

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL
ASHINGTON & BLYTH LOCAL AREA COUNCIL

At a virtual meeting of the **Ashington & Blyth Local Area Council** held on **Wednesday, 13 January 2021 at 6:00 pm.**

PRESENT

Councillor G Webb (Chair)

MEMBERS

E Cartie
G Davey
S Davey
B Gallacher
J J Gobin
L Grimshaw
J Lang

K Nisbet
K Parry
M Purvis
J Reid
L Rickerby
E Simpson

OFFICERS

M Carle
D Lally
P Jones
K Norris
R Wealleans

Highways Delivery Area Manager
Chief Executive
Service Director – Local Services
Democratic Services Officer
Neighbourhood Services Area
Manager

ALSO PRESENT

N Oliver
R Wearmouth
Tourism

Cabinet Member for Local Services
Cabinet Member for Business &

110. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor D Campbell and T Wilson.

111. DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Simpson declared an interest in item 5a, Receipt of New Petitions, as she had submitted the petition referred to. Councillor Simpson would leave the meeting during discussion of that item.

112. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Ashington & Blyth Local Area Council held on Wednesday, 9 December 2020, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

113. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No questions from the public had been received in advance of the meeting.

114. PETITIONS

(a) Receive any new petitions - the following e-petition had been received by Democratic Services and opened for signatures on 3 December 2020:

Newbiggin Town Council held a meeting on 18 November and voted for (3 for only 2 against), the proposed asset transfer of the derelict toilets next to the Cresswell Arms Public House, Newbiggin from Northumberland County Council. This petition is opposed to the asset transfer and redevelopment of a new toilet block at this location to be paid for by Newbiggin residents and instead wants this eyesore demolished and the site cleared. We believe that this best represents the views of local residents who have not been consulted on this matter.

The petition was acknowledged and it was noted that officers would be requested to produce a report for March's meeting.

(b) Consider reports on petitions previously received: No reports to consider.

(c) Receive any updates on petitions for which a report was previously considered: An update would be provided later in the meeting regarding the petition considered at November's meeting about speeding traffic on Woodhorn Road, Ashington.

115. LOCAL SERVICES ISSUES

The Neighbourhood Services Area Manager and Highways Delivery Area Manager were in attendance to provide verbal updates about any key recent, ongoing and/or future planned Local Services work and to respond to issues raised by members.

Neighbourhood Services

R Wealleans, Neighbourhood Services Area Manager, said it had been a long and challenging year for staff in frontline services who were out working across the entire Christmas period. Tasks carried out included refuse collections, emptying litter bins, street cleansing to ensure streets remained clean and tidy, continuation of the winter works programme and winter gritting of footpaths when required.

He was sure members would recognise the huge efforts of the frontline teams over what had been the most difficult period the Council had ever faced.

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Waste Service update

The Refuse Collection Service had worked very well over the Christmas period. There had been some unfavourable weather conditions but a minimal number of bins had been missed in the Ashington/Blyth area and a good communication strategy ensured that substitute collection days were successful. Refuse staff collected 823 tonnes of residual waste and 247 tonnes of recycling waste on the collections after the Christmas and New Year period, an increase of 113 tonnes of residual and 37 tonnes of recycling compared with the previous fortnightly collections.

Grounds Maintenance

Regular winter works were well under way and requests made by members would be addressed. Members were requested to submit any further winter work requests (e.g. hedges and shrub maintenance) for assessment. These would be added to the schedule, if appropriate, and carried out if there were available resources subject to any new COVID restrictions

Street Cleansing

Cleansing routes continued to work well, leaf clearance hotspots were complete and regular sweeping schedules were back in place. Other cleansing activities were ongoing and a litter pick of the A189 spine road was planned over 4 weekends commencing on 7 February 2021.

Additional information

- Glass trial - there had been three collections of kerbside glass. Presentation rates and yields had exceeded expectation.
- Free Tree Scheme - During December free trees were given out to residents over eleven locations spread across the county. Ultimately, the aim had been to give away 15,000 trees and this had been on target for January but as a result of the current national lockdown a review was taking place as to how this could be achieved.

In response to questions the following information was provided:

- Regarding some areas in Ashington where residents were having to put all of their rubbish into bin liners, officers were in the process of submitting planning permission to extend the compounds at Chestnut Street and Maple Street. Councillor Gallacher would be kept informed about the process once notification had been received from the Planning Department.
- Mr Wealleans agreed to contact the Tree Officer about concerns raised regarding dubious material mixed in with hard rubble backing up against a tree on Jubilee Industrial Estate for which a TPO had been approved at the last meeting. An update would be provided to Councillor Gallacher thereafter.
- Regarding concerns about people parking on what was a cycle way between the farm and the church at Blyth Road and walking on rough ground to access the new zebra crossing to the ranch car park. The request for a footpath was a highways

issue and would be picked up by Mr Carle and his team. An update would be provided to Councillor S Davey in due course.

