

AGENDA 9, Enc iv) DRAFT Report of the Enhanced Neighbourhood Services Partnership Board, held on Tuesday 18th February 2025, commencing at 2:00pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington

Members Present:

Cllr Marjorie Chambers, Cllr Pauline Thompson, Cllr Louis Brown, Peter Bowman – Area Manager (South East) Ashington, Blyth and Newbiggin

Also, in Attendance:

Sarah Eden – ATC Executive Officer/RFO, Mark Air – Senior Neighbourhood Services Officer

1. WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

Cllr Marjorie Chambers opened the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr John Tully, Cllr Gemma Hemsley, Stephen Wardle – Divisional Manager, Neighbourhood Services, Robin Wallace - NCC Senior Team Leader Neighbourhood Services, Ritchie Halliday – NCC Team Leader Neighbourhood Services

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

None received.

4. DISPENSATIONS

None required.

5. PREVIOUS MEETING

The report of the last meeting, held on 17th December 2024 was **RECEIVED**, and **AGREED** as a true record.

In respect of those items on the agenda for updates from the last meeting. Peter confirmed that weeds at Lynecroft had not been progressed yet, but they were scheduled with an emphasis on weed rippers and sweeping.

In respect of flyposting on NCC assets and across the town, Peter confirmed that they had considered this and questioned whether it was a good use of the resource. It was noted that work had commenced on the old McKays which would help as they are a large feature of the street and have a lot of flyposting.

In response to a question from Cllr Louis Brown, peter confirmed that the main street was cleansed monthly. It was discussed that this was one of the areas that was reduced when the partnership resource was reduced.

Mark Air explained that the NCC Team and ATC Team that is himself and Ryan do communicate when work to the Station Road beds is being carried out and co-ordinate the weeding, sweeping and the road sweeper – this works well.

Paving discolouration and the poor appearance in this regard was discussed again, and whether this could be addressed, especially in view of linked regeneration at Wansbeck Square, Portland Park and the Rail Station.

6. PARTNERSHIP BUDGET 2024/25

It was AGREED to receive the operational budget for 2024/25 and projected end of year figures which projected an underspend of £10k.

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Members were asked to consider if they would like to utilise the underspend on anything that could be delivered via the Partnership agreement. It was agreed it was appropriate to seek direction from the Council on this.

In response to a question from Sarah, Peter confirmed that being able to recruit a seasonal worker would benefit. Members discussed the usual ongoing issues with back streets in the Hirst, Station Road cleansing, and weed spraying. Sarah mentioned that previously there was a cabinet decision to roll out additional weed spraying county-wide, so this may not be the best direction of ATC funds.

Mark spoke about getting the best value out of £10k as it would not stretch far in view of the costs of machinery and the labour to operate machinery.

RFO Note added following meeting:

In accounting, an apparent underspend can be misleading when examined. While the accrual-based budget does show we have spent less than anticipated on Partnership 2024/25, the cash flow perspective tells a different story. This occurs when an additional invoice or payment—in this case, a full quarter's invoice—is made in the current financial year, effectively increasing our actual cash expenditure. Consequently, what looks like an underspend on paper transforms into an overspend in the budget.

7. FLY-TIPPING ACTION PLAN

Social media updates are being given. Every week there are two crime scene examples in both Blyth and Ashington. In response to a question from Cllr Pauline Thompson, it was acknowledged that Castle Terrace is a major problem for fly-tipping, and it is highlighted each reporting period and has been suggested as an area for a CCTV camera.

In response to a further question from Cllr Thompson on the number of cameras, it was confirmed there were initially twelve cameras in hot stops, as per the previous minutes, but an additional two cameras had been added. Peter confirmed that cameras could be moved around.

It is not clear how long the cameras will be in operation. Sarah confirmed that figures for warnings and notices would be sought from the Environmental Enforcement Team, and they could be invited to a future meeting.

8. ENHANCED SERVICES PERFORMANCE

a) Clerk's Summary

The following report was received.

Overview

The information presented is broken down into the following. There are other areas but only the areas included in the Partnership Agreement have been included:

1. Mechanical Sweepers, for each of the 4 zones.
2. Bin emptying and cleansing, for each of the 4 zones.
3. Staffing for both Core and Partnership resource.
4. Street Cleansing LEQ Inspections

Street Cleansing

There have been no exceptions to the cleansing schedule in the period w/c 2nd December – w/c 3rd February.

