NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

At a meeting of the **Cabinet** held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Morpeth on Tuesday 10 December 2019 at 10.00am.

PRESENT

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

CABINET MEMBERS

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

OTHER MEMBERS

Dodd, R.
Gallacher, B.
Swinburn, M.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Angus, K.	Executive Director of HR/OD and Deputy Chief Executive
Arnold, N.	Chief Information Officer
Aviston, S.	Head of School Organisation
Bradley, N.	Service Director – Strategic Commissioning and Finance
Elsdon, A.	Service Director: Finance
Hadfield, K.	Committee Services and Scrutiny Manager
Henry, L.	Legal Services Manager
Jones, P.	Service Director: Local Services
O'Farrell, R.	Interim Executive Director, Regeneration, Commercial and Economy
Roll, J.	Democratic Services Manager

Ch.'s Initials……

2 members of the press/public were in attendance.

64. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Sanderson and Riddle declared personal interests in item 5 on the agenda (Northumberland Climate Change Action Plan 2020-21) as members of the National Park Authority and in respect of the proposal to jointly fund a post to work on the programme.

65. REPORTS OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR: FINANCE

(1) Setting of the Council Tax Base 2020-21

The report advised Cabinet of the tax base calculation for 2020-21 for all domestic properties liable to pay council tax. The tax base must be set by the statutory deadline of 31 January 2020 (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix A).

Councillor Oliver presented the report advising that this was required to enable town and parish councils to set their precepts and so that the Council could set its budget in February. The council tax base was rising in Northumberland, with an increase of 2,052 band D equivalents. This was due to an increasing number of homes being built.

RESOLVED that the Council Tax base for 2020-21 be approved as detailed within Appendix A equating to 106,868.92 Band D equivalent dwellings. This was an increase of 2,052.21 Band D equivalents from 2019-20.

(2) 2019-20 Estimated Year End Collection Fund Balances - Council Tax and Business Rates

The report advised members of the estimated year end balances on the Collection Fund in relation to Council Tax and Business Rates for the year ending 31 March 2020 (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix B).

Councillor Oliver presented this regular report to members, highlighting the overall estimated surplus of £3.616m. The Council's share of this was £3.351m and the balance went to the Police and Crime Commissioner. He was pleased to report on a good collection rate, and that the overall picture was very good.

The Leader felt this demonstrated that the Council was well-run and he paid tribute to the staff involved. There had been some questlons raised at

Council from opposition members regarding the collection rate and this showed that it was strong and healthy.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) the overall estimated surplus on the Collection Fund for the year ending 31 March 2020 in relation to Council Tax of £3.616 million be noted; the Council's share being £3.351 million;

(b) the overall estimated surplus on the Collection Fund for the year ending 31 March 2020 in relation to Business Rates of £0.229 million be noted; the Council's share being £0.172 million;

(c) the distribution of the estimated Collection Fund surplus for Council Tax to the Northumbria Police & Crime Commissioner of £0.265 million and the distribution of the estimated Collection Fund surplus for Business Rates of £0.057 million to the Secretary of State be noted;

(d) the inclusion of the Council's share of the estimated Collection Fund balances of £3.351 million surplus and £0.172 million surplus, for Council Tax and Business Rates respectively, within the Council's budget 2020-21 be noted.

66. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Partnerships with NHS Bodies

The report updated the Cabinet on developments affecting partnership working with the NHS, and proposed updated partnership agreements between the Council and Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, and between the Council and Northumberland Clinical Commissioning Group (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix C).

Councillor Jones reported that good partnership working had existed for some time with the NHS but the time as now right for a review, particularly since the NTW NHS Foundation Trust had partnered with Cumbria.

Mr Bradley advised members that the opportunity would be taken to see what could be done to achieve a more seamless experience for people with care and support needs, both within social care and between social care teams and NHS services. The report's proposals would also allow better integration to be developed with NTW. Whilst it was not planned to restore the kind of organisational integration which had existed before 2013, officers and NTW were discussing greater alignment and co-location of specialist health and social care staff.

The Leader commented that the Council's relationships with the NHS were the envy of many other authorities, resulting in a much more efficient and improved service. These arrangements had been successful for many years for both the Council and the NHS, and he welcomed the opportunity to build on them.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) the Council's continuing commitment to integrated working with local NHS bodies, particularly in adult social care and public health, be confirmed;

(b) the extension of the Council's Partnership Agreement with Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust for a further year from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 be agreed;

(c) the Chief Executive be requested to arrange a full review of the partnership arrangement with Northumbria, to conclude by autumn 2020, taking account of the context set out in the report and including elected member involvement;

(d) Cabinet agree to the renewal of the Council's Partnership Agreement with Northumberland Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) for the commissioning and case management of NHS continuing health care (CHC) and other services from 1 April 2020, as an open-ended agreement which either party can terminate on six months' notice, and Cabinet note that changes to the financial amounts paid by the CCG will be negotiated separately as variations to the Agreement;

(e) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with relevant Cabinet members, to approve the necessary detailed modifications to the text of the two Partnership Agreements to implement these decisions, and to sign the modified agreements; and

(f) it be noted that discussions are taking place between officers of the Council and Northumberland, Tyne and Wear (NTW) NHS Foundation Trust about closer integration of operational services, including basing social workers who work with the same people as specialist NTW services alongside the staff in those services.

