



South Tyneside Council

Our Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee

23 July 2026

Our Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee Minutes

04 June 2026

Present: Councillors: Rice (In the Chair), Bell, Elsander, Fox, Herbert, Kilgour, Mouat, Muquith, and Turnbull.

James Maughan (Head of Public Protection), Andy Whittaker (Assistant Director of Operations), Phil Dixon (Assistant Director of Strategic Development and Assets), John Scott (Assistant Director - Strategic Investment and Growth), Laura Turvey (Assistant Director of Strategic Transport and Environment), Jonathan Lunness (Scrutiny and Democracy Officer), Leah Stafford (Democracy Support Officer).

Independent Scrutiny Representatives in attendance: David Hern and Michael Maughan

There was 1 member of the press/public in attendance.

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 12 March 2026

The minutes of the last meeting were noted.

Agreed: That the minutes of the previous Committee Meeting be noted as a true and accurate record.

3. Scrutiny Framework in South Tyneside

Submitted: Report of Legal and Governance

Jonathan Lunness, Scrutiny and Democracy Officer, delivered a presentation providing an overview of the scrutiny function in South Tyneside and the role of the Our Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee.

It was explained that overview and scrutiny committees were established under the Local Government Act 2000 and that the current legislative provisions for overview and scrutiny were contained within the Localism Act 2011. Members were advised that the purpose of scrutiny was to hold the Executive to account, review, shape and develop Council policies and strategies, ensure best value and performance management and scrutinise external partners.

It was noted that scrutiny activity could encompass the Executive, Council services, commissioned services, organisations jointly commissioned with the Council, health bodies and authorities, and matters relating to crime and disorder. Members were informed that Executive Members and officers could be required to attend meetings to provide information and evidence in support of scrutiny work.

It was reported that the role of scrutiny was to review and challenge decisions and actions, undertake investigations into services and policy areas, involve local communities where appropriate and support decision makers by developing evidence-based recommendations to improve services. Members were advised that scrutiny should provide constructive “critical friend” challenge, amplify the voice of the public and help drive improvement in public services. It was emphasised that scrutiny should not be overtly political or focused on individual ward-level issues.

The presentation highlighted the characteristics of effective scrutiny, including focusing on relevant issues, basing discussions on evidence, assessing performance, engaging with the appropriate stakeholders and ensuring recommendations were specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound. Members also received an overview of questioning techniques that could support scrutiny work and effective evidence gathering.

Members noted that scrutiny could take place at various stages of the decision-making process, including before a decision was taken, following a decision through the call-in process and through horizon-scanning activities to identify future areas of work. The refreshed scrutiny structure for 2024-25 was also outlined.

The responsibilities of the Our Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee were outlined as:

- Asset Management;
- Cultural Services and Marketing;
- Regeneration, including business growth, economic growth and prosperity, employment and support into employment;

- Planning, Built Environment, Development and Control;
- Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services, including Trading Standards;
- Transport Policy.

It was further noted that the Committee operated as the Council's statutory Crime and Disorder Committee, dealing with relevant referrals and undertaking the review and scrutiny of decisions and actions taken by the Safer South Tyneside Partnership.

The Committee also received information regarding its responsibilities in relation to environmental matters. Members were advised that the Committee would consider the Council's approach to tackling climate change, monitor performance against the Sustainable South Tyneside Strategy and associated action plans, and receive updates on progress relating to the Climate Emergency, Ecological Emergency and Ocean Recovery Declaration. It was noted that the Committee would help shape the Council's strategic priorities in relation to environmental sustainability, nature recovery and net zero ambitions, whilst also receiving updates on community engagement activity and partnership working undertaken to address climate change.

Agreed: That the presentation be noted.

4. Service Overviews

Submitted: Place Strategy and Community Operations

Officers from the directorates Place Strategy and Community Operations delivered two presentations to Members providing an overview on their services as a whole.

Place Strategy

The presentation highlighted that the Place Strategy Directorate was responsible for Public Protection, Strategic Development and Assets, Strategic Investment and Growth, and Strategic Transport and Environment. These services covered community safety and protection, regulatory services, environmental enforcement, emergency planning, corporate assets and development, planning, economic growth, skills and employment support, transport strategy, biodiversity and coastal protection, flooding, environmental health, food safety, pest control and private sector housing matters.

James Maughan, Head of Public Protection, presented an overview of Public Protection, which covered regulatory services, community protection, community safety, CCTV, trading standards, licensing, environmental enforcement and resilience. Responsibilities included building control functions such as plan vetting and building regulation inspections; licensing for taxis, alcohol, gambling, lotteries, pavement

cafés and temporary events; anti-social behaviour and tenancy enforcement; housing standards; trading standards and business compliance activity; environmental enforcement relating to fly-tipping, abandoned vehicles and unauthorised encampments; and emergency planning, business continuity and community resilience. It was noted that the service also managed CCTV operations and worked with partners through the Community Safety Partnership. Key challenges included Building Safety Regulator requirements, staff retention and succession planning, capacity pressures, legal requirements and funding constraints. Opportunities included creative working, prosecutions, social media engagement, resilience standards and securing external funding.

