

**NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**  
**CASTLE MORPETH LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE**

At the meeting of the **Castle Morpeth Local Area Committee** held at Stakeford & Bomarsund Social Welfare Centre on Monday, 20 November 2023 at 6.00 pm.

**PRESENT**

J Beynon (Chair) (in the Chair)

**MEMBERS**

R Dodd  
V Jones

J Foster  
M Murphy

**OFFICERS**

L Little  
K Westerby

Senior Democratic Services Officer  
Highways Delivery Manager

Around 9 members of the press and public were present.

**1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bawn, Darwin, Dickinson, Dunn, Sanderson, Towns and Wearmouth.

**2 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

Questions had been submitted in advance from Longhirst Parish Council including background information and photographs which had been circulated to Members and Officers in advance of the meeting. Councillor Peter Coates was in attendance and provided background to the question.

1. That Northumberland County Council (NCC) formally requested Advance Northumberland Ltd to clear and maintain the ditches draining the affected stretch of Ashington Road and to investigate the source of the surface water discharging onto the site from the south east verge.
2. That NCC raised the level of the affected section of Ashington Road approximately 100m (there was a request currently made via the Local Transport Plan for 2024/25).

K Westerby, Highways Delivery Manager thanked Longhirst Parish Council for their very detailed report which had been submitted along with the question. The Investigation Team had been on site the previous week and a drainage survey had been undertaken. To date a blocked pipe had been found and it was hoped that work to clear this could be undertaken. Contact was to be made with

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Advance Northumberland to seek their agreement for the Council to undertake the work and recharge Advance Northumberland. It was confirmed that a scheme to raise the road by 100mm was included in the Local Transport Plan for 2024/25, however it was not known at the current time whether this would be undertaken. Following surveys undertaken after Storm Babet this scheme for improvement had also been captured and flagged as part of that process. The Team were still on site and it was hoped that the situation could be resolved. It was highlighted that whilst signs stating that the road was closed were in use drivers were still trying to get through.

Councillor Dodds advised that it was not a good time to try to clear drainage ditches due to the very wet weather and problems with vehicle access. He also highlighted that problems were being encountered with residue from rapeseed oil blocking drains.

### 3 **PETITIONS**

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

**(b) Petitions Previously Received –** None

**(c) Receive any updates on petitions for which a report was previously considered –** There were no updates.

### 4 **WINTER SERVICES PREPAREDNESS AND RESILIENCE REPORT 2023-2024**

The update provided for information gave an overall update of the pre-season preparations ahead of the forthcoming winter services season to ensure as far as is reasonably practicable that the highways was maintained in a safe condition in accordance with legal obligations under the Highways Act 1980. In response to questions the following information was provided:-

- There were 12 weather stations across the County with information also provided by other sources, however it was still difficult to predict exactly when and where resources would be needed. There were 28 primary gritting routes which were gritted regularly in accordance with forecasts as a precaution against icing with 26 secondary gritting routes which were treated in more serious conditions after the primary routes had been completed. It was stressed that traffic was required on treated surfaces in order for this to work and allow roads to be cleared.
- There were 112 staff who worked on winter services and whilst there had previously been issues in recruiting HGV drivers, staff had undertaken apprenticeships and were now able to undertake this work.
- Teams work to try to remove excess water from road surfaces before it freezes but if this was not possible then oversalting of that particular area would be undertaken.
- Information would be forwarded to K Westerby from Councillor Jones in relation to problems encountered on the border of Tynedale and Castle Morpeth areas.

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- All information in relation to grit bins was provided on dedicated pages on the Councils website. All yellow grit boxes, which belonged to the Council were currently being replenished. Green grit boxes could be purchased by Town and Parish Councils for a cost of £250 which included three replenishments. There were a number of bins which had been historically placed on which information was not held. Grit bins were provided in order to allow the treatment of roads, however the salt was often taken to treat private driveways.
- Winter services comms was to be undertaken to ensure that messages could be passed on by Councillors to residents.

## 5 **FIX MY STREET**

A presentation on the Fix My Street (FMS) was provided by K Westerby, a copy of which had been circulated with the agenda. FMS was a new web based reporting system replacing previous systems and allowed mapped and asset based reporting including photographic evidence to be provided. It replaced Lagan reporting for Local Services but did not include any waste activities. It provided many benefits for the user allowing easier reporting, updates on reports and a transparent view of all reports made. Reports could only be made on assets which had been adopted or were owned by the Council. The number of reports received by FMS had increased by 143% on those received by Lagan for the same period last year of May to September and to date 24,000 reports had been in six months compared to the average total for the year of 18,559.

