently included blue badge and bus pass renewals. More complex and confidential queries, such as housing benefit or planning issues, could be dealt with by speaking on the telephone to the contact centre in a private space.
- Some of the libraries had absorbed the local tourist information centres and they worked with tourism colleagues in Visit Northumberland. Staff were trained to be able to provide tourist information.
- They were working with interested groups in a number of communities including Corbridge, Wylam and Wooler to see how services could be provided or extended. It was reported that Allen Valleys Local History Society were helping supplement Saturday opening in Allendale Library.
- The use of digital pens was being investigated as they were portable and could be more easily moved between locations than traditional 3D printers

which would require substantial funding to provide equipment in multiple locations. Users could then be signposted to other locations within their local community where further digital opportunities were available.

The Chair and members thanked officers for the informative presentation and raised the following issues:

- Whether details of proposals for South Beach Library could be sent to the local member who worked in the community sector. She strongly believed that provision did not overlap with other facilities in the same ward which might impact on funding.
- Apprenticeship posts were supported, particularly if these led to permanent positions within the service. It was suggested that consideration be given to assisting apprentices with transport, given their low wages whilst in training.
- It was hoped that library service staff had access to contact information for County Councillors to refer residents to them, if required.
- An excellent example of a one stop shop was available in Prudhoe Library with Prudhoe Partnership.

RESOLVED that:

- a) The contents of the report be noted.
- b) The progress and achievements supporting the three phases of the service redesign, be noted.
- c) The service priorities for 2023/24, including the development of a new Library Strategy in the context of new Government guidance, be noted.

54. REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATOR

Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Monitoring Report

The Committee reviewed the monitoring report for the 2022/23 council year. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes).

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator reported that the work programme for 2023/24 was in the process of being developed and was already quite busy, however, if members identified any matters, these should be emailed to him / the Chair / the Vice-Chair.

In response to a query, he agreed to check whether a report from the Social Care Ombudsman on Post 16 Transport was to be considered by the Families and Children's Services OSC.

The Chair expressed his gratitude to Councillor Reid for his work as the former Chair of the Committee and the Scrutiny Co-ordinator and Democratic Services Officer for their support.

RESOLVED that the monitoring report be noted.

55. URGENT BUSINESS

Several Councillors expressed their concern that the minutes from the meeting held on 5 April 2023 had not been included with the agenda papers for this meeting. They were aware that 2 meetings had been held close together and enquired whether any additional support was available. Some members believed the next meeting should not be held, if the minutes were not available as it was better transparency if they were included. A Councillor had wanted to check whether her comments and opposition to changes regarding the scrutiny arrangements had been minuted.

The Chair commented that generally the Committee considered different subject matters at meetings, and he therefore believed that it was not therefore essential that the minutes from the last meeting be considered at the next meeting as they would likely be debating different issues.

It was noted that the minutes from scrutiny meetings were no longer included with the agenda papers for County Council meetings. Also, all members had received regular emails and had been invited to meetings when discussions of the new scrutiny arrangements had been discussed. The matter would also be debated by all members in full at the Annual meeting of Council before a decision was taken.

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator explained that any recommendations made by the Committee to Cabinet were circulated with papers for Cabinet. They were also available to all on the Council’s website. Meetings were also recorded and available via YouTube.

The Chair agreed to speak to the Business Chair and Head of Democratic Services.

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator confirmed that the proposed timetable for 2023/24 would not have 2 meetings so close together.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____

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FORWARD PLAN OF FORTHCOMING CABINET DECISIONS JUNE TO SEPTEMBER 2023

