

AGENDA 12, Enc x) Report of the Enhanced Neighbourhood Services Partnership Board, held on Tuesday 19th September 2023, commencing at 2:00pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington

Members Present:

Cllr Matthew Cuthbert (Chair of Meeting), Cllr Glyn Davies, Cllr John Tully, Stephen Wardle – NCC Divisional Manager Neighbourhood Services, Peter Bowman – NCC Senior Team Leader Neighbourhood Services, Robin Wallace – NCC Team Leader.

Also, in Attendance

Sarah Eden – ATC Executive Officer/RFO, Stephen Humphrey – ATC Assets & Facilities

1. WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

Cllr Matthew Cuthbert to welcome everyone to the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were given for Ray Wealleans.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

None received.

4. DISPENSATIONS

None required.

5. PREVIOUS MEETINGS

a) Report of Previous Meeting

It was **AGREED** to receive the minutes of the last meeting, held on 20th June 2023, as a true record.

b) Update on actions agreed and progress

Dedicated Mobile Number/Email address

The rapid response number has been shared with members of the Ashington Community Litter Picking Group and it appears to be working well. This will be kept under review, but the idea is to cut down on the double handling of collected rubbish requests, minimise the chance of failed collections and reduce the time taken.

Street Sweeper

Peter confirmed that reduced routes were being operated suggested in favour of more sweeping in Hirst/Central but there resourcing issues had affected the frequency generally.

Hirst Clearance

The work ordered from Straughans to supply team of three with hedge cutters and pole saws to cut back the hedges/vegetation, gather the green waste and dispose of from site at a cost of £2,855 (max 3 days), as well as an operative and knap sack spray for paths at a cost of £420 (max 1 day) will be carried out in October.

Sarah asked how many positive responses had been received to the letter requested householders cut back hedging. It was discussed that some but not many. It was acknowledged that the difficult situation created was that those householders who had cut back may feel a bit put out when the team then comes in to do the work, and not o this in the

AGENDA 12, Enc x) Report of the Enhanced Neighbourhood Services Partnership Board, held on Tuesday 19th September 2023, commencing at 2:00pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington

future. It was also discussed that it is not necessarily that householders will not cut back, but that they are not able to for several reasons.

Play Areas

Sarah advised that progress on transferring developer owned play areas was very slow, as developers were not responding. Sarah asked if NCC would support a joint approach whereby the developer is advised that both sides will cease carrying out work in and on the play areas, until they respond. Legally the play areas are owned by the developer, so they are responsible and liable. Stephen confirmed that he would need to seek support from Greg for this type of response. Sarah advised that numerous emails and follow-ups had been sent, and the Council's solicitor was also seeking a response, and that if nothing was forthcoming by the end of October more forcible action would be needed.

Negotiating Meeting

A meeting was held between ATC (Sarah, John, and Pauline, and NCC (Greg, Ray, and Peter). A report of the meeting has been shared and suggested changes to the agreement are being worked out by NCC.

6. PARTNERSHIP BUDGET

a) 2023/24

The Report sent in advance by Ray highlighted the following, but reported everything on track in the main:

Salaries

The YTD figures on the Partnership are currently showing an underspend, but the wage increase for this current financial year has still to be agreed as soon as we have an agreement figure I will inform the Town Council we have budgeted all salaries at a 4% increase but depending on agreement this may increase.

This YTD figures on Core are showing an overspend in NI and Pension, I have asked for this to be checked and will update if needed.

Other Costs

Other cost centres within the partnership are showing some underspends year to date in both ATC and Core, the Fuel costs are shown low; this is due to the override fuel fob for Stakeford depot being used for partnership vehicles. I am conducting an audit of the fuel sheets to rectify and will report on the next meeting.

Vehicle Hire costs (£6,810) for the partnership are for the pickup in use by Ashington Town Council workforce.

7. ENHANCED SERVICES PERFORMANCE

a) Clerk's Summary

It was AGREED to receive the following summary of information from the monitoring tool provided by Northumberland County Council:

AGENDA 12, Enc x) Report of the Enhanced Neighbourhood Services Partnership Board, held on Tuesday 19th September 2023, commencing at 2:00pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington

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

Previously the meeting has been updated with fly-tipping according to each ward. This was time consuming to produce and has not been discussed in any detail. In view of this, the information is not included this time, and reports will be amended to coincide with the priorities of new members.

Street Cleansing

There have been no exceptions to the cleansing schedule in the period 12th June – 28th August, other than the Bank Holiday in August.

