

**AGENDA 10, Enc vii) DRAFT Report of the Enhanced Neighbourhood Services Partnership Board, held on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2025, commencing at 2:00pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington**

In Attendance: Cllrs Glyn Davies, Jim Lang, Louis Brown, Pauline Thompson, Marjorie Chambers, Kerry Davison, Victor Bridges, John Allen, Karl Green, David Coyle, Steven Roberts, Scott Amery, John Tully, Sarah Eden – Executive Officer, Mark Air – Senior Neighbourhood Services Officer and Gary Holmes – Administration Assistant, Steven Wardle - Divisional Manager, Peter Bowman - Area Manager, Robin Wallace - Senior Team Leader and Richie - Team Leader

**1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR**

It was **AGREED** that Cllr Marjorie Chambers be appointed chair.

**2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR**

It was not agreed to appoint a Chair at this time.

**3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

**4. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

There were no disclosures of interest.

**5. DISPENSATIONS**

There were no dispensations requested.

**6. PREVIOUS MEETING**

The report of the last meeting, held on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2025, was **AGREED** as a true reflection.

**7. PARTNERSHIP BUDGET 2025/26**

The budget of £236k was **CONFIRMED** for the 2025/26 financial year, and the updated budget was **RECEIVED**.

**8. ANNUAL REVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES DELIVERED UNDER THE ENHANCED SERVICES PARTNERSHIP (2025/26)**

The annual review of environmental services delivered in Ashington was **RECEIVED**.

Peter Bowman informed the meeting that the new road sweepers had been delivered that morning and confirmed they were suitable for use on narrower front streets such as Juliet Street. Cllr Louis Brown noted that this had been discussed at the previous meeting and was pleased the sweepers would fit, expressing hope that the service would now be maintained consistently.

Cllr Coyle raised concerns that a road sweeper had never been seen in the Haydon ward area. In response, Cllr Marjorie Chambers acknowledged the issue but stated that the situation in Hirst and Central was more severe, and these areas had been direction to more cleansing.

Cllr Amery queried whether there were any figures available showing which parts of Ashington were being cleaned and if certain areas were being prioritised. He noted that in his own area and on Wansbeck Road, a sweeper had only ever been seen once. NCC confirmed that logs were kept and would be shared with him.

**AGENDA 10, Enc vii) DRAFT Report of the Enhanced Neighbourhood Services Partnership Board, held on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2025, commencing at 2:00pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington**

Cllr Tully sympathised with other councillors' frustrations but explained that the standard core service is a sweep every 13 weeks (four times a year), which is enhanced through partnership arrangements to every eight weeks, or six to seven times a year. Robin added that the reliability of the sweepers had been problematic, at one point leaving only one machine available for the entire area.

Cllr Amery questioned what compensation or adjustment was provided when services were not upheld, especially if only one operative was being provided due to equipment failure. Steven explained that as this was a partnership with a shared budget, resources could be reallocated, such as borrowing machines from other areas when needed.

Cllr Tully raised concerns about the availability of sweepers, stating that 40% availability was not acceptable, particularly when the service is meant to be enhanced. He recalled being told there was an operative on the main street six days a week, with additional cover on Sundays, and asked when the decision was made to remove that operative. Peter confirmed the decision was made by NCC last year, and Cllr Chambers noted the workforce was reduced from six to five, leading to the loss of that operative.

Cllr John Allen commented that he considered the service excellent overall, citing examples of operatives working in the park on Sundays. However, he acknowledged the 40% unavailability figure was unacceptable and echoed calls for financial adjustments in light of service reductions. Robin responded that this was the reason an operative had been assigned to the main street – to mitigate the shortfall.

Cllr Coyle asked if the enhancement consisted of five additional operatives, which Cllr Chambers confirmed, with Steven adding that if an operative was off due to illness or other reasons, they were not replaced. Cllr Scott reiterated that although it was a partnership, the service was paid for, and as such should come with guaranteed service levels or contractual assurances.

Cllr Louis Brown pointed out that the partnership had been running for nine years and that originally Ashington Town Council contributed around 30% of the town's street cleaning costs, but due to funding cuts this had risen to 50%. He questioned whether a proper sweeping schedule would now be developed, as there had not been one in place for several years.

