

## **NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a meeting of the **Northumberland County Council** held at County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday, 5 July 2017 at 3.00pm.

### **PRESENT**

Councillor R.R. Dodd  
(in the Chair)

### **MEMBERS**

Armstrong, E.  
Bawn, D.  
Beynon, J.A.  
Bridgett, S.C.  
Campbell, D.  
Cartie, E.  
Castle, G.  
Cessford, T.  
Clark, T.  
Crosby, B.  
Dale, P.A.M.  
Daley, W.  
Davey, J.G.  
Davey, S.  
Dickinson, S.J.  
Dunbar, C.  
Dungworth, S.E.  
Dunn, L.  
Flux, B.  
Foster, J.D.  
Gallacher, B.  
Gibson, R.  
Gobin, J.J.  
Grimshaw, L.  
Hepple, A.  
Hill, G.  
Homer, C.  
Horncastle, C.W.  
Hutchinson, J.I.  
Jackson, P.A.  
Jones, V.  
Kennedy, D.  
Lang, J.A.

Lawrie, R.M.G.  
Ledger, D.  
Moore, R.  
Murray, A.H.  
Nisbet, K.  
Oliver, N.  
Parry, K.  
Pattison, W.  
Pidcock, B.  
Purvis, M.A.  
Quinn, K.  
Reid, J.  
Renner-Thompson, G.  
Richards, M.E.  
Rickerby, L.J.  
Riddle, J.R.  
Robinson, M.  
Roughead, G.  
Sanderson, H.G.H.  
Seymour, C.  
Sharp, A.  
Simpson, E.  
Stewart, G.  
Stow, K.G.  
Swinburn, M.D.  
Swithenbank, I.C.F.  
Thorne, T.N.  
Towns, D.J.  
Wallace, R.  
Watson, J.G.  
Wearmouth R.W.  
Webb, G.

## OFFICERS

Bird, M	Senior Democratic Services Officer
Henry, L.	Legal Services Manager
Ketley, M	Head of Planning Services
Lally, D.	Interim Chief Executive
Roll, J.	Democratic Services Manager

Around 55 members of the press and public were in attendance

### 19. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Wilson.

### 20. MINUTES

With regard to Minute No. 7, final paragraph, Councillor Dale queried the reference to the Leader saying that the Authority was £1bn in debt with no plans to manage or repay it. She said this was inaccurate as a treasury management statement was in place, and a further point about the Leader being informed that the Authority was struggling to pay its bills had been omitted. Councillor Dale would be raising some points with the external auditor. The Business Chair responded that what the Leader had said was not inaccurate.

Councillor Towns stated that he was listed as being present at the meeting, but he had submitted his apologies for the meeting.

Councillor G Davey questioned whether former councillor G Jones' concerns about safeguarding would be answered, in the interests of openness and transparency. The Chair responded that the section in question on the agenda summons was just for members to consider amending the minutes of the 5 April 2017 meeting to include the verbatim comment from Mr Jones. It was noted that Mr Jones was intending to put a question to the next meeting of Council.

In response to queries about the position with correspondence regarding the national schools funding formula, the Chair advised that this would be discussed later on the agenda under the 'correspondence' item.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on 24 May 2017, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and sealed with the Common Seal of the Council, subject to being amended to include Mr Jones' verbatim comment, as detailed in the agenda letter, and to record Councillor Towns as absent with apologies rather than present.

## **21. DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

Councillors Hepple, Dungworth and Dickinson all declared interests in relation to the second motion about Rothbury Community Hospital due to their positions as a non-executive directors of Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, and Councillor Swithenbank declared he was a previous director. All would take no part in consideration of the item, and Councillor Dickinson indicated that he would be leaving the meeting before that item.

## **22. ANNOUNCEMENTS by the Business Chair, Lead and Head of Paid Service**

### **(a) Queen's Birthday Honours List**

The Business Chair congratulated Zoe Fraiss on her BEM award for services to young people, Bethan Zoe Harding MBE for services to education, Hugh Tulip BEM for services to cricket and the community, Paul Liversidge - the Queen's Ambulance Service Medal for service to the North East Ambulance Service, and Colonel Mike Butterick OBE for services to the military. A letter of congratulations had been sent to all from the Leader.

Councillor Ledger was delighted at Colonel Butterick's award; they had been co-chairmen of the North East England group. Colonel Butterick was leaving the armed forces in a better place than four years ago and he would be a difficult act to follow. Councillor Ledger had also written to him personally to congratulate him.

