

**NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

**TYNEDALE LOCAL AREA COUNCIL**

At a meeting of the **Tynedale Local Area Council** held at Hexham House, Gilesgate, Hexham, Northumberland, NE46 3NH on Tuesday, 19 March 2024 at 6.00 p.m.

**PRESENT**

Councillor T Cessford  
(Chair), in the Chair)

**MEMBERS**

A Dale	JR Riddle
S Fairless-Aitken	A Scott
I Hutchinson	A Sharp
D Kennedy	G Stewart
N Morphet	H Waddell
N Oliver	

**OFFICERS**

J Cooper	Strategic Programmes Manager, Digital and Information Technology
N Turnbull	Democratic Services Officer

**ALSO PRESENT**

Inspector K Benson and Sgt L Birchall, Northumbria Police  
K Beckett, Slaley Carpet Bowls  
R Copley, 1<sup>st</sup> Haydon Bridge Scout Group  
1 member of the press.

**46. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Horncastle.

**47. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the following meeting of the Tynedale Local Area Council, held on 13 February 2024, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

Ch.'s Initials.....

#### **48. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no questions from members of the public.

#### **49. POLICING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY UPDATE**

The Chair welcomed Inspector Kate Benson and Sergeant Laura Birchall to the meeting to give an overview and answer questions about policing and community safety matters in the East and West Tynedale command areas.

Inspector Kate Benson explained that with effect from 4 March 2024, Northumbria Police had implemented changes to their force operating model which had increased the number of command areas from 3 to 6. The new structure now aligned with the local authority areas of Newcastle, Gateshead, Sunderland, South Tyneside, Northumberland and North Tyneside with dedicated teams focused on service delivery.

Changes had also been made to shift patterns to enable officers to respond to drink and drug related incidents associated with the nighttime economy; implementation of appointments for victims of crime to enable visits to be arranged when it was more convenient for the victim as well as the allocation a dedicated officer point of contact to provide continuity.

The following statistics were provided for the previous 3 months:

##### Haltwhistle:

- 70 crimes recorded with 24 incidents of anti-social behaviour.
- Lowest levels in December and January for 4 years.
- 2 community protection warnings had been issued to persons over 16 years old for incidents at the Ambulance Station.
- There had been an effective social media campaign which had resulted in 6 drug related arrest warrants.
- A zombie-style knife had been seized and destroyed.

##### Hexham:

- 144 crimes recorded with 71 incidents of anti-social behaviour, predominantly neighbour disputes rather than youth disorder.
- There had been 11 recorded crimes involving youths as the victim or suspect.
- Other crimes mainly related to theft, low level assault or public order offences in known hot spot areas.
- Investigations were continuing for a hate crime.
- There had been no drug related crimes with low intelligence for the area which they hoped to improve through engagement with the public on 3 and 4 April 2024.

##### Prudhoe:

- 128 crimes recorded with 74 incidents of anti-social behaviour.

- There had been 10 crimes involving youths with no pattern or repeat offenders.
- 26 incidents had been recorded at Ferndene Hospital between patients or staff and related to criminal damage and low-level assault. These were generally not pursued as did not meeting the public interest test and mental capacity was also a barrier to prosecution.
- Theft from shops was an issue in the area and nationally. No incidents had involved violence against shop employees.

Generally, crime was very low in the Tynedale area. Domestic violence was a force priority with everyone urged to report concerns.

Officers were working with the Safer Roads Unit which had recorded 144 motorists speeding at locations in Melkridge and Henshaw in previous weeks. Other recent issues in the rural areas included:

- Door to door sellers in Allendale – crime prevention advice was being provided to elderly residents via a letter drop.
- Youths knocking and running away from doors in Haydon Bridge which had a considerable impact on elderly and vulnerable residents. Use of doorbell footage was helpful. Caught offenders would be put through the youth justice system if there had been a crime or alternatively a meeting held with parents.
- More ‘cuppa with a copper’ dates were planned for 2024 as well as engagement with the high schools between March and May to prevent knife crime.
- Crime prevention included officers patrolling in plain clothes to provide support to premises and advice on crime prevention.
- Residents in Corbridge were urged to contact the police regarding anti-social behaviour to enable an accurate picture to be obtained.
- Improvements had been made to the 101 service to provide additional staff and training to improve response rates.