## **9. PARTNERSHIP SERVICE DELIVERY**

### ***a) Presentation by NCC***

A comprehensive understanding of the current Partnership Agreement and what is delivered was **RECEIVED** in the form of a presentation by NCC.

Steven Wardle clarified that NCC is a not-for-profit organisation and does not make any profit from the services provided. Any surplus is rebated, and the financial process is fully transparent. He also confirmed that five staff are currently employed. He added that the enhanced service includes very quick responses to fly-tipping reports.

Cllr Coyle raised the issue of dog fouling and asked how quickly reports are responded to, given that enhancements have been paid for. Peter explained that such reports go through the Fix My Street system and are typically resolved on the same day. He noted that the system was created for this purpose and data is available. Cllr Scott asked whether time spent on cleaning up dog fouling is recorded, suggesting this could inform whether fines are being appropriately pursued. Robin responded that due to the volume, such data is not tracked.

**AGENDA 10, Enc vii) DRAFT Report of the Enhanced Neighbourhood Services Partnership Board, held on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2025, commencing at 2:00pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington**

Cllr John Allen asked about the legal position on dog fouling. Sarah clarified that officers do not have powers of detainment, and whether Legal will act depends on whether enforcement is deemed proportionate. Cllr Allen suggested that visible enforcement would have a strong deterrent effect. Cllr Stevens agreed and called for increased fines and enforcement to make an example, though acknowledged Legal often pushes back due to costs.

Steven from NCC noted that more targeted enforcement is being considered, such as high-visibility operations in problem areas like Hirst. These would involve greater presence, activity logging, and police support for detainment if required. He agreed to follow up with further details. Sarah and Mark discussed increasing bin capacity by replacing smaller bins with double-capacity ones. Mark added that collaboration with NCC on bin placement remains a priority and the focus is on larger bins in high-litter areas.

Cllr Tully recalled that dog fouling had been an issue even 20 years ago and said enforcement alone wouldn't solve it—education and making the behaviour socially unacceptable were key. Robin mentioned that report numbers had dropped. Mark asked if previous suggestions for leaflets, signage, and pavement markings had been followed up.

Steven also noted that Zone 2 is swept three times a week, while Zone 3 is cleaned fortnightly. Cllr Thompson asked if the data on litter collected by the Litter Project was included in figures; Robin confirmed this was separate. Cllr Scott raised the issue of three problem areas being close together and asked whether more signage or CCTV might help. Robin said this type of targeted action had already helped, and Hirst was cleaner now than in recent years.

Cllr Coyle brought up concerns about overgrown fences and unkempt areas in Hirst, attributing the problem to neglect by some landlords. He questioned how much of the £14,000 in fines had been recovered; Peter was unsure. Cllr Scott cautioned against blaming all landlords, noting the difficulty they face in controlling tenant behaviour. Cllr Coyle clarified he meant a few absentee or repeat-offending landlords.

Cllr Allen explained selective licensing schemes, which require landlord vetting before letting properties, including an enhanced DBS check. However, he criticised the lack of government oversight in terms of who landlords then rent to. Cllr Tully noted that although fly-tipping incidents had declined, tonnage remained the same. Robin responded that rapid response teams no longer clear waste even from compounds—a dedicated team is responsible.

Cllr Green asked about potential arrangements for van users to access the household recovery centre services. Cllr Scott said he was currently disputing NCC's restrictions, which he viewed as unfair to sole traders.

Robin responded regarding concerns over chemical edging on footpaths. Cllr Chambers disliked it due to the resulting mud, which becomes problematic in rain. Robin responded that the grass recedes, and the mud naturally settles over time, this method was less labour intensive than edging.

Cllr Green raised concerns from Seaton Vale residents, who feel neglected by NCC and questioned what they receive in return for their council tax. Robin explained that a landscaper does cover the area but added it is difficult since the roads are not yet adopted. Cllr Amery stated that all residents, adopted or not, should benefit from services. Cllr Chambers added that legally, acting on unadopted roads could be seen as interfering with private property.

Cllr Allen praised NCC for their efforts and asked that formal thanks be recorded.

