

## NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

### ASHINGTON & BLYTH LOCAL AREA COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Ashington & Blyth Local Area Council** held on **Wednesday, 10 May 2023 at 5:00 pm** in **Blyth Town Football Club, South Newsham Playing Fields, Sandringham Drive, Blyth, Northumberland, NE24 3PS.**

#### PRESENT

Councillor L Grimshaw (Chair)

#### MEMBERS

|             |              |
|-------------|--------------|
| C Ball      | K Parry      |
| E Cartie    | J Reid       |
| B Gallacher | M Richardson |
| C Humprey   | A Wallace    |
| K Nisbet    | A Watson     |

#### OFFICERS

|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| J Caisley    | Neighbourhood Police Inspector            |
| W Daniels    | Neighbourhood Police Inspector            |
| R Greally    | Assistant Democratic Services Officer     |
| R Masson     | Highways Delivery Area Manager            |
| P Soderquest | Director of Housing and Public Protection |
| R Wealleans  | Neighbourhood Services Area Manager       |

4 Members of the press and public were in attendance

#### 02 APOLOGIES FOR ABSCENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Jim Laing, Wojciech Ploszaj and Mark Purvis.

#### 03 MINUTES

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

## 04 LOCAL POLICING UPDATE

Inspectors W Daniels and J Caisley gave an update to committee. Neighbourhood police were getting a much needed uplift of staff. The force had suffered from financial cuts however the force was gradually recruiting. The neighbourhood police force was low in number currently but with the gradual recruitment there would be a more positive outlook and the force would have increased capability. The force operating model was to respond to the most vulnerable and tried to concentrate on activity that caused the most harm. It was highlighted that neighbourhood police officers had a lot of responsibility including domestic violence crimes and repeat offenders.

In the past 12 months the Blyth area had 4892 crimes reported the majority of the crimes reported were in the public safety and welfare category. This was usually where individuals had concerns over mental health and although the police were the first responders it was not always the best response for the individual. The number of crimes was lower than previous years. Shoplifting and burglary had been consistently low for a number of months the neighbourhood police had been working with retailers through a retail crime partnership with teams targeting repeat offenders.

Youth anti-social behaviour had been high in the area however not as high as previous years. Projects were in place to tackle the anti-social behaviour and there was a concentration on the anti-social behaviour letter system which had seen a high success rate. The letter system would inform parents of their children's behaviour and would be followed up by visits and finally an acceptable behaviour agreement if needed. The force was aware of a number of areas that were affected by motorcycle disorder and there were plans to tackle it in specific areas. The inspectors encouraged the public to continue to report any activity regarding motorcycle disorders to ensure the force had accurate data to work from.

Over the past 12 months in the Ashington area there had been 4144 crimes committed which was an increase in number from the previous year. The majority of crimes reported in the area were within the public safety category. The road safety unit was tasked with improving speeding problems in the area. Staff were due to be trained to use the speed guns within the next two months. The area was also affected with motorcycle disturbances, it was challenging to identify offenders as many of the bikes had no registration plates and the riders often wore balaclavas and helmets. The youth anti-social behaviour was expected to increase with the better weather but the neighbourhood team were aware of the affected areas. A new project was underway which created a multiagency approach. The neighbourhood police were working with Northumberland Communities together and match funding was being used to create a post for a coordinator who would cover key themes within the network. Funding would be key to keeping the project a success and future funding stream were being sourced.

Members highlighted that there was a project being pursued which hoped to help tackle the motorcycle problem, however it was in the early stages planning. It was hoped that the project would allow young people to take their bike to a location where they would learn skills and be able to ride their bike. The neighbourhood police officers encouraged members to contact the police crime commissioner regarding funding as they were confident it would be supported.

