

# ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL

**Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Environment and Amenities Committee held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 10 February 2015, at Ashington Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX.**

**PRESENT:**

Councillors:	Keith Chambers (Chair)	Marjorie Chambers
	Avril Chisholm	Glyn Davies
	Pauline Thompson	Ely Turnbull
	Mark Purvis (Ex Officio)	

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Mike Slaughter – Town Clerk  
Stephen Humphrey – Funding & Projects Officer  
Sue Coulthard – Snr. Admin. Officer  
Cllr. Stephen Fenwick – Non-Committee Member  
Members of the Public – 2 (incl. NCC Cllr. J Lang)

**E&A15/250 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Les Alderson, Victor Bridges, Louise Brown, Vicky Brown, Lawrence Henderson, Maggie Lang, Kris Lavery, Liam Lavery, Wyn Stewart and Bob Walkinshaw.

**E&A15/251 2. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

There were no disclosures of personal and prejudicial interest.

**E&A15/252 3. ASHINGTON NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES PARTNERSHIP**

The Chair stated that there were three areas for discussion and consideration:-

- (i) Progress report from Northumberland County Council (NCC) neighbourhood Services Team on service delivery in the town.

- (ii) Presentation from NCC outlining options available regarding the current vacancy in the Ashington Neighbourhood Services Team.
- (iii) Decision taken regarding the release of the final part of the Town Council's contribution to the Neighbourhood Services Partnership.

The Chair welcomed the NCC Neighbourhood Services Management Team (Paul Jones and Amanda Cryer) to the meeting and invited them to give an update on service delivery and present information regarding the options available in relation to the current vacancy on the Ashington Neighbourhood Services Team.

Paul Jones (Head of Service) and Amanda Cryer (Neighbourhood Services Manager) confirmed that the Ashington area had been divided into 5 "Zones" and that improvement works had now been completed in Zones 1, 4 and 5; operatives were currently working in Zone 3 and once that was completed, would move to Zone 2.

The following points were highlighted:-

- A particular problem that had been encountered by the Team was repeated fly-tipping in certain areas and this had been set as a high priority by the Management Team. The NCC Enforcement Team would be actively following up on any evidence found leading to the perpetrators.
- The Management Team asked whether there was an alternative way of operating that would make an impact and asked for feedback from residents and town and county councillors.
- An issue had arisen regarding the opening and closing of the gates on Station Road had occurred although this had now been resolved.

Mr.Jones and Ms.Cryer stated that it was their assumption that the winter programme of improvement works was going well as they had not received any complaints; they did however recognise that the summer months would be more of a challenge.

In response to a question regarding the fly-tipping problem in Ashington, Ms.Cryer stated that fly-tipping and dog fouling had become a problem in Newbiggin by the Sea and that Newbiggin

Town Council was considering funding additional enforcement in order to address the issue.

Mr. Jones added that dog fouling was a county-wide problem, but that most of the issues were in more urban areas, with Blyth and Ashington considered to be “hot spots”. Members were advised that from the fixed penalty notices issued in the whole of Northumberland during 2014, 25% of the total for fly-tipping and 10% of the total for dog fouling had been in Ashington.

In answer to a question, members were informed that the term “litter” included general litter, papers, cigarette ends, chewing gum, etc.; and that “fly-tipping” was bagged waste, old furniture, etc. Amanda Cryer stated that the problem was often in areas where there was a high turnover in private landlord tenancies where people moving left rubbish in back streets, etc. This was an area where investigations would take place and the perpetrators identified and prosecuted.

Members stated that there were still concerns over the levels of cleanliness in the main shopping area of the town and also in the Hirst Ward colliery rows where the mini-sweeper was unable to travel between the gardens. Ms. Cryer agreed to look into these matters.

The Town Clerk stated that members needed to make an informed decision regarding the current vacant position within the Ashington Neighbourhood Services Team. He asked that the NCC Officers outline the available options in relation to this matter.

Paul Jones explained that the vacancy had occurred some time ago and that there had been no significant impact on the delivery of services in Ashington. Although the vacancy was that of “Neighbourhood Services Team Operative”, there was an option to have more enforcement in the town which would address some of the problems already identified (i.e. fly-tipping; dog fouling and graffiti).

Members were asked to consider using the savings made from the current vacancy to secure additional enforcement officer time at weekends in order to address the issues. Members were advised that the cost was likely to be in the region of £1,000 per month and added that the overall 2014/15 savings to the partnership were expected to be in the region of £25,000.

The Chair thanked the NCC Officer for their comments and stated that ATC Members would discuss the options. Paul Jones and Amanda Cryer left the meeting at this point.

The Chair asked members for opinions regarding the work carried out by the Ashington Neighbourhood Services Team to date.

Cllr. Thompson stated that she had not seen a vast improvement in the Hirst Ward, although members commented that a significant improvement was evident in other areas of the town, e.g. the Seaton Ward.

The Town Clerk reminded members that the Town Council had entered into a five-year long agreement with the County Council and that the newly appointed NCC Management Team had not established the “zonal” model until November 2014.

The Town Clerk asked members to consider the options available which might include:-

- Additional presence in certain areas of the town and/or the main street
- Allocate different size teams in areas which had differing challenges and ongoing issues (i.e. more operatives working in the Hirst Ward)
- Town Centre to have more attention and operatives at weekends
- Enforcement Officer employed at weekends
- Additional operatives and/or overtime at weekends

The Town Clerk stated that the £25,000 saving primarily as a result of not filling the vacancy in the Neighbourhood Services Team last year although clearly that had been other areas where costs had not been as high originally envisaged. Members were reminded that any filling of the vacancy post April 2015 would be funded from the 2015/16 budget and not from 2014/15 projected savings.

A lengthy discussion followed regarding how the £25,000 saving could be used or whether in fact it could be returned to the Town Council for other projects.

Although members had initially felt that more operative time should be employed in order to keep the town clean and tidy, they had taken note of the points raised by the County Council Officers regarding the need for more enforcement in the town.

The Town Clerk reminded members that, following a decision taken by Committee, the balance of the second payment to NCC in accordance with the Neighbourhood Services Agreement had not yet been paid. Members agreed that the balance of £62,500 should now be released as they were satisfied that progress had been made and that the partnership was now operating as intended.

**Resolved:**

**That:-**

- (i) That Northumberland County Council be asked to undertake an environmental enforcement pilot scheme Ashington,**
- (ii) The scheme begin as soon as possible and be carried out over an initial period of 2 months, to be funded from the identified savings in the 2014/15 Neighbourhood Services budget,**
- (iii) The current vacancy for an Ashington Neighbourhood Services Operative be advertised with the intention of the post being filled in April 2015; and that**
- (iv) The final payment of £62,500 to Northumberland County Council for the 2014/15 Neighbourhood Services Partnership be agreed.**

**E&A15/253 4. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no other urgent business.

**E&R15/254 5. DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Environment and Amenities Committee was scheduled for 6:00pm, Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> March 2015, in the Council Chamber at the Town Hall, Ashington.

**The meeting closed at 7.30pm.**