



A COUNCIL THAT WORKS FOR EVERYONE

Corporate Plan 2017-21

**Revised Cabinet Draft
23 November 2017**

INTRODUCTION

[Section will be refreshed in February 2018 when final Plan is approved]

In May 2017, you gave us a clear mandate as to the Northumberland in which you want to live.

We are committed to ensuring that all of you:

- feel safe, valued, and part of your community
- live in distinctive vibrant places, which you value and in which you feel proud
- can easily get to work, to learning, and to the various facilities and services you want to use
- regardless of your age, have the right qualifications and skills to secure a good job that pays well and provides the prospect of a rewarding career

We are determined to work with every one of you to deliver this vision. Over the first few months of our office, I hope you feel that we have made a positive start and lived up to our manifesto pledges.

We hit the ground running by putting an immediate stop to the plans to demolish County Hall in Morpeth and build a new headquarters in Ashington. This means the 1,225 Council staff based in County Hall can concentrate on delivering services rather than worrying about where they might be moving to and it frees up the Portland Park site in Ashington for other opportunities that can benefit and reflect the wishes of the local community.

We pledged to create five Local Area Councils, with powers to make local decisions and responsibility to determine planning applications. We saw this through and the first round of meetings were held in June. We have also reignited our relationship with town and parish councils and regard them as a critical partner going forward.

We listened carefully to you and agreed there was a need to review the Local Development Plan to ensure that it is truly fit to address our future housing and economic needs, whilst respecting and protecting our beautiful county. In July, we withdrew the plan previously submitted to Government and we are now working towards a new strategy which we will consult with you on in the New Year.

Our war on potholes has started. Extra funding of £500,000 has been allocated for a new Northumberland Local Pothole Fund. This will complement our continued commitment to spend £20m on the maintenance of our roads and bridges.

Not everything, though, is as straightforward. We are carrying out a review of Arch to see whether its investment programme is best for the whole of Northumberland. We are also reviewing the Council's approach to leisure, arts, culture, heritage and library services. This will inform the future operation of Active Northumberland.

We are also starting to get to grips with the state of the Council's finances. We have commissioned an independent review to be clear about where we are and to define the scale of the challenge we have until the next County Council elections in 2021. This Corporate Plan sets out our ambitions for Northumberland over that period in the context of that review. Both give us a sound basis for preparing a medium term financial plan for 2018-21 and a budget that balances for 2018-19.

In so doing, we fully understand that the county faces a number of challenges. We are all ageing and living longer and our health and social care services need to reflect this. We also know that it can be tough for young people to access learning, source a good job, or get on the housing ladder - and as a result many leave the county. Too many households continue to feel hardships and the forthcoming introduction of Universal Credit potentially raises further challenges. We need to tackle these issues.

Our future success is largely set by what we achieve through our education. At the moment, young learners in Northumberland are being let down as we have one of the worst track records in the country on attaining qualifications. To transform this is our top priority. This has to be followed through by supporting our businesses to create more skilled jobs. We will work to support existing businesses to invest and grow, whilst also seeking to attract major investment externally to create not just more jobs but better, higher earning opportunities across our county. There are some existing success stories with business in Northumberland and we will work to make sure that there are many more in the next four years. Our county needs to be fit to measure up to the challenges of Brexit.

But we have a unique set of circumstances to drive a step change to our economy. I am personally involved in negotiations with Government to bring additional funds and powers through devolution to the county that will help in making us more competitive and in ensuring that everyone benefits from that economic growth. I hope that in the coming months we will have both a North of Tyne Devolution Deal and a Borderlands Growth Deal in place.

Together they will give us the means to deliver transformational projects such as the reopening of passenger rail services from Newcastle right through the south east of Northumberland, the creation of an international energy park on Blyth Riverside (Energy Central), and the delivery of a range of iconic cultural and tourism initiatives.

We want to fully involve you on this journey which will need us to take some hard decisions. My pledge to you all is that we will be clear and transparent in what we are trying to do - and we will keep you updated and engaged throughout as our plans move forward.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Peter Jackson".

Peter Jackson, Leader of the Council

“WE WANT TO BE EFFICIENT, OPEN AND WORK FOR EVERYONE” [HOW]

Our Vision and Values

[Section will be refreshed in February 2018 when final Plan is approved]

Our Vision focuses on making Northumberland a county which you regard as a great place to live, and in which you can access the things you enjoy, whilst having the opportunity to learn and thrive.

We are reviewing the organisational values of the Council to ensure that they reflect our ambitions for the next four years. We are engaging our staff so that we all have a shared ethos to how we as a Council will behave and operate under our stewardship.

