

Dear Mr Murphy et al,

I am responding to the letter on behalf of myself and OneJesmond, both tagged with your open letter to the Chief Executive of Newcastle City Council, signed by yourself and 58 other anonymous people, including many I note who live outside our Jesmond community. Just like the comments on Commonplace, it's very easy for cowardly people to hide behind anonymity. Your letter is full of inaccuracies some of which I'll deal with below, but for information, I'm not retired. I'm very much still working in a Governance role across several businesses.

Unlike many of the signatories of your letter, I do live in Jesmond and have seen the devastating impact this badly thought through, knee jerk reaction scheme, has had on the daily lives of many people. Over 4000 people have signed a petition to that effect, a petition managed through Change.org, a reputable organisation. In addition, many businesses are suffering great harm as a direct consequence of this scheme.

I realise you, and no doubt many who signed this letter, were the architects of this scheme, working almost exclusively with Council officials and Cabinet members, and that you, and they, don't like the fact that many people have chosen to reject the principle that you speak for our community and that you know best. You don't!

The Council work for us, the citizens of this community. They spend our money, not theirs, and like it or not they are accountable to us for the way in which they spend it. This LTN and the wider clean air zone plans will cost very significant sums of our money and we have the right to have our voice heard when we think the Council have got it wrong. ***Had they followed proper process and consulted in line with the recommended Statutory guidance set out by the Department for Transport*** we, and they, wouldn't be in this mess.

Instead, they chose to allow a select group to design a scheme that was fit for them but no one else. What a surprise that people object to that. There is now huge evidence of similar failed schemes throughout the country; every day there are headlines of Councils backtracking and now just today, the announcement of a government review of LTN schemes.

You have written to the Chief Executive, which is interesting as she and other officials, alongside the politicians, are the very ones that need to be held accountable for failing to follow good governance principles. The Audit Committee, made up of cross-party and independent members, are our security as citizens that the Council can't just do whatever they want, or spend whatever they want, without respecting the views of all citizens rather than the few. Their role as an audit committee follows those very principles, which I've set out below and which are enshrined in the Council's Corporate Governance Framework. You will note it also refers to engaging with stakeholders including individual citizens, which is what I proudly am, "a citizen living in Jesmond", that just happens to have some background in good governance. I know what it looks like, and I certainly know what it doesn't look like.

Finally, the original concerns I had weren't just with the East Jesmond LTN. I have also reproduced my email to the Council below in which I raised wider governance concerns over, *"The Connected Clean City Grant Scheme"* and the *"Installation of CCTV cameras in residential streets"*. My initial suggestion was that these matters should be considered by the Audit Committee, which was rejected by Council officials, with a "fob off" that they would commission an internal audit report on the consultation processes across all LTNs, i.e., let's water down any challenges around the East Jesmond LTN. Hence why I turned up at the Audit Committee meeting and asked politely if I could raise my concerns given officers weren't bringing these matters to the attention of the members charged with that oversight role. The minutes of that meeting, when available, will bring you and others fresh perspective of the role of officers, no doubt under political pressure, in denying the original request for agenda items to be considered.

I didn't ask to be granted exceptional rights, indeed there is previous precedence for major governance concerns to be raised and be heard by the committee. However, I am sure the committee would rather officers include such concerns on the agenda rather than avoiding them which necessitated this request. The minutes will show this was the first time apparently that agreement on the agenda hadn't been reached between the Chair and officers and it does trouble me why that should be the case. Why is scrutiny in this case so difficult for Cabinet members and officers? Maybe this sits alongside the ***recent FOI Commissioner's decision that the Council breached the Freedom of information Act 2000***, failing to respond to an FOI request concerning consultations with Space for Jesmond?

Fortunately, a great example of good governance was the decision by the Audit Committee to let me speak about my concerns, but in the time allowed I could only deal with one of these issues. It doesn't mean that The Council shouldn't be held accountable for these other areas as well. The Committee were doing the job we should all expect of them, hearing concerns of governance failures so that they can act where appropriate. Hopefully the scope of work that will be done will now be wide enough to properly identify the failings which have occurred in this particular area, failings which have already been acknowledged by Councillors and planners alike.

Yours faithfully,

David Wilkinson

*Corporate governance is a phrase used to describe how organisations direct and control what they do. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFAs) publication "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government" (2016 Edition), sets a framework, and the standard, for local authority governance in the UK. The Framework sets out a set of principles which we test our governance arrangements against to consider the extent to which the Council complies with the principles of good governance as set out in the Framework.*

## Section 3: The Governance Framework

<b><u>Principles of Good Governance</u></b>	
<b>A.</b> Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law	<b>E.</b> Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it
<b>B.</b> Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement	<b>F.</b> Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management
<b>C.</b> Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits	<b>G.</b> Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability
<b>D.</b> Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes	

<b>A. Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement</b>	
<i>The Council's Commitment to Good Governance</i>	
Engaging stakeholders effectively, including individual citizens and service users	

“Dear Antony

I understand you are the contact person for the agenda items for audit committee meetings at Newcastle city council.

