NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL
AREA COMMITTEE - WEST

At a meeting of the Area Committee – West held in Humshaugh Village Hall, Humshaugh, Hexham, Northumberland NE46 4AA on Tuesday, 10 March 2015 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor RR Dodd (Chair, in the Chair)

Councillors E. Armstrong, C Cessford, A Dale, R Gibson, C Homer, C Horncastle, I Hutchinson, P Jackson, V Jones, P Kelly, A Sharp JR Riddle and T Robson.

OFFICERS

S Aviston          School Capital and Strategy Development Officer
H Clear-Hill       Sustainability Programme Manager
G Gavin            Divisional Manager (Central & West), Neighbourhood Services
R McKenzie         Senior Programmes Officer
R Powell           Locality Officer
N Turnbull         Democratic Services Officer
R Wealleans        Area Manager (West)
K Westerby         Area Highways Manager (West)

ALSO PRESENT

7 members of the public
1 member of the press
G Stephenson, British Gas

95. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E Burt, J Fearon and T. Reid.

96. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Area Committee - West held on Tuesday, 10 February, 2015 as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

97. Public Question Time

There were no questions from members of the public.
98. Petitions

This item was to:

a) **Receive any new petitions:**

There were none to consider.

b) **To consider reports on petitions previously received:**

There were none to consider.

c) **To consider updates on petitions previously considered:**

There were none to consider.

**DISCUSSION ITEMS – CORPORATE**

99. Warm Up North Programme

Hugh Clear-Hill, Sustainability Programme Manager, informed Members that Warm Up North was a partnership of 9 north east councils with British Gas as the delivery partner. The aim of the programme was to help households save energy and money by improving energy efficiency in their homes, making them warmer and more affordable, with associated health benefits. The scheme also addressed issues raised in the recently published Fuel Poverty Strategy. The purpose of the presentation was to publicise the programme to Members in order that they could promote the scheme and answer questions from residents.

The particular focus at this time was a free or subsidised gas boiler offer targeted at recipients of certain benefits. It was acknowledged that whilst many properties in the west locality were not serviced by gas, the wider scheme could often provide assistance with other methods of heating, as well as loft and wall insulation. Specific offers for off-gas areas were being developed and would be rolled out in the next few months.

Graeme Stephenson, Warm Up North Partnership Development Manager, British Gas made reference to the assistance under the previous scheme Warm Front. There were opportunities for measures to be provided through Warm Up North to link with the national ‘Green Deal’ finance scheme, the costs of which were recuperated through households monthly bills and the savings that had been achieved by implementation of the energy saving measure.

Members welcomed the scheme and awaited details of the off-gas schemes in the near future. They discussed the following issues:

- The problems of insulating stone, solid wall properties and complexities of installing insulation. The Warm Up North programme could offer solid wall insulation or solid fuel heating systems when installed by householders from their own funds or through the Green Deal scheme.
Concern that households not meeting the criteria, such as young single individuals on low incomes, would not be eligible for assistance that was linked to specific benefit criteria.

Availability of new technology such as more economical electric storage heaters from Germany. These had not yet been assessed and were unlikely to be used at this time.

The problems of cold calling by agents for other utility companies. The nine local authorities working in association with the Warm Up North Programme endorsed the scheme operated by British Gas but could not prevent marketing of alternative schemes.

Details of response times, including installation within 5 days of referral, if a system had failed and a household was without heating and hot water, was provided.

Copies of information leaflets and posters were circulated and further copies were available for Councillors to take away or additional supplies could be requested after the meeting. Officers confirmed their willingness to attend local meetings or discuss other initiatives to promote the programme.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

100. Update on LTP Programme for 2015/16

The report set out the detail of the draft Local Transport Plan (LTP) Programme for 2015-16; members were asked to comment on the draft programme so that their views on the proposals could be considered when a final programme was recommended for approval. Richard McKenzie, Senior Programmes Officer briefly explained the process in the development of the programme to date and agreed to circulate details of the email address to be used for submission of comments. (A copy of the report is attached to the minutes as Appendix A.)

Several members highlighted a number of proposals that were important to them and included the rolling five year programme to implement 20 mph speed limits outside schools. Additional information was provided regarding schemes listed within the programme where requested. It was believed that work on some projects had slipped due to emergency work being carried out elsewhere and a few projects included within the programme in the previous year had been re-listed. The officer agreed to seek clarification.

Improvements to the highway had been seen in recent months but concern was expressed that a smaller allocation had been made to the west area for projects and improvements in the forthcoming year in comparison with the north and south east areas. It was recognised that the final decision regarding inclusion of schemes within the programme should be made by officers with reference to the criteria.

RESOLVED that the presentation be noted.
DISCUSSION ITEMS – LOCAL

101. Prudhoe High School

Sue Aviston, School Capital and Strategy Development Officer, gave an update on the proposed new build school at Prudhoe Community High School. The update included: background information regarding the scheme, details of the funding arrangements and expected timescales for commencement and completion of the project.

She was pleased to report that planning permission had been granted on 3 March 2015 and confirmation had also been received that additional funding had been obtained from Sport England and the Football Association for a 4 court sports hall, due to the level of community use out of school hours.

Members welcomed the update and commented upon the change in the Council’s approach regarding the number of bids submitted to the government’s Priority Schools Building Programme and the unexpected success of having three schemes approved. They also discussed the differences in builders and funding arrangements for the school at Prudhoe with the schemes at Alnwick and Bedlington.

Copies of a briefing note, plans and artists impressions of the site were circulated at the meeting.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

102. Highways Issues

The following issues were reported by Members:

- Expression of gratitude to all involved in the resurfacing work carried out at Bellingham, particularly the liaison work undertaken by Jeff Oliver.
- Concern regarding the signage and road markings at Matfen Road End, where a serious accident had recently occurred and where there were regular near misses.
- Completion of installation of ‘Residents Only Parking’ signs in Linden Way, Ponteland, to enable enforcement action to be taken.
- Deterioration of the A68 at Fotherley. It was reported that a decision was awaited on a bid for funding from the government’s local highways maintenance challenge fund to improve routes used by heavy vehicles in the timber industry.
- Misuse of car parking facilities in Ponteland. Details of vehicles and companies to be supplied after the meeting.

RESOLVED that the comments be noted and relayed to employees.
INFORMATION ITEMS

103. Members’ Local Improvement Schemes

A report detailing schemes under consideration, approved and carried over from the previous year was received. (A copy of the report is attached to the minutes as Appendix B.)

Concern was expressed regarding the changes to the scheme which had introduced a minimum funding level of £2,000. Members were frustrated that the higher amount prevented assistance being given to smaller schemes, reduced the number of schemes being given assistance or resulted in projects being expanded to meet criteria.

The Chair was requested to relay Members’ comments to the Policy Board/Area Chairs Working Group, seek confirmation why the changes were implemented and ascertain if the original criteria could be reinstated.

RESOLVED that:

1. The report be noted.

2. The Chair to relay Members’ comments to the Policy Board/Area Chairs Working Group, seek confirmation why the changes were implemented and ascertain if the original criteria can be reinstated.

104. Working Groups

There was nothing to report.

105. Future Meetings

It was noted that future meetings would be held as follows:

- Tuesday, 14 April 2015 at 6pm at Bellingham Town Hall
- Tuesday, 12 May 2015 at 6pm at Merton Hall, Ponteland

It was suggested that a future meeting be held in Gillsland at an appropriate time to discuss dualling of the A69 and other relevant issues with Cumbria County Council.

CHAIR

DATE