

AGENDA 13, Enc xi) DRAFT Report of the Enhanced Neighbourhood Services Partnership Board, held on Tuesday 21st 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, Ray Wealleans – Area 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

All present.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

None received.

4. DISPENSATIONS

None required.

5. PREVIOUS MEETINGS

a) Report of Previous Meeting

It was **AGREED** to receive the report of the last meeting, held on 21st November 2023, as a true record.

b) Update on actions agreed and progress

- √ **Fly-tipping** – reputable waste carrier reminder and Press Release. Sarah updated that the Town Council has put out publicity on 23rd November reminding residents about the dangers of using unlicensed waste carriers. The pictogram designed by Gary Holmes was commended by everyone as a good visual message.

<https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2023-11-23-waste-carrying-and-fly-tipping-know-the-risks>

- √ **5th Avenue** (Pont Street/Milburn Road). Peter updated that work was scheduled.
- √ **Update on Bin Stores**. Peter updated that the compounds are mostly completed other than an issue with a slope created on the surface of the compound on Hawthorne – this would be corrected. Robin supplied images of the bin compounds before and after deep cleansing. Sadly, the images denote black bin bags and rubbish lying within the compound area, even when bins have obvious capacity.
- √ **Virgin Media**. No further update on restorative work following installs, other than it is still required, and it has been known to take some time. It was confirmed that any work not carried out would be followed up by Highways.

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- √ **Resident letter following work in Hirst.** Stephen advised a letter was not sent but advised that Highways would be approached earlier to act in the future, should the path become overgrown again.
- √ **Litter bin in new car park.** Stephen Humphrey quickly sorted a bin being installed and NCC confirmed it has been added to the route.

6. PARTNERSHIP BUDGET 2023/24

Members received the updated report to the end of December. In summary:

Salaries are projected to exceed the original budget by £11,330 for Core Activities and £7,147 for the Partnership. The pay deal and overtime are key drivers.

Underspends on equipment, maintenance, and fuel are helping offset the overage on salaries.

Overall Partnership spending is projected to be £2,547 over budget by year end. Overtime and staffing costs need to be managed.

Cllr Tully commented that wage increase represented the biggest increase and whilst well deserved this made a significant impact for the Town Council moving forward.

7. ENHANCED SERVICES PERFORMANCE

a) Clerk's Summary

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

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 13th November – w/c 1st January, other than Christmas Day and New Years Day.

The averages for each zone are shown below. Those that have gone down are highlighted green, those that have gone up are highlighted yellow.

- Zone 1 – Average 1,733kg/wk (prev 1,568kg)
- Zone 2 – Average 1,290kg/wk (prev 1,596kg)
- Zone 3 – Average 1,760kg/wk (prev 1,426kg)
- Zone 4 – Average 1,010g/wk (prev 1,316kg)

b) Rapid Response

Over the period there have been 248 fly-tips removed via Rapid Response (434 in the same period last year), that is an average of 31 each week (43/week in the same period last year),

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approximately 6.5 each day (8.5/day in the same period last year). The weight of collections over the period is 13,200kg (20,160kg in the same period last year).

Comparing to the previous quarter there is a significant decrease, however this be explained by the loss of the rapid response van early in the quarter and staffing issues, as well as only 5 collections in Christmas week. Robin will be able to further explain. The impact of post-Christmas, which was substantial on Rapid Response, will be shown in the later data collected.

In in previous evaluations, the incidents of fly-tipping are primarily 'other household waste', with Central making up more than 50% and Hirst more than 25%; this remains the same. Sycamore St, Maple St, Chestnut St, and Castle Terrace consistently make-up 50% of rapid response collections. the main areas for rapid response activity.

The meeting discussed the street scene improvement because of bin compounds, but also misuse. The rubbish was more contained but some of the images shared were disappointing.

c) Street Sweeper

The inclusion of street sweeping in the Partnership Agreement enhances street sweeping from 4 times a year to 6/7 times/year. In the period w/c 13th November – w/c 1st January all routes were taken up with leaf clearance. One sweeper was off road from w/c 1st January.

Cllr Glyn Davies asked about leaves on all routes. Robin responded that the routes were being changed to reflect the zonal cleansing routes so street sweeping and cleansing would work in tandem when street sweeping was scheduled. New maps and training are being prepared.

8. INSPECTIONS

NCC

Between the period w/c 13th November – w/c 1st January 23 LEQ inspections have been carried out by Senior Officers all resulting in scores of 3 or 4.

