

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

ASHINGTON & BLYTH LOCAL AREA COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Ashington & Blyth Local Area Council** held on **Wednesday, 15 March 2023 at 5:00 pm** in **The Welbeck Suite, Newbiggin Sports and Community Centre, Woodhorn Road, Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, NE64 6HG**

PRESENT

Councillor L Grimshaw (Chair)

MEMBERS

C Ball
E Cartie
B Gallacher
C Humprey
J Lang
K Nisbet

K Parry
W Ploszaj
M Purvis
J Reid
M Richardson
A Wallace
A Watson

OFFICERS

G Bucknall
R Greally

S McMillan
J Stewart
R Wealleans

Highways Delivery Area Manager
Assistant Democratic Services
Officer
Service Director
Strategic Housing Manager
Neighbourhood Services Area
Manager

2 Members of the press and public were in attendance

02 APOLOGIES FOR ABSCENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Daniel Carr and Elizabeth Simpson

03 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Ashington & Blyth Local Area Council meeting held on Wednesday 13 February 2023, as circulated, be a true record and signed by the Chairman.

04 PETITIONS

- (a) A new petition had been submitted regarding the running and funding of Ashington Hirst Park. The petition had 77 signatures and a report would be brought to a future meeting. It was anticipated that it would be heard at the May meeting.

With the agreement from the Chair the devolution consultation item was brought forward on the agenda.

06 DEVOLUTION CONSULTATION

Sarah McMillan, Service Director and Councilor Glen Sanderson, Leader of the Council introduced the presentation to committee. The consultation for the devolution deal commenced on 26 January 2023. During the consultation period, amongst public events, discussions have also taken place at Local Area Councils, Youth Parliament, with business and NALC.

The deal would have seven local authorities working together: Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland, County Durham, Gateshead, South Tyneside and Sunderland. The Leader confirmed that all authorities were working well together creating the deal. It was hoped through the devolution deal the Authorities would be able to create the best conditions for growth in jobs, investment and living standards. Members were assured that the devolution deal would not impact on the existing local authorities in the region, and the authorities would continue to provide the statutory and local services they do currently.

There were several priorities for the County that were highlighted in the deal including clean energy and net zero. The rural economy and sustainability was another highlight of the deal which was a priority to the Council as Northumberland had a high proportion of rural areas. The Health & Public Service reform priority would be tackling inequalities which is one of the main priorities of the Council.

The 7 Councils commissioned a Governance Review to explore whether the combined authority for the region would be beneficial. The Review concluded that the new authority would benefit economic growth and delivery of public services. It was unlikely existing governance arrangements could have been meaningfully strengthened without adopting the Mayoral Combined Authority model of governance. A change was required to enable the North East authorities to pursue their economic and social policy agenda at a greater pace.

The consultation commenced on 23rd January and was due to close on 23rd March. There had been several events across the region and communications had been published to publicise the consultation period. Once the consultation period had concluded the feedback would be reviewed by individual councils to decide whether to proceed. If all councils agreed, a summary of the consultation would be prepared, and once approved by Cabinets, submitted to Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities. The Secretary of State would

then decide if the statutory criteria had been met and whether the relevant authorities had given the necessary consents, before making the statutory order to create the new mayoral combined authority. If the region proceeded it was most likely that this would be in May 2024, when the new North East Mayoral Combined Authority would be formed and an election would be held to appoint the new Mayor.

The following comments were made in response to members questions:-

- It was acknowledged that the local area council was held at 5:00 pm which may have made it difficult for some members of the public to attend. However, it was confirmed that there had been a lot of engagements organised to engage with the public and that the County Council had gone above and beyond what other Authorities had done.
- There were several non-negotiables in the deal that the Leader had stressed including; rural development needed and maintaining the Council's own fire and rescue service.
- Transport was a priority of the Council and the importance of having sustainable funding for rural transport was recognized. It was acknowledged that tourist spots were being looked at for possible transportation routes, however the priority for transport links would be for residents.
- It was confirmed that the £42 billion was not index linked, however a number of spending reviews would occur throughout the deal term. The combined authority would have borrowing powers.
- The devolution deal was an executive function and therefore Cabinet would make the final decision on it. The Leader confirmed he would be happy to discuss the deal with all members at full council.
- It was confirmed that a new Mayor for an expanded Combined Authority would not take on the role of the Police Crime Commissioner, as the combined authority will not be contiguous with the Police forces in the region.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

08 LOCAL SERVICES

Ray Wealleans, neighbourhood services area manager, gave an update to committee.

Winter works continued at a rate expected.