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The averages for each zone are shown below. This is litter from public litter bins and litter collected, either by NCC, or Ashington Community Litter Project who leave bags by bins. All areas have decreased and combined this represents a decrease of almost 20%. The combined average is 1,180kg, again it is positive to note this is down on last year's average for the same period, which was 1,450kg, a similar almost 20% decrease.

It may seem odd to reflect positively on reduced litter in public litter bins (as we do not separate that collected from the bin or the ground), however as part of our Climate Change goals is to reduce waste and this is part of it.

- ❖ Zone 1 – Average 1,232/wk (prev 1,618kg)
- ❖ Zone 2 – Average 1,154kg/wk (prev 1,783kg)
- ❖ Zone 3 – Average 1,406kg/wk (prev 1,828kg)
- ❖ Roadsides (previously Zone 4 – Average 526kg/wk (prev 640kg)

Street Sweeper

The inclusion of street sweeping in the Partnership Agreement has increased the frequency from 4 times a year to 6-7 times per year. During the 10-week period of the report there has never been an instance of both sweepers being operational; they have operated a 40% capacity.

Regular Street Sweeping Routes Completion Record: Ashington Partnership * Data entered by Senior Team Leader								
Mechanical Sweeping								
Week Comm	Zone 1		Zone 2		Zone 3		Zone 4	
	Completed Cleansing Routes	Comments / Reasons for any non completion	Completed Cleansing Routes	Comments / Reasons for any non completion	Completed Cleansing Routes	Comments / Reasons for any non completion	Completed Cleansing Routes	Comments / Reasons for any non completion
25 Nov	Maps 5,6 & 7	1 roadsweeper off road	Maps 11 & 12	1 roadsweeper off road	Maps 24 & 25	1 roadsweeper off road	Maps 38 & 40	1 roadsweeper off road
2 Dec	Maps 1 & 2	1 roadsweeper off road	Maps 14,15 & 16	1 roadsweeper off road	Map 29 & 30	1 roadsweeper off road	Map 40	1 roadsweeper off road
9 Dec	Maps 4,5 & 7	1 roadsweeper off road	Map 11 & 12	1 roadsweeper off road	Map 30,31 & 32	1 roadsweeper off road	Map 38 & 40	1 roadsweeper off road
16 Dec	Maps 1 & 2	1 roadsweeper off road	Maps 17,18 & 21	1 roadsweeper off road	Map 24 & 25	1 roadsweeper off road	Map 40	1 roadsweeper off road
23 Dec	Map 5 & 6	1 roadsweeper off road	Map 14, 15 & 16	1 roadsweeper off road	Maps 24,26 & 27	1 roadsweeper off road	Map 38 & 40	1 roadsweeper off road
30 Dec		2 roadsweepers off road		2 roadsweepers off road		2 roadsweepers off road		2 roadsweepers off road
6 Jan		2 roadsweepers off road		2 roadsweepers off road		2 roadsweepers off road		2 roadsweepers off road
13 Jan	Maps 4, 5 & 7	1 roadsweeper off road	Map 11 & 12	1 roadsweeper off road	Map 30,31 & 32	1 roadsweeper off road	Map 39 & 40	1 roadsweeper off road
20 Jan	Map 1 & 2	1 roadsweeper off road	Maps 17, 18 & 21	1 roadsweeper off road	Map 24 & 25	1 roadsweeper off road	Map 38 & 40	1 roadsweeper off road
27 Jan	Map 5 & 6	1 roadsweeper off road	Map 14, 15 & 16	1 roadsweeper off road	Map 29 & 30	1 roadsweeper off road	Map 40	1 roadsweeper off road
3 Feb	Map 4,5 & 6	1 roadsweeper off road	Map 13,15 & 16	1 roadsweeper off road	Map 30,31 & 32	1 roadsweeper off road	Map 39 & 40	1 roadsweeper off road
10 Feb								

Rapid Response

During the reported period, there were 315 fly-tips removed via Rapid Response, compared to 339 fly-tips during the same period last year. This represents an average of 31 fly-tips per week, which is down on the previous year, but not on the previous period which showed an average of 27/week. Hopefully the success that was emerging on fly tipping is not going backwards.

In addition to fly-tip collections, weighted collections from bin stores are calculated, although these are not categorised as fly-tips. The weight of these collections can provide insights into behavioural changes.

The total weight of fly-tip collections for the 10-week period was 16,240kg, compared to 22,340kg during the same period last year. The weight of collections from bin stores was 4,020kg. The combined weight from fly-tips and bin stores amounted to 20,260kg, which is more than 9% lower than the same period last year. However, as discarding in bin stores is not counted as fly tipping, the reduction could be shown as 27% for this period, on last year.