Phil Dixon, Assistant Director Strategic Development and Assets, advised that the service was responsible for property management, acquisitions, disposals and valuations; building compliance, repairs and maintenance, surveys, facilities management and allotment management; major capital works, energy management and street lighting; and the management of schools, corporate buildings, leisure facilities, social care properties, housing assets and public conveniences. Previous projects included the Middlefields Masterplan, South Shields Town Hall, asset transfer schemes, VENJ and Hebburn energy projects, children's homes, sporting improvements and demolition programmes. Upcoming projects included Pride in Place initiatives, housing development, the Asset Transfer Programme, Town Hall Clock Tower works, extra care provision, sporting improvements at Epinay, the VENJ Wind Turbine project and ongoing compliance work across the corporate and education estate.

John Scott, Assistant Director Strategic Investment and Growth, outlined the service's responsibilities for business and employer support, business centres, employment and skills programmes, the Schools Careers Programme, development management, planning policy, regeneration and adult learning provision linked to regional priority business sectors. It was noted that upcoming projects included the King Street Public Realm scheme, Customs House refurbishment, Hebburn Town Centre regeneration, South Tyneside College campus developments, progression of the Local Plan and continued development of the International Advanced Manufacturing Park.

Laura Turvey, Assistant Director of Strategic Transport and Environment, presented an overview of the service's responsibilities, which included transport strategy and investment, flood and coastal protection, noise nuisance and air quality, tree risk management, natural heritage, private rented sector housing, environmental compliance and enforcement, food standards, health and safety, pest control and animal welfare. Planned work for 2026/27 included development of a Strategic Transport Policy Framework, a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, coastal and ocean recovery

updates, an Environmental Growth Strategy, an Ecological Emergency Declaration update, an Air Quality Strategy update and further delivery of the Warm Homes Project.

Community Operations

Andy Whittaker, Assistant Director of Operations, provided an overview of the Community Operations Directorate, which was responsible for Highways, Infrastructure and Project Delivery, Operations, Housing Asset and Property, and Housing and Homelessness.

Details were provided on Highways, Infrastructure and Project Delivery, including the maintenance of roads, footpaths, drainage and structures; statutory highway functions; delivery of construction and major works; management of the Council's vehicle fleet; parking services; road safety education and initiatives; coordination of roadworks and network management; winter maintenance; and contract management. Key achievements included receiving substantive assurance through peer review and fleet audits, delivering 43 resurfacing schemes, 12 patching schemes, 15 concrete bay schemes and 12 footway schemes, and repairing more than 8,200 potholes. Key challenges and priorities included identifying future options for Heugh Street Bridge, maintaining the Borough's 627km road network against an estimated £103.2 million maintenance backlog, and delivering externally funded major schemes including Abingdon Way/Witney Way, Cotswold Lane/Hubert Street and NCN14.

Information was also presented on Operations, which included household waste and recycling collections, trade, commercial and garden waste services, street cleansing, litter collection, fly-tipping and graffiti removal, out-of-hours services, South Shields Market, parks and open spaces, launch ramps, bereavement services and contract management. Key achievements included the introduction of new refuse collection vehicles, improvements in team culture and productivity, management of the impact of winter storms on the foreshore, and development of an interactive Streetscene Service Directory. Future challenges and priorities included low-cost cremations, implementation of a Memorial Safety Policy, preparations for Simpler Recycling from 1 April 2027, Extended Producer Responsibility requirements, grounds maintenance contract specifications and managing expectations around frontline service delivery and quality.

Public Protection

A Member raised concerns regarding anti-social behaviour at the South Shields Interchange. They advised that drivers were refusing to operate services due to incidents of anti-social behaviour, and that one bus driver had been assaulted. The Officer advised that a

number of actions had been taken to address the issue. A problem-oriented policing plan was in place to tackle street drinking, and work was also being undertaken in relation to groups of young people. The Officer explained that criminal matters remained the responsibility of Northumbria Police and advised that further discussions with Nexus were planned over the coming months.

A Member commented that the issues occurred predominantly during the evenings and referred to the use of electric bikes, noting that the police were unable to pursue riders. The Officer advised that enforcement in relation to electric and off-road bikes was intelligence-led, as officers could not safely engage with riders while they were on the bikes. The focus was therefore on identifying where the bikes were being stored, where they were gathering and where they were coming from. The Officer advised that the police operation, known as Operation Caprio, was currently under review and that work continued to identify hotspot locations. It was further noted that the issue was a national problem, with such bikes being legal to sell but illegal to ride on footpaths or public roads.