The following information was given in response to questions:

- The Inspector was unaware of incidents of door-to-door sales in Acomb. The practice of doorstep cold calling was not in itself illegal although the police would check the legitimacy of individuals reported to them and hoped to increase awareness via social media campaigns.
- Information on drink driving campaigns over the Christmas period would be provided by email following the meeting.
- Operation Harley had been replaced with Operation Capio which aimed to disrupt and prevent anti-social motorcycle use across the region. Operations had been held in the forests around Wark, Slaley and Prudhoe/Horsley/Wylam with drones used to obtain footage and try and identify riders as they were not able to pursue the bikes due to the risks involved. Joint operations were held with neighbouring forces to identify and prevent travelling criminals between force areas. The speed van was also deployed to pre-approved locations following identification of areas of

- concern by Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) trained to use handheld devices. The A68 was a popular route for speeding bikes.
- Drug related investigations often took time before cases went to court due to the testing required of substances. It was helpful to obtain drug related intelligence from residents and build relationships with and gain the trust of residents.
  - Claims for accidents for vehicle damage or questionable injuries such as whiplash would predominately be investigated by insurance companies. The police investigated more serious injury cases or where there were concerns regarding incidents of careless or dangerous driving.
  - Operation Checkpoint was a joint operation with other police forces working collaboratively to prevent and tackle rural crime including poaching offences, diesel theft and stolen vehicles such as quadbikes etc.
  - Officers worked closely with colleagues in the Council's Highways Team to consider measures to address inconsiderate parking / blocked pavements, particularly in historic towns, to obtain the most appropriate solution.
  - An update on theft of high value satellite equipment would be obtained from Inspector Garry Neill from the rural policing team.
  - An update was expected to be released in the near future on the results of investigations following the felling of the tree at Sycamore Gap.
  - There were circa 12 Community Speedwatch trained volunteers in the Tynedale area. Whilst volunteers were particularly keen to use the equipment at locations near where they lived, ideally the use of the camera should be task driven where it was most needed. Any volunteer who did not have a partner in their locality could be teamed up with a PCSO or police officer.
  - A brief explanation was provided regarding the difficulties of taking action against individuals under the Vagrancy Act 1824. Information was provided to individuals regarding support services available. No recent reports had been received regarding individuals in Hexham. Members of the public were encouraged to provide as much information as possible regarding vehicles dropping off 'beggars' including date and time, vehicle make, model and registration so checks could be made of nearby Automatic Number Plate Recognition cameras, to safeguard individuals and prevent any potential exploitation.

Several members thanked the officers for the activity and improvements in their towns and villages over the last 12 months including Corbridge, Haltwhistle, Haydon Bridge and Stocksfield.

The Chair encouraged members not to wait until these meetings if they had an issue, they needed an answer to sooner rather than later, but to contact Inspector Benson with police related concerns at any time via email or telephone.

**RESOLVED** that the update be received.

## 50. COMMUNITY CHEST PRESENTATIONS

The Chair was pleased to introduce Karl Beckett from Slaley Carpet Bowls and Rob Copley from 1st Haydon Bridge Scout Group who had been amongst a number of organisations awarded Community Chest Grants.

#### Slaley Carpet Bowls (£817)

Karl Beckett, Secretary for Slaley Carpet Bowls, explained that the club had been formed in 1983 and provided an opportunity for farmers, who mainly worked in isolation, and others, to make new friends. They met weekly between September and March and played matches against other clubs around the county and was very competitive. It also provided an opportunity for those working from home and older residents to socialise, aiding participants mental health. The age of their members ranged between 14 and 91 years old.

He thanked members for the grant of £817 which had been put towards a new carpet and coloured carpet bowls.

Following lockdown, they had lost a number of members and they hoped that their group and the game could be promoted across Northumberland to increase awareness and membership.

The Chair thanked Mr Beckett for attending the meeting and confirmed that the photographs taken before the meeting would be sent to the Council's Communications Team.

Councillor Oliver challenged members of the Slaley Carpet Bowls Club to a game of quoits at Corbridge Cricket Club, another competitive game, and hoped they could reciprocate and generate publicity for each other.

#### 1st Haydon Bridge Scout Group (£1,000)

Rob Copley, Scout Leader at 1st Haydon Bridge Scout Group, gave a brief background of the history of the Scout Association and the formation of the Haydon Bridge Scout Group circa 1908 although the first official record at Northumberland County Scout House was 1949. The association had evolved over the years with the addition of girls in Venture Scouts in 1976, Beavers in 1986 and Squirrels in 2021.

He and his son had joined nearly 10 years previously with him eventually moving up to Group Scout Leader following the resignation of the previous leader after 25 years.

They were lucky to use facilities at St. John's Church Hall in Haydon Bridge with good outside space and a storage shed for their equipment. They had over 45 young people on roll with demand from more places. Key to this was the delivery of a diverse, exciting and interesting programme with knots and first aid alongside more modern activities and skills. One of their biggest challenges was recruiting Leaders.

The grant had enabled them to buy mini microscopes and soldering equipment, the latter had been used to make electronic circuits. The funds had also enabled the scouts to participate in surfing sessions, pottery making, making steam boats, entering a float in the Haltwhistle carnival and participation for some scouts in Project Challenger.

They hoped to establish a Squirrel Scouts section for children between the ages of 4 and 6 years old if they could recruit more adult volunteers and build a second, more secure storage shed.

He was pleased to report that 1st Haydon Bridge Scout Group was thriving with the support and skills of their volunteers and financial support from organisations, such as the Council and other donors, for which he expressed their gratitude.

