

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

ASHINGTON & BLYTH LOCAL AREA COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Ashington & Blyth Local Area Council** held in Newbiggin Sports and Community Centre, Woodhorn Road, Newbiggin by the Sea, NE64 6HG on Wednesday, 10 January 2018 at 5.30 pm.

PRESENT

Councillor G Webb (Chair, in the Chair)

MEMBERS

B Gallacher
E Cartie
G Davey
S Davey
J J Gobin
L Grimshaw

J A Lang
K Nisbet
K Parry
J Reid
E Simpson

MEMBERS ALSO PRESENT

P Jackson
N Oliver

OFFICERS

H Bowers
S Bucknall
M Carle
D Lally
J Rose
L Sawyer
R Wealleans

Democratic Services Officer
Highways Delivery Manager
Highways Delivery Area Manager
Chief Executive
Economic & Inclusion Policy Manager
Business Support Manager
Neighbourhood Services Area
Manager

ALSO PRESENT

L Langton
D Tweddle
10 members of the public

Northumberland Community Bank
Galliford Try

Chair's initials

Ashington & Blyth Local Area Council - 10 January 2018

61. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Campbell, Purvis, Rickerby and Wilson.

62. DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Nisbet declared an interest in agenda item 7 (b) as she was a Board Member of Northumberland Community Bank.

63. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Anna Moore, NE24 2BT referred to the bus only route in Newsham which was being misused by car drivers. Children had been playing "chicken" on the crossing and recently there had been a road traffic accident. Local residents wanted to have the road closed but the general public wanted it kept open for a short cut. The question had previously been raised at the meeting in June but she had not received a response from the Highways Department. She suggested that cameras be put in place and asked for clarification who would be responsible for that.

The Highways Delivery Area Manager advised that a response would be provided.

Eva Hartley, NE64 6HR asked who was responsible for the cleaning and tidying of the demolition site at Windsor School

The Highways Delivery Area Manager advised that this would be taken forward and looked at.

RESOLVED that the responses be noted and followed up after the meeting.

64. PETITIONS

- (a) **Receive any new petitions:** No new petitions were received.
- (b) **Consider reports on petitions previously received:** no reports were considered at the meeting.
- (c) **Receive any updates on petitions for which a report was previously considered:**

Ashington Town Centre Regeneration

Members were advised that plans were in development and would be reported in due course. A Member requested a specific time as to when the petition would be reported.

65. LOCAL SERVICES

This item enabled Members to raise issues about services provided by the Local Services group with the area managers from Technical Services and Neighbourhood Services.

Members raised the following issues:

- Councillor Nisbet referred to the mural at Wilkinson in Bowes Street, Blyth which had been taken down. The wooden lats that were left were being used as a resting place by pigeons;
- Councillor Cartie requested that the Manager at Mecca Bingo, Blyth be contacted as he had concerns regarding parking restrictions and the effect this would have on deliveries and the disabled;
- Councillor Gobin conveyed his thanks to Councillor Sanderson and Lynsey Sawyer for the prompt action taken in repairing street lights in his ward;
- Councillor Grimshaw referred to the recurring flooding at Potland Burn. In addition an update had not been received on the re-siting of the 30 mph sign post near Ashington Rugby Club;
- Councillor Gallagher referred to litter on the main trunk roads in and around Ashington and asked whether that could be done as part of the Winter Services Programme
- Councillor Simpson asked what was happening with the fly-tipping that had been reported at Newbiggin Colliery stables

RESOLVED that the issues identified be followed up by officers.

66. DISCUSSIONS ITEMS - CORPORATE

STREET LIGHTING

Lynsey Sawyer from the Street Lighting section and Dawn Tweddle from the main contractor, Galliford Try, were present to answer Members' questions about street lighting in Northumberland.

- Members requested that the detailed work programme be sent to them.
- The street lighting programme had not been completed in Ashington. There were also broken lamp-posts taped up for many weeks which was unsightly and a danger to the public.
- The reporting procedure needed to be examined

Ms Sawyer reported that there had been a lot of internal changes in the service and downfalls in the service had been identified. The service also relied on the public to inform them of any problems. A new administrator was in place who would record any problems or complaints and

acknowledge and respond. It was proposed to put a notice around any broken lamp-posts.

