

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

At a remote meeting of the **Cabinet** held on Tuesday 7 July 2020 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillor P. 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.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Angus, K.

Arnold, N.
Bradley, N.

Hadfield, K.

Hand, C.
Lally, D.
McLoughlin, J.

O'Farrell, R.

Executive Director of HR/OD and
Deputy Chief Executive
Chief Information Officer
Service Director – Strategic
Commissioning and Finance
Democratic and Electoral Services
Manager
Executive Director of Finance
Chief Executive
Executive Director: Regeneration,
Commercial and Economy
Interim Executive Director: Place

114. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 9 June 2020, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

Ch.'s Initials.....

115. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

Write Offs 2019-20

The report provided details of debt written off during the 2019-20 financial year (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix A), and was presented by Councillor Oliver.

This was an annual report on the level of debt write offs. Provision was made within the Council's accounts for debt write off, so once a debt was actually written off it made little impact on the Council's books.

He highlighted the debt being written off in each of the categories and provided some explanation about them. The report demonstrated prudent financial management and collection rates were higher than the average. He was comfortable with the levels of write off and the proactive approach being taken, and he commended the report to members.

The Leader thanked the staff for their work.

RESOLVED that the content of the report be noted.

116. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Update on the Local Full Fibre Network Programme

The report updated members on the progress of the Local Full Fibre Network (LFFN) Programme and requested approval to utilise £932,111 from the Councils existing approved Capital Programme to complete the delivery of Full Fibre Connectivity to the remaining public buildings in Northumberland not covered by the DCMS/BDUK grant (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix B).

Councillor Oliver advised that the Council had been successful in a bid through the North of Tyne CA to a £12m programme to provide broadband in public buildings across the County. This was a very important development as it would create a greater broadband structure and roll it out into areas that currently did not have it. It was also important to the efficient delivery of Council services particularly in education, providing the opportunity to use digital technology in small rural schools where resources were shared. Officers had worked very hard with BDUK to get this across the line, and he welcomed the £932,000 being brought back into the County and invested into this project.

In response to a question from the Leader regarding timescale, Councillor Oliver advised that BT Openreach had already started work and December 2021 was the cut off date, though one or two installations would spill over beyond that. Improvements should be seen within the next few months.

Regarding other similar projects, Councillor Oliver advised that the Authority had been successful through the Borderlands Growth Deal in establishing a £2m voucher project, and the Council was also putting money into vouchers, so that where it was too expensive to connect a business or home to broadband by traditional methods, the vouchers could subsidise that and get connections put in. This was already making a real difference to rural communities.

Councillor Daley referred to the roll out of £250,000 of IT equipment and dongles to young people. This was a joined up effort in rolling out broadband but it was also about addressing learning loss as a result of Covid-19, which was absolutely vital.

Councillor Oliver detailed some of the funding bids which had been submitted to ensure that the County was accessing all impossible sources of support.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the update on the progress of the Local Full Fibre Network programme be received;
- (b) the Leader of the Council's decision to approve the following points as a matter of urgent business, in accordance with the Council Financial Standing Orders be endorsed, in order to ensure the delivery of the programme progress in a timely manner; and
- (c) £932,111 currently included within the Council's Capital Programme for Community Broadband and Phase 2B Gainshare be utilised to support the completion of the Full Fibre programme to the remainder of the public buildings that will not be funded by the LFFN grant.

117. 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 on 5 June 2020 (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix C).

117.1 Holy Island and Seahouses Public Toilets Refurbishment

Councillor Sanderson advised that many councils were either closing their public toilets or changing the way the service was provided. However, this Administration felt that they were very important, and were looking to improve

facilities, firstly in key tourist areas. Bamburgh had just been completed and Holy Island and Seahouses were next to be significantly improved. These toilets would benefit from Changing Places facilities to assist those with more complex disabilities and their carers, and he hoped members would support the proposals.

RESOLVED that Cabinet approve the refurbishments and the associated budget requirement of £315,270, to be funded from the Stewardship Fund within the Council's approved capital programme for 2020-21.

117.2 Football Foundation Grant Hexham QE High School

Councillor Homer advised this facility was not just for the students at Hexham Queen Elizabeth High School, but would benefit the whole community and wider area. There had been a huge demand for these facilities and she was very pleased to welcome the grant which was the result of a joint piece of work with the Hadrian Learning Trust.

RESOLVED that Cabinet accept the grant award from the Football Foundation of £482,575, and accordingly approve an increase in the overall budget provision for the Hexham Schools project from £40,810,000 to £41,292,575.

117.3 Ponteland Section 106 Highway Improvements

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Cabinet note that an overall funding contribution of £390,000 for highway improvements has been secured via a Section 106 agreement from the former Police Headquarters development site in Ponteland;
- (b) Cabinet note that the first tranche of this funding amounting to £170,000 has been released to the Council by the developer, and approve that this amount be added to the Council's 2020-21 capital programme to cover the works identified in paragraphs 8.6 and 8.7; and
- (c) authority for any further work requirements beyond those proposed in paragraphs 8.6 and 8.7, but within the £170,000 budget allocation, be delegated to the Executive Director – Place and Portfolio Holder for Environment & Local Services.

117.4 Berwick Leisure Centre

The Leader commented that work was already underway on this very exciting and impressive project. Work had continued during the recent pandemic and would be a wonderful facility for Berwick and the whole of North Northumberland.

RESOLVED that Cabinet recommend County Council to approve an increase in the project's budget of £1.347 million – to be funded by additional

borrowing. The additional budget is required for the 2022-23 financial year of the Council's capital programme.

117.5 Ponteland Schools and Leisure Project

The Leader was pleased to report that work had continued during the pandemic, however, the pace of work had slowed a little due to social distancing and the need to change ways of working. This meant delivery of the project would be a month or two late necessitating the temporary use of some mobile classrooms and therefore the increased cost. The design was extremely impressive and would be an amazing facility for the area.

Councillor Daley commented that the leisure and learning complex project had already received national and international recognition and the delivery of parts of the equipment from other countries had contributed to the delay. Also, some of the building materials had been diverted to build a Nightingale hospital in London.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Cabinet note that, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the revised scheme completion date will be delayed until 22 October 2020;
- (b) Cabinet approve an increase in the project's capital budget of £2.414 million made up of £1.000 million of underspends from within the existing approved budget, £1.264 million of additional external resources and £0.150 million of additional NCC capital resource (see next recommendation);
- (c) as part of this new requirement, County Council be recommended to approve the £0.150m of additional NCC capital funding – capital receipts; and
- (d) Cabinet approve the additional revenue budget requirement of £0.928 million in respect of the temporary mobile classrooms to be funded from Council revenue contingency.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....