

AGENDA 22, Enc xviii) DRAFT Report of the Enhanced Neighbourhood Services Partnership Board, held on Tuesday 15th April 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, Cllr Caroline Ball

Also, in Attendance:

Sarah Eden – ATC Executive Officer/RFO, Mark Air – Senior Neighbourhood Services Officer, Kenny Jonston – NCC Principle Environmental Enforcement Officer

1. WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

Cllr Marjorie Chambers opened the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr John Tully, Cllr Mark Purvis, Cllr Lynne Grimshaw, 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 18th February 2025 was **RECEIVED**, and **AGREED** as a true record.

Sarah confirmed details previously shared which had been added to the report following the meeting, that the operational underspend on the Partnership for 2024/25 does not result in available funds for ATC to redirect due to expenditure. This was fully understood by all.

6. PARTNERSHIP BUDGET 2025/26

There was no report received as it is too early in the financial year.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT

Sarah advised that Kenny was in attendance following concerns raised regarding dog fouling. It was explained the ATC tried to encourage more reporting of dog fouling, through the proper channels, rather than the more frequent complaints on Facebook. Following the figures provided by NCC Environmental Enforcement being shared alongside this post, it was heavily criticised the lack of enforcement via penalties. Following a meeting with Kenny, and Allotment Officer Alan Bunker about related matters, it became clear that issuing penalties is not as simply as some might think.

Cllr Marjorie Chambers invited Kenny to describe the situation and the barriers to issuing penalty notices, on the spot fines and fines via the legal system. Kenny described what enforcement officers are up against in regards the legal powers available to them, the resource for the County, and legal guidelines in respect of the use of CCTV and evidential continuity. With limited powers via fines and the legal procedure it is clear that education should be the focus.

Cllr Marjorie Chambers highlighted the positive actions highlighted in the report which included using CCTV and highlighting to NCC where there are problem areas, CCTV hopefully allowing

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the sharing of more specific timeframes, pavement markings, community initiatives and the green dog walker's scheme.

Sarah confirmed that Kenny had already shared the stencils for pavement markings, and this would be actioned by NSO's asap. Additionally the football clubs who play at Hirst Park and People's Park were on the radar to work with the create a very visible community campaign – again this would be actioned when ATC officers have the capacity.

Cllr Caroline Ball challenged the objective of enforcement officers when faced with so many barriers to punitive actions.

Mark Air questioned to route available via warning or advice letters as opposed to penalty notices and fines. Kenny advised that this was still heavily governed by NCC legal. The informal route used by ATC was noted where known individuals are advised via ATC Officers that they are at risk of being fined, without the legal context of giving any false impression.

Cllr Marjorie Chambers talked about the community taking a stance when there are infringements, like she would by offering people dog bags if it looked likely they would not pick up. Cllr Louis Brown suggested that this type of role should be carried out by paid officers as members of the public would be putting themselves at risk if they challenged behaviour.

Cllr Caroline Ball asked for more direct communication and engagement on this issue, like the 'Don't be a tosser' campaign. Cllr Pauline Thompson has shared some direct-action signage used in Sunderland. In respect of the resident who has been in touch multitude of reports via Fix My Street and no resulting action, it was agreed these details would be passed on. Additionally, why not use Ashington as a pilot to have a blitz on dog fouling.

Sarah asked Peter about the impact of dog fouling on the neighbourhood team, as reports on Fix My Street would come their way to clear up. Peter confirmed that there was no obligation to clear from grassed areas, but there was from the pavement.

Following on from Cllr Caroline Ball's comments about a blitz, Sarah described that it felt like the town needed a very visible campaign like the efforts on fly-tipping. Having some well written stories with folk having been caught and properly punished via a fine would help this, but it required NCC Legal to allow some follow-through. Perhaps some of those that might not be pushed through every time could be to make an example. Sarah commented that perhaps this needed members to take a direct approach with cabinet members and leads.

Cllr Marjorie Chambers agreed and noted the campaign on cigarette litter some years ago taking that stance with a blitz on Station Road. All agreed that this was also an issue.

The matter was closed from discussion, with a lot of frustration but some positive action in regards those items already mentioned, and that Kenny would seek advice from NCC legal about more specific temporary signage on lampposts in hotspot areas.