A Member commented that the Dean in Hedworth was a particular hotspot for this activity and advised that they had previously requested the installation of CCTV at the location but understood that funding was not currently available. A Member also commented that the area was well connected, providing a link between the Metro and the airport, making it easily accessible from neighbouring Boroughs. The Officer advised that partnership working was essential in tackling these issues. They explained that incidents needed to be reported in order for the police to identify hotspot locations and target resources effectively. The Officer added that agencies would continue to work together to address the issues.

Strategic Housing and Assets

A Member raised concerns regarding the leasing of community associations and questioned how sustainable the arrangements were, together with the future implications for costs and funding. The Officer advised that he would bring further work on the matter to a future meeting of the Committee. It was explained that the Council had invested in a community hub model and, following a three-year period during which the facilities had been considered efficient to operate, responsibility had been transferred to community groups and charities. A number of facilities had since transferred under these arrangements. The Officer advised that the intention was for the groups to maintain the facilities and seek external funding to support their ongoing operation.

Strategic Investment and Growth

A Member asked how they could monitor the progress of the work and where they could find information on the future plans. The Officer

explained that any proposals would be subject to public consultation. Following the consultation, the responses would be analysed and used to develop a plan, which would then be brought back to the Committee for consideration.

A Member commented on the Local Plan and raised concerns regarding the proposed additional housing numbers, noting that these appeared to be in addition to the existing Local Plan. The Member asked whether the matter would be brought back to the Our Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee before being considered by Borough Council. The Officer stated that the Council was awaiting Central Government to provide timescales before commencing the work. The Officer confirmed that they would be happy to return to the Committee to set out the proposed timescales once they were known.

A Member sought clarification as to whether the proposals were an addition to the existing Local Plan. The Officer confirmed that they were not an add-on to the existing Local Plan but would instead form a separate plan.

A Member commented on the regeneration of the town centres, including Hebburn, Jarrow and King Street. They noted that a butcher's shop in Jarrow had recently closed after trading for 40 years and raised concerns regarding the role of private landlords. The Member asked whether the Council had any control over privately owned premises. They further commented that, whilst the town centres had significant potential, they were becoming dominated by empty shops, anti-social behaviour and vape stores. In response, the Officer advised that the Council had no control over privately owned properties and could not dictate how they were managed.

A Member asked whether there had been any progress in relation to adult learning provision. The Officer advised that there was a network of 22 organisations delivering learning opportunities to unemployed adults.

A Member commented that youth unemployment was at its highest level in a decade and expressed concern that, if young people were not in employment, they could become involved in anti-social behaviour. The Member asked whether there were any additional projects planned to support young people into work. The Officer explained that discussions were ongoing regarding funding to help young people develop skills and return to employment. The Officer further explained that funding would be made available to employers to support the recruitment of individuals into employment.

Another Member commented that many young people were leaving college with the necessary skills but were unable to secure apprenticeships. The Officer advised that there continued to be skills shortages within the construction sector and that funding was available to employers to support apprenticeships. However, the

Officer noted that they did not have information on how many apprenticeships employers were taking up. Another Officer suggested that this could be an area for future consideration by the Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee.

A Member referred to the South Tyneside College project and asked whether apprentices were being employed as part of the development. The Officer confirmed that the contractor delivering the college project did employ apprentices, although they were unable to confirm whether apprentices were working on that particular project.

A Member commented that they had previously sought, through the Planning Committee, to require major developments to employ local people. However, they noted that there were no resources available to monitor or enforce such arrangements.

Strategic Transport and Environment

A Member commented that the Sustainable South Tyneside Strategy Action Plan 2025 appeared to be out of date and noted that it was not included on the list of potential future reports. The Member asked whether it would be brought forward to the Committee. The Officer stated that the Council had declared a climate emergency in 2019 and had committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2030 through a range of energy and sustainability schemes. The Officer explained that the previous action plan had come to an end towards the end of the previous year and that the Council anticipated it would fall short of its target. However, this provided an opportunity to develop a better understanding of residents' priorities and needs before developing a new framework.

A Member commented on matters relating to flooding, the coast, sewage and air quality, noting that the Committee had an important role in scrutinising these issues, particularly in light of the ongoing sewage spills affecting the River Tyne. The Officer advised that they would be happy to bring a report on these matters to a future meeting of the Committee. However, the Officer emphasised that responsibility for these issues did not rest solely with the Council and that a number of organisations had a role to play.