### **(b) Sixth Annual School Games**

The Business Chair referred to a booklet about the games which had been provided for all members of Council. (*Copy of leaflet appended to the official minutes of the meeting.*) It had been a hugely successful event, with over 2,000 students competing at Cramlington in 20 sports. All students involved had been successful in reaching the games. Special schools had also been involved in a paralympic event. The Business Chair thanked everybody who had taken part.

## **23. CORRESPONDENCE (if any) to date of meeting**

The Business Chair reported that a letter had been received from Nick Gibb MP, Minister of State for School Standards regarding the schools' funding provision.

The former lead member for children's services wrote to the Prime Minister making a number of criticisms of the proposed National Funding Formula, but the letter did not suggest that there would be a loss of £16m to Northumberland.

The Council's calculation was in fact that the formula would bring about a small overall gain in funding for Northumberland, though many individual

schools and academies would not gain or would lose out. The letter from the former lead member suggested a number of changes to the formula which had been consulted on, including changes to introduce a greater protection for small rural schools and more predictability to enable schools to plan more than a year ahead. The letter did however cite figures from the National Audit Office suggesting that current national spending plans would lead to reduced funding nationally.

The Council received a response on 21 April from Nick Gibb, Minister of State for School Standards, to whose office the letter had been passed by 10 Downing Street. The response set out the Government's overall current position about the schools funding formula, rather than commenting specifically about funding in Northumberland. The Minister said that the core schools budget would increase in real terms, though difficult decisions had had to be taken in a challenging economic environment about other elements of the education budget, including funding for central support services provided by local authorities. The Minister confirmed that the Government would be publishing its response to the consultation about the proposed funding formula in due course.

A copy of the letter would be provided for all members of Council. In response to a request from Councillor Dale, it was confirmed that a copy of the summary read out would also be provided for all members.

Councillor Gallacher referred to the letter sent on behalf of the G40 Group, for which any reply received would also be followed up.

*(At this point in the meeting Council briefly adjourned to accommodate the overspill of public attending in the restaurant next to the chamber.)*

- 24. QUESTIONS** to be put to the Business Chair, a member of the Cabinet or the Chair of any Committee or Sub Committee, in accordance with the Constitution's Rules of Procedure No.10.

**Question 1 from Councillor G. Hill to Councillor J. Riddle**

Does the new administration agree that the fire service is an essential front line service and that recent tragic events have demonstrated, if any reminder was needed, the value of our firefighters and the gratitude we owe them? Do you also agree that the previous administration failed to demonstrate this and potentially compromised public safety by closing fire stations and slashing funding? If you agree, what steps will be taken to rectify this?

Councillor Riddle responded that this administration certainly did agree that Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) provided an essential front line service and it was valued by them and their communities not only when it had to respond to emergency incidents or perform rescues but for the prevention and protection work it undertook to improve the health, welfare and safety of our residents and visitors. The tragic events of Grenfell Tower had

shown the high regard and esteem the Fire Service was held in, not only in Northumberland, but across the UK.

He thought all elected members of the Council valued the contribution made by NFRS as a crucial front line service of the County Council and would express their gratitude for the sometimes very challenging and dangerous work done by their firefighters.

Councillor Hill added that the previous administration had reduced funding, considered the decision on pensions was mean and unjust, and hoped that funding would be received despite this ruling. Councillor Hill asked what steps would be taken to rectify cuts made and would the retained firefighters of Hexham and Bewick get their settlements?

Councillor Riddle responded that the firefighters' case had been looked at by the previous administration under a fair system with guidelines and done 'by the book'. This administration might have undertaken cuts elsewhere, but Haydon Bridge station had already been put up for sale. Through a risk assessment undertaken there were no detrimental effects yet from the changes.

#### **Question 2 from Councillor G. Hill to Councillor J. Riddle**

Are you aware of the large scale dissatisfaction felt by taxi drivers in Berwick about the service they receive from NCC?

Councillor Riddle confirmed that the taxi testing arrangements for Alnwick and Berwick licensed vehicles had recently changed and owners would be required to present all licensed vehicles to the Council's fleet maintenance depot at Lionheart Industrial Estate in Alnwick which is our approved testing station. The Council policy was changed in December 2015 with a long lead in period prior to the implementation of the new arrangements for Alnwick and Berwick. All other areas had had similar requirements since December 2015.

The changes were introduced in the interests of public safety as the staff at the Council's depots could be authorised to prohibit an unsafe vehicle and prevent its further use as a taxi. Examiners at Private MOT testing stations could not be so authorised.

