AGENDA 14, Enc x) PARTNERSHIP BOARD UPDATE REPORT AND REPORT OF ASHINGTON PARTNERSHIP BOARD MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 22ND OCTOBER 2025

Background and Context

Following NCC's presentation to Council on 3rd June 2025, the Partnership Board has been engaged in comprehensive review of the Enhanced Neighbourhood Services Partnership. This has included:

- Detailed memo to NCC in September 2025 proposing shift from cleansing to environmental enhancement priorities
- NCC response on 24th September 2025 supporting the principle but indicating budget constraints
- Two further meetings in October with frank discussions about priorities and feasibility
- Comprehensive follow-up communication requesting full resource picture, cost breakdowns, and trial approach

The Partnership Board met with Northumberland County Council officers on 22nd October 2025 to progress discussions on the proposed shift from cleansing focus to enhanced grounds maintenance and kerb appeal priorities.

This report details the outcomes of the Partnership Board meeting held on 22nd October 2025 to progress these discussions.

Key Points from 22nd October Meeting

- NCC has agreed in principle to reconfigure workforce, moving 5 Partnership-funded operatives from cleansing to grounds maintenance work
- Trial programme will commence early December 2025 in 2-3 streets per ward plus one key town entrance
- Impact of reduced cleansing capacity will become visible during trial period
- Service Level Agreement model discussed (would increase costs due to contingency requirements)
- Next Partnership Board meeting scheduled for 24th November 2025 to review trial proposals

Action Required

- Council to receive the report
- Members invited to raise questions for Partnership Board members
- No decisions required at this stage

Next Steps

- Councillors to submit trial street suggestions by early November
- NCC to provide full trial details by 17th November 2025
- Partnership Board to meet 24th November to agree trial commencement

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- Trial to run December 2025 through to March 2026, providing evidence for budget decisions
- Full recommendations will come to Council following trial completion and evaluation

Report of Ashington Partnership Board Meeting Held on Tuesday 22nd October 2025

Present

Cllr Majorie Chambers (Chair), Cllr Louis Brown, Cllr David Coyle, Cllr Kerry Davison, Cllr Jim Lang, Sarah Eden (Executive Officer), Mark Air (Senior Neighbourhood Services Officers), Greg Gavin (NCC Head of Neighbourhood Services), Stephen Wardle (NCC Divisional Manager Neighbourhood Services) Peter Bowman (NCC Area Manager, South East Neighbourhood Services), Chris Mordue (NCC Senior Team Leader)

Summary

The Partnership Board met on 22nd October 2025 to discuss the evolving environmental partnership between Ashington Town Council (ATC) and Northumberland County Council (NCC), particularly the future configuration of cleansing and grounds maintenance services.

Context

ATC and NCC currently operate a joint service model comprising 6 Core-funded cleansing operatives and 5 Partnership-funded operatives, within a wider workforce of approximately 20–22 operatives working across all cleansing and grounds maintenance activities in Ashington.

It was acknowledged that since the Town Council's focus shifted towards a cleansing partnership, ATC has not been directly concerned with NCC's resourcing or outputs for grounds maintenance, viewing this as NCC's responsibility. The partnership discussions have therefore concentrated solely on cleansing services.

All operatives are employed under the same NCC job description, allowing work to be interchangeable between cleansing and grounds roles, provided that staff receive appropriate training, supervision, and support.

Discussion

NCC confirmed they would explore how to reconfigure the cleansing workforce so that the 5 Partnership-funded operatives currently deployed on cleansing would instead form a Partnership resource within grounds maintenance, focused on kerb appeal and visible enhancement work.

This would take some re-working of how to deliver the cleansing response, which would not be as responsive. The Partnership team would move from cleansing duties to carry out enhanced grounds maintenance activities.

While the two roles are interchangeable, it was recognised that this change will require a period of retraining and confidence building for team leaders to ensure new tasks are carried out safely, efficiently, and to the expected standard.

The redeployed Partnership team will deliver kerb appeal enhancements, including:

- **Pavement edging** – carried out mechanically rather than chemically.
- **Weed management** – weeds sprayed, strimmed, and removed (not left in situ).
- **Leaf clearance** – leaves sucked and removed rather than blown aside.

NCC understood clearly that ATC wishes to see visible, area-based results, with the Partnership team working together to complete defined areas before moving on.

Current Cleansing Service

It was recognised that under the current partnership model, the service delivered in Ashington goes well beyond NCC's core offer, providing:

- **More frequent litter bin emptying**
- **More regular litter picking**
- **Faster response to fly-tipping**

However, this enhanced level of service has also created higher public expectations and, in some cases, service misuse, particularly around rapid responses to fly-tipping and the large number of litter bins currently in use. ATC is actively working with NCC to rationalise the number of litter bins to make the service more sustainable.

It is recognised that the impact of a reduced workforce on cleansing will likely be revealed, as well as offering a very visible indication of the resource and frequency required.

Future Trial – Kerb Appeal Work

It was agreed that NCC would develop and deliver a **trial programme** to test the new kerb appeal approach.

The trial will:

- Begin in early December 2025
- Include 2–3 residential streets per ward and one key town entrance
- Use a mix of FixMyStreet hot spots and Councillor-suggested areas

The trial will help to establish:

- Realistic timescales for completing visible enhancement works
- Achievable outcomes and quality standards
- A clearer understanding of what can be delivered within available resources

The results will provide an evidence base for discussions about a new partnership arrangement beyond March 2026.

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High Street Cleansing

The High Street was discussed as a continuing area of concern. Both ATC and NCC acknowledged the need for a considered approach to litter and detritus management, particularly if there is a shift in operational focus.

Future Service Model

Discussions have considered moving away from the current **cost recovery partnership** to a **Service Level Agreement (SLA)** model, which could introduce:

- **Defined performance measures**
- **Penalties or redress mechanisms** when machinery or staffing shortfalls affect delivery

NCC advised that an SLA model would be more costly due to the need for greater resilience and contingency cover. It was confirmed that no spare capacity currently exists to backfill absent staff or replace broken machinery, though resources are always reprioritised to meet the most pressing needs.

While the partnership model does not currently include financial penalties, there are procedures to seek redress where performance fails to meet intended outcomes. With clearer, measurable outcomes, future monitoring could become more straightforward.

Dual Branding

The idea of **dual branding** (NCC and ATC) for the Partnership team was discussed, with ATC to consider whether to proceed with this approach.

AGREED ACTIONS

1. NCC – Cleansing Reconfiguration

- NCC to review how the current cleansing workforce (6 Core and 5 Partnership) can be reconfigured, with the 5 Partnership operatives transferring to grounds maintenance work.
- NCC to identify the retraining and supervision required to ensure operatives can deliver high-quality kerb appeal outcomes.
- NCC to assess implications for core cleansing standards, particularly around bin emptying, litter picking, and fly-tipping response, and to outline mitigation measures.

2. NCC – Kerb Appeal Trial

- NCC to identify and propose trial areas (2–3 streets per ward and one main town entrance) using FixMyStreet and Councillor input.
- NCC to define the parameters and expected outcomes of the trial, including performance measurement.
- NCC to circulate trial details and outcomes to ATC by 17th November 2025, ahead of the next Board meeting.

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3. ATC – Partnership Decisions

- ATC Councillors to submit suggestions for trial streets by early November.
- ATC to consider and decide on dual branding for the Partnership team (before any new agreement).

4. Next Meeting

- **Next Partnership Board meeting scheduled for Monday 24th November 2025 at 2:00pm.**
- Meeting to review NCC's proposed reconfiguration, trial areas, parameters, and expected outcomes, and agree commencement.