Since the last LAC (in January), the service had experienced a mild winter period. The exception being w/c 6th March.

- The Grounds staff continued to work a 28-hour week during the winter period until the end of March, progress through scheduled work had been a challenge but ultimately successful.

- They were on target to complete all scheduled winter works tasks with a couple of areas to be completed in Ashington.
- Officers asked to be alerted at the earliest convenience if Councillors believed any requested work had not been completed.

Preparations were finalised for the upcoming grass cutting season. All grass cutting equipment had either been serviced or was scheduled to be serviced.

- Grass cutting would potentially start within the next 2 weeks depending on ground conditions
- Routes within the remit of Stakeford depot remained unchanged from last year
- Grass cutting schedules for the Blyth area had some changes made in line with agreements with Blyth Town council around gateways into the town as part of the partnership agreement.
- The service was now recruiting for seasonal grounds maintenance positions for this year and had a number of returning staff in both areas.

Weed control activities would be undertaken in-house again this year.

- Blue dye would be used again this year.

Street Cleansing

- Business as usual.
- Street sweeping was always affected by ground frost, the service was suspended w/c 6th March with staff assisting in the gritting of all identified routes.
- Reminder to LAC - The brushes lost their effectiveness in freezing conditions as vegetation and detritus sticks to the ground. When this is observed, machines are stood down.
- **The Great British Spring Clean 2023:** We are supporting Ashington Town Council in this event with the area team adding to resources by helping with the clean up and transporting all rubbish to tip from the various sites over the week. We also approached local fast food outlets (McDonalds and KFC) McDonalds have all in hand and did not require any assistance but we have arranged with KFC to assist in the collection of their bags on the day of their clean up. Any other Town or Parish in need of assistance please let me know.
- Planned work for the beginning of April will commence for the A189 Spine Road over 4 weekends with night time closures.

WASTE

Residual and recycling

- It was business as usual for waste collection services.
- Round Review - Work had been completed in readiness for deployment of the two new RCV's. This was done to ensure they are deployed in the most efficient way possible.
- This LAC area would benefit from some areas of Cramlington and Blyth going back to the collection service for that area which released the Stakeford crews to take up the majority of new builds within Ashington, Ellington and surrounding areas.

Garden waste collections have started

- Increased housing/customer numbers had meant additional tweaking of rounds had been required to accommodate the increase.
- Initial take up for the service was high, the scheme remained as popular as ever.

Information Only:

- Glass collection was still going well with 4.7 ton collected given a cumulative total of 181 ton collected since the start of the trial, the front-line collection round had commented on the lower amount of residual waste collected within the trial area.

The following comments were made in response to members questions:-

- It was confirmed that signage for the commercial bins was being prepared and should be rolled out in the very near future. The communal bins should be rolled out by the end of April
- Members were assured that if communities wanted to extend the clean up event that it could be accommodated.
- Members requested feedback on the winter services and updates on the road sweepers which the officer confirmed they were happy to provide.

Graham Bucknall, Highways Delivery Area Manager, gave an update to committee:-

On the day-to-day maintenance side, the Highways Inspectors and their response gangs continued to repair carriageway defects, across the Southeast area. It was hoped after winter once there was a new budget allocation, progress would be made with the backlog of potholes.

NCC were nominated last year for a national Excellence award in Highway and street lighting Maintenance by APSE (Association for public service excellence). It may be assumed that the County's roads are poor, but they were among the top performers in the country.

Gully emptier was fully deployed dealing with reported issues and cyclic maintenance.

On the Capital side of the business, since last Area Council, large structural patching had been carried out at the following locations;

- Burnside, Ashington
- Ashford Close, Blyth
- 1st/2nd/4th/12th Avenue, Blyth
- Broadway, Blyth
- Sea Crest Road, Newbiggin
- A193 Plessey R/A, Blyth
- Ravens Hill, Ashington
- Hawthorn Road, Ashington
- Ingram Drive, Blyth

Drainage Improvements:

Drainage Improvements had been carried out in the following areas:

- Kenilworth Road, Ashington

Chair's Initials.....