**AGENDA 10, Enc vii) DRAFT Report of the Enhanced Neighbourhood Services Partnership Board, held on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2025, commencing at 2:00pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington**

***b) Partnership delivery discussion and review***

Cllr Amery asked whether newer councillors were required to report directly to Sarah, which Sarah confirmed was the case for matters under the partnership, but not NCC areas of delivery which County Cllrs could report directly. Steven clarified that any reports would be processed through the Fix My Street website.

Cllr Louis Brown raised concerns about the financial arrangements, noting that county operatives are now attempting to deliver the same level of service with significantly reduced funding - approximately one-third of the £900,000 that was previously allocated to the partnership.

Cllr John Tully acknowledged the importance of street maintenance but emphasised that all efforts are constrained by available resources and funding. He noted that the impact of budget cuts is becoming evident as the service is struggling to meet its obligations and maintain standards.

Sarah sought confirmation regarding operational capacity, specifically asking whether the 11 operatives working with enhanced and core services represented the largest allocation in Northumberland, with reference to Ashington. Steven confirmed this was indeed the case.

**The latter agenda items were deferred due to time.**

**The report that follows was drafted by the Executive Officer following the meeting to summarise the points made during and after the presentation.**

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**Executive Summary**

The Partnership Board reviewed the annual performance report and discussed operational challenges. Key outcomes include improved litter reduction (11% decrease) and fly-tipping incident reduction (18%), though equipment reliability issues affected street sweeping capacity. The meeting also addressed broader environmental concerns requiring action by other bodies.

**PARTNERSHIP PERFORMANCE MATTERS**

***Street Cleansing Services***

**Performance:** Significant improvement with 290,090kg waste collected (11% reduction from previous year)

- Equivalent to nearly 2,000 fewer bin bags collected
- All zones showing positive trends
- **Action:** Continue current service delivery

***Fly-Tipping Response***

**Performance:** Mixed results requiring strategic review

- **Positive:** 18% reduction in incidents (1,961 to 1,610)
- **Concern:** Only 3.7% reduction in tonnage suggests displacement to bin stores
- **Resource Issue:** Service operating at 35% underutilisation (90 days minimal/no activity)
- **Action Required:** Partnership Board to consider resource reallocation or service scaling

**AGENDA 10, Enc vii) DRAFT Report of the Enhanced Neighbourhood Services Partnership Board, held on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2025, commencing at 2:00pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington**

***Street Sweeping Enhancement***

**Performance:** Operated at less than 40% capacity due to equipment failures

- **NCC Response:** New, more reliable machinery sourced
- **Action Required:** Monitor new equipment performance and reassess effectiveness

**NON-PARTNERSHIP MATTERS**

*These issues require direction to appropriate NCC departments/services*

***Enforcement Issues → NCC Legal & Environmental Enforcement***

- Dog fouling enforcement not actioned as well as could be fines "not proportionate"
- Fly-tipping enforcement inadequate
- **Recommended Action:** County Councillors to request review of enforcement protocols and fine structures

***Highway Infrastructure → NCC Highways Department***

- Lamp post signage requirements
- Drain maintenance (weed compaction)
- Street lighting obstruction issues
- **Recommended Action:** County Councillor requests to Highways

***Housing Standards → NCC Housing Services***

- Poorly maintained properties and gardens
- Landlord licensing requirements
- Tenant enforcement issues
- **Recommended Action:** County Councillor requests to Housing Services

***Community Initiatives → NCC Neighbourhood Services***

- Amnesty action days for litter/fly-tipping
- Enhanced education programmes
- Joined-up enforcement approach
- **Status:** Under consideration by NCC

**Budget Considerations**

- Current enhanced service may exceed operational requirements
- Opportunity to redirect resources from underutilised fly-tipping response
- Consider prioritising "on the ground operations" over other expenditure

**AGENDA 10, Enc vii) DRAFT Report of the Enhanced Neighbourhood Services Partnership Board, held on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2025, commencing at 2:00pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington**

**Partnership Effectiveness**

***Strengths:***

- Genuine waste reduction achieved
- Strong collaborative relationship between ATC and NCC
- Additional services provided (play area inspections, event support)

***Areas for Improvement:***

- Equipment reliability
- Data accuracy and reporting
- Resource optimisation

**FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS**

**For Partnership Board:**

- Review resource allocation for fly-tipping response service
- Monitor new street sweeping equipment performance
- Establish enhanced data collection protocols