- Officers were aware of the ongoing issues with fly tipping in the Croft Ward and were currently working with the Enforcement Team to see what could be done. Councillor Nisbet would be kept informed. The Chair added that any perpetrators being caught should be dealt with appropriately in order to send a warning message out to others.
- With regard to concerns about the condition of the gravel along the cycle path at Blyth beach, members were advised that a meeting was being held on Monday with Colas who carry out the work and they would be doing a full sweep of the length of the cycleway with a mini sweeper.
- Following concerns raised about overgrown trees and hedgerows along the river Wansbeck from Sheepwash Bridge to Stakeford Bridge and sharp hawthorns, Mr Wealleans said he would be in that area next week and would look into this.

On behalf of himself and the committee the Chair thanked the Neighbourhood Services Area Manager and his team for all of the hard work they had done and asked for this to be passed on to the team.

RESOLVED that the information be noted and the concerns set out in the bullet points above be followed up with a response provided to members as indicated.

Technical Services

M Carle, Highways Delivery Area Manager, provided an update on highways as follows:

- Tarmac Patching had been carried out in Fallowfield Way and Keats Grove, Ashington; Thornton Street and Bowes Court, Blyth.
- Drainage works had been completed in Cowpen Road and Newsham Road, Blyth; Purbeck Gardens, Ashington.
- Hedge to hedge work had now been completed in Wellhead Dean Road, A1068 and A189, Ashington; Newsham cycle track, Blyth and Newbiggin cycle Track (rear of Grace Darling Campus).
- In terms of other work, two raised tables and improved drainage had been carried out at First and Second Avenue, Ashington; kerbing works were progressing well at Bothal Cottages, Ashington and were expected to be finished this week; the installation of a new cycle track at Collingwood, Newbiggin was now complete.
- Tarmac patching was scheduled for Avondale Avenue, Chester Grove and Marine Terrace, Blyth; North Seaton Road, Ashington and Bothal Bank.
- Upcoming flags to flex – Fulmar Drive, Blyth (programmed to start on Monday, 18 January for four weeks) and Beatrice Avenue, Blyth; College Road, Ashington.
- Work would be starting in the car park at High Street, Blyth on 14 January for two weeks to remove the old planters and reinstate with tarmac.

With regard to winter services, Mr Carle said it had been a very mixed winter so far with predominately marginal temperatures across the county including a small amount of larger temperature dips. A mixture of precautionary gritting runs had been carried out from high route runs to full runs.

The end of October 2020 to the beginning of December 2020 had been fairly quiet with just precautionary runs taking place. Since the start of December until 9 January 2021 there had been three small weather events predominantly 150-200ft in the higher ground.

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These events involved increased gritting runs and ploughing as well as the involvement of the Winter Services Farmers and Sub Contractor framework to support the snow clearing efforts. In Allendale the snow blower had been required to clear some of the smaller roads.

As of 8:00 hrs on 11 January the following work had been carried out:

- 49 full gritting runs involving all 28-front line gritters.
- 6 additional reduced runs including all routes defined as west of the A1 (where the level above sea increases out of Zone 1 (Coastal)). This still included 22 front line gritters.
- 10 additional high route runs on routes over 800 ft. with 7 gritters.
- This equated to approximately 1800 individual WS operations.
- Secondary routes had been treated on numerous occasions when the conditions persisted for prolonged periods into the day (snow/ice persisting into the day past 10am) or in advance of expected snow/ice. Assistance from colleagues in Neighbourhood Services had been much appreciated.
- Excluding the three smaller snow events 10,000 tonnes on the gritting network had been used. An additional 1,500 tonnes had been used on snow events etc.
- Officers were currently taking stock of current salt levels for a refill in early February 2021.

Mr Carle noted the following concerns and agreed to look at them or forward them to the relevant officer as appropriate:

- Problems with the gully flooding on the corner of Croft Road/Bondicar Terrace (update to be provided to Councillor Nisbett).
- Confirmation of when double yellow lines would be done on Plessey Road, Blyth and Central Parkway, Newbiggin (to be chased up with N Snowdon and update provided to Councillor Cartie (Plessey Road) and Councillor Simpson (Central Parkway)).
- An update on the petition regarding speeding traffic on Woodhorn Road (to be chased up with N Snowdon and update provided to Councillor Parry).
- The position regarding a request for deficient lighting on the zebra crossing near the Elephant pub on North Seaton Road to be rectified (to be chased up with officers in Street Lighting and update provided to Councillor Purvis).
- Concerns about the condition of Milburn Road from 5th to 6th Avenue and also about levelling of paving after work carried out by the Electricity Board to replace cables in 7th Avenue, Milburn Road (M Carle to look at general condition of Milburn Road and provide an update to Councillors Gallacher and Purvis. Complaints about the reinstatement of paving would be reported to streetworks to contact whoever carried out the utility work).
- The position of traffic calming measures in High Market, Ashington and Institute Road, Ashington and the 30 mph traffic sign being moved back at Potland Burn Estate, Ashington (to be chased up with N Snowdon and update provided to Councillor Grimshaw).
- The position regarding traffic calming requests for South End Avenue and West Court, Blyth (to be chased up with N Snowdon and an update be provided to Councillor Webb).