Members also asked that they be updated regarding the coordinator project as they would be willing to assist with funding. It was confirmed to members that the Ashington area included Newbiggin by the Sea and West Sleekburn. The inspectors thanked members who had helped fund several defibrillators around Ashington and agreed it was an asset to the area. Neighbourhood Police reminded members that they were always available to speak to and encouraged member from both County Council and Town Councils to contact them regarding any concerns.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

## **06 LOCAL SERVICES ISSUES**

Raymond Wealleans, Neighbourhood Services Area Manager, gave an update to committee:-

### **Operational information to make the LAC aware of:**

#### **Waste Service**

- Residual and Recycling waste collection services continued to perform well.
- The service were in the final stages of completing a detailed review of all kerbside collection rounds – in response to ever increasing housing stock numbers. More information on this would follow when the work is completed.
- Demand for the bulky waste service remained high but performance was good, this service was constantly monitored and booking slots adjusted accordingly.
- Garden waste service was up and running and was also performing well.
- There was a total of 9245 paid customers in the Ashington & Blyth area, with residents still coming on. There was a total of 10,127 last season.

#### **Grass Cutting**

- Required number of seasonal staff were appointed and started cutting late March/early April weather permitting.
- They were now on cut 2/3 in all areas.
- The service aimed to start the grass cutting season as stated in March but saw a few interruptions in the form of wet weather and the usual bank holidays, this made the gap between cut 1 and 2 a little longer than average but teams were recovering well.
- The very wet start had been challenging for the teams, but teams would push to recover during May (despite the extra bank holiday's)

### **Weed Control**

- The team had undertaken the spraying of obstacles in all main areas and would continue to do so.
- Some wider area spraying, or ripping had been undertaken in the Southeast area including Newbiggin, Cambois, Blyth and Ashington Areas
- It was confirmed that blue dye would be used to combat weeds.

### **Street Cleansing**

- Scheduled works continued within the Southeast area
- Fly tipping was still an ongoing problem particularly with the Hirst and Cowpen Quay areas, the team were working with our enforcement team to identify and where possible prosecute.
- Sweepers were also working to schedule with no reported issues.
- A189 Spine Road Cleansing and Maintenance work took place over April with the teams working 5 Night Shift weekends A total of 2.5 tonnes of rubbish was removed, with just under 11 miles of road litter picked, cut, trimmed, swept and weed sprayed.

## **GENERAL - COUNTY WIDE INFORMATION**

### **Verge Cutting will start before the next LAC**

- Work will take 2 months, running through June and July
- Schedule remains unchanged from last year
- The service had 6.8 million sq. metres of verge to cut in the county.
- Local farmers were engaged with to help get through the significant workload.
- As usual, we will react quickly if we need to revisit any visibility splays due to re-growth.

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

- It was confirmed that the land outside of the South Shore phase 1 development belonged to the County Council. Members were assured that the Council would look into the ownership and maintenance of the hedges in that area.
- Members thanked the team for their hard work on the spine road clear up project.
- Members acknowledged that fly-postering or fly-stickering needed to be reported especially if the content is of a distasteful nature. It would be the responsibility of the environmental enforcement team to look into enforcement against organisations who carried out the fly-postering.
- It was suggested by members to send out correspondence to those who had memorial benches what was acceptable to place on the benches as in

some cases the memorabilia were in excess. Officers acknowledged the issue and agreed to look into a solution.

Russell Mason, Highways Maintenance Senior Team Leader, gave an update to committee:-

All Highways Inspectors and maintenance crews continued to work inspecting, fixing carriageway/footway defects, making repairs, and making safe category one defects across the Southeast area.

The gully emptiers were fully deployed dealing with reported issues and cyclic maintenance.