Kenny was invited to leave but stayed for the rest of the meeting. Cllr Caroline Ball left the meeting.

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8. PARTNERSHIP SERVICE DELIVERY

a) Presentation by NCC

Peter asked the meeting to support that he had further opportunity to sit down with Robin and go through report and to follow-up with details on all the areas to be addressed. The forthcoming information will cover cleansing resource allocation, Rapid Response service utilisation, street sweeping services, and additional deliverables under the Partnership Agreement. This data will help members understand current service constraints and opportunities and inform discussions about future partnership arrangements.

b) Partnership Delivery Discussion and review

Some discussion points were shared in advance of the meeting which included Station Road concerns, street sweeper downtime, rapid response operations, and cleansing in particular zones. Whilst it was acknowledged that decisions would be for the incumbent Council, Sarah identified that having the discussion, suggestions and answers now who speed up the opportunity for change.

Peter acknowledged that not having a permanent presence on Station Road had, had a detrimental impact, but shared images of work that had now been carried out to clear under the public seats.

There was a lengthy discussion of those streets in Hirst and Central where it is not possible to get a street sweeper up them, due to overgrown hedges, failing fences, etc. Cllrs Pauline Thompson and Cllr Louis Brown described that they were the worst they have ever been, and it is unacceptable. Backyard accumulations were also discussed and Cllr Pauline Thompson described conversations with Neil Quinn in this regard. Peter acknowledged that the issue of backyard accumulations was out of his control.

Sarah clarified the issues of colliery rows were discussed in Partnership meetings previously. ***A review of the reports confirm that this was brought in December 2022, then it was agreed to seek costs associated with hedge cutting and clearing in March 2023, in September 2023 it was confirmed that the work had been ordered at a cost of just under £3,000 and was carried out by Straughans. NCC did not seek reimbursement of these costs.*** The meeting discussed, as it had previously, residents and/or landlords not looking after properties. Having carried out this work, it could set a precedent for it being carried out again. Hedges and lamp columns obstruct the street sweeper, and doing this manually is time consuming and costly. Members raised that it is a public footpath, and it is not currently being cleared of weeds, litter and detritus.

Cllr Marjorie Chamber voiced that with the sweeper only operating at 40% capacity this called into question whether it was worth ATC enhancing this service as it was not being delivered. Peter explained that a new sweeper has been delivered, and this was expected to change operations entirely. This was followed up to ask what operatives carried out when the sweepers were out of service. Peter confirmed that they would cover elsewhere on cleansing.

Cllr Marjorie Chambers described that the Rapid Response team should not be used to clean bin stores which was a refuse issue. Peter explained the categorisation of the accumulations in bins stores, which would otherwise be fly tipping out on the street, which is why Rapid Response is clearing this. Peter acknowledged that legally this was not fly-tipping but if it wasn't taken by Rapid Response – who would collect it? Cllr Louis Brown commented that it was about resources.

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Sarah asked if the bins stores implementation plan had factored this into their evaluations, and if they had, who did they think would take the discarded household goods?

In respect of fly-tipping and the action plan with crime scene tape and CCTV, Peter advised that a press release was soon expected on the impact of this as it had been 6 months. £14,000 had been issued in fines. Sarah and Peter agreed that the weekly figures showed that whilst there had been a downward trend early on, the figures suggested that fly-tipping was back where it had always been which was disappointing. Peter compared the current figures in Blyth with Ashington – in Blyth the figures were almost half of those in Ashington in the last week and they were condensed in one area of the town.

Sarah passed on that a Cllr commented that having been around some of the streets in Blyth they looked very tidy and was Peter able to advise what partnership changes Blyth had made. Peter confirmed that due to resident feedback Blyth was focusing on weed control enhancement and watering. Whilst they have returned to core services for grass cutting as satisfied with the number of cuts provided, they have included play area strimming and bus shelter cleansing. The areas that are cleansed weekly are visited by a vehicle and a sweeper.

It was AGREED that changes were required, and this would be taken forward by the new Council. Cllr Marjorie Chambers summarised with concerns about the down time on street sweeping that ATC paid to be enhanced, about Rapid Response being used to clear bin stores, and more efforts on Station Road, in addition to standards in those wards mentioned as a result of sweepers not being able to access.

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

To be confirmed.