On behalf of himself and the committee the Chair thanked the Highways Delivery Area Manager and his team for all of the hard work they had done and asked for this to be passed on to the team.

RESOLVED that the information be noted and the concerns set out in the bullet points above be looked at and a response provided as indicated.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

116. COVID UPDATE

This item had been withdrawn from the agenda as members had received an update at Council the previous week and regular briefings for members were being held.

117. BUDGET 2021-22 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

Councillors N Oliver, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and R Wearmouth, Cabinet Member for Business & Tourism were in attendance to provide a power point presentation which outlined the Council's strategy to the 2021-22 Budget within the context of the Corporate Plan. A copy of the presentation would be filed with the signed minutes and be uploaded to the Council's website.

Councillor Oliver presented the following information:

Budget 2021-22 Approach

- Maintain high quality services most important to residents and businesses
- Continue to support the most vulnerable in communities whilst giving communities more control.
- Leading economic recovery following Covid with an investment in a green recovery.
- Meet budget challenges through a programme of continuous innovation and improvement.

Councillor Oliver wished to place on record his thanks to officers across all services who had responded in an amazing way to provide an excellent service to residents in these unprecedented times. In Northumberland 10% of people had now been vaccinated and it was hoped the economy would re-open in the Spring. These had been very difficult times for many people and the Council must be geared up and ready for recovery.

State of the Area

- **Public Health** - the most up to date Covid figures were provided and it was hoped that the peak had been reached in Northumberland, however, there was no room for complacency and it was important that everyone continued to follow the current Government guidelines to protect themselves and others.
- **Economy** – Rural and coastal areas had been hit harder by the impact of COVID having a strong tourism and hospitality sector. There had been an increase of 62% in unemployment figures since March 2020. This particularly affected young people working in the sector and grants had been unprecedented. It was hoped the sectors would be able to recover quickly following the lifting of restrictions. Vacancy

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levels across the County were provided and these were 3% less than in 2019. It was hoped vacancies would rise and fall again as jobs were filled going forward.

- **Council Services** - Throughout COVID the Council had maintained services most important to residents. Officers had reacted quickly and successfully and had adapted to new ways of working, embracing digital solutions and continuing to improve services. Within 4 weeks 4,000 people had been given access to remote working. Some changes would remain and some would be for the short term.

Budget 2021-22: Financial Context

- Next year savings target circa £8.3 million.
- Improving frontline services.
- Increasing demand for services.
- COVID-19 pandemic.
- Ambitious capital programme.
- Still investing in infrastructure and services whilst delivering savings.

Details were provided of the funding analysis from 2014 – 2024 along with the overall funding arrangements. Details of a one-year spending review, which were better than expected, had been received in December and figures were being reworked to reflect that. There had been a lot of support from the Government for the costs of COVID including replacing lost Council Tax and extra costs in delivering Adult Services. In line with the cap for core Council Tax it was proposed there would be a rise of 1.99% with 1.75% in the first year and 1.25% in the second year. The cap on Adult Social Care was 3%. Details were also provided on the savings to be made by each directorate with a summary of savings by year and changes in spending by service (gross). Movement in debt and details of the capital programme for 2021-2024 were highlighted and it was acknowledged that slippage had been more dramatic because of COVID.

Budget 2021-22: Summary

- The budget position, whilst challenging, was under control.
- Through managing debt better and driving efficiency the savings gap had been reduced.
- The organisation continued to improve frontline services and was determined to make the most of Government support.
- Increased costs and growing pressures in demand remained, particularly in adult and children's services.
- Tough decisions were still to be made but the Administration was committed to protecting the most vulnerable.
- Ambitious for the future with targeted £748 million capital investment programme.
- Investment from North of Tyne Devolution Deal to make a difference to people's lives.
- Borderlands Growth Deal could act as a catalyst for further investment.
- Determination to shine a light on all that was great about Northumberland as a place to work, live, visit and do business.

Budget 2021-22: Next Steps

- The budget consultation had started on 10 December and had been very well publicised. There had been in excess of 450 responses which was unprecedented.
- Views from the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Local Area Councils would be invited and the final version would be considered by Full Council in February.

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Councillor Wearmouth presented details of the investment programme going forward.