In answer to questions, it was confirmed that there were approximately 8-10 groups in the Hadrian Scout District. They were lucky to be able to camp at the nearby Hawkthirst facility where groups competed in different activities such as bowling, shooting, night challengers etc.

A member requested information on recent community chest recipients.

**RESOLVED** that the presentations be received.

## **51. PETITIONS**

This item was to:

### **a) Receive any new petitions:**

None were received.

### **b) Consider reports on petitions previously received:**

There were none to consider.

### **c) To consider updates on petitions previously considered:**

There were none to consider.

## **52. TRANSITION FROM ANALOGUE TO DIGITAL LANDLINES**

John Cooper, Strategic Programmes Manager, Digital and IT, gave a presentation on a national initiative, led by the telecommunications industry, on the transition from analogue to digital landlines by Openreach. A copy of the presentation was enclosed with the signed minutes and circulated electronically to members following the meeting. The Council was not directly involved in the programme but had taken the decision to raise awareness with

residents, businesses and community groups and signpost those with concerns to the relevant organisation for support.

The presentation included:

- The reason for the transition, analogue lines were unreliable, had limited functionality and were reaching the end of their serviceable life.
- An explanation of the organisations involved and how the switchover would take place. Focus to date should be on those that were ready to switch which should be straightforward for the majority of users. Vulnerable and landline dependent individuals who might need additional support should be deferred to the last stages of the switchover. These included residents living in an area with no mobile phone signal, vulnerable people with additional needs, users of healthcare alarms, elderly people and those who do not have a broadband service.
- Individuals who used their landlines for additional equipment were encouraged to speak to their supplier.
- The arrangements if there should be a powercut e.g. installation of generators for mobile phone masts to increase the resilience of the network.
- Examples of domestic back up products which should be provided free of charge to qualifying residents.
- The role of Northumberland County Council to raise awareness it did not have access to switchover plans and timescales by individual communications providers.
- BT intended to hold roadshow events in the region during May and June. 7 of 15 of these events would be taking place in Northumberland.
- Concerns needed to be raised directly with suppliers.

Members were particularly concerned for residents in rural areas and highlighted a number of issues including:

- Delays to broadband provision until 2028.
- Lack of 4G coverage.
- Level of information held by communication and other service providers to identify vulnerable residents.

In answer to questions, it was confirmed that:

- Those residents falling within the identified categories should receive any additional equipment required as part of the switchover, free of charge. The Council had been made aware that some residents had been charged and had intervened to get the charges overturned.
- The Council shared concerns regarding the project and wanted to raise awareness, support residents, and protect them from potential scams. Information leaflets had been included with the yearly Council Tax bills to alert individuals that further information should be forthcoming from the communication provider. It was unlikely that the switchover would be stopped and therefore people needed to be prepared.

- Officers could not comment on the resources and training provided by the communication providers. The initial focus should be on the straightforward cases giving more time to get the process correct for those that required additional support.
- Some new telephones did not require a router for those homes which did not have broadband. There was a lot of new equipment coming on the market and therefore helpful for residents in the vulnerable categories to be switched in a later phase.
- Residents in Northumberland with a telephone health care alarm were recommended to contact the provider of their equipment in the first instance with any queries. They should be aware of the digital switchover and ensure that the alarm would continue to work on a digital platform.
- Members were encouraged to lobby their local Members of Parliament with their concerns regarding the recent storms and potential duration of power outages and the need for providers to improve network resilience.
- Officers were working with the local residents in Glendale to improve community resilience, exploring options including use of Starlink satellite internet, a generator for the village hall, providing warmth and connectivity.
- Planning permission for new telephone masts should require back up generators.
- The problems with the analogue network had been known for many years. The switchover had already been delayed once to allow providers to make adequate preparations. It was up to the communication providers to find solutions.

The Chair thanked the Strategic Programmes Manager for his patience and presentation. A copy of the presentation and his contact details would be circulated to members by email following the meeting.

**RESOLVED** that the presentation be received.

### **53. LOCAL AREA COUNCIL WORK PROGRAMME**

A list of agreed items for future Local Area Council meetings was circulated. (A copy is enclosed with the minutes.)

Members were invited to email any requests to the Chair and / or Democratic Services Officer between meetings.

**RESOLVED** that the work programme be noted.

### **54. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting would be held on Tuesday 21 May 2024.

There was a brief discussion amongst members on the approval of the Timetable of Meetings for 2023/24 at the annual meeting of the County Council and subsequent arrangements put in place for separating the planning



and local area business, and the merits, or otherwise, of this. It was suggested that 'one size' did not fit all.

The Chair reminded members that the Review of the Effectiveness and Function of Local Area Councils (Committees) and the arrangements for Local Area Committee meetings agreed at the annual meeting on 17 May 2023. It was important the members read and understood all papers before voting. An email previously circulated confirmed that the arrangements would be reviewed after 6 months.

**CHAIR** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE** \_\_\_\_\_