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- Coburg Street, Blyth
- Rotary Way, Blyth
- Carlton Street, Ashington
- Woodlands Road, Ashington
- Rutherford Street, Ashington
- Station Road, Ashington
- Dunlin Drive, Blyth
- Milburn Road, Ashington
- 1068 Ashington
- Furnace Road, Bebside

LTP – Carriageway Resurfacing

It was approaching the end of the LTP resurfacing programme for this year. Schemes had recently been completed at

- Thoroton Street, Blyth – Completed 15th March
- Laverock Hall Road, Blyth – Completed 14th March
- Hirst Roundabout, Ashington. - Starting 15th March for 3 nights. 20:00 – 06:00

Other Completed and Upcoming Schemes

- Remscheid Way, Ashington. - Installation of 15 bollards and new 'Slow' road markings, completed 9th March.
- Woodhorn Crossroads – Traffic safety scheme started on Monday 13th March, new traffic signs and road markings. The signs were now installed, and road markings were expected to be completed by end of March.
- A189 Woodhorn Museum Entrance – Traffic safety scheme, this was installation of new road markings and refreshing of existing markings. This would be a night-time road closure for 5 nights starting 15th May.
- Northern Line upgrades – Working alongside Network Rail there would be improvement works carried out at North Seaton Crossing, Ashington and Newsham Road Crossing, Blyth, there were no fixed dates for this yet but would be looking to start work in early late spring. The work consists of carriageway resurfacing at Newsham and footpath upgrades at North Seaton.

Regeneration Scheme

- Bowes Street, Blyth – Was now almost complete. Installation of Giant planters and seating was programmed for week commencing 27/3/2023. There was also street cleansing and sealing booked in for this week, this was nightshift working between 20:00 and 06:00.

Winter Maintenance

It was hoped they were now coming out of Winter. It had not been a particularly severe Winter although there had been three or four very cold spells but the team had done a fantastic job as always.

The following comments were made in response to members questions:-

- Officers asked for any details regarding redundant lighting and sign posts being taped off but yet to be removed.
- Officers confirmed that they would pass on concerns regarding utility companies digging up paths & roads and not restoring them sufficiently.
- Members questioned whether staff could report other faults or issues and work across departments.
- Members thanked the officers for the hard work their staff undertook during the recent cold spells.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

09 HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING REPORT

Julie Stewart, Strategic Housing Manager, introduced the report to committee. The updated Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy 2022-2026 has been approved by Cabinet. There is a statutory duty to carry out a review of homelessness in the Authority's area and create a strategy based on the review. The strategy outlines priorities for the next five years. The service works with Advance and other housing companies depending on location to help provide additional temporary accommodation, increasing the options available to the team. The new strategy defines what a rough sleeper is which is different to homelessness. The report highlights the provisions available to rough sleepers as well as those who were homeless or at risk of homelessness.

In November a rough sleeper count was conducted in November 2022 and 5 people were verified as sleeping rough within the County. The service does not underestimate the number of hidden homeless. The service is under increasing pressure, there are a high number of homelessness reported daily to the Council and funding from the Government had been reduced.

There had been 2,491 homeless applications in Northumberland to date, 1011 (41%) of these were in the Blyth area. There were 434 (17%) applications in Ashington and 66 (3%) in Newbiggin by the Sea. It was thought that there was a high proportion of homelessness in Blyth as that was where many services were.

The following comments were made in response to members questions:-

- The service was flexible with its definition of affordable housing. The service would work with those needed on an individual basis to ensure that the individual could suitably afford the property.

- It was confirmed that Changing Lives worked with individuals for a maximum of 6 months to try and move them onto permanent housing depending on the individual.
- There was work ongoing with empty properties and dwellings however Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs) are very lengthy and sometimes the costs incurred was very high. Often the reason behind Empty properties were complex and some are often tied up in complex legal situations such as probate.
- The Government are considering bringing forward a decent home standard for private landlords. The Council do have an accreditation scheme however it is voluntary scheme so often it was more the proactive landlords that join up to the scheme.
- The Council commissions one service in the County to support people with complex needs. This is delivered by Changing Lives. The council also commissions the Somewhere Safe to Stay scheme, for people sleeping rough, funded from Government funding under the Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI). This scheme is also delivered by Changing Lives. The services were inspected regularly and required to provide quarterly reports to the Council. It was important to note that there were other services available that were not commissioned and there was no obligation for those services to be inspected.
- It was confirmed that the Government set the date of the homelessness Rough Sleeper Count however the Council also complete interim surveys at different times of the year.
- It is hoped that Selective Licensing in a focused area in Blyth will roll out next May depending on the results of a formal consultation which will be taking place this year. . The funding for this is being provided by Public Health.
- It was acknowledged that there is an increasing number of people with complex needs who are homeless and there is a gap within the service provision to assist them.
- It is hoped that with government funding there will be a designated team that would be able to investigate empty homes and be able to use enforcement against private landlords not maintaining standards.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on Wednesday 12th April (planning only).

Chair _____

Date _____

Chair's Initials.....

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