**For County Councillors:**

- Request enforcement review from Legal & Environmental Enforcement
- Submit highway infrastructure requests to Highways Department
- Raise housing standards issues with Housing Services

**For ATC Budget Planning:**

- Consider resource reallocation options
- Evaluate priority of ground operations vs. other expenditure
- Plan for potential service scaling adjustments

**CONCLUSION**

The Partnership demonstrates measurable environmental improvements while highlighting opportunities for better resource utilisation. Non-partnership environmental issues require systematic referral to appropriate NCC departments through County Councillor requests to ensure comprehensive community environmental management. This could be achieved via the Local Area Council Meeting for Ashington & Blyth.

**AGENDA 10, Enc vii) DRAFT Report of the Enhanced Neighbourhood Services Partnership Board, held on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2025, commencing at 2:00pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington**

| <b>Issue Discussed</b>              | <b>Current Status/Response</b>                                 | <b>Action Required</b>                                                | <b>Responsibility</b>   |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Partnership Service Delivery</b> |                                                                |                                                                       |                         |
| Pavement markings for dog fouling   | In progress by Partnership Team                                | Monitor completion                                                    | Partnership Team        |
| Flyposting                          | Actioned by Partnership Team                                   | Completed                                                             | Partnership Team        |
| New sweeper equipment               | New machines sourced to address <40% capacity performance      | Monitor effectiveness of new equipment                                | Partnership Team / NCC  |
| Refuse bin store cleansing          | No longer carried out by Partnership Resource                  | Service adjustment noted                                              | Partnership Team        |
| Weed spraying program               | Completed February 2025 with ripping and strimming             | Request timetables of areas visited                                   | Partnership Team        |
| Station Road operations             | Full-time operative replaced with team approach - working well | Continue monitoring performance                                       | Partnership Team        |
| Core service reduction              | Enhancement being absorbed into reduced baseline service       | Review partnership value proposition                                  | ATC / Partnership Board |
| <b>Non-Partnership Matters</b>      |                                                                |                                                                       |                         |
| Lamp post signage for dog fouling   | Requires highways approval                                     | County Councillor request to Highways/Enforcement                     | County Councillors      |
| Street sweeping obstructions        | Lamp posts blocking access on some streets                     | County Councillor request to Street Lighting for lamp post relocation | County Councillors      |
| Drain maintenance                   | Drains compacted with weeds                                    | County Councillor request to Highways                                 | County Councillors      |

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|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Ward prioritisation concerns  | Wards visited according to need - schedules reflect frequency variations                              | Clarification provided - no action required                                 | N/A                        |
| Sick/leave cover arrangements | Partnership agreement doesn't include guaranteed cover - Blyth has 1-month reserve for agency workers | Understanding noted - contractual limitation                                | N/A                        |
| Machinery ownership vs hire   | Cannot hire Hako equipment - must be owned                                                            | Operational constraint noted                                                | N/A                        |
| <b>Enforcement Issues</b>     |                                                                                                       |                                                                             |                            |
| Dog fouling enforcement       | Currently deemed "not proportionate" - discussed increasing fines                                     | County Councillor request to Legal and Environmental Enforcement            | County Councillors         |
| Fly-tipping enforcement       | Insufficient enforcement - discussed proportionate fines                                              | County Councillor request to Legal and Environmental Enforcement            | County Councillors         |
| Amnesty action days           | NCC considering targeted approach for litter, fly-tipping, dog fouling education                      | NCC reviewing joined-up enforcement approach                                | NCC Neighbourhood Services |
| <b>Housing Standards</b>      |                                                                                                       |                                                                             |                            |
| Poorly maintained properties  | Lack of enforcement on homes and gardens                                                              | County Councillor request to Housing Services and Environmental Enforcement | County Councillors         |
| Landlord licensing            | Discussed licensing requirements for poor landlords                                                   | County Councillor request to Housing Services                               | County Councillors         |
| <b>Resource Allocation</b>    |                                                                                                       |                                                                             |                            |
| Increased ground operations   | More resource needed for operations vs "nice to have" items (e.g., Christmas lights)                  | Partnership contribution to be discussed in ATC budget rounds               | ATC Budget Planning        |