67. REPORT OF THE INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION, COMMERCIAL AND ECONOMY

Northumberland Climate Change Action Plan 2020-21

The report provided an update on the actions taken by the County Council since declaring a Climate Change Emergency in June 2019 and sought Cabinet approval to the proposed Climate Action Plan for 2020/21 attached as Appendix A, and the associated additional capital and recurring revenue expenditure (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix D, along with the report of the Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC circulated at the meeting).

Councillor Sanderson introduced the report. This issue remained a priority for the Administration and the Action Plan would be going to Council in January for sign off. He thanked officers for their work and skills in reaching the current position, and highlighted that the key point of the report was that it allocated significant capital sums and annual revenue funding so that the actions identified in the report could be delivered. He drew members' attention to some points in the report:-

- There was a firm commitment to understanding the value of trees and every household would have the opportunity to have a tree by 2025 through the free tree scheme.
- Funding had been received from the Forestry Commission following a bidding process to plant mature trees.
- Work would continue to support the Northumberland to Newcastle passenger train line through bids for funding, but there would also be an in house review of public transport.
- Access to the electric vehicle charging infrastructure would increase through the provision of over 100 EV charging points.
- Walking and cycling would be made more attractive and accessible through the efforts of Councillor Homer and the Cycling and Walking Board. This would ensure that the local cycling and walking infrastructure plans were finalised and were already making an impact on the LTP.
- An engagement officer had been appointed and the Steering Group were continuing to meet. The Commission was in the process of being formed and would review the programme moving forward.

The Leader added his thanks to those already expressed to the staff involved for their hard work in making such progress in a short period of time, and to Councillor Sanderson, for leading on the issue.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) the current position and progress made since declaring a Climate Change Emergency in June 2019 be noted;

(b) the Climate Action Plan for 2020/21, as detailed in Appendix A, be approved;

(c) County Council be recommended to approve the provision of additional capital of £3,357,151 within the Medium Term Financial Plan to cover the period 2020/21 to 2022/23;

(d) County Council be recommended to approve the provision of recurring annual revenue expenditure of £80,125 from 2020/21,

(e) authority be delegated to the Service Director - Local Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Environment and Local Services, to update and amend the action plan so that it remains accurate and further measures can be progressed in a timely manner; and

(f) the report of the Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC be noted.

68. REPORT OF THE CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER

Update on the Rollout of Microsoft Office 365

The report updated members on progress being made on the implementation of Microsoft's Office 365 product, including the outcomes of the business pilot, and requested support for an adjustment to revenue budgets to manage the additional cost of the programme of work (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix E).

Councillor Oliver introduced the report and advised that the difference in cost of Google, as originally anticipated, was no longer there, and partner organisations had not moved over as expected. This created difficulties in communication and exchange of information. A three month trial of Office 365 had been carried out which had been very successful and the product had a range of benefits, including better efficiency.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) the update on the programme to implement Microsoft Office 365 be received;

(b) Cabinet support the Leader of the Council's decision to approve the following points as a matter of urgent business, in accordance with the Council's Financial Standing Orders, in order to secure the time limited discount offered by the Supplier:

a. Microsoft Office 365 is implemented corporately to replace the Google Suite of applications

b. That additional revenue funding is allocated to the Information Services budget to cover the additional costs to the levels set out below:

i. 2019/2020 - £185,500 (to be funded non-recurrently from contingency)

ii. 2020/2021 - £371,000 (to be identified as a budget pressure and included in the Council's 2020-21 budget)

iii. 2021/2022 - £416,000 (an additional £45,000 to be identified as a budget pressure and included in the Council's 2020-21 budget and MTFP)

iv. 2022/2023 - £416,000

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

Summary of New Capital Proposals Considered by Officer Capital Strategy Group

The report summarised proposed amendments to the Capital Programme considered by the officer Capital Strategy Group at its meeting held on 8 November 2019 (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix F).

69.1 Ad Gefrin Distillery and Visitor Centre

Members welcomed this very exciting and interesting project for the north of the County, which hopefully would encourage more people to visit. It was commented that fifty new jobs for the area would be very welcome, and would breathe new life to the locale.