I wanted to request the inclusion of the following matters at the next audit committee which I understand is scheduled for July.

**Connected Clean City-** How are the governance arrangements working for the provision of grants under the clean air zone financial support scheme. Specifically, but not exclusively, to include the number of grants awarded to date, the percentage awarded of the total amount allocated for this scheme, and value of grants awarded to date and the ease of access to the scheme. How are we ensuring those individual businesses impacted are able to access the scheme effectively.

**Installation of CCTV cameras in residential streets-** there have been a large increase recently in CCTV cameras across various parts of the city, such as Jesmond and Heaton, without prior-warning, and I am concerned about the governance arrangements over these installations. What measures have been undertaken to inform residents about the impact on their personal privacy and ensure they aware these infringements may arise.

#### **East Jesmond LTN scheme**

The recent disclosure through an FOI request that the Police had significant reservations about the implementation of the LTN scheme is of great concern.

They clearly identified a major impact on being able to effectively Police Jesmond. This was known to Council officers in early May and to Councillor Byrne, responsible for this scheme, no later than 12 June. Despite knowing this Councillor Byrne failed to inform residents of Grosvenor Road and Grosvenor Avenue at a meeting on 15th June that such concerns existed. Indeed, she said there were no concerns arising from the emergency services.

The interim report on the scheme was issued on 16<sup>th</sup> June and failed to mention these same concerns and as such was wholly misleading when issued to the General public.

This report displays significant bias in many areas, lacks objectivity and given the Police issues noted above appears to lack integrity. I question how such a report has gone through robust review within the Council or via the Cabinet member responsible to ensure the interim report was fit for purpose and therefore the governance arrangements in place appear to be sadly lacking. I have summarised these concerns below.

- Report does not mention Teams meeting with Police on 2 May in which concerns were raised by the police, even though The Council were aware of this prior to the report's publication.
- Gives the impression that the LTN has reduced traffic congestion overall - in direct contradiction to the statements the Police have made in the FOI (and the experience of thousands of motorists).
- Lack of disclosure of the Teams meeting and its outcome in the report calls into question the credibility of the Council's report as a whole.
- Was there any internal/external oversight to ensure the report was impartial
- Citing reduced journey times between Sandyford and Benfield as indicative is misleading. The problem is not with Sandyford, it's with Jesmond Road & Osborne Road.
- Disingenuous to claim an 18% traffic reduction in eastbound traffic volumes post bollards on the Coast Road. The acute problems are not on the Coast Road but along Jesmond Road and Osborne Road.
- Misleading to compare Coast Road and Osborne Road data from 2019 over different dates to those for 2023. People now work much more from home or attend work 2 or 3 days per week. This is not comparing like with like data. Why did the report not simply use the same date ranges for each year?
- Using average journey times. Why not also include peak journey times? unless of course the intention is to cherry pick data as it suits.
- No comparative air quality data provided for Osborne Road before the scheme. This is fundamentally important as Osborne Road is now often gridlocked.
- Misleading report space is given to graphs showing reduction of traffic on bollarded roads. Of course, if you stop traffic on those roads, it will reduce but will end up somewhere else, i.e., Osborne Road and Jesmond road.
- Misleading report space given to graphs showing increase in cycling and walking after the scheme. Walking and cycling increases anyway during spring and summer. What data exists for walking and cycling in the same period in prior years, was this measured at all?

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Pollution levels have moved from some roads to others, namely Osborne Road and Jesmond Road, which have increased with standing traffic. How is this being measured before and after the implementation of this scheme.

Where is the input of traffic engineers to this scheme in the report and why were they removed from involvement during the process as part of the Councils planning for this scheme.

Were there any other reports produced internally advising the Council on the implementation of this scheme and if the advice was against implementing the scheme as currently introduced, why did Cabinet ignore such recommendations.

The report should address the outcomes against the Councils own stated criteria for measuring success and my observations to date, alongside many thousands of others, are that it is failing badly. To introduce such a scheme in the first place that would have such a profound impact on people's daily lives, and then ask residents and businesses afterwards during a lengthy trial is astounding. I can't think this represents best practice to ensure good governance from the start of the scheme.

These are just some of the concerns around the wider governance of the east Jesmond LTN which I think is worthy of major consideration at the audit committee. "

Regards

David Wilkinson