

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

ASHINGTON & BLYTH LOCAL AREA COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Ashington & Blyth Local Area Council** held on **Wednesday, 10 November 2023 at 4:00 pm** in **Room G01, Blyth Community Enterprise Centre, Ridley Street, Blyth, Northumberland, NE24 3AG.**

PRESENT

Councillor L Grimshaw (Chair)

MEMBERS

C Ball
D Carr
E Cartie
B Gallacher
J Lang
K Parry
M Purvis

J Reid
M Richardson
L Simpson
A Wallace
A Watson

OFFICERS

J Caisley
R Greally
N Snowdon

K Westerby

Inspector Neighbourhood Policing
Assistant Democratic Service Officer
Principal Programme Officer (Highways
Improvement)
Highways Delivery Manager

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

G Sanderson

Leader of the Council

About 2 members of the public were in attendance.

19 APOLOGIES FOR ABSCENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Humphrey, Nisbet and Ploszaj.

20 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Ashington & Blyth Local Area Council meeting held on Wednesday 15 November 2023, as circulated, be a true record and signed by the Chairman.

21 PETITIONS

(a) Receive any new petitions

Officers informed the committee of new petition that was submitted titled "Finalise Crofton Grange Housing Estate", it had received 102 signatures and it was confirmed that a report was anticipated to come to the next Ashington & Blyth Local Area Committee in March 2024.

(b) Consider reports on petitions previously received

Request for a Controlled Pedestrian Crossing on Newbiggin Road, Ashington

Mr Picton, the lead petitioner introduced the petition to the committee. It was highlighted that there were no controlled crossings on the stretch of road which meant that residents in the area were disadvantaged especially those with disabilities. Other crossings on the stretch of the road were island crossings which were not suitable for visually impaired residents to use independently.

Local Councillor Mark Purvis had requested a controlled crossing to for the Local Transport Plan for 2022 and 2023. Mr Picton welcomed the recommendation of another survey as pubs, shops and more houses had been developed. The housing development had grown substantially since the original survey and it was pointed out that the increase in houses meant there was an increase in Council Tax being paid into the County which could have been used to construct the desired crossing.

Neil Snowdon, Principal Programme Officer, introduced the report to committee. The report suggested that a new pedestrian and PV2 traffic survey be carried out to assess the amount of pedestrians and traffic in the area. If the survey results met the criteria then the crossing would be considered as part of the LTP programme.

The survey camera would be positioned in a way that would capture the main crossing in question but would also pick up the other crossing further down the road. The survey would take place as soon as practicably possible and if successful the crossing would be considered in the 2025 Local Transport Plan.

Members raised concerns over the length of time it was going to take to consult, design and construct the crossing. It was suggested that the design process be started at the same time as the survey taking place. Members felt that the survey and hopefully the crossing needed to be started as soon as possible. Several Ashington members suggested that they would contribute part of their small member's scheme to the crossing to help move the process along.

RESOLVED that members considered the report and recommended:

- (i) they support the actions proposed;
- (ii) the design process be started alongside the survey

(c) Receive any updates on petitions for which a report was previously considered

There were no updates on previous petitions.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

22 LOCAL AREA POLICING

Inspector Jonathan Caisley gave a policing update to the committee. He gave his apologies for Inspector Wayne Daniels who was unable to attend the meeting but had provided an update which would be read out by Inspector Caisley. Within the Blyth area there were two teams each with a sergeant, seven police constables and two Police Community Support Officers. There was a healthy number of officers in neighbourhood policing as there had been good investment.

In the Blyth area crime levels remained steady there had been a decrease in violence linked to nighttime economy. Anti-Social behaviour remained consistent and there had been no spikes. Reports of motorbike anti-social behaviour was at a similar level to previous years – there had been a decline over the winter period which was expected. Inspector Caisley confirmed the team were working with Ashington neighbourhood officers to create a dedicated team to help combat motorcycle disorder. The upcoming priorities were anti-social behaviour, drug dealing as well as retail and business crime.

