

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

At a meeting of the **Cabinet** held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Morpeth on Tuesday 17 September 2019 at 10.00am.

PRESENT

Councillor P. Jackson
(Leader of the Council, in the Chair)

CABINET MEMBERS

Daley, W.	Oliver, N.
Homer, C.R.	Riddle, J.R.
Sanderson, H.G.H.	Wearmouth, R.

OTHER MEMBERS

Dodd, R.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Angus, K.	Executive Director of HR&OD and Deputy Chief Executive
Aviston, S.	Head of School Organisation and Resources
Dent, S.	Finance Manager
Hadfield, K.	Committee Services and Scrutiny Manager
Henry, L.	Legal Services Manager
Lally, D.	Chief Executive
Mason, A.	Finance Manager
McEvoy-Carr, C.	Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services
Peaden, A.	Library Service Manager
Walsh, N.	Head of Cultural Services

2 members of the press and public were in attendance.

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39. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Jones and Flux.

40. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Outcome of the Outline Business Case for the Haltwhistle Primary School Provision for Wise Academy Trust

The report informed Cabinet of the outcomes of the Outline Business Case for Haltwhistle Primary School provision. An outline capital allocation of £1.6m for investment to support the reorganisation of the education system in Haltwhistle has already been made within the Council's medium term capital programme. The Outline Business Case sought to confirm the capital required for the construction of the proposed scheme, being £2.65m, with the Council's contribution being up to £2.5m (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix A, along with the report of the Family and Children's Services OSC circulated at the meeting).

Councillor Daley introduced the report and provided some background to the current proposal to develop the previous Middle School site into the new Primary school, including Early Years. The Wise Academy was an impressive and well run organisation, and the additional investment would future proof the school and create an excellent learning environment. The report demonstrated the Administration's commitment to improving educational outcomes across the County. He thanked Mrs Aviston and the team for the significant amount of work which had gone into this project, and in fact all of the school development projects across the County. The Family and Children's Services OSC had considered the report the previous day, and had very much supported it.

Mrs Aviston advised that the Wise Academy Trust had completed the statutory consultation to close the Middle School and extend the age range of the First School. Secretary of State approval had been given on 31 August to close the Middle School, so all of the arrangements were now in place. It was aimed to complete the project in time for opening in Sept 2020.

Councillor Homer commented that the effect of uncertainty on children and parents should not be underestimated, and she very much welcomed the proposals.

The Leader added his thanks to those already expressed to officers. This was a very ambitious programme which was progressing on time and within budget, which was very good to hear.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Council be requested to approve an increase to the budget to £2.65m, including a further £860k of council resources to deliver the scheme to refurbish Haltwhistle Middle School building for Wise Academy Trust. This will support the development of the primary school following the Secretary of State's decision to close Haltwhistle Middle school and expand the age range of Haltwhistle First School to become a primary school. The balance of £153k will be funded by The Wise Academy Trust;
- (b) subject to Council approval of the project, Cabinet approve the commencement of procurement through a traditional strategy utilising a RIBA Stage 4 detailed design prior to tender issue in order to deliver the project;
- (c) Cabinet note the content of the Outline Business Case attached to the report and the recommended preferred option to convert Haltwhistle Middle School into the primary school. The project will also include the relocation of the Children's Centre into the building. The procurement process was set out in the Outline Business Case within Appendix 1 of the report;
- (d) officers be instructed to procure the works through a traditional strategy utilising a RIBA Stage 4 detailed design approach prior to tender issue; and
- (e) the report of the Family and Children's Services OSC be noted.

41. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF HR&OD AND DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Northumberland Library Service - Proposal for Public Engagement and Future Service Design

The report provided an update to members on progress to date of the redesign of the library service.

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It also sought endorsement of the proposed methodology and timeline for the statutorily required public consultation to inform the future design of library services within Northumberland.

The report also provided an update to members on the opportunities that a revised future design of library services may provide across Northumberland, particularly based on enhancing the use of technology and supporting communities across the County (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix B).

Councillor Homer presented the report and set out the background to the current position as detailed in the key issues of the report. The service had been very fragmented in 2017 with no sense or rationale applied to its delivery. Many qualified librarians had been made redundant and staff morale had been very low, along with customer satisfaction. Since then, there had been a lot of focussed activity going on behind the scenes. Staff had been brought back into the County Council and a service manager appointed, and a lot of good work had been carried out which she credited the staff for. She reiterated the Administration's commitment to the library service and was pleased that the position had now stabilised, but the service needed to be taken forward so it was sustainable for the future and met the demands of communities going forward.

Councillor Wearmouth very much welcomed the proposals and was pleased to see that the situation was improving. He hoped there would be a good response to the consultation.

Councillor Oliver agreed that the library service was in a better place now, certainly in his area, and hoped that this was the beginning of something sustainable.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) progress on consideration of the findings of the internal Library Service Review which took place in late 2017, and the recommended proposed future service model be noted;
- (b) members agree the proposed methodology and timeline of the public consultation from which the findings will be used to inform the future design and opportunities for service provision within Northumberland, and the estimated cost of £25,000 which will be funded from forecast underspend within the 2019/20 revenue budget be noted;

- (c) an allocation of up to £100,000 non recurrently be agreed from the Strategic Management Reserve to support the accelerated transformation of the service over the next 12 months; and
- (d) the sterling efforts and commitment of the libraries team in striving to deliver the best possible service to residents during the significant period of structural change begun in 2015 be recognised, and the ongoing improvement and innovation measures introduced from 2017 be noted.

42. REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR:FINANCE

Financial Performance 2019-20 - Position at the end of July 2019

The report informed the Cabinet of the current financial position for the Council against the Budget for 2019-20 (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix C).

Councillor Oliver detailed the main points of the report which included:-

- There was a projected overspend of £1.826m. This should not be cause for concern at this point in the year but it was important not to be complacent.
- There was a good programme in place saving plans delivery and reprofiling and he was optimistic these would be delivered by the year end.
- There were pressures in adults and children's services. These reflected the national picture and were being dealt with through extra capital, revenue care packages and working with partners to deliver services.
- The overspend on IT was due to the decision to change platform and upgrade the IT structure. However, this investment was needed to progress the digital transformation programme.
- There was a projected underspend in the school transport budget of £800,000. This would be reviewed for next year.
- An extra £1m in income from business rates was forecast.
- The schools' grant was being managed within its envelope.
- Reserves were being built up within the Housing Revenue Account which would help delivery of the Administration's housing programme.
- Reprofiling of the capital programme of £36.191m was outlined in the report.

The Leader commented positively on the current position, which was within 1% of the overall target.

Councillor Sanderson commented that this was a very ambitious programme with improvements now being made across the County.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the report be noted;
- (b) the projected overspend of £1.826 million be noted;
- (c) the pressures currently identified be noted;
- (d) the adjustments to the capital programme shown at 18.3 of £0.115 million (net) to reflect the confirmation of grant allocations for the Pothole Fund, Integrated Transport and Disabled Facilities grants, be approved;
- (e) a net re-profiling of £36.191 million: £46.577 million from 2019-20 to 2020-21; and £10.386 million from 2020-21 to 2019-20 be approved to reflect estimated expenditure levels in the current financial year;
- (f) the virements at Appendix B be noted;
- (g) the new grants at Appendix C and the required changes to the budgets be approved; and
- (h) the progress on the delivery of the approved savings at Appendix D be noted.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....