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Cllrs previously reported noticing fly-tips reported on fix-my-street that are not removed but are shown as closed. It is helpful to remind everyone that if a fly-tip is not on NCC Land, it will be passed to the landowner and then marked as closed, That does not indicate that NCC have removed it, but that the landowner is notified.

Further analysis of fly-tips does not include w/c 2nd February, although this is included in totals above. It is notable that there have been no fly-tipping removals recorded on Friday of any week during this period. Out of the potential 45 working days (Monday to Friday) during the period, there were 14 days when no collections were recorded, and a further 8 days with fewer than 5 recorded. It would be helpful for NCC to highlight how resources have been otherwise utilised.

w/c	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Total
02/12/2024	15	9	13	4	0	41
09/12/2024	27	2	0	6	0	35
16/12/2024	22	7	5	8	0	42
23/12/2024	20	1	0	0	0	21
30/12/2024	5	9	0	4	0	18
06/01/2025	8	4	8	1	0	21
13/01/2025	20	9	5	7	0	41
20/01/2025	7	15	8	2	0	32
27/01/2025	12	4	14	0	0	30
Average	15.11	6.67	5.89	3.56	0.00	31.22

As in previous evaluations, the incidents of fly-tipping are primarily 'other household waste', around 75%.

Central continue to make up more than 40%, Hirst 25%, and College 25%, up from last period. The streets remain to be Sycamore St, Chestnut St, and Castle Terrace consistently; Woodhorn Road, Hawthorn Road, Milburn Road, and Alexandra Road have crept in which could suggest that perpetrators are moving away from the CCTV covered areas into these areas; this requires more insight from NCC.

Our own system flags streets a brighter red as they appear more frequently, so the concerns are obvious. There are different streets to usual appearing, I will identify these at the time of the meeting following a more detailed examination.

Inspections

NCC

During the period there have been 21 LEQ inspections carried out by Senior Officers mainly resulting in scores of 3 and 4, but with only one score of two for litter.

Summary

Street Cleansing Performance

- Overall positive trend with a 20% decrease in collected litter across all zones
- Combined average of 1,180kg/week, down from 1,450kg in the previous year
- All individual zones showed decreased litter collection

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Street Sweeper Issues

- Significant operational problems noted
- Sweepers only operating at 40% capacity
- Never had both sweepers operational during the 10-week period
- Partnership Agreement increased frequency from 4 to 6-7 times per year, but this may not be achievable with current equipment issues

Fly-tipping Situation

- 315 fly-tips removed (31/week average), slightly up from previous period (27/week)
- Total weight decreased by 27% compared to last year (16,240kg vs 22,340kg)
- Additional 4,020kg collected from bin stores
- Notable patterns:
 - No collections recorded on Fridays
 - 14 days with no collections
 - 8 days with fewer than 5 collections
 - Location patterns show possible displacement from CCTV-covered areas

Discussion Points and Actions:

Equipment Reliability - Urgent review of street sweeper maintenance and reliability

1. How can the street sweeper operational capacity be improved from current 40%?
2. What are the main causes of equipment downtime?

Resource Allocation – How are resources are being used on days with no fly-tip collections

1. Review Friday operations specifically, as there are no recorded collections
2. Consider reallocation of resources to match peak demand periods
3. How is the 14 days of no collections utilised?
4. Is current staffing suitable for the service demands?

Fly-tipping Prevention - Investigate possible emerging patterns in new areas (Woodhorn Road, Hawthorn Road, etc.)

1. If there is a pattern emerging, how to address the apparent displacement of fly-tipping to non-CCTV areas?
2. What additional data would be helpful?
3. How can the successful reduction in overall waste be maintained while addressing new challenges?

The meeting discussed the downtime with sweepers, and Peter agreed with the operational impact. Peter advised that a new HAKO machine will be in place this year which is larger and much better. In regards the large sweeper that is owned by NCC, this covers the whole county. Breakdown periods are lengthy as NCC as an organisation struggle to recruit fitters. Those in post have 30/40 years' experience. They are looking at apprenticeship recruitment. Hopefully with new machines this will improve.

Sarah asked about hiring vehicles as opposed to purchasing them. Peter advised that this had previously been looked at and it would cost £750/day to hire a sweeper with driver, there was no option for self-drive.

In regards fly-tipping there was a discussion about the possibility that fly-tips are moving elsewhere due to CCTV cameras; this will be monitored with further scrutiny of addresses. Cllr Marjorie Chambers asked for confirmation of the response time for fly-tips. Peter confirmed that 24-48 hours with the Rapid Response being funded at ATC, elsewhere the response would be

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72 hours. The meeting was reminded that fly-tips are removed from NCC land, i.e. the highway, back lanes, etc. this does not include private land owned by others, or private gardens.