The policy was fully consulted on prior to the introduction and the decision was taken by the Licensing Regulatory Committee. Consultations event were arranged throughout the county including Berwick. However most of the consultation events within Berwick were cancelled due to lack of interest. In 2015 the Council also introduced 3 year duration licences for taxi drivers. This allowed drivers to reduce both the cost and administration required to remain licensed.

The arrangements for personal appointments at Berwick had been reviewed due to recent unforeseen staffing issues. The drivers could still hand in items at the Information Point at Berwick to be forwarded to the Licensing office. Arrangements were being made for appointments within Alnwick and this

would be continually monitored and amended where staffing levels allowed and there was sufficient need.

Councillor Hill advised that some drivers had applied but told that the sessions had been cancelled. Councillor Hill asked if Councillor Riddle would meet with her and the Berwick councillors and taxi drivers to discuss the situation as they were dissatisfied with the situation.

Councillor Riddle responded that he would be happy to meet to discuss.

### **Question 3 from Councillor T. Clark to the Leader**

I am sure the Leader has read the minutes of Capital Works Cabinet Advisory Group from April where officers deemed James Calvert Spence College to be the next priority School in need of refurbishment or rebuild. I am sure he also read that the Cabinet Advisory Group recommended the approval of the investment from the already allocated Schools Capital Fund.

Can the Leader confirm whether the financial commitments made to James Calvert Spence College by the former Administration which were endorsed by the Officers and the Capital Works Advisory Group will be honoured, and that much-needed investment for the education of children in Amble and surrounding areas will be delivered?

The Leader responded that a major review of all capital contracts were being reviewed due to massive debts. It was wrong to say that it was the next priority school, as three or four others were ahead. He had not seen a detailed business case yet so it was not right for the Council to programme without the level of detail required, but he was happy to look at and help the school find forms of investment.

Councillor Clark hoped that the administration would seek transformation in life of every child.

The Leader replied that well functioning, modern schools brought hope and development for young people. Young people had to be entitled to suitable provision and good buildings.

### **Question 4 from Councillor B. Gallacher to the Leader**

The previous administration signed a joint letter on behalf of this Council and families across Northumberland to the Prime Minister highlighting the Conservative Government's proposed changes to schools funding formula arrangements that could see Northumberland £16 million worse off. Can he explain what response has been received to date?

The Leader referred to a written response produced for people to see, but the £16m cut quoted was not true. The totality of funding proposed came to between £1m - 2m overall. They were fighting for a better settlement and could see Northumberland doing better than other areas in the UK.

Councillor Gallacher then referred to an article in the Hexham Courant from 22 March 2017 about the Executive Headteacher of Hexham High and Middle

Schools being asked for contributions to help with cuts. It was an unfair policy, and many parents in the county would not be able to contribute.

The Business Chair ruled that any supplementary points had to be questions.

**Question 5 from Councillor I. Swithenbank to Councillor G. Sanderson**

Parish and town councils are concerned at the plans to change the service delivery areas, especially for those who have enhanced services and have built up relationships with those council workers for many years. This is valued income to the County Council that also benefits the environment for communities across Northumberland.

What measures will he put in place to ensure a smooth transition between teams and when will information be circulated to those town and parish councils along with county councillors about the changes?

Councillor Sanderson referred to the written response produced and explained how the new Local Area Councils was very important in the administration's manifesto. Local people had a great depth of expertise in such matters and the Local Area Councils would work closely with local people. Further information about the new arrangements would be available by the end of July.

Councillor Swithenbank added that Local Services had done a great job to set up and maintain relationships with town and parish councils. He thanked Local Services, who were doing a magnificent job, and Northumberland was doing well as a result. He asked if Councillor Sanderson would agree to the production of a joint thank you message on behalf of them both.

Councillor Sanderson replied that he was always ready to be consensual and would look at a joint response, subject to the detail of what information would be in the letter.

**Question 6 from Councillor B. Pidcock to the Leader**

Has the current Administration any plans for a Holocaust Memorial Day event, following the success of the Labour Group over the past 4 years?

The Leader responded that he had attended two of the events, which were very effective, and involved young people. It was intend to have a similar event in 2018. The Director of Children's Services and David Cookson, Commissioner for Secondary Education, had been asked to co-ordinate the event with Councillor Veronica Jones the Equality and Diversity Champion, and they would welcome Councillor Pidcock's support and input into the event.

Councillor Pidcock responded that he was delighted with the answer. He referred to how Holocaust Memorial Day had previously received been subsidised by the the Community Chest, would this still be available?

The Leader replied that proposals for the Community Chest were being presented to all the Local Area Council meetings in from 10 - 20 July.

