

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

At a remote meeting of the **Cabinet** held on Tuesday 23 June 2020 at 1.00pm.

PRESENT

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

CABINET MEMBERS

Daley, W.
Homer, C.R.
Jones, V.

Oliver, N.
Sanderson, H.G.H.
Wearmouth, R.

OTHER MEMBERS

Dodd, R.

Flux, B.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Angus, K.

Bridges, A.
Hadfield, K.

Hand, C.
Henry, L.
Hunter, P.
Lally, D.
McEvoy-Carr, C.

McLoughlin, J.

O'Farrell, R.
Roll, J.

Executive Director of HR/OD and
Deputy Chief Executive
Head of Communications
Democratic and Electoral Services
Manager
Executive Director of Finance
Legal Services Manager
Service Director: Policy
Chief Executive
Executive Director: Adult Social
Care and Children's Services
Executive Director: Regeneration,
Commercial and Economy
Interim Executive Director: Place
Head of Democratic and Electoral
Services

Ch.'s Initials.....

111. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Riddle.

112. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Covid-19 - Northumberland County Council Response

The report provided members with a full update on the impact of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic on the work of Northumberland County Council and an overview of the Council's immediate emergency response from mid-March until publication date of the report. The report also provided members with a summary of the Council's response to the Covid-19 emergency and the implications for council services, as they were currently understood (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix A).

The Chief Executive made a presentation to members on the Council's emergency response covering both the internal and external arrangements which had been put in place to support communities (copy of presentation attached to the signed minutes). She thanked staff, members and the public for the support which had been provided to the Executive Team which had enabled them to ensure that the right arrangements were in place. Civil contingency arrangements had been enacted along with the Council's business continuity plans and existing pandemic plans. This had helped to ensure that the Council's priority had been on the health and safety of residents.

Some of the work undertaken in service areas included:-

- Revised arrangements to support the most vulnerable children and families. Staff had gone above and beyond their usual jobs to ensure families were safe, including staff fostering children and over 22,000 calls had been made to support families across the County.
- The majority of schools in the County had been open during the lockdown for vulnerable children and to support key workers, and she thanked headteachers, teaching staff and Unions across Northumberland for making this possible. She looked forward to further supporting the schools to open more fully as things progressed.
- The Northumberland Communities Together initiative had shown how residents, communities, staff and members and partner organisations could pull together. Over 1000 volunteers and 300 community groups, town and parish councils had been involved to ensure families across Northumberland had had the support they needed.
- The Business Hub, staffed by staff from Finance, had taken on new roles in paying out grants from government to the business community and she thanked businesses for continuing to work where they could.

- Communications had been maintained throughout to keep the public updated. A special edition of the Northumberland News had gone to every household to ensure that the more vulnerable residents had a direct communication from the Council.
- Over 15,000 outbound calls had been made to shielded and vulnerable residents and families and over 6000 calls had been received, and she paid tribute to the teams of Customer Services staff who had undertaken this work.
- Work was now ongoing on opening a whole range of services including HWRCs, car parks, public toilets, care services and wider business support services. Health and safety was still a priority and work was currently being carried out to support other services in getting ready to reopen.
- On adult social care, the priority was to ensure that people were safe, and staff had worked very closely with care homes on PPE and the national agenda.

Councillor Jones had been acutely aware of the challenges facing the care sector and was also mindful of the exceptional work which had been carried out in a variety of settings. She wished to place on record her sincere thanks to all staff who had been involved in caring for vulnerable people without thought for themselves. Providers of adult social care had been under significant pressure and it was testament to them that they had maintained delivery of essential care and support.

The greatest difficulty they had faced was getting PPE for staff and this had been a national issue. The Council had worked tirelessly to track down its own supplies and had been able to source significant stocks and set up its own operation through the Community Hub. A number of donations including PPE and hand sanitiser had been received from communities and businesses and she thanked those involved for that. She also thanked care staff across Northumberland for everything they had done, which was very much appreciated.