These values will form the basis of a new organisational cultural strategy. The key themes of this emerging strategy include:

- Ensuring our services are customer focused
- Supporting communities and staff to embrace change and innovation
- Involving communities and staff in decisions which affect them
- Supporting communities to feel safe
- Creating a healthy and positive working environment

Our Operating Principles

There are five key traits that we want this Administration to be remembered by - that when you look back over our 4 years of office you feel we have consistently applied.

The first is **financial prudence**. We are aware that we have responsibility for a public pot of money to which you have all contributed to and as such we need to make sure that every penny of it is spent wisely. We will therefore adopt a robust business planning approach to how we make future investment decisions. We will also take a proportionate approach to our use of reserves, our level of borrowing, the scale of our capital programme, and our propensity for awarding grants and loans. This will be built from the independent review of the Council's finances.

We also want to be regarded as having been **resourceful**. We appreciate the need to make every pound count. We will therefore constantly challenge all of our service delivery to be lean and efficient and to embrace new ways of working that minimise waste and remove duplication. This will include entering into shared services with other

public sector agencies where this makes sense and does not weaken our ability to meet your needs as Northumberland residents - with our arrangements with Northumbria Healthcare acting as a benchmark. We will also take an ambitious approach to promoting our services and products to other agencies - again provided that this does not prejudice our capacity to respond to your needs. Equally, we want to get the most out of our arms-length organisations. We will fundamentally review how Arch, Active Northumberland, and Northumberland Tourism work so that they are delivering the right activities and offering value for money, whilst recognising they can access funding that is closed to Councils. In all of this, the views and ideas of our staff will be of paramount interest.

Despite this, we know that we will still face tough decisions that will not be universally popular. We will not take these lightly and pledge that we will always **listen to and consider** your views. We believe that the key actions we have taken in our first few months demonstrate that we will pay attention to and act on your concerns. So, we are not moving our headquarters out of the current County Hall; we have withdrawn the Local Plan to allow a reappraisal of the housing growth numbers; we have already released more funds for highway improvements; and we are reviewing our approach to home to school transport. This will continue throughout our term of office - and where there are conflicting opinions, we will explain why we took the decision we did.

We also want to be seen as **empowering**. At the heart of this is our commitment to take more decisions at a more local level. Our five new Local Area Councils (covering North Northumberland; Castle Morpeth; Ashington and Blyth; Cramlington, Bedlington and Seaton Valley; and Tynedale) already have delegated authority for certain planning and transport decisions and we anticipate that over the coming years their powers, budgets and influence will grow. We also appreciate that our networks of parish and town councils, and voluntary and community sector organisations are best placed to deliver certain services and activities. We will work with both to ensure that community-led solutions and approaches are taken forward.

Finally, we will seek to **collaborate** where it is in Northumberland's interests to do so. Our unstinting participation in securing a North of Tyne Devolution Deal (with Newcastle and North Tyneside) and a Borderlands Growth Deal (with Carlisle, Cumbria, Dumfries & Galloway, and Scottish Borders) illustrate our drive in this regard. To complement this and ensure that our residents benefit from any economic growth these Deals generate, we want to enter into new partnerships with our businesses and the region's universities. We need to harness their insight and enterprise to our collective horizons in what we are all capable of achieving.

“WE WANT YOU TO FEEL SAFE, HEALTHY, AND CARED FOR” [LIVING]

We are committed to ensuring that all of you feel safe, valued, and part of your community.

We all want to feel well. Good health and a feeling of wellbeing is one of the most important things to the majority of us and is as much to do with building on those assets that make us feel well as preventing the conditions that cause ill health such as smoking and drug and alcohol misuse. When we feel content and well we experience positive relationships and enjoy a good work and home life. The Council has a key role in supporting people and communities to achieve their potential and we know that you are Northumberland’s biggest asset. We want to ensure that positive choices are easy to make, that being out in your village, town or community is safe and welcoming, that you can enjoy walking and cycling to get from A to B or for fun with family and friends. We want to help you to enjoy a long and healthy life and we will support you to do this by providing a range of programmes which will help you achieve and maintain positive and healthy lifestyles in a way which suits you.

Having a decent roof over your head is fundamental to this health and well being. None of you should be forced to live on the streets, or in a “home” that is a health hazard or physically impedes independence. We therefore pledge that we will support any one of you facing this scenario to find fit-for-purpose accommodation for the long-term. We acknowledge that this will mean increasing the supply of both affordable and specialist supported housing, including extra care housing for older people. This remains a priority for us but any new building needs to be in the right place, at the right scale and for the right end-user. We want to have a constructive dialogue with you as to how we best achieve this to meet the specific needs of your community.