**Question 7 from Councillor B. Pidcock to Councillor J. Riddle**

I am sure the new administration believes that good council housing is important just as the previous administration did. The previous administration returned Homes for Northumberland back to the Council so members could be more involved in housing and be taking issues up for their residents, ensuring good housing provision was available in Northumberland and members had some part in shaping the future along with important tenant's voices.

To avoid the democratic process being eroded can the Cabinet member confirm that Homes for Northumberland will be included in Council scrutiny processes and they will make members aware of any policy reviews in good time so meaningful input can be given?

Councillor Riddle responded that the Council remained committed to ensuring all of its social housing stock met the decent homes standard and there was a significant rolling capital investment programme to ensure that this is the case.

Housing Services were included within the terms of reference for the Communities and Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the committee was in the process of formulating its work programme for the year. Notwithstanding, he could confirm that in accordance with the Council's procedural arrangements, any policy issues / key decisions relating to housing services would go through pre-scrutiny prior to being considered by Cabinet.

He also wished to take the opportunity to confirm that they would continue to work closely with and listen to the views of their tenants as part of the normal management arrangements for the service.

Councillor Pidcock was pleased with the answer, and further asked for reassurance that neither Homes for Northumberland or any council service were to be privatised.

Councillor Riddle confirmed that there would be no role for any privatisation within the services within his responsibility. He would continue to work and meet with tenants at any time.

**Question 8 from Councillor K. Nisbet to Councillor G. Sanderson**

It was interesting to hear at the Morpeth Area Council that the Leader's patch was receiving weed spraying the following Monday, however, other areas are yet to see a weed sprayer. Do the Conservative plans for weed spraying include areas outside the seats held by the administration as it did previously or has the budget for the other areas been removed?



Councillor Sanderson referred to how a written response had been produced but added that the Council currently engaged private contractors to undertake the first application of weed sprays; the previous administration had drawn this up. This was supplemented by council staff, and he was grateful for their work. Councillor Sanderson confirmed that 79% of routes had been covered so far in the current year, compared to 11% in the last year. No preference was given; all areas were visited. If Councillor Nisbet had any further queries, she should contact him.

The Business Chair confirmed that copies of the written answers would be circulated.

## **14. COMMITTEE MINUTES**

### **Audit Committee**

These were introduced by Councillor Dale, who explained that she was no longer chair of Audit Committee and was also independent of any political group. Councillor Dale wished the new chair of Audit Committee well.

Councillor Dale explained that Arch had consolidated its accounts and these would be audited by Ernst and Young; she would ask them to look at the two issues raised by Councillor Jackson. She referred to Deloitte's report on planning with reference to concerns about costs on appeals and not having a Core Strategy in place. Councillor Dale was happy to answer any questions on the accounts over the past six years; this year's audit report had not yet been received but it had been confirmed in the last report in 2016 that the Council was in a strong financial position.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Audit Committee be received.

## **15. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND ECONOMY**

### **Northumberland Local Plan Core Strategy**

The report informed Council's consideration of the following motion in relation to the Northumberland Local Plan Core Strategy Draft Plan which was submitted to Government for independent examination on 7 April 2017 following approval at the meeting of Council on 22 February 2017:

- Rescind the previous decision to approve the Northumberland Local Plan Core Strategy Pre Submission Draft Plan (as modified) for submission to Government for independent examination;
- Formally withdraw the Core Strategy from the independent examination process and advise the Secretary of State of this decision;
- Instruct Officers to undertake a full review of the housing and employment numbers, and strategic land use allocations, required during the Plan period to sustain Countywide and regional economic growth; and

- Resolve to undertake the work required to carry out the review and progress any necessary associated work and public consultation to enable the Council to reconsider approval of the Core Strategy for submission to Government as soon as practicable.

Councillor Riddle advised that a further addendum report providing additional information was being provided (copy appended to the official minutes of the meeting).

The meeting adjourned for around 15 minutes for Council to read the addendum report (copies were made available to members and the public at the meeting).

Upon restarting the meeting, Councillor Pidcock objected that it was an unfair process; to make a decision members needed to study the papers conscientiously, and he had not been given enough time. In response the Business Chair drew attention to another occasion when pink papers had been submitted at short notice by the previous administration.

Councillor G Davey then expressed concern about a lack of background information to the motion, the impact on job losses, and the impact of increasing the working age of residents.

