

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

At a meeting of the **Cabinet** held in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth on Tuesday 8 October 2019 at 11.15am.

PRESENT

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

CABINET MEMBERS

Homer, C.R.
Jones, V.

Oliver, N.
Wearmouth, R.

OTHER MEMBERS

Bowman, L.
Dodd, R.

Flux, B.
Seymour, C.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Bradley, N.

Elsdon, A.
Gorman, C.
Hadfield, K.

Henry, L.
Lally, D.
McEvoy-Carr, C.

Morgan, L.
O'Farrell, R.

Roll, J.

Service Director: Strategic
Commissioning and Finance.
Service Director: Finance
Principal Account (Pensions)
Committee Services and Scrutiny
Manager
Legal Services Manager
Chief Executive
Executive Director of Adult Social
Care and Children's Services
Director of Public Health
Interim Executive Director,
Regeneration, Commercial and
Economy
Democratic Services Manager

Ch.'s Initials.....

2 members of the press and public were in attendance.

43. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Daley, Riddle and Sanderson.

44. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the following meetings of Cabinet, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair:-

(a) Tuesday 10 September 2019

(b) Tuesday 17 September 2019

45. DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Jones declared a personal interest in item 4 (1) on the agenda (Council Tax Support Scheme).

46. REPORTS OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - STRATEGIC COMMISSIONING AND FINANCE

(1) Council Tax Support Scheme for 2020-21

The report sought approval for the local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2020-21 (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix A).

Councillor Oliver introduced the report highlighting that this was a statutory requirement and that no changes were proposed to the scheme from the previous year. The scheme allowed for 92% maximum level of support and did not include those of pensionable age, only working age adults, and there were a range of support mechanisms in place.

Experience to date showed that the scheme was still working its way through and therefore the full impact on residents and the collection rate was not yet known, but the position continued to be monitored.

RESOLVED that County Council be recommended to approve the Council Tax Support Scheme attached as Appendix 1 to be adopted as the Council's local scheme for 2020-21.

(2) Council Tax Empty Homes Premiums

The report sought approval to amend the Council Tax Discount Policy to include introducing additional empty homes premiums (EHP) for council tax for properties that were unoccupied and substantially unfurnished to take effect from 1 April 2020 and 1 April 2021 (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix B).

Councillor Oliver advised members that this was a new proposal following legislation from the Government, which gave local authorities powers to bring properties which were substantially unfurnished back into use through the imposition of a premium. Such properties could cause problems when left empty for a long time. The level of premium which could be charged depended on the length of time the property had been empty for, and local authorities could take control of those properties which became a serious danger. Currently 673 dwellings in Northumberland fell into the three bands and the imposition of the premium should impact positively on the available housing stock in the County.

The Leader welcomed the introduction of these powers by the Government, as it was often the case that a property which stood empty for a long time could blight the whole street and attract anti social behaviour.

Councillor Homer commented that it was important to recognise the cost of doing nothing. Councillor Oliver advised that, in exceptional circumstances, there was a form of discretionary relief that could be applied.

Councillor Jones queried how robust the arrangements were on checking that properties were "substantially unfurnished". Councillor Oliver confirmed that there was a thorough inspection regime in place.

RESOLVED that County Council be recommended to approve the Council Tax Discount Policy attached at Appendix 1 which introduces the following:

- (a) An increase in the current 50% EHP to 100% for property unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for two years or more, but less than 5 years, with effect from 1 April 2020;
- (b) A 200% EHP for property unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for 5 years or more from 1 April 2020; and

(c)A 300% EHP for property unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for over 10 years with effect from 1 April 2021.

47. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Oral Health Strategy Update

1. The report updated the Cabinet on the progress being made with the Northumberland Oral Health Strategy and provided an overview of activity to date to tackle oral health inequalities across the county.
2. The report provided an update on the technical appraisal undertaken by Northumbrian Water to consider the feasibility of expanding the community water fluoridation scheme in Northumberland, following approval from the Health and Wellbeing Board in July 2017 and more recently in March 2019.
3. The report requested approval to take the next legislatively defined steps for varying the current scheme in Northumberland (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix C).

Councillor Jones introduced the report highlighting the importance of oral health for a healthy life and general wellbeing, and the link to physical health. She drew members' attention to the action plan for improving oral health set out in the report.

The Director of Public Health confirmed this was an important issue. Dental issues were one of the main reasons children were absent from school and accounted for many admissions to hospital. There was a personal, social and economic cost to poor oral health, which was largely preventable, and which affected a large proportion of the population.

Councillor Watson, Chair of the Health and Wellbeing OSC, advised that the report had received cross party support when it had been considered by the Committee and would undergo a lengthy consultation process. Liz Morgan confirmed that the report would come through the decision making process before going to the Secretary of State to request change.