Ray commented that there were 20 inspections a month being carried out and a league table was operating to promote some healthy competition.

9. PLAY AREAS

The following report on the progress with play area legal transfer of ownership and responsibility was received.

Epsom Drive (Taylor Wimpey)

Transfer deed approved and awaiting document for signature.

Aintree Close (Esh Housing, previously Dunelm)

ATC solicitor has contacted Esh Housing solicitor. We are waiting for the plan, which has been chased. This will then proceed to the issue of a draft transfer.

Seaton Vale (Persimmon Homes)

Transfer deed approved and awaiting document for signature.

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Warren Court (Harron Homes)

No continuing response. Previously emailed to advise that play area should be included in their own insurance liabilities, outlining urgency of situation and a response. This will be brought to an agenda in February with officer advice that the Council should remove any connection with the play area as attempts to achieve a formal agreement have failed, and the play area is not an attractive asset for the Council.

Shire Farm Close (Bellway)

A representative of Bellway has responded after 6 months, but then nothing again since 30th November, despite email reminders.

Ashington TC along with Northumberland County Council have been managing and maintaining this play area from installation, with no agreement in place or financial contribution from Bellway. Bellway is accepting massive legal liability by owning this space but failing in due diligence to thoroughly inspect, fix, or replace equipment. The current situation can no longer be supported and must be resolved. Whether that be an asset transfer to the Council, or as the current owner of record, Bellway retains legal responsibility over management and maintenance of this asset and ensures to do that.

Bellway has agreed to transfer the land for £1, however, the play area itself is quite dated and would require significant upgrades to equipment, fencing and gates to meet modern standards. This is unlikely to be achieved for any less than £30k. Additionally, ongoing maintenance and inspection expenses would amount to several thousand pounds annually.

Given the limited use of this play area currently and its poor condition, Stephen and I feel the significant capital and maintenance costs make it an inadvisable asset for the Council to take on. I have advised Bellway that we would be open to revisiting this and remain open to a potential transfer if funding can be secured. Engagement with nearby residents would also be advisable.

Any decision is ultimately with the Council, but this would be our advice to members going forward. I would expect a decision to be brought to the Council in February.

Alexandra Road, North Seaton Colliery, Paddock Wood, and People's Park

NCC Strategic Estates have now issued a draft licence. I have advised that the Council may wish to seek independent legal advice. I have requested amendments to the outline plan for People's Park, as this showed the wrong area. I have also asked that the draft be amended to make clear that NCC is responsible for emptying litter bins, that we may carry out our own inspections, also to remove any reference to the payment of rates and taxes.

Additionally, the licence has no timeframe, and it would be appropriate to agree one, especially if funding is ever pursued in the future.

NCC Legal responded on 4th December that they would take instruction on this.

Bywell Close

Last comms was received from Bernicia on 23rd November, this was to follow-up on the proposed resident survey to establish perceived value of the area with the play area. The

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delay was due to a member of staff being off who was taking it forward. I have asked for an update. Sarah further updated that a survey of residents was conducted by Bernicia with 8 responding that they do value the play area. Sarah has since discussed whether Bellway would be open to providing capital funding to upgrade the play area, and to fence it off. A further update will be brought when a response is received.

The report and meeting asked what the resulting action of NCC would be if Ashington TC agree that they do not wish to take on Warren Court or Shire Farm Close Play Areas.

In the absence of any formal agreement or contract specifying maintenance responsibilities, my advice to the members is that Ashington TC should be courteous and provide reasonable advance notice that we will no longer be providing voluntary maintenance of either Warren Court or Shire Farm Close play areas, and will therefore not be receiving inspection reports, or making any plans for the renewal of equipment. What constitutes "reasonable" is the difficulty as this arrangement has been in place for several years, but the notice would be clear with an end date.

If Ashington TC is removed from any association with these play areas, NCC would also need to agree their own stance, or consider at the same time with a joint response.

Stephen Wardle advised that NCC may continue to carry out inspections as a duty of care to residents. Sarah responded that in Prudhoe a developer play area was condemned, and removed at a cost to the developer, as they would not maintain it.

The meeting heard that attempts to contact those developers that were not engaging were frequent, and it was very frustrating.

10. FUTURE CHANGES

Robin reported that the zonal frequency changes made so far would be seen more as we move further into the year, but the shared images demonstrate the extra work that has taken place.

Cllr Tully suggested that ideas should be brought for discussion if members noted areas that required more or less attention.

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

Tuesday 19th March 2024, at 2:00pm.