NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

AREA COMMITTEE - WEST

At a meeting of the Area Committee - West held in Acomb Village Hall, Millersfield, Acomb, Northumberland, NE46 4RQ on Tuesday, 15 April 2014 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor RR Dodd (Chair, in the Chair)

Councillors E Burt, A Dale, R Gibson, C Horncastle, I Hutchinson, PA Jackson, V Jones, P Kelly, A Reid, JR Riddle, A Sharp.

OFFICERS

D Brown  Delivery Manager - Community Safety & Support
A Douglas  Temporary Timber Transport Liaison Officer
D Phillips  Network Manager
R Powell  Locality Officer, Development Services
S Richards  Assistant Chief Fire Officer
B. Rowland  Executive Director - Place
N Turnbull  Democratic Services Officer

ALSO PRESENT

Bruce Ledger, Chief Executive, Blyth Valley Arts and Leisure Trust

89. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E Armstrong, C Cessford, J.B. Fearon, C. Homer and T. Robson.

90. Minutes

Minute No. 82 - Working With Town and Parish Councils

A reference to be included in the last bullet point to refer to the double charging for cemeteries.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Area Committee - West held on Tuesday, 11 March 2014, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair, subject to the inclusion of the above.
91. **Disclosures of Members Interests**

Councillor Horncastle disclosed a registerable personal interest in the Update on Leisure Services in Northumberland as his partner was employed by North Country Leisure.

92. **Public Question Time**

Questions were asked as follows:

**Peter Kelway, NE48 3LG** asked, following the anticipated resolution of the pothole crisis in June 2014, what plans the Highways Department were making to address the serious state of drainage on many of the county’s roads? He commented on the onset of only moderate rain on roads such as the Military Road produced significant areas of standing water which extended almost halfway across road lanes which posed a serious road safety risk.

It was reported that in 2013/14 approximately £330k had been spent on drainage refurbishment works to address structural drainage pipe repairs, replace defective gullies and continue with essential ditching works. Investment in this type of work was set to continue in future years from the Local Transport Plan maintenance settlement, with the expectation of real benefit to the longevity of the network being realised. The west area had received an allocation of £100,000 for the forthcoming financial year.

The Executive Director – Place acknowledged that prior to 2012/13, drainage works had received a small allocation. He advised that the Council had recently been awarded £2.7 million to make repairs to the road network following winter damage. He made reference to the ‘Challenge Fund’, a new government initiative where the Council intended to bid for a significant sum of money which would help fund the works being referred to by Members.

Members commented on the need for continued investment in roadside maintenance including a schedule for the regular clearing of ditches. Officers were investigating the acquisition of more efficient equipment. It was also reported that many road surfaces were in a poor condition and required a programme of planned maintenance.

**Peter Kelway, NE48 3LG** enquired what plans the County Council was considering to assist in overcoming the gap left by the demise of the Hadrian’s Wall Trust in maintaining the site and if it would be cooperating with other local authorities in doing so? He added that there had been criticism over the years about the poor level of management of the World Heritage Site and the end of the Trust’s involvement offers an opportunity as well as a challenge to improve the situation.

It was confirmed that the Council was working in partnership to ensure that co-ordinated arrangements were in place for the future care, protection and promotion of the World Heritage Site and National Trail. The Council was acting as the lead local authority on behalf of the eight local authorities who provided financial support for Wall and Trail related activity.
Northumberland National Park Authority (NNPA) has agreed to be the lead delivery partner and would assume responsibility to coordinate the management of the 84 miles of the Hadrian’s Wall Path and National Trail. Transition arrangements were in place for the peak visitor season and to ensure adequate arrangements were in place for maintenance and repair.

NCC, Hadrian’s Wall Trust and NNPA were working together to ensure that the Hadrian’s Wall Bus would be operating during the summer months. Members expressed concern that Cumbria County Council had withdrawn its funding for the bus service which meant that there was no link between Brampton and Hexham. The Executive Director – Place confirmed that all partners were working together on the transitional arrangements and that negotiations were continuing with bus operators to retain previous routes.

93. Petitions

This item was to:

a) Receive any new petitions:

A petition had been received regarding bottle bank facilities in Ponteland and a report would be produced to a future meeting.

b) Consider any reports on petitions previously considered:

There were none to consider.

c) To receive any updates on petitions previously considered:

There were none to consider.

DISCUSSION ITEMS - CORPORATE

94. Update on Leisure Services in Northumberland

The committee received an update on the latest position on arrangements for the provision of leisure services in Northumberland by Bruce Ledger; Chief Executive, Blyth Valley Arts and Leisure Trust.

The presentation included an overview of existing arrangements, the reasons for change and the transfer of staff from most of the existing operators within the next 6 months to Active Northumberland with the possible exception of Leisure Connection due to the terms of their existing contract which was valid until 2020.