We also know that loss of dignity, being scared or feeling lonely can cause untold anxiety. We will not tolerate any form of abuse, and safeguarding your welfare will be of paramount concern. We will also provide tailored support for those of you with defined care and support needs in a way that puts you in control, and gives you the confidence and resilience to live independently as part of the wider community. Within this, we will promote Ageing Well to help older people stay active, connected and well. We are also keen to foster the basic human needs of friendship and belonging. We will do our best to support the retention of local meeting places - such as community centres, village halls, post offices, and public houses - through the co-location of in-demand Council services. Your role will be to use and animate these assets as bustling hubs that offer a rich tapestry of activities and events that engage everyone.

Struggling to make ends meet and being in debt has a debilitating effect. Supporting more of you into work and - just as importantly - those of who on low wages into better paid jobs is critical - an issue which we will return to later. But we also need to create a culture of good financial management. This is why we are fully behind the setting up of a Northumberland Community Bank. Regardless of your income level or your financial difficulties, this Bank will offer you sound independent advice on how best to manage your money; refer you to the benefits and support services you are entitled to; and give you access to ethical savings schemes and loan facilities that fit with your personal circumstances.

“WE WANT YOU TO LOVE WHERE YOU LIVE” [ENJOYING]

We are committed to ensuring that all of you live in distinctive vibrant places, which you value and in which you feel proud.

This starts with raising the standard of our local services. Whether we are emptying the bins, filling pot-holes or cutting roadside verges, we want you to be assured that we care about keeping the county’s streets and roads clean, tidy and safe. We understand that this will bring challenges given the size and extent of the county - and that, for some services, these will become even more acute in prolonged periods of dry, wet or cold weather. But we will respond as promptly as we can and keep you informed of what we are planning when. So, we ask you to play your part by refraining from dropping litter or dumping rubbish; recycling wherever possible; and making more journeys on foot, by bike, or by jumping on a bus or train.

We also appreciate the quality of the wider environment. Northumberland is blessed with stunning countryside and coastline that is peppered with a host of remarkable cultural and heritage assets and is home to a network of towns and villages that each have their own unique characteristics. We not only want to protect and improve this quality but also make sure that the places where you live, work and play continue to evolve and grow whilst retaining and deepening their appeal. We know this means planning the careful release of land for new development, maintaining the vibrancy of our town centres, and striving to keep essential local facilities and attractions open. The revised Local Plan will provide an overarching framework for this. But equally, you are the experts, you know your community. So we urge you to get involved - put your ideas forward. We have established Local Area Councils to help with this and complement other important local processes such as neighbourhood planning.

Community participation also extends to pursuing shared hobbies and interests; keeping fit and playing sport; and being creative through music, drama and the arts. We see this as vital - it binds us together, gives us self-worth, and improves our well-being by giving us a welcome release from the pressures of modern life. We are therefore committed to investing in our leisure and cultural assets, and to developing programmes that inspire more people to join in. In return, we trust you will continue to passionately support and run the clubs, societies, and venues that bring our communities to life.

“WE WANT YOU TO HAVE ACCESS TO THE THINGS YOU NEED” [CONNECTING]

We are committed to ensuring that all of you can easily get to work, to learning, and to the various facilities and services you want to use.

Access to high-speed and reliable digital connectivity will increasingly be central to achieving this. The technology is now capable of providing hyperfast broadband and we will work tirelessly to make this a reality through the progressive insertion of a “full fibre” network. This will complement our ongoing efforts to secure, as a minimum in the short term, superfast broadband to all properties. We will then have in place an infrastructure to enable improved productivity and business opportunity; as well as significantly increase consumer and learner choice and convenience.

Notwithstanding this, we also appreciate that not everything can or should be done online. Physical access, particularly given the proximity of the Tyneside conurbation and the extent of our rural area, remains important. So, we will continue to push for further improvements - beyond those already announced - to both the A1 and A69. In consultation with you, we will tackle congestion and accident black spots across the wider road network and within our main towns. We also believe that the existing rail line from Ashington through south east Northumberland to Newcastle Central Station is a dormant asset. We will seize the opportunity to open it up as a new economic corridor by reintroducing passenger services unlocking commercial investment along its length.