DECISION	PROPOSED SCRUTINY DATE	CABINET DATE
<p>Ashington Regeneration Programme Establishment – Strategic Sites Acquisition</p> <p>To update Cabinet regarding the establishment, development and delivery of the £30m Ashington Regeneration Programme, which will have a catalytic impact on the town’s economy and drive forward the implementation of the Ashington Town Investment Plan. (W. Ploszaj/J. Rose - 07500 097568/ K. Donaldson -07966 324034) (Partial confidential report)</p>		13 June 2023
<p>Potential Loan to Northumberland Community Bank</p> <p>The Report requests members to approve the potential loan facility to Northumberland Community Bank of up to £50,000 towards its capital reserve to maintain its Capital:Asset ratio in line with FCA Regulations . (R. Wearmouth/J. Willis - 01670 623424)</p>		13 June 2023
<p>Trading Companies’ Financial Performance 2022-23 - Position at the end of March 2023</p> <p>The purpose of the report is to ensure that the Cabinet is informed of the current financial positions of its trading companies for 2022-23 (Confidential Report) (R. Wearmouth/M. Calvert - 01670 620 197)</p>		13 June 2023
<p>UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) Update and Northumberland Delivery</p> <p>To provide an update on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) programme and the UKSPF funded projects secured by Northumberland County Council to support levelling-up activity across the County. (W. Ploszaj/S. McMillan – 07814298052)</p>		13 June 2023
<p>Asset Management Framework</p> <p>The report presents for information and approval the new Asset Management</p>		11 July 2023

<p>Framework which includes a new Asset Management Policy and Asset Management Strategy for 2023/2026. (R. Wearmouth/J. Willis - 01670 623424)</p>		
<p>Financial Performance 2022-23 – Final Outturn (subject to audit) The report will provide Cabinet with the revenue and capital final outturn position against budget for 2022-23 (subject to audit). (R. Wearmouth/ K. Harvey 01670 624783)</p>		11 July 2023
<p>Integrated Drug and Alcohol Service Contract To seek permission from Cabinet to award the contract of Integrated Drug and Alcohol Service in Northumberland. This service will be commissioned using the public health ring fenced grant. The grant conditions state that Local Authorities must provide drug and alcohol services for its population. The contract is for four years (W. Pattison/J. Liddell - 07929 775559)</p>		11 July 2023
<p>North East Pathfinder (Foster with North East) Collaboration In response to the Independent Care Review and the launch of the Children’s Social Care Implementation Strategy, the Department for Education (DfE) has committed to recruiting 9,000 foster carers by 2026. The department is seeking to deliver a holistic package of intervention on a regional basis to support the greatest sufficiency pressures and put in place end-to-end improvements that support boosting foster carer numbers.</p> <p>Subsequently the DfE have selected the North East as the UK’s national pilot / pathfinder region for a fully-funded 1 year project to improve foster carer recruitment and retention and selected Together for Children Sunderland as the regional implementation lead. (G. Renner Thompson/A. Kingham - 07814298047)</p>		11 July 2023
<p>Northumberland Stewardship and Rural Growth Investment Programme – Nature Recovery Response As well as being a statutory requirement, the development of an ambitious North of Tyne</p>		11 July 2023

<p>Local Nature Recovery Strategy will support important elements of the Stewardship and Rural Growth Investment Plan, specifically Strategic Investment Programme 1: Decarbonisation, Biodiversity and Resilience, and will also support the Local Investment in Natural Capital Programme that Northumberland and four other local authorities are piloting for DEFRA. This report will propose governance arrangements for the North of Tyne Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). It will also propose that Northumberland County Council joins other local authorities in declaring an ecological emergency to coincide with the commencement of work on the LNRS. This will create a framework for the Council's work on nature recovery and will also be a public statement of intent, acknowledging the widespread and growing concern about the state of nature in the UK. (C. Horncastle/D. Feige - (0777 429 5253))</p>		
<p>Outcomes of Statutory Consultation regarding School Reorganisation in the Berwick Partnership</p> <p>This report sets out an analysis of the representations and responses received from interested parties and stakeholders during the four-week statutory consultation, which commenced on 11 May and closed on 8 June 2023, in relation to proposals for schools in the Berwick Partnership. Cabinet is asked to make a final decision on whether or not to approve the proposals, including school closures, set out in the statutory proposal. At the same time, Cabinet is requested to make a final decision on whether or not to approve the non-statutory proposals relating to the voluntary schools within the Berwick Partnership as set out in the Report of the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services, Berwick Partnership Organisation – 9 th May 2023. In making its final decision, Cabinet are advised to consider the decision of the DfE's Regional Director of Education for the North East with respect to proposed changes to St Cuthbert's Catholic First School and Berwick Academy. (G. Renner Thompson/S. Aviston - (01670) 622281)</p>	<p>FACS 18 July 2023</p>	<p>20 July 2023</p>