- The backlog of trees being trimmed and unadopted housing estates. Residents had complained in the Potland Burn estate and there was a dispute who was liable. Had anyone informed the house builders that they are liable ?

Ms Sawyer advised that a lamp-post could not be inspected until a design was approved and installed. Officers were being encouraged to contact the developer and use their influence. If Members wanted to contact her she could then contact the developer.

- Why were Officers not working with the developer?

Ms Sawyer believed the Planning Department would need to discuss installation of lamp-posts with the developer.

- How long would the lamp-posts remain as stumps?

Ms Sawyer explained that columns that needed to be replaced, would be replaced as part of the modernisation project which was in the programme of works. The service was looking to improve that.

- The National Grid took 30 days to fix a fault.

Ms Sawyer reported that it was hoped to improve communication with the National Grid.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

67. REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - PARTNERSHIPS AND DEVOLUTION

(a) NORTHUMBERLAND COMMUNITY BANK

Members received a report from Lauren Langton, Chief Executive of the Northumberland Community Bank explaining the financial products and services of the Northumberland Community Bank that were available to all residents. (Report attached to the signed minutes as Appendix C)

The Chair welcomed Lauren Langton to the meeting. She raised the following points:-

- The Bank had an ambitious growth plan and in order to be financially self sustaining it must grow substantially. This would be a challenge but Northumberland deserved to have local ethical lender
- A formal launch was expected to take place in April 2018
- The bank would expand on products such as savings and loans and provide a more traditional bank with debit cards which would help people budget

- It and management processes would be improved whilst aiming to grow, costs must be kept down. The bank had small resources but aimed to use them where needed most
- The bank would have a personal touch and be accessible to all.
- It was aimed to increase the savings balance with the bank and this year's target was £700,000. The maximum deposit allowed by regulators was £7,500 and that was also the limit of any loan.
- The key message of the bank was to save as well as borrowing.
- The bank was quite specific to Ashington and Blyth areas where there was high financial inclusion support needs
- Following the recent closure of the Eric Tolhurst building, workshops had been carried out to support and help people
- She specifically thanked the Chief Executive, support from local people and town and parish councils

Councillor Jackson commented that the team had done fantastic job in such a short space of time and thanked them for providing an important service to Northumberland and wished them every success.

Members echoed the recognition and and thanks were also conveyed from Ashington Town Council.

RESOLVED that the work of the Northumberland Community Bank welcomed by Ashington & Blyth Local Area Council.

68. REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - FINANCE

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2018-21 AND BUDGET 2018-19

Members were advised of the content of the draft Corporate Plan and the proposed budget strategy for the Medium Term Financial Plan, and its implications for setting the Council's budget for 2018-19.

Councillor Jackson, Leader of the Council referred to debt levels inherited and the increasing pressure on services.

Councillor Oliver, Portfolio Holder, Corporate Services explained that the operating principles of the of the plan were: Financial Prudence, Resourceful, Listening and Considering, Empowering, Collaborative, Service Integration, New ways of working and Income Generation with a holistic approach working in partnership with subsidiaries, eg, Active Northumberland.

It had been decided not to build the new County Hall development and it was hoped that aspirations would be delivered which would empower residents, working with town and parish councils. The new Local Area Councils would give more local democracy and locally accountable decisions.

The collaboration of the North of Tyne devolution deal would bring new money into the County to work with partners in Newcastle and Tyneside and also help pursue the Borderlands initiative.

Councillor Jackson and Councillor Oliver then gave a presentation highlighting the proposed budget strategy for the emerging Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and the draft Corporate Plan. (Report and Presentation are attached to the signed minutes as Appendix B).