In regards the lack of fly-tips collected on Fridays, Peter confirmed that they have been diverted to the compounds, and although this is not legally considered fly-tipping, or categorised as fly-tipping by NCC it is collected and cleared by the Rapid Response team as would not be taken by Refuse. Peter acknowledged that the Town Council paid resource is being used in this way, for the collection of what would otherwise be on the street and collected by Rapid Response anyway. Peter also acknowledged that the Town Council may not want this practise to continue.

9. INSPECTIONS

An update on Local Environmental Quality (LEQ) and Quality Assurance (QA) inspections carried out by NCC Leaders was **RECEIVED**.

21 LEQ (Local Environmental Quality) inspections conducted
Inspection scores mainly ranged between 3 and 4..

10. DOG FOULING

The meeting was advised that figures had been requested from Enforcement. First to Third Avenue was highlighted as an issue, along with parks, and Kenilworth Road.

11. FUTURE CHANGES

Receipt of the previous report at Council had prompted a discussion of timings of meetings, prompting that it be placed on the agenda. Cllrs were less inclined to discuss any proposed changes at this time. Peter confirmed that NCC would politely request that meetings were held during working hours.

Peter advised that the questionnaire on grounds maintenance was expected mid-March, and that it would be shared with Partnerships and stakeholders in the first instance, then more widespread.

In regards any potential enhancements or proposed changes, members suggested these come from Council.

12. DATE, TIME, AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 15th April, 2:00pm, Town Hall, Ashington, NE63 8RX.

The meeting ended at 15:00pm.

Report on Reserves Position and Partnership Contract Payments

Background

I want to make Councillors aware that our available reserves are lower than expected this year. This is not due to any missing funds or financial impropriety, but rather a technical accounting issue related to how we have historically recorded payments for the Partnership Contract with Northumberland County Council (NCC).

Like all payments, these should be correctly accounted on an income and expenditure basis. However, some historical payments were not allocated to the correct financial years, and this year we have accounted for an additional quarter's payment as we correct our reporting approach.

Why This Has Happened

When using **income and expenditure accounting**, costs must be recorded in the year they relate to, even if they are paid later. However, for several years, Partnership Contract payments were not correctly accrued at year-end, leading to a timing issue:

Quarter 1 of 2022/23 was issued very late and invoices were out of sync that year. **Quarter 1 of 2022/23** was **paid in 2023/24** but was not recorded as an accrual. This means the cost was not shown in 2022/23, as it should have been.

Quarter 4 of 2023/24 was also **not recorded as an accrual**, meaning it now remains in the 2024/25 accounts.

Because of this, **five quarters' worth of payments** are now being recorded in 2024/25 instead of the usual four. This does **not** mean that money is missing—it is simply a timing issue that has resulted in the current year's expenditure appearing higher than expected.

Impact on the Budget and Reserves

The additional quarter's payment has affected how much we can transfer into our earmarked reserves. However, this does not mean the Council is in financial difficulty, as we have **contingencies and reserves in place** to absorb variations like this.

To manage the impact, we have adjusted our reserves as follows:

General Contingency Fund has been set at **£171,500** (expected to return to **£175,000** with savings on election costs).

Earmarked Reserves have been streamlined to focus on five key areas:

- **Play Areas** (now combined rather showing each individual location, but I will retain the asset management budget to save towards replacements)
- **Allotments**
- **Elections**
- **Environmental Improvements**
- **Memorials**

Report on Reserves Position and Partnership Contract Payments

The total in earmarked reserves now stands at **£51,000**, which we aim to **build up over time** to fund future capital projects.

Next Steps and Priorities

This year's priority capital project is **North Seaton Colliery Play Area**, which will be funded from the Play Areas reserve, section 106 Windfarm Funding (£27,145), and any other funding that can be achieved. Moving forward, we need to continue adding into reserves to support capital projects.

Conclusion

There is **no financial impropriety or missing money**—this is purely an accounting correction. The additional quarter's payment was always due, but in previous years it was not properly accrued. Our contingency and reserves have helped absorb the impact, and going forward, all payments will be recorded correctly to ensure clarity and accuracy in our financial position.

In **2025/26**, we will be moving to a formal accounting system rather than relying on spreadsheets. This will help prevent errors like this one, as the new system will automatically record accruals and ensure payments are correctly attributed to the relevant financial year. This shift will help ensure accuracy in our financial reporting going forward.