<p>Trading Companies' Financial Performance 2022-23 - Position at the end of June 2023</p> <p>The purpose of the report is to ensure that the Cabinet is informed of the current financial positions of its trading companies for 2023-24 (Confidential report) (R. Wearmouth/M. Calvert - 01670 620 197)</p>		12 September 2023
<p>Leisure Programme Update</p> <p>To update Cabinet with progress on the Leisure programme (J. Watson/M. Donnelly 07517 553463)</p>	N/A	12 December 2023
<p>Trading Companies' Financial Performance 2022-23 - Position at the end of September 2023</p> <p>The purpose of the report is to ensure that the Cabinet is informed of the current financial positions of its trading companies for 2023-24 (Confidential report) (R. Wearmouth/M. Calvert - 01670 620 197)</p>		12 December 2023
<p>Trading Companies' Financial Performance 2022-23 - Position at the end of December 2023</p> <p>The purpose of the report is to ensure that the Cabinet is informed of the current financial positions of its trading companies for 2023-24 (Confidential report) (R. Wearmouth/M. Calvert - 01670 620 197)</p>		12 March 2024
<p>Leisure Programme Update</p> <p>To update Cabinet with progress on the Leisure programme (J. Watson/M. Donnelly 07517 553463)</p>	N/A	9 April 2024



Northumberland County Council

Minimising firefighters' exposure to toxic
fire effluents

Interim Best Practice Report

An independent report by  with a foreword by FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack

Commissioned by 



www.northumberland.gov.uk



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Agenda Item 6a



Contaminants, Toxicity and Exposure Pathways

- Fires produce a cocktail of toxic, irritant and carcinogenic chemicals – the composition of which varies depending on the specific materials burning and the fire conditions.
- They can be released in the form of particulates which will include aerosols, dusts, fibres, smoke and fumes or gases and vapours.
- Some of these fire effluents (e.g. carbon monoxide, hydrogen cyanide and acid gases) have immediate adverse effects on health after only a single or short exposure (e.g. asphyxiation). This is known as **acute toxicity**.
- However, most other fire effluents (e.g. volatile organic compounds, or polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons) have much longer-term adverse effects on health, causing conditions which are more complex and can develop more slowly e.g. cancer, cardiovascular (related to the circulatory system which comprises the heart and blood vessels) and neurological (nervous system) diseases. This is known as **chronic toxicity**.
- Repeated exposure to even very small amounts of chronic toxicants over time increases the likelihood of developing long-term health conditions.

Firefighters' exposure to toxic fire effluents will depend on:

- Fire Scenario (fire conditions)
- Fuel (materials involved in the fire)
- Specific toxicants released during and post fire
- Contamination from fire debris/residues
- Type, frequency and duration of fires attended
- The tactics employed at the incident
- The extinguishing medium used
- Use of Personal Protection Equipment
- Hygiene facilities and practices
- Time between contamination and the use of hygiene facilities and practices

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Acute and chronic toxicants can be then further classified according to the specific types of adverse effects they have on health. These classifications are referenced throughout this guide, and include:



- **Carcinogens**; substances which cause cancer (e.g. benzene, PAHs etc.).
- **Teratogens**; substances that can harm the foetus if exposure occurs during pregnancy (e.g. lead compounds, ethylene oxide, formamide etc.).



- **Sensitisers**; substances which result in an allergic type hypersensitivity reaction (e.g. of skin or lungs) (e.g. chromium, formaldehyde, isocyanates etc.).
- **Irritants**; substances which react in contact with moisture on/within the body and cause an inflammatory response (e.g. hydrogen chloride, hydrogen bromide, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides etc.).

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It has been proven that combinations of different chemicals which are not particularly harmful individually can give rise to entirely new hazardous effects. Moreover, the effects of chronic toxicants may be cumulative, and can remain latent for a long time before any symptoms arise or are even measurable. (Heys et al., 2016)

Firefighters may be exposed to toxic contaminants via multiple exposure pathways:



Inhalation



Many gases, vapours, mists, dusts and fibres released during fires can be inhaled through the lungs. The amount of contaminant inhaled by a person is directly linked to the volume of air inspired and expired, which increases with physical exertion. Normal breathing frequency at rest is 12-20 breaths per minute (approx. 7-14 litres of air). However, under extreme stress, firefighters with normal lung capacity can metabolise up to 100 litres of air per minute (Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, 2015).