Members then viewed a short video featuring Lucy Craig from Craig Healthcare, a care home provider, on her experiences of the pandemic.

The Leader commented that he was very proud of the way the Council had led the County through the crisis. This had included setting up the Community Hub to ensure a coordinated effort, supporting businesses across the County and being one of the most effective authorities in the country in paying out £86m in grants, and supporting the care sector through the provision of additional funding and access to free PPE. Advice on infection control continued to be provided.

Councillor Homer acknowledged there had been some real challenges in dealing with this situation. The Council had achieved some excellent results across its services and the initiatives mentioned had worked very well. Communication had been excellent and she expressed her thanks to the

senior officer team, heads of service, and all staff, Cabinet members, partner organisations, voluntary and community sector and town and parish councils.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the impact of the coronavirus emergency on Northumberland County Council be noted;
- (b) the work undertaken to date by the Council be acknowledged;
- (c) further reports be received on the work being undertaken by the County Council to develop a longer term resilience and recovery plan to ensure the ongoing delivery of statutory and key council services at this time; and
- (d) the Overview and Scrutiny Committees be invited to examine the recovery plans for the Council services areas within their remits, and to make regular reports and recommendations to Cabinet on their findings.

113. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Covid-19 - Planning for Recovery in Northumberland

The report outlined the Council's plans to support residents, businesses and communities to recover from the Covid-19 crisis in the coming weeks and months (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix B).

The report was introduced by the Leader who referred to the PM's announcement that morning about the further easing of restrictions which would be particularly important to Northumberland, and was welcomed in terms of getting the economy and the tourism industry back to normal.

The Council had performed very strongly during the crisis and achieved many amazing things with partners. He thanked the Chief Executive and her team, and all staff, for their efforts. The focus now had to be on the economic recovery of the County and getting this back on track was his main priority. Covid had been a shock but the County had not lost its strengths in terms of innovation, skills and natural assets. He did not underestimate the scale of the challenge as figures indicated that the UK economy had shrunk by 20%, and investment in the UK was predicted to decrease by 25%.

Northumberland had seen a 62% rise in unemployment between March and April. He was determined that the Council would play its part in getting the economy back on track and he pledged six commitments:-

- They would ensure the tourism economy came back stronger than ever.
- Plans to invest in new infrastructure across the County would be progressed.

- The Council would work with Government to accelerate plans for the Northumberland Line which would help revitalise town centres including Bedlington and Ashington.
- The Covid Business hub would become a permanent feature of operations to provide support and advice to business.
- Plans for the delivery of the climate change action plan would be progressed.
- Apprenticeships and training opportunities would be made available to help develop the skills needed for future careers.

This report was the first in a series over the coming months which would set out the Administration's high level plans for supporting recovery. He pledged that members would listen to businesses and communities and would work with them and with Government and regional partners to take recovery forward. This had in fact already started, and he introduced a brief video message from James Ramsbotham, Chief Executive of the North East Chamber of Commerce.

Councillor Wearmouth reported on the Council's plan for economic recovery and regeneration including:-

- Advance and the Council had been working with business to provide support where they could and £86m of grants had been directed to local businesses. The Council had been recognised as one of the five fastest Councils in distributing those funds. Over 1700 support packages had been provided and where some business had not initially qualified for the packages, the Council had lobbied government, along with MPs, to ensure the delivery of a further £4.6m of support, and £1.5m from the NoT Combined Authority.
- He thanked Councillor Oliver, Chris Hand, Juliemma McLoughlin, Julie Dodds and their teams for their hard work in supporting businesses during a very difficult time.
- He thanked businesses and traders who had met the challenge, supported staff and begun planning for the future.
- The Council had done its best to listen to concerns and suggestions from businesses and this would continue.
- The Administration's ambitious plans for economic growth remained in place though these would need to adapt. The green growth agenda would continue and the regeneration of town centres would be driven forward with private sector investment supported with funding from the County Council and Government.
- Plans for better transport links would be accelerated, including the Northumberland Line and dualling of the A1.