It is helpful to compare the average collection over the period, with the collection from each zone. In total approximately 79,660kg collected over the period (66,340kg in last period), an average of 19,915kg for each zone. A weekly average of 1,660kg (1,659kg in last period, 1,713kg same period last year). Those that have gone down are in bold, those that have gone up are not.

- ❖ **Zone 1 – 24,360kg overall, Average 2,030kg/wk (last Q – 2,060kg) Same period last year av 2,152kg/wk**
- ❖ **Zone 2 – 18,400kg overall Average 1,533kg/wk (last Q – 1,754kg) Same period last year av 1,895kg/wk**
- ❖ Zone 3 – 22,800kg overall Average 1,900kg/wk (last Q – 1,374kg) Same period last year av 1,386kg/wk
- ❖ **Zone 4 – 14,100kg overall Average 1,175kg/wk (last Q – 1,300kg) Same period last year av 1,550kg/wk**

One black bin bag is approximately 10kg in weight, so that is over 7,966 black bin bags collected throughout the town over the period, about 664 each week. This is in addition to household waste.

We have approximately 421 town bins that are on the schedule. In view that most are sized to take a black bin bag, we could approximate that around 243 black bags each week are being collected from the ground as part of cleansing, which includes that collected by volunteer litter pickers. When making any assumption we need to consider that dog bags weigh more; 10kg is an estimate to inform discussion.

Street Sweeper

The inclusion of street sweeping in the Partnership Agreement enhances street sweeping from 4 times a year to 6/7 times/year.

- w/c 12th June – one sweeper driver on phased return to work.

AGENDA 12, Enc x) Report of the Enhanced Neighbourhood Services Partnership Board, held on Tuesday 19th September 2023, commencing at 2:00pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington

- w/c 19th June – one sweeper awaiting repairs. Zone 3 routes undertaken.
- w/c 26th June to w/c 24th July – All zone routes undertaken.
- w/c 31st July – Both sweeper drivers on sick.
- w/c 7th August to w/c 14th August – Routes in zones 1 and 2 undertaken.
- w/c 21st August – One sweeper driver on sick, routes in zone 2 and 3 undertaken.

In the previous reported period, which was brought to the last meeting, only the first three weeks were operational due to resourcing issues because of long-term sickness.

It would be helpful to better understand the cost/resource implication of this, and to ask if it is unrealistic to expect delivery can be achieved in view of the human resource issues.

The monitoring information provided doesn't make deciphering the frequency of enhanced street sweeps very easy. I am working with our administrator to be able to extract this information, so we know when we hit the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and so forth for each map.

Resourcing

In the last period the meeting was updated that there had been high levels of sickness across the teams.

Including both periods of reporting, so from 1st April up to and including w/c 28th August, there has been 20% sickness absence on the Partnership team, and 10% sickness absence on the Core team. This has been calculated from the possible number of working days minus holiday leave. 115 workings days have been lost on the Partnership, and 59 days on Core.

This is very high, compared to an average across the public sector of 3.6% in 2022. Last year the sickness absence for the whole year on Partnership was 8% and on Core 5%.

The monitoring information provided highlights that operatives are lost from mechanical sweeping rather than cleansing routes, and that this is long-term, as opposed to regular incidents.

Stephen added that long-term sickness absence does pose difficulties across the County. It was noted that NCC has employees with very long history records who have been committed to their jobs through their health and are being supported through their ill health. Locally, there will be changes. Following a question from Cllr Tully in regards supporting staff into different roles, it was confirmed that this did happen.

Rapid Response

Over the period there have been 497 fly-tips removed via Rapid Response (429 in the same period last year), that is an average of 41 each week (36/week in the same period last year), approximately 8 each day (7/day in the same period last year). The weight of collections over the period is 31,250kg (26,480kg in the same period last year).

Comparing to the previous quarter, averages only as we are looking at 12 weeks, as opposed to 10 weeks, there is an increase from 37/week (+4). This isn't significant but an average weekly weight of fly-tipping over this period has increase from 2,140kg to 2,606kg. If that were the average black bin bag that is over 40 more.

AGENDA 12, Enc x) Report of the Enhanced Neighbourhood Services Partnership Board, held on Tuesday 19th September 2023, commencing at 2:00pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington

Robin explained the implications of off-loading at the recycling centre and the need to separate waste.

In previous evaluations, the incidents of fly-tipping are primarily (75%) 'other household waste', with Central making up more than 50% and Hirst more than 25%. Pont St, Sycamore St, Maple St, Chestnut St, and Castle Terrace are those most frequently collected from.

NCC Inspections

LEQ inspections by Senior Team Leaders are scheduled to be carried out twice weekly. At the meeting last month members were advised these were random but generally carried out in areas that have been visited.