Community Operations

A Member commented on the timescales for undertaking highway works, referring to a recent scheme involving temporary three-way traffic lights to facilitate the removal of a zebra crossing. The Member questioned whether it was reasonable for the works to be scheduled over a three-day period. The Officer explained that the duration of highway works could not always be predicted, as the conditions beneath the road surface were often unknown until the works commenced. Flexibility was therefore required, however the concern was noted. The Member further commented that, for works of this

scale, they could not understand why such a lengthy timescale was necessary. The Officer suggested that a presentation on how the highways network operated and how works were programmed could be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

An Independent Scrutiny Representative raised concerns regarding waste, litter and fly-tipping, commenting that there appeared to be a lack of clarity over the responsibilities of the various organisations involved. They referred to the challenges faced by local businesses in managing waste and the interaction with housing services and asked whether there were any arrangements in place to encourage greater producer responsibility. The Representative cited litter from businesses such as Starbucks and Greggs as an example. The Officer outlined that complaints received by Council depots were dealt with individually and that task and finish groups were established from time to time to address particular issues. The Officer explained that responsibility for certain aspects of litter also rested with producers and noted that some businesses proactively employed staff to carry out litter picking in the surrounding area. The Independent Scrutiny Representative further commented that producer responsibility should also extend to abandoned shopping trolleys, noting that where ownership could be identified, retailers should be responsible for their collection.

A Member raised concerns regarding the condition of potholes on Boldon Lane and Cleadon Village. The Member commented that temporary repairs were being carried out and questioned whether a permanent repair would be more cost effective than repeatedly undertaking temporary works. The Officer stated that permanent repairs could not always be undertaken during periods of poor weather, as conditions were not suitable. The Officer added that a presentation from Highways could be brought to a future meeting of the Committee to explain how repairs were prioritised and delivered.

A Member commented on food waste being placed in recycling bins and asked whether there were any plans to introduce separate food waste collections. The Officer confirmed that all waste was processed at a waste treatment facility and that, whilst the Council was not required to provide a separate food waste collection service, it had chosen not to introduce one at the present time. The Officer explained that the main reasons were the risk of contamination and the significant associated costs. It was further suggested that recycling and waste collection arrangements could be considered at a future meeting of the Committee.

A Member commented that the portfolio covered a significant range of services and acknowledged that officers were doing a good job despite the scale of the work involved. However, the Member highlighted concerns regarding refuse collection and the criticism that officers were receiving on social media. The Member also raised the issue of the out-of-hours housing service, commenting that where

residents reported an emergency repair on a Friday, they were required to wait until Monday for assistance. The Officer clarified that these matters fell within the remit of Housing Officers and it would be passed on.

A Member commented on bereavement services and raised concerns that the cost of adding an inscription to a headstone was not always made clear to families. The Member noted that there was an additional charge each time an inscription was added, even after the headstone had been damaged and suggested that the Council should make families aware of this at an early stage, as it could be difficult to be informed later in the process. The Officer confirmed that responsibility for arranging and paying for headstone inscriptions rested with the family. However, the Officer acknowledged the point raised and agreed that the matter could be considered further.

A Member asked whether all waste was ultimately being sent to the incinerator. The Officer reassured Members that recyclable waste was processed appropriately and that materials were only diverted where recycling was not possible, such as where loads were heavily contaminated. The Officer added that there was always an appropriate disposal route available.

A Member raised concerns regarding the maintenance of roads and footpaths. They noted that repairs were generally only undertaken once defects had been reported and suggested that a more proactive approach to permanent repairs would be preferable to repeated temporary works.

A Member also referred to the backlog of highways works and commented that a detailed breakdown of outstanding works and the method used to prioritise them would be beneficial. The Officer confirmed that this information could be provided and noted that many schemes were awaiting funding. It was suggested that the backlog of works be considered at a future meeting.

Agreed: That the presentation be noted.

5. Our Place Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2026/2027

Submitted: Report of the Director of Governance and Corporate Affairs

Officers and Members suggested the following items be brought to Our Place and Environment Scrutiny Committees in the 2026/2027 year:

- Update on the Asset Transfer Programme, including progress relating to the transfer of assets and leases, particularly those concerning Community Associations;

- Update on the development and progression of the Hebburn Town Centre Regeneration Programme, including emerging proposals and future plans;
- Consideration of the Draft Strategic Transport Policy, providing Members with an opportunity to contribute to its early-stage development;
- Consideration of the emerging Environmental Growth Strategy and its development priorities;
- Overview of Flood and Coastal Protection responsibilities within the borough, including the respective roles of the Council, the Environment Agency and Northumbrian Water;
- Review of the borough's road network and pothole repair programme, including consideration of the highways maintenance backlog, factors contributing to current pressures, and potential approaches to future investment and maintenance;
- Update on Simpler Recycling requirements and other statutory waste management responsibilities affecting the Council;
- Review of Grounds Maintenance arrangements, including grass cutting and the management of public open spaces;
- Overview of Network Management responsibilities, including the coordination and management of utility works and roadworks on the highway network.

Agreed: That the Work Programme for 2026/2027 be approved.

6. Chair's Urgent Items

There were no urgent items to be discussed.