- **Investing in Growth** – details of Northumberland’s strengths were highlighted. This included reference to natural capital and green businesses in the Port of Blyth where there was an opportunity for offshore wind and the recent announcement by Britishvolt about manufacturing electric car batteries.
- **Investing in the transition to a future economy** - opportunities in South East Northumberland to lead the green revolution and ensure that residents would benefit from the jobs created.
- **Investing in our places, culture and tourism** – the introduction of passenger rail services between Ashington and Newcastle were close to being secured and funding was being sought to transform the corridor throughout that route; A town deal for Blyth was underway and would hopefully be secured for Ashington and Bedlington (whether specific or as part of the Borderlands Growth Deal). There was an Ambitious Capital Development Programme and as part of Borderland Investment, potential for mini town deals, as already being discussed for Newbiggin.
- **Investing in transport and digital connectivity** - improvements to address gaps in infrastructure for internet and broadband connectivity; Plans for the Northumberland Line to be up and running by 2023; dualling of the A1 and strategic road improvements.
- **Investing in people, jobs, skills and livelihoods** – project in Blyth for Energy Learning Hub; maximise training and opportunities for local residents in SE Northumberland, part of which was ensuring the influence of the kickstarter programme; ensuring the Education Challenge Fund would come to the North East as proposed in the Devolution deal.
- **Investing in a rural green recovery** - significant aims in terms of Low Carbon Heat Networks, for eg heat recovery from mine water; discussions with the Great Northumberland Forest, funding for renewable energy to carry out feasibility studies to assist with that process; infrastructure for electric vehicle charging and investing in green homes.

In response to questions/concerns raised by members, the following information was provided:

- Concerns from Councillor Simpson that, as Ward Councillor, she had not been made aware of or approached about plans for Newbiggin under the Borderland Investment potential for mini towns. Councillor Wearmouth said he had not realised Councillor Simpson had not been informed and would like to rectify that as soon as possible. He suggested they have a meeting the following week with the Community Regeneration Manager to bring Councillor Simpson up to date and discuss any suggestions she may have.
- Concerns were raised that Ward Members were not being kept fully informed about what was happening in their area or in South East Northumberland generally and more clarity was needed. Councillor Wearmouth said if members wished to have more information brought to the LAC he would be happy to provide presentations.
- In terms of the town deal for Ashington, a partnership had been formed and meetings had taken place last year to get this established for whoever may come on board. The next stage would be setting up a framework/constitution and a presentation could be provided to the LAC if required. Councillor Gallacher said emails would be sufficient to keep members up to date about what was happening in South East Northumberland.

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- Concerns about savings and improving front line services. Councillor Oliver referred to the table in the presentation showing the overall gross budget for each service level. He gave an example of Local Services which would see an increase in spending of £4 million, however, within Local Services there was a savings requirement, so the Council was trying to deliver services whilst dealing with inflation and increasing demand. The gross budget of the Council was increasing by £23 million but within that there was £8.3 million of efficiencies.
- It was acknowledged this year would be tough but going forward there would be a lot of investment in the county with jobs coming through and increased business rates. Northumberland was therefore in a good position for recovery and delivering economic growth.
- In response to concerns from Councillor Grimshaw about £8.3 million in savings across services, Councillor Oliver reiterated that the overall the budget had increased by £23 million. The spending on frontline services was rising and it was important to present a balanced picture. The Administration would always try to drive efficiencies and do things in a more innovative way to deliver better value and higher quality services. In terms of capital expenditure this was spread across the county, the South East area probably being the greatest beneficiary.
- Regarding the request for a breakdown of what jobs were available in each area, officers would be asked if this was possible.
- A presentation would be provided on the budget consultation response.
- Regarding school meals, members were advised that 95% of schools in Northumberland were offering vouchers and there had been no reports of poor quality lunches being provided. If members were aware of any problems, they should bring this forward.
- Business rates were set by the Government and were not part of the Local Authority's budget.
- Councillor Gobin raised concerns that he had not been involved in any discussions about the Northumberland Line which would come through his ward or new businesses in his area. In response Councillor Wearmouth said Councillor Gobin had been invited to a meeting on 25 January with Strategic Planning Committee members to receive more information on the battery facility. He agreed that a briefing could be provided to Councillor Gobin in advance of the meeting. Councillor Wearmouth had attended a meeting with the Town Council on 21 December and had covered details to the extent he was able at that time.

The Chair thanked Councillors Oliver and Wearmouth for their presentations and for answering the questions put forward.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

118. LOCAL AREA COUNCIL WORK PROGRAMME

Members received the latest version of agreed items for future Local Area Council meetings (attached to the signed minutes as Appendix D).

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

119. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

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It was noted that the next meeting would take place on Wednesday, 10 February 2020, time to be confirmed.

The meeting closed at 7.33 pm

Chair _____

Date _____