

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

At a remote meeting of the **Cabinet** held on Tuesday 10 November 2020 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillor G. Sanderson
(Leader of the Council, in the Chair)

CABINET MEMBERS

Dodd, R.	Riddle, J.R.
Jones, V.	Watson, J.G.
Oliver, N.	Wearmouth, R.
Renner-Thompson, G.	

OTHER MEMBERS

Beynon, J.	Pattison, W.
Flux, B.	Stewart, G.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Angus, K.	Executive Director of HR/OD and Deputy Chief Executive
Bradley, N.	Service Director – Strategic Commissioning and Finance
Hadfield, K.	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Hand, C.	Executive Director of Finance
Lally, D.	Chief Executive
Lancaster, H.	Principal Solicitor
McLoughlin, J.	Executive Director: Regeneration, Commercial and Economy
McEvoy-Carr, C.	Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services
O'Farrell, R.	Interim Executive Director: Place
Roll, J.	Head of Democratic and Electoral Services

133. MINUTES

Ch.'s Initials.....

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 13 October 2020, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

134. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

Budget 2021-22 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2021-2024

The report provided an update on the development of the 2021-22 Budget and the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) covering the period 2021 to 2024. The report also detailed budget proposals for 2021-22 to meet the budget gap as a basis for budget consultation, prior to the receipt of the Local Government Finance Settlement 2021-22 in December 2020 (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix A, along with the report of the Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC).

Councillor Oliver presented the report and highlighted that this was the fourth and most challenging budget he had presented, due mostly to covid based uncertainty. He thanked officers and members for the work which had gone into achieving the current position but there was still a lot of work to do, including consultation, a public event, LAC consultation and Scrutiny in January before the draft budget was considered by Cabinet in February.

A one year settlement was expected from the Government in December due to the current level of uncertainty. The Authority had lobbied hard and he was hopeful of a generous or at least manageable settlement announcement. He referred to the savings proposals on page 8 of the report adding that the gap was currently £8m and that some reserves may need to be used. The key principles and the budget timetable were set out in the report.

The report had been considered by Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC the day before. There had been a lot of questions asked, to which responses would be provided.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the revisions to the assumptions within the 2021-22 Budget be noted;
- (b) the budget balancing measures for 2021-22 totalling £8.299 million be approved as a basis for budget consultation, prior to the receipt of the Local Government Finance Settlement 2021-22;
- (c) Cabinet note that further work is required to refine the Medium-Term Financial Plan and that there are still budget balancing measures required to be identified over the term of the Medium-Term Financial Plan; and
- (d) the report of the Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC be noted.

135. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ADULT CARE

Discretionary Grants for Adaptations to Housing for Disabled People

The report recommended the adoption of a policy permitting the discretionary use of the budget for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs), to make possible more flexible responses than were permitted within the mandatory national DFG scheme, in situations where this would be a more effective way of achieving the same objectives (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix B, along with the report of the Health and Wellbeing OSC).

Councillor Jones introduced the report, highlighting to members that the Authority had a duty to provide grant assistance for adaptations to meet the needs of disabled people. This was provided in the form of a grant from the Government. The purpose of the report was to provide more flexibility within the policy to allow a greater range of changes and support to people in their own homes to meet the needs of their disabilities.

Neil Bradley advised members that the report's proposals would address three main problems:

- It would allow the ability to move house where this was a better option than adaptations.
- It would provide the ability to go above the £30,000 threshold for larger adaptations and thereby reduce the demand on the children's and adult services revenue budgets.
- It would provide discretion for officers to step in with grants when normally the mandatory means test would not allow a grant to be made.

Councillor Beynon advised that the Committee had supported all of the proposals, particularly the extra flexibility it would provide on means testing and allowing officers to work more efficiently.

In response to a query from Councillor Watson, Neil Bradley advised that the some of the grant funding could go towards supporting moving costs, but it would mainly be about supporting the cost of house purchase.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the discretionary grants policy attached as an Appendix to the report be adopted;
- (b) Cabinet note that funding for grants made under this policy would come from the grant to the local authority for DFGs; and
- (c) the report of the Health and Wellbeing OSC be noted.

136. 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 1 October 2020 (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix C).

136.1 Five Arches Park, Berwick (Parks Enhancement Programme)

The Leader spoke in support of this report. The pandemic crisis had shown just how valuable parks were for everyone to enjoy the outdoors.

RESOLVED that the grant award of £25,000 from the MHCLG's Pocket Parks programme be accepted and an overall budget requirement for the project of £68,000 within the 2020-21 capital programme be approved, including an allocation of £43,000 from the existing Parks Enhancement provision.

136.2 Grant Awards - Emergency Active Travel Fund Capital Funding and Ponteland Surface Water Flood Alleviation Scheme

Councillor Oliver commented this was a great example of how different organisations could work together to provide a joined up solution.

Councillor Watson commented that consultation had been ongoing for some time and there had been some good collaboration. He felt sure the cycle stands would be successful and widely used. The Leader suggested it would be good to have an update in a few months' time.

RESOLVED that

- the Department of Transport Emergency Active Travel Fund grant award of £69,960 be accepted and the associated budget provision in 2020-21 capital programme for the installation of cycle stands in town centres be approved; and
- the Environment Agency grant award of £323,000 for Ponteland Surface Water Flood Alleviation be accepted and the existing 2020-21 budget allocation for the Callerton Lane, Ponteland highway works be increased accordingly.

136.3 Ashington Academy – Refurbishment Grant

Neil Bradley advised that any underspends in the grant would be recovered.

Councillor Renner Thompson commented that this demonstrated the Administration's commitment to all schools in the county, not just those which were LA maintained.

RESOLVED that

- a grant award of £1,501,000 to Ashington Academy be approved, from the school refurbishments provision within the 2020-21 capital programme, for the refurbishment and remodelling of elements relating to historical backlog maintenance;

- Cabinet note that the funding for each of the identified elements in the scope of works is to be ring-fenced specifically against those items. Any underspends realised against any individual item will revert back to the Council, whilst any overspends will be the liability of the trust;
- Cabinet note that, as an Academy, the project will be delivered by the trust themselves, with the Council performing a monitoring role to ensure the scheme is delivered within the constraints of the funding; and
- Cabinet note the proposed spend profile and amendment of the capital programme phasing to reflect the estimated expenditure for 2020-21 of £394,350 and £1,106,650 for 2021-22.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....