Anyone wishing to report a problem could see if the same issue had already been reported. Many people had reported a positive experience in using FMS with an 88% response rate achieved. Any calls received by the call centre were also entered into FMS including the details of the person making the report allowing updates to be provided. Advice was provided that anything that was deemed as an emergency should still be reported by telephone.

In connection with reports about gullies, it was clarified that there was a programme for the cleaning of gullies and any ad hoc reports would be prioritised only if it caused traffic to have to go into a different live lane or pedestrians onto the road network. There were only four gulley tankers to clear 92,000 gullies and these had to work to cyclical routes in order to get the best use of them. During yellow and amber storm warnings then the known hotspots would be prioritised.

In addition to the FMS reporting tool it was clarified that inspections were carried out on the road network with a walked inspection on roads under 40mph and a camera vehicle on roads over 40pmh with all defects picked up. There was a criteria on what was deemed a pothole and any reports which did not meet this standard would not be repaired.

Members thanked K Westerby for his attendance and presentation.

## 6 **CHOPPINGTON DISABILITY GROUP**

Graham Huntley and David Nicholson were in attendance to provide a short presentation on the formation and work of the Choppington Disability Group (CDG). They advised that they had been active members of the Group since its formation in 2013 and which was now celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The CDG had been established by a community group who felt that there was a gap in that there was no support for disabled people or their carers who felt isolated and had no one to talk to about any of their problems. CDG gave the opportunity for those people to share space, time and their experiences in order to improve their wellbeing and quality of life.

All work was done in partnership with other organisations, some of whom were based at the Welfare Centre. The CDG was run by volunteers who had a lot of expertise as a number of them were retired practitioners, however they did not provide a direct service, but could signpost their users to other voluntary organisations and groups for help and support. A great deal of support was provided to the Group from a network of partners such as Choppington Parish Council.

A coffee morning was held on the first Friday of every month and various trips and meals out were organised throughout the year. A Christmas get together was also held every year. Wider support for events was also provided through local community involvement. There were approximately 50 regular members attending the Group all of whom were local people. CDG were associated members of a mental health organisation in the North East with an awareness of what support was available, however they were not part of any care plans.

The Chair and Members thanked Mr Huntley and Mr Nicholson for their attendance and very informative presentation.

## 7 **LIONS CLUB OF MORPETH**

Les Sage, the President of the Morpeth Lions Club in its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year and a Member of the Lions for 46 years, was in attendance to provide a presentation on the work of the Club within the Morpeth and surrounding areas. Members were advised that the Lions had originally started in 1917 in the USA and it now had 48,000 Clubs worldwide with 1.4 million members. There were 600 Clubs in the UK which made it one of the largest voluntary organisations of its kind. It had the motto "We Serve" and guaranteed that all money raised would go to Charities.

The huge Charity Booksale organised by the Lions in Morpeth provided funds to support many local charities and organisations within the locality with 125 sacks of toys provided to social services for vulnerable children at Christmas. He highlighted the high cost of hiring a stall in the market place in Morpeth or using the Town Hall for events which greatly reduced the amount of funds available for the charitable work which the Club undertook and asked Members for their help with this.

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A big Christmas event was Santa on his Sleigh who visited the special schools in the area and provided selection boxes to the children. The generosity of residents of Northumberland was highlighted with Morpeth Lions having raised £20,000 for victims of the Ukraine War out of a total of £60,000 raised by 61 Clubs in the North of the Country, with a total of approximately £30,000 - £40,000 being raised each year by Morpeth Lions.

The Club was focussing efforts over the next few months so that a book, which had been written by Mr Sage's daughter in law, Laura Coel, a survivor of sexual abuse, could be provided to all primary schools in Northumberland for schools and parents to use as a resource to help them approach the subject of sexual abuse and teach children not to have bad secrets. A Kingham, Executive Director - Children, Young People and Education at NCC had been very supportive and the book was currently being assessed by Educational Psychologists before copies were provided to schools. A copy of the book entitled "Laura's Secret" was given to each of those present.

The Chair in recognising the work undertaken by the Morpeth Lions highlighted the work undertaken in providing help for people who had been affected during flooding in the town. Mr Sage was thanked by the Chair and the Members for his attendance and very interesting presentation.

**8 LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair reminded Members that anything they wished to be added to the work programme should be forwarded either to himself or L Little, Senior Democratic Services Officer.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

**9 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Chair took the opportunity to thank those present for their attendance and to Angela Brindley and the Stakeford and Bomarsund Welfare Social Centre for their hospitality.

**CHAIR**.....

**DATE**.....

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