The Monitoring Officer then advised that the report circulated was in connection with agenda item 8; item 9 was the motion and he counselled against any debate on that item yet. The addendum report had been circulated earlier that day, and a change to the motion was also being proposed, which could only be brought by the mover of the motion. Any amendments to the motion could follow but that should be during the debate that would follow in due course. The purpose of the report and addendum was to provide additional background information to help members consider the pros and cons of the motion proposed. If a debate then followed the motion, it would be safe to move to a decision. Members were just being asked to note the report and addendum report.

Questions were then asked of Councillor Riddle, to which he responded:

- if the Core Strategy was withdrawn, adopted Neighbourhood Plans would carry full weight, and emerging ones would carry some weight depending on where they were up to in their preparation.
- regarding when more information would be available from the Queen's Speech about where more housing was to be built, consultation would be beginning shortly on the community need for housing and a national standard methodology for calculating housing need.
- regarding whether the proposal for 2,000 new houses were a minor modification, it was up to the relevant inspector to take a decision on this.

**RESOLVED** that the report and additional addendum report be noted.

## 16. NOTICE OF MOTION

### Motion No.1

In accordance with Council Rules of Procedure No.10, Councillor P. Jackson revised the following motion, received by the Democratic Services Manager on 13 June 2017, in order to add additional wording, as follows:

*“We call upon the Council to review its decision made on 22 February 2017 to approve the Northumberland Local Plan Core Strategy Pre Submission Draft Plan (as modified) and submit it to Government for independent examination.*

*It is important for Northumberland County Council to support an economic and housing growth agenda aimed at creating sustainable and successful communities across the County. It is equally important that the Council fully commits to the ambitions of the North East LEP Strategic Economic Plan. Ongoing support for, and commitment to, the North of Tyne devolution agenda is also critical.*

*Whilst acknowledging the above, we have serious reservations relating to the level of new housing development proposed in the Core Strategy. The proposed level of new housing in the County, at 24,320 by 2031 plus the inclusion of up to an additional 2,000 houses at Dissington Garden Village over and above objectively assessed need, are significant issues. Recent and anticipated national publications on housing and population projections, together with the recent refresh of the Strategic Economic Plan, present an opportunity to review the housing numbers required for Northumberland to play its part in securing long term sustainable economic and housing growth across the whole of the North East.*

*This would require further work and consultation in relation to the Core Strategy and this should be undertaken in a timely manner in order to minimise the period that Northumberland has without an up-to-date Plan in place. It is therefore proposed that Council:*

- *Rescinds its previous decision to approve the Northumberland Local Plan Core Strategy Pre Submission Draft Plan (as modified) for submission to Government for independent examination;*
- *Formally withdraws the Core Strategy from the independent examination process and advises the Secretary of State of this decision;*
- *Instructs Officers to undertake a full review of the housing and employment numbers, and strategic land use allocations, required during the Plan period to sustain County-wide and regional economic growth; and*
- *Resolves to undertake the work required to carry out the review and progress any necessary associated work and public consultation to enable the Council to reconsider approval of the Core Strategy for submission to Government as soon as practicable”.*

**To add the following wording:**

*For the following reasons:*

*The submitted Core Strategy was informed by and developed predominantly on the basis of the 2012 Sub-National Population Projections (SNPP). The SNPP 2014-based population projections are now available and it is clear from the tables presented in the Addendum Report that the levels of residential growth required to support and sustain economic growth in Northumberland are significantly different based on the SNPP 2014 data when compared to the 2012 data.*

*Whilst the SNPP 2014 data suggests an annual jobs loss, and therefore a positive "Policy On" approach would still be required in order to reverse the trend of jobs loss which is predominantly due to a loss of people of working age population from within Northumberland, it is evident from the tables provided in the Addendum Report that it is possible to address the jobs loss issue with less houses being required than are currently proposed in the submitted Core Strategy.*

*At a national level, it is clear from changes to statute and the contents of the Housing White Paper that the national policy context is also currently evolving and, in the near future, Government policy will have changed in certain respects. Government consultation is expected to commence on a standardised methodology to calculating housing need later this month and this will also have a material bearing on future housing requirements.*

*Finally, discussions are currently ongoing between the three North of Tyne authorities and Government regarding the possibility of a devolution deal that will see the creation of a mayoral combined authority in the North of Tyne area. This deal would aim to support economic growth in the North of Tyne area, and wider North East, thereby supporting the North East LEP's Strategic Economic Plan that was refreshed earlier this year. A review of the Northumberland Local Plan Core Strategy would allow the Council to ensure that the plan directly supports the economic ambitions in the North of Tyne area.*

It was then put to the vote about whether the revision be accepted for consideration, and the votes were cast as follows: **FOR: 37: AGAINST: 23; ABSTENTIONS: 5.**

Councillor Jackson then further introduced his motion. Many residents were unhappy with the Core Strategy, had voted for a review and wanted a Council that listened. Many residents did not think they were being heard and many communities felt increasingly threatened by large scale developments and people did not want to live in villages that were doubling in size. There was no infrastructure planning in the Core Strategy, and many areas were affected -

for example gridlock on Telford Bridge in Morpeth and residents of Blyth not being able to get into local schools, plus parking problems in Alnwick.