In response to a question from the Leader regarding local dentist support, members were advised that a letter of support from the professional dental association was attached to the report, and though nothing had come back from local dentists yet, she would be surprised if they were not in support. Cath McEvoy-Carr confirmed that local paediatricians were very supportive.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the progress made on the oral health action plan and next steps for delivery be noted;

(b) it be noted that Northumbrian Water has confirmed that the proposal put forward to vary the Northumberland community water fluoridation scheme is operable and efficient and technically possible to implement;

(c) the potential increase in revenue costs be met from the allocated ring-fenced public health grant;

(d) Cabinet agree to consult with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (SoSHSC)¹ as to whether the variation being proposed is operable and efficient (s88C)¹ and, subject to the SoSHSC confirmation :

- Contact affected Local Authorities to decide whether further steps should be taken in relation to the proposal (s88D) and invite them to notify the Council as to whether they wish to participate in the process (s88F).
- Provided the Local Authorities consulted do not oppose taking further steps on the proposals and do not wish to participate in this process, agree to undertake public consultation (date to be determined) in accordance with the relevant legislation (s88E(2))².

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

Review of the Overview and Scrutiny Function

Cabinet was asked to consider the findings of the [**House of Commons - Communities and Local Government Committee: Effectiveness of Local Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committees Report December 2017**] and the subsequent [**The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government “Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities” May 2019**] and to be satisfied that Northumberland’s Scrutiny Service was fit for purpose (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix D).

The report was presented by Councillor Dodd, who highlighted the views of Chairmen’s Group on each subject. The Group had recognised that there were matters outside their remit, which were for Cabinet to consider.

The Leader endorsed the comments in the report. He was aware of the power and scope of scrutiny and fully supported it as a way of engaging with all members. He also felt that scrutiny should not just be internally focussed and that it should investigate bodies which provided services to residents.

RESOLVED that the Guidance contained in the report be noted, and the comments from Chairmen’s Group on the issues raised be endorsed.

Ch.’s Initials.....
Cabinet, 8 October 2019

49. REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - STRATEGIC COMMISSIONING AND FINANCE

Summary of New Capital Proposals Considered by Officer CSG

The report summarised proposed amendments to the Capital Programme considered by the officer Capital Strategy Group at its meeting held on 13 September 2019 (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix E).

(49.1) Morpeth Leisure Centre

Neil Bradley provided members with some background to the need for increased funding for this project.

Councillor Homer commented that this refurbishment was long overdue. The Centre could not currently cope with the demand for swimming classes and she welcomed the opportunity for a co-location of services with Libraries and Customer Services, and with Adult Learning, which had proved successful elsewhere, when it was properly planned. This represented an excellent opportunity to revitalise the service and put services together, which would improve access for residents.

Councillor Wearmouth commented that the original discussions on this had been around leisure services, but more recent discussions had focussed on the County Council offer in the town. Library footfall had fallen in the current location, and co-location with leisure in a better location would release the Council from an expensive rental on Manchester Street, as well as provide the opportunity for a capital receipt from the adult learning service site. The project would bring together all Council services in Morpeth into one place, which made sense and should be welcomed.

The Leader felt this project had really exciting potential. Wentworth Leisure Centre had recently been refurbished and the results of that had been amazing with over 350 people accessing services each week.

RESOLVED that Council be recommended to approve the proposal to increase funding for the new Morpeth Leisure Centre currently included in the Medium Term Financial Plan at £18m to £21m. Additional funding was required to cover flood mitigation work and to incorporate a community services hub consisting of customer services, library and adult learning.

(49.2) Children's Social Care LIFT software module

RESOLVED that the acquisition of LIFT software licences at a cost of £55,000 be approved, to be funded from the Person Centred Care Information Provision within the current capital programme.

(49.3) Rural Growth Network programme

RESOLVED that an increase in the Council's Capital programme to include an additional £1m of Regional Growth Fund (RGF) grant from the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (NELEP), be approved which will enable the Rural Growth Network programme to be extended from March 2020 to April 2021.

(49.4) Contracts in Excess of Delegated Limits

RESOLVED that approval be given to the award of a contract for the refurbishment of Blyth Sports Centre, at an estimated cost of £5,500,000.

50. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

- (a) That under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item on the Agenda as it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A of the 1972 Act, and
- (b) That the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure for the following reasons:

Agenda Item	Paragraph of Part I of Schedule 12A
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10	3 - This report contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
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The public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the interest in disclosure because disclosure would adversely affect the Authority's ability to conduct its affairs.

51. REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR: FINANCE

Proposed Merger of Northumberland County Council Pension Fund with Tyne and Wear Pension Fund

The report sought Cabinet support for NCC's pursuit of a merger of Northumberland County Council Pension Fund with Tyne and Wear Pension Fund to reduce LGPS administration costs charged via employer contributions to NCCPF's participating employers, including the Council (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix F, coloured pink and marked "Not for Publication").

RESOLVED that recommendations (a) and (b) in the report be approved.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....