Dermal Absorption



Occurs when a toxicant comes into contact with an individual's skin. There are many situations in which firefighters' skin comes into contact with harmful substances e.g. through direct contact with soot (touching the skin with contaminated hands or with gloves that have been in contact with fire debris) or when an area of skin is exposed in a smoky environment.

Absorption of toxicants via the skin will vary depending on exposure time, the quantity and type of substance, location and the surface area of the skin. The physical demands of firefighting (wearing breathing apparatus, performing rescues, post fire activities etc.) and the high temperatures in which firefighters operate increases their blood flow, sweating rates and body temperature. Together with the body's reduced water content, this leads to increased dermal absorption of fire effluents.

Ingestion



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Occurs when a toxicant is swallowed. Exposure to contaminants via ingestion may occur when food or drink is contaminated with fire effluents, e.g. if eating/drinking with soiled hands. In addition, when fire gases or particulates have entered the upper respiratory tract via inhalation, they may be carried via mucous and saliva into the digestive system and absorbed into the body.

61% of UK serving firefighters who responded indicated they have problems with their sleeping.

(FBU & UCLan National Firefighter survey)

Due to the large gender disparity in fire services globally there is very limited evidence concerning the health effects of firefighting activities and exposure to contaminants in female firefighters.

Over 4% of UK serving firefighters who responded to the survey have already been diagnosed with cancer.

(FBU & UCLan National Firefighter survey)

Recommendations For Fire personnel

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- Respiratory protective equipment (e.g. SCBA) should be worn at all times whilst firefighting. This should also include during salvage and turning over activities and other activities undertaken by FRS personnel (and/or others) after firefighting has been completed, but whilst the building contents are still 'gassing off'. Respiratory protective equipment should be one of the last items of PPE removed during de-robing (after decontamination).
- PPE that is suspected of being contaminated should be transported back to the station or workplace in an air-tight container to prevent cross-contamination.
- Avoid eating, drinking or smoking with unwashed hands whilst wearing, or after de-robing PPE that may be contaminated.
- After attending a fire incident, all personnel should change into a set of clean, dry clothes as soon as possible, ideally before re-entering the appliance (or FDS vehicle).
- PPE should be clean and should be thoroughly decontaminated after every incident to avoid a build-up of toxic contaminants. PPE should be inspected for wear and damage on a regular basis, and replaced as necessary.
- It is important to protect areas of exposed skin and airways when cleaning soiled PPE/equipment. This requires appropriate respiratory protection (e.g. face masks or face coverings) and gloves. "Shower within an hour" when returning to the station from an incident, or following a live fire training exercise.
- Regular health screening and recording attendance at fire incidents over the course of a firefighter's career is strongly advised and will be key to the longer-term monitoring and management of health.

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A Respirator (filtering device) must never be used in place of a compressed air breathing device (SCBA or airline).

Firefighters' fire gear is not designed to prevent combustion gas particles from coming into contact with the body (Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, 2015).

Allowing the appliance or any other vehicle to idle in the appliance bay must be avoided (both when the appliance bay doors are still shut and/or appliance doors are opened)

NOTE: this practice was observed when visiting UK FRS stations for indoor contaminant testing and in the FBU & UCLan National Firefighter survey.

CONTAMINATION: CONTROLLING AMOUNT AND EXPOSURE TO TOXINS

- The inherent toxicity of fire effluent components cannot be controlled.

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• Neither can the inherent physical properties of these effluents, which make certain exposure pathways viable.

- What can be controlled to some extent is the amount (or “dose”) of fire effluents which firefighters are exposed to.

Contamination Types

Surface contamination occurs when contaminants are present on the outer layer of a material but have not been absorbed into the material . Surface contaminants are usually easy to detect and easy to remove to a reasonably achievable and safe level (dust, fibres etc.).

Permeation of contaminants occurs when contaminants are absorbed into a material. If not removed, contaminants may continue to permeate further through the material. Factors that influence permeation include:

- **Temperature** - Increase temperature = increase in permeation.
- **Contact time** - Increase time = increase in permeation.
- **Concentration**- Increase in concentration = increase in permeation.
- **Chemical and physical properties** - Low viscosity gases and liquids = increase in permeation.

Contamination Types

Direct contamination occurs via direct physical contact with a contaminant or any contaminated object (during the fire incident, the turning over process or the decontamination process). Helmet, gloves and boots are the most common areas that get directly contaminated. Both surface contamination and permeation can occur through a direct contamination pathway.