There were issues with affordable housing; developers got away with not providing it. The plan needed to be based on an evidence base. The 2012 household projection figures were higher than the 2014 figures but the most recent figures were not being planned on. Consultation was being planned from the Communities and Local Government on how housing was provided; this review was needed.

The North East Economic Plan mentioned little about housing; lack of skills was a bigger issue. Time should be taken to help the residents of the county. The North East did not have the same pressure for new housing that the South East had. The Council had a duty to cooperate with other local councils; for example Newcastle objected to the possibility of gridlock resulting from a use of Green Belt land on its borders; the Green Belt was valued and was there for a reason. There should be more use of other land including bringing brownfield land back into use.

House numbers were not the way forward. The previous administration had been the developers' friend and 4000 houses had been built. The Council had to listen to communities' concerns. It had to be ensured that the Core Strategy was robust enough to satisfy the inspector at the inquiry and fit for purpose. 90% of it was agreed on. Councillor Jackson concluded that the review should be agreed, which was a brave decision, but the Council would be castigated for generations if this move was not done.

Councillor Riddle seconded the amended motion.

Councillor Homer referred to concerns in Hexham about 600 proposed new housing and accompanying deletions from the Green Belt, Thousands of residents had objected to the modifications for solid reasons. Overestimating population levels had included a failure to provide exceptional circumstances for deleting the Green Belt, and the infrastructure could not cope. Hexham wanted to get the housing it needed going forward, and residents felt they had not been listened to. Councillor Homer welcomed that further work would take place throughout the county and that Hexham residents looked forward to open consultation going forward.

Councillor Kennedy explained how the proposed 600 new houses in his electoral division would have seen a 40% increase in its population. These were big executive houses, whereas a balance was needed, not just a number of large houses dragging the town westwards. He queried where the employment strategy element was. He welcomed the proposal and work to investigate the position, and suggested that a more evolutionary approach was needed. A legacy would be left, and it should not result in more commuter belts for large towns.

Councillor Cessford referred to how housing in Hexham could have been split across five or six sites, however it then became one large block, with no

exceptional circumstances presented. 600 homes on one site would have led to a new commuter belt, traffic could not easily get through the town and the infrastructure was already struggling, including car parking, which needed to be amended.

Councillor Hepple referred to how the Core Strategy was not just about house numbers, but also dealing with demographic change. Every £1 spent on building a house generated a £5 return. The longer the delay in confirming the Core Strategy, the more opportunities that developers would have to apply to build, plus appeals were possible, with one costing £600,000. If the information submitted in 2012 and 2014 about household projections, could that not just be dealt with as a minor modification at the examination? The Council had listened and made changes to the Core Strategy as a result of comments from the public. Timescales were set, extra costs would be incurred, and developers had greater financial means. Councillor Hepple queried if they were prepared for government intervention and at what cost.

Councillor Bawn suggested that the small delay would be worth the outcome to get the right policy. It was not a case of “if you build it they will come”; Northumberland needed to be driven by skills and investment. The plan did not have the support of the new members or residents. On balance, the only way forward was to pass the motion at this meeting.

Councillor Dale referred to her previous role in preparation of the Tynedale Local Plan and suggested that the minor modifications stage be revisited as the Core Strategy was due to be heard in September. After work began in 2008, she referred to the Conservative group’s non-involvement in the Local Development Framework Working Group from 2014 onwards and how the views of west area residents were not being represented or heard after that. There were no planning policies for staff to evaluate against, with previous District Council policies overruled by the National Planning Policy Framework and its presumption in favour of sustainable development. Developers could put in whatever applications they wanted and there was no strategy to appeal against. If people wanted Green Belts built on, they should vote for the motion. The process would take at least two years. Instead of withdrawing, changes should be dealt with as minor alterations and the Core Strategy be put in place. It would affect future generations and being political about the proposal was misleading the public.

Councillor Oliver referred to how the NPPF included some protection against development on Green Belts. For areas like Corbridge, it was too late to stop developments as their 327 new houses granted represented a 15% increase. This proposal would however protect communities.