Maintaining and improving the quality of services on the wider bus and rail network is also critical. We will expand the availability of real time information so you have certainty as to when the next bus or train will arrive. We will also act as a broker between you and the commercial operators to maximise the reach and frequency of marginal services - challenging you both to come up with solutions that meet essential community travel needs at a “value for money” rate. For our part, we will ensure that our home to school transport commitments are met as efficiently as possible - and with community use in mind. We will also address the unfair situation that students aged between 16 and 18 face in travelling to their nearest place of education.

We highlighted earlier the importance we place on protecting community assets and encouraging regular walking and cycling. Both also have the added advantage of reducing car journeys. Nonetheless, the geographical scale of the county is such that we have to accept that driving will remain a necessary way to get around for many of you. But we can at least make it cleaner. We will insert a comprehensive network of electric car charging points that give you the assurance that you will never run out of power on county roads.

“WE WANT YOU TO ACHIEVE AND REALISE YOUR POTENTIAL” [LEARNING]

We are committed to ensuring that all of you, regardless of your age, have the right qualifications and skills to secure a good job that pays well and provides the prospect of a rewarding career.

We are under no illusion that improving our education performance represents our single biggest challenge. The latest GCSE results have starkly illustrated that the current approach is not working and that our young people have been let down. We need to equip all school leavers with the right skills and give them, and the wider workforce, the opportunity to grow and develop those skills.

We **will** therefore bring about fundamental change to the whole lifelong learning system from early years, school age qualification attainment, progression to Further/Higher Education and work, through to employability, in-work learning and retraining.

This will make for some tough conversations and difficult decisions. But we need to create a new and shared culture that fundamentally lifts aspirations and puts learning excellence at the forefront of all of our minds. It will require leadership at all levels and throughout our mixed economy of education providers.

As part of this, we believe the greater participation of our business community is critical. We need to involve them in our schools more. This could range from a firm becoming a school sponsor to more business leaders becoming governors or enterprise advisers. They can particularly help in promoting technical education (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) where we know there are local career opportunities. We also need to work with all our companies to support them in offering apprenticeships, training and skills development for their workforce.

The University sector also has a key role to play. We need to increase their visibility and presence within the county - not only as a source of inspiration and motivation for our learners, but also as a catalyst and engine for ideas and innovation.

Digital skills are now a prerequisite for the modern workplace. Increasingly, not only do we need to have a grasp of the basics, we also need to grow and adapt our expertise as the technology develops. For this reason, we see the promotion of digital literacy as a fundamental strand of our learning strategy and will work with you to develop appropriate training that will help you to realise your full potential.

“WE WANT TO ATTRACT MORE AND BETTER JOBS” [THRIVING]

We are committed to ensuring that our businesses are booming by doing everything in our power to create the right conditions for economic growth. We want to be recognised as a county that is open for business.

Key to this is securing the resilience and expansion of our existing companies. This means working with the larger international brands to maximise the success of their operations based within the county. It also involves supporting the extensive range of our smaller and medium sized enterprises to maximise their competitiveness whether through scaling up, extending their reach, diversification, or innovation.

Indeed, our ambition is for Northumberland to be nationally recognised as the place to be if you are a large company or small business owner who wants to both prosper and be located in or close to a high-quality rural setting. This attraction of new inward investment will also focus on reinforcing the supply chains of our niche sectors in advanced engineering; energy; food and drink; healthcare and life sciences; and advanced manufacturing. In particular, the nationally-significant, deep-water energy park planned on the River Blyth (branded as Energy Central) will put us on the international map as a premier business destination. Within all of this, it goes without saying that the delivery of our transport and digital connectivity ambitions will be pivotal.

There are two other sectors which we believe warrant special attention. Tourism is also important to our economy but yet has the potential, with careful management, to attract more visitors to stay longer, at all times of the year, and spend more. We will therefore continue to work with our attractions, hospitality businesses, and other partners to deepen range and quality of the visitor experience. The county’s farming, forestry and fishing industries are both suppliers of local produce and the custodians of our countryside and coastal waters. In a post-Brexit world, we will seek measures that safeguard their commercial viability, particularly in marginal areas such as the uplands.

Community-led regeneration is fundamental to our approach. Projects that are built in the community by the community for the community are powerful in that they bring about real change that lasts and grows over time. Places such as Kielder, Wooler and Amble have clearly demonstrated this and are rightly showcased as national exemplars. We will give all of our local partners the space and support they need to generate ideas and make them happen. We trust that you will get behind these processes and constructively engage in making things better for your community.

**“WE WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE”
[SUCCESS MEASURES]**

[To be added as part of the budget setting process]