Cross (or secondary) contamination occurs when a person or object that is already contaminated makes contact with a person or object that is not contaminated and subsequently contaminates that person/object (National Operational Guidance (NFCC), 2020) (e.g. storing contaminated gloves within a clean helmet). Both surface contamination and permeation can occur through a cross contamination pathway.



Designated Zones

	Hazard level	Locations	Function
Red zone	Dirty area	Appliance bay Appliance washdown Operational washdown Workshop Operational equipment store Compressor room Dirty kit collection Briefing/debrief room	These are primarily operational areas. Ideally, there should be a decontamination at source policy, but the red area has a medium risk of cross contamination or exposure to carcinogens. If leaving a red area, staff should not be able to enter a green area without passing through a transitional zone (amber) with the opportunity to wash and change clothes.
Amber zone	Transitional area	WC/showers Lockers Laundry In-use kit room Drying room / cabinet BA servicing / wash area General equipment store Cleaners' store	A transitional space between red zones and green areas where firefighters and staff can clean and remove contamination. The risk of exposure to contamination or carcinogens is low. Firefighting kit can be worn in this area if suitably clean.
Green zone	Clean area	Public entrance Reception Community room Public WC Personnel main entrance Meeting rooms and offices Quiet rooms / prayer rooms Briefing / training room Recreational rooms Mess area / kitchens Bedrooms / Dormitories Gym IT Comms rooms	Clean areas within a station where food is prepared or consumed and clean only tasks are carried out. I.e. office tasks. No firefighting kit is to be worn and there should be no risk of exposure to contamination from carcinogens.





Northumberland
County Council

Food Waste Update



www.northumberland.gov.uk

Summary: Pilot Food Waste Kerbside Collection and Home Compost Bins

OSC Received report June 2022 on plans to conduct pilot weekly kerbside food waste collections and for home compost bins for food waste in rural communities

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Kerbside collection offered to 5,000 properties at 4 locations in central and SE Northumberland

Home compost food waste bins offered to households at 3 rural villages

Pilot data to confirm modelled assumptions on household kerbside food waste collections and explore the feasibility of home compost bins for use by householders in rural locations

Prepare response to Resources and Waste Strategy, mandatory weekly food waste obligations



Food Waste Kerbside Collection

DEFRA commitment to food waste collections from April 2026 subject to new burdens funding from central government.

In next 12 months, using modelling to shape future strategy for food waste collection in Northumberland.

This will confirm the number of food waste rounds, vehicles, collection staff, and containers.

Modelled collection rounds will be subject to Technical, Environmental and Economically Practicable (*TEEP) assessment rural areas.

*TEEP- Technically, Environmentally and Economically Practicable: "Where necessary... to facilitate or improve recovery, waste shall be collected separately if technically, environmentally and economically practicable and shall not be mixed with other waste or other material with different properties."

Food Waste Kerbside Collections

- Commenced November 2022
- Areas

Area	Collection day
Morpeth/Longhirst/Hebron/Ulgham	Monday
Morpeth Stobhill	Tuesday
Bedlington	Wednesday
Pegswood	Thursday

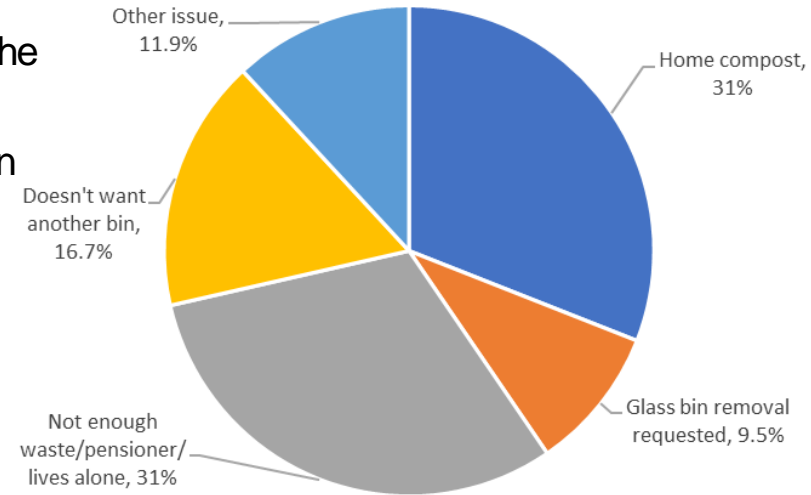
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- Households received an initial warm up letter announcing the upcoming trial start date and what to expect
- Followed with bin delivery (5L caddy and 23L outside bin), first roll of compostable liners and a leaflet instructing on how to use the service.
- Participating households present bin weekly on days shown above.