Councillor Bridgett also added it was late for Rothbury as its target was 200 by 2031 but 270 had already been proposed, 14 years before the end date. The report referred to how the Council and local residents would be at risk of appeals where resisting applications on the basis of the withdrawn plan. The focus was now on the NPPF rather than local plans. It put his community at risk of overdevelopment as withdrawing the plan left the Council more

exposed. He also expressed concern about the national policy through which developments of 10 or less homes required no Section 106 or other contributions and how there was nothing the Council could do about that.

Councillor G Davey referred to the development of 850 houses in Kitty Brewster electoral division without any S106 funding, and one developer was not introducing fibre Broadband as the copper option was cheaper. Developers were awaiting the decision and would blame the Council as they would win their appeals. The previous administration could not be blamed for this now.

Councillor Pidcock expressed further concern about the late submittance of the additional report and the focus placed just on Hexham, Morpeth and Ponteland. 10 years of hard work had gone into this process, so the Core Strategy should be agreed. The planning system would otherwise be subject to greedy developers and Green Belt mayhem. A significant amount of work would need to be done but the Council did not have the capacity to do so anymore due to the impact of austerity.

Councillor Reid considered it was a mistake and would take two years to get back. Protecting Hexham's Green Belt would be a distant dream. He understood the purpose of the move but this represented using a 'sledgehammer to crack a nut'. Removing it from public examination was fundamental; he moved that even if the motion was passed at this meeting, could the Council instead take no action until they had discussed it with the relevant government minister, and if the minister had no concerns, they could instead decide then to proceed to withdrawing it in September. If so he would give his support to the proposal. This was removing the one pillar protecting the Council from overdevelopment.

Councillor Reid added that there should be a name change in the terminology from 'North of Tyne', as there was more of Northumberland situated south of the Tyne than the combined area of Newcastle and North Tyneside.

The Leader responded that advice had been received, both from the Communities and Local Government and external legal counsel. Local communities were instructing this course of action.

Councillor Pidcock stated that he would second Councillor Reid's proposal as a further amendment to the motion. The Monitoring Officer sought clarification about any proposed motion, following which Councillor G Davey moved that the motion be deferred to September's Council meeting to take advice from the Homes and Communities Agency and legal counsel first.

Councillor Reid indicated that he would withdraw his proposal and second Councillor G Davey's instead.

The Leader replied that time was running out for a deferral. Serious and detailed discussion had taken place with Whitehall. Legal advice had been received that this was being done properly; York City Council had also

withdrawn their plan. He also stated that there had been no redundancies in the departmental section and it could instead be resourced to a higher level. Communities did not feel represented in the Core Strategy currently.

Councillor Swithenbank suggested that proposal brought risk when it was not needed.

Councillor G Davey's amendment, seconded by Councillor Reid, was then put to the vote. On the required number of members calling for a named vote on the proposals, the votes were cast as follows:-

**FOR: 28** as follows:-

Bridgett, S.C.	Hepple, A.
Campbell, D.	Lang, J.A.
Cartie, E.	Ledger, D.
Clark, T.S.	Nisbet, K.
Dale, P.A.M	Parry, K.
Davey, J.G.	Pidcock, B.
Davey, S.	Purvis, M.
Dickinson, S.	Reid, J.S.
Dungworth, S.E.	Rickerby, L.J.
Dunn, L.	Robinson, M.
Foster, J.	Simpson, E
Gallacher, B.	Swithenbank, I.C.F.
Gobin, J.J.	Wallace, R.
Grimshaw, L.	Webb, G.

**AGAINST: 37** as follows:-

Armstrong, E.	Murray, A.H.
Bawn, D.L.	Oliver, N.
Beynon, J.A.	Pattison, W.
Castle, G.	Quinn, K.R.
Cessford, T.	Renner-Thompson, G.



Crosby, B	Riddle, J.R.
Daley, W.	Robinson, M.
Dodd, R.R.	Roughead, G.A.
Dunbar, C.L.	Sanderson, H.G.H.
Flux, B.	Seymour, C.
Gibson, R.	Sharp, A.
Hill, G.	Stewart, G.
Homer, C.	Stow, K.
Horncastle, C.W.	Swinburn, M.D.
Hutchinson, J.I.	Thorne, T.N.
Jackson, P.A.	Towns, D.
Jones, V.	Wallace, R.
Kennedy, D.	Watson, J.G.
Lawrie, R.M.G.	Wearmouth, R.W.
Moore, R.	