The presentation covered the following areas:-

- The Corporate Plan would lay out the direction of the Council over the next 3½ years.
- The £65 million inherited pressures and the £1.5 billion potential debt
- The five key themes of the administration were; Living, Enjoying, Connecting, Learning, Thriving
- The disparities of well-being in communities across the county
- Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement
- Council Tax Proposed 2.99% increase
- Funding Analysis 2014-2022
- Gross Expenditure by Service 2018-19
- Summary of Identified Savings by Category 2018-2020
- MTFP Cumulative Savings
- Capital Programme 2018-2021
- Capital Investment
- Capital Spend Comparison
- Debt Servicing Costs
- The Next Steps
 - Invite views from Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Local Area Councils
 - Final version to be considered by full Council in February 2018 alongside the Medium Term Financial Plan
 - Subsequent preparation of Service Planning Frameworks

The following issues were raised and/or discussed:-

- A Member did not agree with what had been presented which made it difficult to comment on. There would be no opportunity to debate or correct the plan following Scrutiny due to the shortness of timescale and base figures should therefore be given.
- Millions of pounds were to be invested in Ponteland.
- The site in Ashington had been abandoned and staff would lose their jobs in Revenues and Benefits at Wansbeck Square due to sharing of services.
- There was no market initiative for the area and the finance for multi-storey car parks had been removed.
- The figures did not explain how the £65 million gap would be closed.
- The actual council tax figure was queried.
- Clarification on the name of the proposed passenger railway line.

- There was nothing in the budget that suggested assisting young people with learning disabilities with transition.
- Concerns regarding redundancies.
- The welfare of schools in south east Northumberland
- Concerns regarding the scrutiny process which was not open and transparent. The Leader of the Opposition should be included in any confidential scrutiny papers
- Area Committees had been changed to Local Area Councils which had diluted decision making

Responses were as follows:-

- The Local Area Councils would be able to determine local issues. It had been suggested that Rights of Way applications be considered by the Local Area Councils and the Administration was open to ideas.
- Services from where savings needed to be made had not been identified by the previous administration. In addition there had been no operational budget for Active Northumberland until recently.
- A new town centre was to be built on the site originally designated for County Hall and information would be shared from the recent consultation.
- The process to move Revenues and Benefits Services started 18 months ago and previous plans had been to move to Manor Walks. Staff from both services would be co-located in Northumberland and there would be more jobs.
- An ambitious but prudent housing and capital programme would be delivered.
- The proposed rail line would benefit the community and open up major economic regeneration opportunities.
- Extensive discussion had taken place regarding SEN, and the Corporate Plan would improve educational outcomes for everyone. A major part of the North of Tyne deal was to enable access to better job prospects.
- The scrutiny process was very effective and any concerns would be taken on board. The Legal Services Manager was examining the legal position regarding the circulation of confidential papers and included members from all parties.

RESOLVED that the report and presentation be received.

REPORTS OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - PARTNERSHIPS AND DEVOLUTION

69. NORTH OF TYNE DEVOLUTION

Janice Rose, Economic and Inclusion Policy Manager gave a presentation which outlined the content of the North of Tyne devolution deal recently announced by Government which detailed the processes for the subsequent creation of a North of Tyne Combined Authority and the election of a Mayor in May 2019. The subsequent discussion focused focus on exploring the implications of the approach in promoting economic growth across Northumberland and the wider North of Tyne.

The presentation covered the following areas:-

- Developing the deal
- Deal Announcement
- Current Focus
- Deal content
 - Governance
 - Investment Fund
 - Themes
 - Inclusive Growth
 - Industrial Strategy
 - Housing
 - Digital connectivity and smart data
 - Maximising impact of Great Exhibition of the North, including legacy
 - NT Rural Productivity Plan & Rural Scale Up Champion for England
- Transport
- Governance Review - Statute
- Consultation - NECA area
- Provisional timetable

The following issues were raised:-

- The £20 million per year allocation of revenue funding over 30 years
- The cost of an elected Mayor every 5 years;
- How much money would be spent on education in Northumberland ?
- How much money was being spent on adult education?
- Where would the Mayor's office be?

Ms Rose explained that back office services would be provided by 3 constituents.

The combined authority, working with the Mayor had the power to set a precept on local council tax bills. At the last budget the Government announced a new fund to help meet the running costs of Combined Authorities, and the £20 million annual investment fund can also be top-sliced to cover operational costs.

INFORMATION ITEMS

70. LOCAL AREA COUNCIL WORK PROGRAMME

Members received the latest version of agreed items for future Local Area Council meetings. (A copy of the report is filed with the signed minutes as Appendix E).

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

71. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, 14 February 2018, at 5:30 pm.

The meeting ended at 8:00 pm.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....