Councillor Daley reported on the recovery issues for young people in the County and introduced a short video featuring Youth Cabinet members.

- Regarding Children's Services, the whole team had been ahead of the game working with schools and partners to ensure that services continued to be delivered. He thanked Cath McEvoy-Carr and all of her team, and also the

schools, alternative providers and transport providers who had made this happen.

- School places for vulnerable children and those of key workers had resulted in some of the highest attendance records in the North East, with 52,000 attendances in the first ten weeks of lockdown.
- Education staff continued to work with schools to help them make adjustments as more pupils returned to school.
- Online learning packages were supporting both pupils and apprentices towards achieving their qualifications.
- The Authority was ready to launch its teaching task force appeal. This would encourage former and newly qualified teachers to help young people recover from learning loss as a result of Covid. The Council would also be running 28 summer pop up sites over the summer with support from the Newcastle United Foundation.
- Plans for recovery including taking forward the education challenge to boost attainment, which would take into account the additional challenges that Covid had brought. Schools would be supported to develop a recovery curriculum to ease the transition back to school and reduce the gap. The Government had allowed the Authority flexibility to allow Yr 4 and Yr 8 pupils to return to school safely where they could. An education improvement board would be established to drive forward the attainment agenda and new schools would continue to be built. Special needs education would continue to be reviewed.

Councillor Sanderson reported on local services matters as follows:-

- Waste collection had continued throughout which had been a tremendous achievement, and basic roadworks had also continued. Larger scale roadworks had recently restarted which was very good news.
- HWRCs had also reopened at quite an early stage which had taken a great deal of partnership working with SUEZ and intensive work by officers.
- More people had been enjoying both urban and country parks during the crisis and there would be further announcements on country park investments to come.
- Teams had assisted with signage in the reopening of town centres and the public had been very appreciative of the work which had been done by them.
- Regarding the next stages of the climate change action plan, the major tree planting programme would be initiated and work already done would be built on to bring about the changes which were needed.

Councillor Homer reported on matters within her portfolio as follows:-

- Tourism businesses had taken a huge hit from Covid, and whilst other businesses had been able to get support from Government, most tourism businesses had effectively been shut down at their busiest time, threatening their long term viability. The Authority had pushed the Government to extend the support to tourism related businesses who had initially not qualified.

- Tourism was massive to the Northumberland economy - over 10.5 million visitors spending over 1 billion pounds in the County, and supporting over 13,000 jobs. The impact of Covid could halve the number of visitors and reduce the spend to around £370m with thousands of jobs put at risk.
- The Council had a package of exciting measures to support the sector, and if there was to be an upsurge in people holidaying at home, then the sector would be ready to maximise every opportunity. The Discover Our Land Programme would be made bigger, including the launch of a new digital platform. Other work continued behind the scenes such as developing the Hadrian's Wall Partnership and engaging with the Government to deliver the cycling and walking strategy, which would encourage visitors and help with the climate change targets. £1.5m had been secured from the Combined Authority which would be used for a range of measures to support business and the recovery of the sector.
- Efforts would continue to promote all that was great about the County. Listening had been a key theme all through the crisis, this would continue going forward and the Council and Northumberland Tourism would work together on the recovery plans.

Members then watched a short video message from one of the tourism businesses in the County.

Councillor Daley commented that there were challenges but also fantastic opportunities for the Council and sector going forward. He stressed that the Council was very much taking a joined up approach across its services including inspiring apprentices to come and work in the tourism sector.

The Leader commented that the Administration was now clearly focussed on building an ambitious and prosperous future for the County and was determined that there would be a strong economic recovery throughout the County.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Cabinet agree the initial plans and priorities to support economic and social recovery from the Covid crisis across Northumberland; and
- (b) Cabinet agree to receive further reports on recovery planning as the Council moves further into the recovery phase in the coming months.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....