Initial response to trial

The option to opt out of the food waste collection was provided to residents, this could be done via the online form or through the customer contact centre. Through the analysis of the submissions we managed to obtain an overview of why residents were refusing to participate in the service.

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Collection and disposal

Collected with one purpose-built vehicle, on hire.
Tips into skip located at SUEZ West Sleekburn site.

Two schools and County hall receiving collections.

Disposal: GAP Organics Wardley Biogas facility, where it is converted into biogas and a fertiliser substitute through anaerobic digestion.

The food waste sent for disposal has reportedly been low in contamination, and no issues raised by the processor onsite.

Budget secured for continuation of pilot until 2024/25



Set out rates

Area	Average set out rate
Morpeth/Longhirst/Hebron/Ulgham	54.8%
Morpeth Stobhill	48.6%
Bedlington	40.8%
Pegswood	44.6%

Key findings so far:

- Overall set out rate of 47.2%
- Average weight of 2.84 kg collected per week from actively participating households
- Average weight of 1.4 kg collected per week for all households in trial area issued with a bin
- Very low levels of contamination
- Negligible missed collections and reliable replacement caddy liners (bags)
- Positive feedback is being received from residents participating in the service – overall user satisfaction levels are still to be determined via customer survey activity later this year

Residual waste impacts

Area	Tonnage diverted from Residual Waste (November 2022 to April 2023)
Morpeth/Longhirst/Hebron/Ulgham	32.66t
Morpeth Stobhill	32.76t
Bedlington	33.84t
Pegswood	37.1t

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- In total 136.36t of food waste has been diverted from residual waste (equivalent to 13 full refuse collection vehicles)

Future Options and Next Steps

- Anticipated significant pushback on bag use but experience to date confirmed by WRAP that residents value bags for cleanliness and tidiness. Keeping close eye on usage for future budget.
- Explore feasibility of alternative bag types – starch more expensive
- Promote awareness and convenience and increase participation in pilot areas
- Consider more communal food waste storage and collection solutions
- Market research into alternative food waste containers and vehicle types
- Continue to run the pilot & monitor longer term performance levels/trends to support modelling and business case for roll-out from April 2026

Home Compost Trial

- Over 40 households currently taking part with more bins to be distributed at Gilsland, Elsdon and Chatton, nr. Wooler
- Majority of trial participants have noticed the contents of their residual waste bin have decreased significantly.

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Shortlisted for 'The Best Local Authority Recycling Initiative' at the Awards for Excellence in Recycling and Waste Management



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Northumberland County Council

Communities and Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Work Programme 2023-2024

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Agenda Item 7

1. Terms of reference:

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

2. Issues to be Timetabled/Considered

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

31 May 2023

Fire and Rescue – Contamination

To consider the measures that can be put in place to reduce the risk of contamination for firefighters.

Food Waste Recycling Pilot

To consider the outcome of the pilot scheme and next steps.

26 July 2023

Committee Work Programme

To receive an overview from the Portfolio Holders for Looking After Our Communities, Promoting Healthy Lives, Improving Our Roads and Highways, and Looking After Our Environment on forthcoming issues within their remits which members may consider appropriate for inclusion on the Committee's work programme.

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Tree Management Policy

To review the framework for how the Council responds to enquiries, and how it inspects and maintains trees that it is responsible for.

20 September 2023

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.

15 November 2023

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).

<p>Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Action Plan</p> <p>Social Housing</p>	<p>To consider progress against the Action Plan following Cabinet's approval of the Strategy in March 2023.</p> <p>To consider the implications of the new Social Housing Regulations following consideration</p>
<p>31 January 2024</p>	
<p>Library Service Strategy 2021-26</p>	<p>To update the Committee on the implementation of the Strategy.</p>
<p>27 March 2024</p>	
<p>Northumberland Infrastructure Funding Statement</p>	<p>To consider the annual Infrastructure Funding Statement in respect of Section 106 Agreements</p>