In the Ashington area crime levels also remained steady however summer tended to see an increase in levels. In August motorcycle disorder spiked in Newbiggin and Ashington. Ashington and Blyth teams were working together and pooling resources to give a consistent approach to tackle motorcycle disorder. It was expected that a greater amount of bikes would be seized and there would be a more targeted approach using technology such as drones.

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

- There was a retail crime partnership in the Blyth area. A panel were taking ideas forward however support had waned. However, if anyone was interested they were encouraged to contact the local neighbourhood police team.
- It was acknowledged that the motorcycle disorder was an issue and the neighbourhood police team were looking to proactively sort the problem using targeted approaches such as drones. The offroad track project was still being looked into but there was no indication of a timescale for this.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

23. BUDGET 2024-25 AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Leader of the Council, Glen Sanderson, gave a presentation to the committee. The presentation outlined the intentions for the next budget. The Leader felt that the budget addressed the three priorities of the Council; achieving value for money, tackling inequalities and driving economic growth. There had been two policy conferences held for members to discuss the setting of the budget. There was also an online consultation due to take place to allow members of the public to comment on it. The budget would protect frontline services and it was hoped that compulsory redundancies would be avoided if possible.

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

- Members raised concerns over the lack of detail in the presentation. However, it was confirmed that the presentation was to show where the Council was to the public. The budget was still not complete and was still under consultation. Members were able to discuss the details and figures about the budget in the Corporate Services & Economic Growth scrutiny meeting and at Full Council.
- Members were assured that the consultation was intended to gather responses from stakeholders regarding the budget. There had been policy conferences, meetings with group leaders and an online consultation.
- The Leader confirmed that the budget could not be set and finalised until the Authority had received the final settlement figure from Government which happens in late December. However, conference policies had been carried out throughout the year to try and keep members up to date. Members suggested that more discussion needed to take place during the conference policies.

RESOLVED that the presentation be noted.

24. FIX MY STREET

Kris Westerby, Highways Delivery Manager, gave a presentation on the new web-based reporting system, Fix My Street (FMS), which had been launched in May 2023. (A copy of the presentation is enclosed with the signed minutes.)

The presentation outlined:

- The limits of previous systems used by Local Services and other departments with minimal integration of back-office systems and lack of feedback to customers.
- The benefits of FMS which included asset-based reporting, use of photographic evidence, accuracy of locations, integration with other systems, ability to produce reports for users and respond to FOI / EIR information.
- The implementation timetable.
- The benefits for users and staff with slides which demonstrated views of the web and mobile apps and ability to monitor reports made.
- Data on reports logged using FMS from May to September 2023 and comparison with issues logged for the same period in 2022 (there had been an increase of 143%).
- The ability to monitor trends by ward or postcode and obtain a detailed breakdown by category.
- The top 5 reporting categories were:
 - i. Roads – potholes
 - ii. Flytipping
 - iii. Hedges / Overgrown vegetation
 - iv. Blocked gullies
 - v. Grass cutting

- Next steps including ongoing enhancements such as inclusion of grit heaps and bins, developments to aid defence of insurance claims, improvements to consistency and feedback to users, increased front end automation of responses with reference to policies, use by more departments such as housing etc.
- The demonstration included a brief overview of the system as viewed by officers, how the system interacted with Alloy (the system used by Highways Maintenance) and how reports could be reassigned between users and departments.
- Users were able see whether the same issue had already been reported.
- Residents could continue to report issues by telephoning the Contact Centre who would enter the details on Fix My Street.

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

- Members thanked Kris for his hard work and agreed the app was beneficial to the Authority. It was acknowledged that the work was on-going and tweaks were still needed.

- It was acknowledged that the data was only as good as the input from the public and output from officers.
- There was an expectation from the public that the Council will deal with all queries however the fix my street app will direct the query to the appropriate service if it is not within the Council's remit.

25 LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Councillors requested that a presentation on tourism within the area be brought to committee. It was confirmed that officers had been contacted and a date would be scheduled as soon as practicably possible.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

26 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Ashington and Blyth Local Area Committee would be held on Wednesday, 13 March 2024.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

Chair _____

Date _____