Members expressed concern regarding the changes taking place without detailed information and input from all members. Their discussion also included:

• The requirement for a leisure strategy to be prepared,
• The need for high standards to be maintained in all facilities and enhanced where it was possible by sharing good practice;
• Separation of duties by the operators with interests elsewhere;
• The need for uniformity of leisure offer, pricing and concessions across the county;
• The benefits of one organisation providing a single point of contact for Sport England, schools etc.

It was confirmed that targets had not yet been set although it was anticipated that the merger of leisure providers would need to contribute to the savings the Council was required to make.

During the discussion Councillor Dale requested that the Chair refer to all Councillors in the same manner.

Members wished to acknowledge the contribution made by Lynn Turner, Service Manager - Leisure, Tourism and Development Services for her work developing the excellent facilities in the former Tynedale area. It was agreed that a letter of thanks be sent to her from the Committee.

It was agreed that a further update be given to the Committee before the end of 2014, following the transfer of staff to Active Northumberland.

RESOLVED that the presentation be received.

95. Draft Fire and Rescue Plan 2014 – 2017

The Committee received a presentation from the Assistant Chief Fire Officer on the draft Fire and Rescue Plan 2014 – 2017. (A copy of the power point presentation and draft plan were attached to the minutes as Appendix A).

The presentation included a breakdown of the service, identification of primary risks, aims and priorities and an explanation of how Prevention, Protection and Response was used to best mitigate the impact on communities.

Members discussed the plan which was considered to be comprehensive and thorough. Questions were answered in respect of:

• The preventative measures to reduce the risks of a fire in Kielder Forest, particularly during unusually hot summer months, as experienced the previous year. It was confirmed that the Fire and Rescue Service worked with landowners and the Forestry Commission via the Northumberland Fire Group to discuss measures to prevent the destruction of large areas of forests such as the introduction of fire brakes to prevent fire spreading.
• Road safety and awareness for motor bikes in rural areas. Officers from the Fire and Rescue Service were unable to attend county shows or similar events to talk to motor cycle riders face to face. This was one of activities of the police. They had however funded road safety signs through an LMAPS initiative for the Think Bike campaign which warned of accident hot spots and dangerous bends.
Members commented on the wide ranging duties of the fire and rescue service. They also worked alongside the National resilience Centre to assist other areas of the country with the provision of manpower and/or specialist equipment during extreme events, such as the flooding in Somerset earlier in the year.

It was confirmed that the consultation period on the draft Fire and Rescue Plan ended on 9 May 2014. Focus groups were being held to obtain feedback on the use of language and whether the document was readable by a wider audience.

**RESOLVED** that the presentation be received.

96. **Timber Transport: Funding For C Road Maintenance**

The report, for information, provided details of: the importance of the forest sector to the economy of the North of England and Northumberland in particular; the impact of timber haulage on C roads across Northumberland and the Council’s approach to managing this impact; the importance of ensuring the sustainability of such routes in the longer term; funding opportunities going forward for ensuring a well maintained network. (A copy of report attached to the minutes as Appendix B).

Members discussed the economic value to Northumberland from the forestry industry against the damage of timber haulage on the highways network. Reference was made the grants that had been made available in Scotland which had enabled hauliers to upgrade their vehicles and trailers to those which reduced the impact on roads such as trailers with tyre deflation or vehicles with maxi tyres. It was noted that these systems cost an additional £10,000 per vehicle / trailer and that hauliers needed a good reason or incentive to upgrade.

The Committee made the following comments:

- The engagement with the forestry industry and hauliers was welcomed.
- The impact on villages such as Stonehaugh which were surrounded by forests and ‘C’ and ‘U’ class roads not suited to large vehicles.
- The poor condition of roads which were not fit for purpose but served many rural businesses, including Mill Knock Quarry.
- The Council should work with neighbouring authorities to lobby the government for additional funds to improve the highways network to facilitate the removal of timber from the region.
- The Highways Working Group and the Executive Director – Place be requested to meet with interested parties such as Egger and MPs to consider the best method of raising the profile of the impact of the timber industry on the highways network and lobby the government for additional funds.

**RESOLVED** that

1) The information be noted; and
2) The Highways Working Group meet with the Executive Director – Place and other interest parties to work to lobby the Government for additional funding to improve timber transport equipment and funds to improve the highways infrastructure that serves the timber industry.
INFORMATION ITEMS

97. Working Groups

Councillor Jones confirmed that the Community Chest Panel had allocated the remaining funds from the £90,000 budget for 2013/14 and provided a summary of the grants allocated during the year. A final report would be submitted to the meeting in May.

98. Future Meetings

It was noted that the next meetings will take place as follows:

Tuesday, 13 May 2014 at 6pm at Haltwhistle Library
Tuesday, 10 June 2014 at 6pm at Merton Hall, Ponteland
Tuesday, 8 July 2014 at 6pm at The Spetchells Centre, Prudhoe

The meeting ended at 8.10 p.m.