RESOLVED that a grant award of £600,000 be approved, subject to the full funding package for the project being secured and confirmation of the State Aid solution. The grant will be met from the Strategic Regeneration Projects provision within the 2020-21 capital programme.

69.2 Hexham High Streets Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ)

The Leader thanked officers for their work in securing this funding.

Councillor Homer advised that this had been well received in the town and had brought a lot of positivity and organisations together. Historic England had acknowledged the County's application as one of the best in the country, which was a great accolade for the officers involved. Work was continuing on a further two bids and lots of ideas were being generated to improve the high street. A cultural network was also being set up which would bring huge benefits.

Other members spoke in support of this proposal.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) Cabinet approve the capital budget requirement of £1,011,501, to be met from the Strategic Regeneration Projects provision with the capital programme for 2020-20 to 2022-23;

(b) Cabinet agree the submission of the final Hexham HSHAZ scheme programme design to Historic England national office by the deadline of 20 December 2019, and;

(c) authority be delegated to the Interim Executive Director of Regeneration, Commercial and Economy to enter into a formalised agreement with Historic England for NCC to deliver the agreed scheme as the lead partner.

69.3 Children's Home (New Build)

Councillor Daley sought member support for this, which would both reduce the need to send children out of County, and also made financial sense. Eleven out of thirty children currently resided in Northumberland homes, the rest were in regulated providers across the country.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) Cabinet approve the proposal to build 2 new children's homes at Pegswood and Hadston at a cost of £1,296,000, to be met through the Children's Homes Provision included in the medium term capital plan; and

(b) as the existing medium term programme only includes a provision of £1,200,000 for the project, Cabinet recommends County Council to approve the additional budget for the project of £96,000 when the Budget 2020-21 is agreed in February 2020.

69.4 HRA Affordable Housing – New Builds

RESOLVED that the capital budget requirement of £10,202,000 for the 5 projects be approved, to be met from the 'HRA Re-provision, Re-modelling and New Build' provision within the capital programme.

70. REPORT OF THE FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY EXCLUSIONS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Cabinet was asked to consider a report from the Exclusions Task and Finish Group which was considered by Family and Children's Services OSC at their meeting on 28 November 2019 (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix F1).

Councillor Daley spoke on the report advising that this had been an issue for many years, mostly in a small number of schools, and reaching an all time high in 2017-18. A Scrutiny cross party working group had been formed and carried out an intensive and wide ranging piece of work to address the rising level of exclusions. Membership of the Group had included representatives of schools where there had been issues, and of schools which were high

performers. This had enabled information and good practice to be shared and there had been a 27% reduction in exclusions already.

As Chair of the Group, Councillor Swinburn commented that it had been important to get a balanced view from the Working Group and to get advice from across the country about the successful methods of tackling this issue. The previous reactive approach to dealing with exclusions had had a significant cost implication. The alternative approach would reduce costs and help individuals in their home life and in life opportunities. He welcomed the improvements which had already been made from the more focussed approach, and he hoped all members of the Council would endorse the report's recommendations. He drew members' specific attention to recommendation 1 in the report.

Members spoke in strong support of the work carried out by Scrutiny on this, which demonstrated its value when carried out well. Anything which brought a more strategic approach to the issue was to be welcomed. Councillor Daley suggested that authority be delegated to the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services, in consultation with himself as portfolio holder, to ensure that the Working Group's recommendations were developed and implemented, and that a progress report be made back to Cabinet in due course. Members supported this.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) the content of the report be noted;

(b) the recommendations as detailed in the body of the report be endorsed; and

(c) authority be delegated to the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services, in consultation with the portfolio holder for Children's Services, to ensure that the Working Group's recommendations are developed and implemented, and a progress report be made back to Cabinet in due course

71. 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
11	3 - Information relating to (the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). The public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the interest in disclosure as the Council would not be able to secure value for money for the public purse if it were to disclose the expenditure proposed to be incurred by the authority for the supply of goods or services in advance of the main works contract procurement exercise being completed.

72. REPORT OF THE INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION, COMMERCIAL AND ECONOMY

Union Chain Bridge - Approval for Award of Main Works Contract

The report sought approval from Cabinet for the Interim Executive Director of Regeneration, Commercial and Economy, in consultation with the Head of Shared Procurement Service and Cabinet Member for Environment and Local Services, to be authorised to award the Union Chain Bridge, Main Works Contract, provided that the value of the contract was within the agreed capital budget provision for the project (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix G, coloured pink and marked not for publication).

RESOLVED that recommendations one and two, as detailed in the report, be approved.

CHAIR……..

DATE…….

Ch.'s Initials……

Cabinet, 10 December 2019