The data shared with Sarah on a weekly basis and at the time of writing included up to w/c 28th August (22 weeks). There are only 12 out an expected 44 LEQ inspections recorded on the Monitoring Tool. This is highlighted as a concern and is included on the agenda for discussion and resolution.

ATC Inspections

It has been difficult to routinely carry out inspections over this period. In honesty, we have reverted to reporting issues on sight due to workload, annual leave, and other priorities.

In view of previous inspections and our thoughts that some areas were Grade B before a cleansing visit, and questioning whether they require a weekly cleanse, it would be a better use of resources to pick up ATC inspections once the revised Partnership Agreement is operation.

- Grade A – no litter and refuse.
- Grade B – predominantly free of litter and refuse.
- Grade C – widespread distribution of litter and refuse with some accumulations.
- Grade D - heavily littered with significant accumulations of litter and refuse.

b) Rapid Response

Robin further commented on the information shared from the monitoring tool on the frequency of rapid response.

Cllr Tully questioned where the waste that was fly tipped came from. It was reiterated that 75% was considered household waste – toys, furniture, household goods, etc. Cllr Tully asked if NCC could share fly-tipping from elsewhere in the County. **It was AGREED** to source this information and feedback to the next meeting.

c) Street cleansing and sweeping

This was discussed in detail above, no further comments. Changes suggested via the negotiating meeting will be brought back for discussion once resource implications are known.

d) Weed control

It was discussed that weed spraying has been problematic across the County. This was due to weather, and the products that can be used now. Peter reported operational improvements due to more operatives being trained to use quad bikes, and 12litre knapsacks.

AGENDA 12, Enc x) Report of the Enhanced Neighbourhood Services Partnership Board, held on Tuesday 19th September 2023, commencing at 2:00pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington

Cllr Tully expressed that this was the worst he had seen weeds, and improvements were needed as residents were rightly concerned as it just made the place look a mess.

8. INSPECTIONS

Stephen acknowledged that the level of LEQ inspections carried out was far below that expected and apologies were given. Stephen was keen to express that this should not reflect badly on the workforce carrying out the work. The teams were working hard to deliver the service expected, and it certainly did not mean that the service was below that standard, but simply put Senior Officers had taken their eye off completing them, but they would get back on track.

Cllr Tully thanked NCC side for their honesty and expressed that the LEQ inspections should be viewed as a mechanism for celebrating good work, as well as identifying when improvements are needed.

9. FUTURE CHANGES

The following chart summarises potential future changes/negotiations:

Any future agreement will be for 12 months, with an option to extend for a further 12 months.	Assured/Agreed
The Partnership Agreement is valued by both parties.	Assured/Agreed
Grass-cutting can be enhanced but grounds maintenance delivery will be changing in the next 12-18 months. The emphasis is on biodiversity and value for money.	Nothing new can be introduced until the Counties 'Best Programme' is introduced and established.
Street Cleansing Zones that could be moved to monthly or fortnightly identified by Peter.	This is being operated – impact on environment and resource will be available in the coming weeks/months.
Operatives from cleansing moved to enhance service standards on grass-cutting quality, gateways, strimming, weeding, and cutting back hedging.	This will be assessed when resource implications of changes to cleansing are evident, but grass-cutting needs to wait until new County-wide standards are introduced.
High footfall, amenity, gateways, and visitor areas are all priorities for enhanced services.	As above, the available resource will be calculated.
Ashington uniform or logo'd extras (for NCC staff working in Ashington).	Requires further consideration.

AGENDA 12, Enc x) Report of the Enhanced Neighbourhood Services Partnership Board, held on Tuesday 19th September 2023, commencing at 2:00pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington

What is the income from bulky household waste collected from Ashington?	352 collections from April to August this year with income of £7,845 (£1,570 per month or £21.27 per collection).
Estimate the cost of covering a reduced fee for bulky household waste.	Difficult to estimate. In the same period as 352 bulky h/h waste collections were made in Ashington, there were 859 fly-tipping incidents collected by rapid response. That is 1,211 (242/month), 12 per working day based on collections now (7 day) this would require a resource input of 2 vans/4 operatives. It is difficult to say if fly-tipping would go down as a result, but it is likely that those who would book bulky collections would increase.

Other comments made include:

- Core Service delivered in Ashington is based on need and therefore there is a greater investment of resource, than elsewhere in the County.
- Street cleansing is known for being recognised more when it is not done, rather than when it is done.

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

Following the suggestion by Cllr Tully, and support by the Chair, Cllr Cuthbert, it was agreed the Partnership meetings should be held more frequently, with the next scheduled for Tuesday 21st November, at 2:00pm.