

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Environment and Amenities Committee held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 28 July 2015, at Ashington Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX.

PRESENT:

Councillors:	Marjorie Chambers (Vice-Chair)	Louis Brown
	Vicky Brown	Avril Chisholm
	Glyn Davies	Stephen Fenwick
	Lawrence Henderson	Kris Lavery
	Pauline Thompson	Bob Walkinshaw

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mike Slaughter – Town Clerk
Stephen Humphrey – Funding & Projects Officer
Sue Coulthard – Snr. Admin. Officer
Members of the Public – 0

E&A15/276 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Les Alderson, Victor Bridges, Keith Chambers, Maggie Lang, Liam Lavery, Mark Purvis, Wyn Stewart and Ely Turnbull.

E&A15/277 5. ASHINGTON NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES PARTNERHIP

The Chair welcomed Paul Jones, Louise Hayward and Amanda Cryer (NCC South East Northumberland Neighbourhood Services Management Team) to the meeting. The Chair explained that they had been invited to the meeting to give an update on the Ashington Neighbourhood Services Partnership.

Prior to the meeting, the Town Clerk had circulated a report written by Amanda Cryer and Steven Leightley regarding the Ashington Neighbourhood Services Partnership entitled "Project and Service Planning July-September 2015".

The Chair invited the NCC Neighbourhood Services Management Team to present that report.

Louise Hayward noted that concerns raised by Ashington Town Council had generally fallen into the categories of litter bins; street cleaning; grass cutting; weeds and the general visibility of the Ashington Neighbourhood Services Team). She outlined how these issues would be tackled over the coming months as follows:-

Litter Bins: The types of litter bins in the town, emptying frequency and the type of litter being discarded was currently being monitored. Discussions would be held with the Town Council regarding the results of the monitoring exercise and recommendations for future action.

Weekend Street Cleaning: As a result of extra work being caused by anti-social behaviour in and around the public toilets on Station Road at weekends, it had been agreed to bring in two additional operatives on Saturday and Sunday mornings to help with street cleaning. In addition, the newly recruited operative had accepted a formal contract based on hours worked Friday to Monday and would be starting on 1st September.

Grass Cutting: It had been agreed to carry out grass cutting on a Monday to Thursday basis, leaving Fridays allocated for additional maintenance duties and special projects.

Weeds: NCC had not been satisfied with the work done by the contractor employed to carry out weed spraying across the town and had refused to make any payments. However, it was recognised that the weather had not been conducive which had exacerbated the problem. Grass cutting had been suspended during some periods in July to allow the Team to concentrate on weeds and improvements were now visible.

Team Visibility: Although there had been no change in core staffing levels, it had been agreed to appoint Stephen Leightley as a Team Leader. He would be given authority to make decisions on how the work programme should be carried out on a daily basis. It was proposed that Mr Leightley be available on a regular basis at the Town Hall to meet with Town Councillors and members of the public to address concerns regarding service delivery. He would prioritise the issues raised and instruct Team Operatives accordingly.

Ms Hayward reported that the proposed work programme for the rest of 2015 was to concentrate on weeds during July; tackle additional maintenance duties and special projects during August

and have a general “tidy up” in September (tackling graffiti, fly-tipping etc) before starting the winter work programme in October.

The Chair thanked Ms Hayward for her presentation and invited comments from those present.

Members commented that the County Council had failed to meet certain aspects of the initial Partnership Agreement and asked what the position might be in the light of further local government cutbacks. The Town Clerk reminded members that this was a “partnership” between the two councils and that the Town Council would also need to consider its position in light of any cutbacks. Members were reminded that the Town Council had committed itself to a five year partnership agreement with a £250,000 per annum minimum investment funding enhancements to the core services provided by the County Council. The Town Clerk stated that what was important was that outcomes were achieved as a result of those enhancements and that people would start to see a difference in the town as a result.

In response to members’ comments the NCC Management Team confirmed that certain areas of service delivery were being scrutinised and monitored and that local union representatives were fully aware of that. Following further discussion, it was agreed that the proposal for the newly appointed Team Leader (Stephen Leightley) to come into the Town Hall on a regular basis to meet with town councillors and members of the public be implemented. Amanda Cryer added that NCC was attempting to establish a “back to basics” approach by encouraging members of the Neighbourhood Services Team to report jobs that need attention and take some pride in the way they work.

The Leader of the Council thanked the NCC Management Team for attending the meeting and presenting their report. He added that he felt encouraged by the statements made.

Paul Jones, Louise Hayward and Amanda Cryer left the meeting at this point.

E&A15/278 2. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of personal and prejudicial interest.

E&A15/279 3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2015 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

E&A15/280 4. MATTERS ARISING

E&A15/272: Ashington Gardens Competition: The Town Clerk reported that the Gardens Competition had been judged and that it was likely that the prizegiving evening would be held early in September.