### **Larger Tarmac Patching**

**Larger Tarmac Patching had been carried out in the following locations:**

- South Newsham Road, Blyth
- Links Road, Blyth
- Amersham Road, Blyth
- Briarley Road, Blyth
- First Avenue, Blyth
- Park Villas, Ashington
- Park Road, Ashington

### **Drainage Improvements:**

**Drainage Improvements had been carried out in the following areas:**

- LTP - Carriageway Resurfacing
- Carriageway Resurfacing had been carried out the following areas:
- North View/Matfen Terrace, Newbiggin (LTP Prep) - Resurfacing 5th June
- Madison Street, Blyth, Prep work w/c 15th May - Resurfacing 8th June

### **Other Completed and Upcoming Schemes**

- A189 Woodhorn RA – North Seaton RA – Southbound - large patching Started 23rd May.
- 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.
- Ashington Central Primary School – Traffic Safety Scheme completed
- Hawthorn Road, Ashington Flag to Flex complete.
- Northern Line upgrades – Working alongside Network Rail the team would be carrying out improvement works 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 consisted of

carriageway resurfacing at Newsham and footpath upgrades at North Seaton.

### **Regeneration Scheme**

- Bowes Street, Blyth – was now almost complete. Final planting of all planters commencing Friday 12th May.

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

- Officers confirmed that members could email or call to notify them of any specific issues raised.
- Members suggested that there should be a system in place where officers can communicate to members which gullies had been emptied in their area.
- Officers confirmed that the £3.8 million from Government for the LTP would be split equally in all areas of the County.
- It was confirmed that all issues recorded via fix my street would be prioritised in the same way regardless of the who reported it. The public should be encouraged to self-serve and report their issues themselves rather than relying on members of local and town councils.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

## **08 PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING UPDATE**

Philip Soderquest, Director of Housing and Public Protection, gave a presentation (attached with the minutes) to committee. Ashington and Blyth area had the highest proportion of long-term empty (LTE) properties in Northumberland. There were 291 in Blyth and 295 in Ashington – Blyth and Ashington made up 26% of the total long term empty properties for Northumberland.

The Council had initiatives in place to try and combat the long-term empty homes. The housing service had joint initiatives with other services such as planning and public protection. In problematic areas there were targeted interventions which included engaging with the community and owners of the empty properties. There were 3 private sector housing officers to cover Northumberland. There was a proposal for an implementation of selective licensing in the Croft and Cowpen area of Blyth. In the last 12 months 14 empty homes had been brought back into use with interventions from the Private Sector Team in the Blyth area. The Homes England funding programme had succeeded in completing 4 empty dwelling management orders in Blyth, as well as 7 properties being purchased, repaired and added to Council housing stock.

In Ashington there had been previous targeted intervention including working with community groups. The housing team were working closely with Advance Northumberland to use empty properties for dispersed temporary accommodation. In the past 12 months there had been 24 long term empty properties brought back into use through interventions and the Private Sector team.

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

- Officers acknowledged the challenge with probate and was aware of a number of properties that were in that position. Probate limited the ability for intervention but the Authority was seeking legal advice on a number of challenging properties.
- One of the main challenge with long term empty properties in the area was that many of the properties in Northumberland were where the mortgage liability was greater than the worth, or where it was not a viable option to improve the property to rent as the work would cost more than the property value.
- Officers were actively working with Advance Northumberland to maximise their stock and bring their long term empty properties back into use. It was acknowledged the cost implications associated with bringing properties back into use and that there was a risk it could cost Advance money.
- It was stressed the difficulty of enforcement within the housing sector. The resources were limited and there was limited capacity. Housing Law did not allow for much interference. There was no law that gave the authority power to take properties.
- Officers acknowledged that there was a high number of absentee landlords in the area and this was most likely to do with the low property prices in the area. It was confirmed that the increase in Council Tax for empty properties had been successful and had the desired effect.
- Members thanked Philip for his hard work and dedication to the authority for many years. They wished him well in his retirement and hoped he had a well-deserved rest.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

## **10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting was due to be agreed at the Annual Meeting of the County Council on 17 May 2023 and was likely to take place in June 2023. Details would be circulated when the date had been confirmed.

**Chair** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_