E&R15/281 5. ASHINGTON NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES PARTNERSHIP

The Town Clerk suggested that, in light of the presentation given by the NCC Neighbourhood Services Management Team and subsequent discussions, the Town Council consider the way forward.

Resolved:

That:-

- (i) The offer of fortnightly sessions held in the Town Hall by the Neighbourhood Services Team Leader be taken up after the Summer Council recess**

- (ii) These sessions be made available for both councilors and members of the public to attend to flag up any concerns regarding service delivery**

- (iii) The Ashington Town Council representation on the Neighbourhood Services Partnership be agreed as:-**
 - Leader or Deputy Leader of the Council**
 - Chair or Vice Chair of Environment & Amenities Committee**
 - Town Clerk**
 - One other council member (on a rotational basis)**

E&R15/282 6. ASHINGTON MEMORIAL GARDEN

The Town Clerk circulated a report on the current status of the Ashington Memorial Garden Project. Members of the Committee were informed that work was now well underway. The Town Clerk informed members that the clearing process had included the removal of a significant amount of hedging, shrubbery and trees. It was reported that the initial project proposals had not included a new wall, however, as it was apparent that the existing wall was in a poor state of repair. Members were asked to consider the written report and in particular the three options outlined regarding the boundary wall provided by Hugh Massey Architects, the project management consultants.

The Town Clerk reminded members that an overall Town Council contribution of £79,360 to the project had been approved at a previous meeting. However, an additional £11,500 external funding had since been secured which would have reduced the ATC contribution had the problems not been identified regarding the boundary wall.

The Town Clerk had recommended Option 3 for approval by the Town Council at an additional contract cost of £9,900 and asked that members approve the extra cost to be met from the £11,500 external funding.

Resolved:

That:

- (i) The necessary urgent repair work to the Ashington Memorial Garden boundary wall be undertaken in line with Option 3 as outlined in the Town Clerk's written report as follows:-**

“Reduce wall to 4 courses above ground level, top off with new course of bricks to match elsewhere. Install metal fencing (height 1.000m), mild steel bow top railings in 2,750 lengths, Costs = 45 linear m @ £220.00/m.”

- (ii) The additional contract costs of £9,900 be met**

from the additional external funding secured;
and that

(iii) Future decision-making regarding capital work related issues be delegated to the Town Clerk.

E&R15/283 7. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

- (i) **Workers' Memorial Garden:** Cllr. A Chisholm asked what the position was regarding the Workers' Memorial Garden and whether the Neighbourhood Services apprentices could be involved in planting work. The Town Clerk suggested that the matter was one which could be raised with the NCC Team Leader once the sessions at the Town Hall were implemented. Cllr M Chambers stated that the GMB Union was to be asked for a contribution towards this project.
- (ii) **NCC Street Lighting Modernisation Project Update:** The Town Clerk circulated a copy of a Briefing Note received that afternoon from Northumberland County Council regarding the Street Lighting Modernisation Project.

The Briefing Note explained that the county-wide Street Lighting Modernisation Project had begun in South East of the county in March of this year. Ashington had been the first town visited as it had the poorest lighting stock and the highest level of faults. The Briefing Note outlined how the County Council had responded to concerns being expressed by Ashington residents that the replacement lighting units did not give adequate lighting output.

Subsequently, it had been evident that a proportion of the original designs submitted to the County Council by the contractor were flawed, and in some cases this had resulted in a lower wattage lantern being installed. These would be replaced by the contractor at no cost to the County Council.

The Town Clerk stated that he had been informed by the County Council that 51% of the newly installed lanterns had been assessed and that 70% of those inspected needed to be changed. It was expected that, once all of the new lanterns were inspected, 65% would need to be replaced with the correct wattage. During a lengthy discussion, members expressed concerns about the way in which the

Street Lighting Modernisation Project had been delivered in Ashington. In addition, members were unhappy with the flow of information between themselves and the County Council regarding the street lighting project.

The Town Clerk stated that this was a major County Council “Invest to Save” project and that it was likely to result in future savings. He believed that the matter would have warranted discussions at the highest NCC Leadership level to take account of such major savings possibly resulting in poorer lighting levels and any compromise to community safety. The Town Clerk reminded members that the appropriate forum to raise the issue with the County Council was at a meeting of the South East Area Committee. In response to a question regarding ATC representation, he informed members that attendance at SE Area Committee meetings was open to all Ashington Town Councillors.

E&R15/284 8. DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Environment and Amenities Committee was scheduled for 6:00pm, Tuesday, 15 September 2015, in the Council Chamber at the Town Hall, Ashington.

The meeting closed at 8.15pm.