The motion fell, so Council then further debated the original motion as proposed by Councillor Jackson and seconded by Councillor Riddle.

Councillor Dungworth expressed concern about the debate as members were elected to represent the interests of the whole Council, not just their local area. The proposal would be a huge risk to finances and communities. Appeals would be lost.

Councillor Wearmouth referred to the permissions for 3,000 houses in Morpeth and the area of Green Belt due to be cut out from Ponteland. The NPPF did make some specific circumstances about building on the Green Belt, so it was not a fair description of the document referred to earlier in the meeting.

Councillor Roughead referred to concerns about Berwick often being ignored and as it was the gateway between England and Scotland. Could consideration also be given to working with local authorities to the north also?

Councillor Jackson responded that hundreds of acres were due to be taken out of Green Belts and it was wrong to say that there was no protection. He supported Councillor Roughead's request for other areas to be considered. He said that the proposal was a brave but responsible decision and a moral duty

for the county and its communities.

Councillor Jackson's motion was then put to the vote. On the required number of members calling for a named vote on the proposals, the votes were cast as follows:-

**FOR: 39** as follows:-

Armstrong, E.	Murray, A.H.
Bawn, D.L.	Oliver, N.
Beynon, J.A.	Pattison, W.
Castle, G.	Quinn, K.R.
Cessford, T.	Renner-Thompson, G.
Crosby, B	Riddle, J.R.
Daley, W.	Robinson, M.
Dodd, R.R.	Roughead, G.A.
Dunbar, C.L.	Sanderson, H.G.H.
Flux, B.	Seymour, C.
Gibson, R.	Sharp, A.
Hill, G.	Stewart, G.
Homer, C.	Stow, K.
Horncastle, C.W.	Swinburn, M.D.
Hutchinson, J.I.	Thorne, T.N.
Jackson, P.A.	Towns, D.
Jones, V.	Wallace, R.
Kennedy, D.	Watson, J.G.
Lawrie, R.M.G.	Wearmouth, R.W.
Moore, R.	

**AGAINST: 22**

Campbell, D.	Gobin, J.J.
Cartie, E.	Grimshaw, L.

Clark, T.S.	Hepple, A.
Dale, P.A.M	Lang, J.A.
Davey, J.G.	Nisbet, K.
Davey, S.	Parry, K.
Dickinson, S.	Pidcock, B.
Dungworth, S.E.	Purvis, M.
Dunn, L.	Simpson, E
Foster, J.	Swithenbank, I.C.F.
Gallacher, B.	Webb, G.

#### **ABSTENTIONS: 4**

Bridgett, S.C.	Reid, J.S
Ledger, D.	Rickerby, L.J.

*(Councillors Bridgett and Ledger took advice on abstaining as both had briefly been out of the room during the debate immediately before the second named vote.)*

**RESOLVED** that Councillor Jackson's revised motion be approved: Council rescinds its previous decision to approve the Northumberland Local Plan Core Strategy Pre Submission Draft Plan (as modified) for submission to Government for independent examination; formally withdraws the Core Strategy from the independent examination process and advises the Secretary of State of this decision; instructs officers to undertake a full review of the housing and employment numbers, and strategic land use allocations, required during the Plan period to sustain countywide and regional economic growth; and resolves to undertake the work required to carry out the review and progress any necessary associated work and public consultation to enable the Council to reconsider approval of the Core Strategy for submission to Government as soon as practicable, for the reasons given.

*(The meeting then adjourned for a short break.)*

#### **Motion No.2**

In accordance with Council Rules of Procedure No.10, Councillor S. Bridgett moved the following motion, received by the Democratic Services Manager on 9 May 2017:-

*The twelve inpatient beds at Rothbury Community Hospital were closed in September 2016 by Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust and the Northumberland Clinical Commissioning Group.*

*Since then, both organisations have proposed the permanent removal of these beds. As such they have only consulted on one option in the recent consultation, not even giving residents of my area in Rothbury, Coquetdale, Whittingham Vale, Glanton and Elsdon the possibility of considering another option.*

*Whilst the Council is not directly responsible for this matter, it does have statutory and political options that it could consider. I would therefore propose that this Council:*

- 1. Formally opposes the proposed removal of the twelve inpatient beds at Rothbury Community Hospital;*
- 2. Recommends that the Council's Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee refers the matter to the Secretary of State with the powers given to it under Statutory Instruments No 218, The Local Authority (Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Scrutiny) Regulations 2013, Part 4, Section 23, Paragraph 9; and*
- 3. The Council carries out a full Risk Appraisal report that investigates the possibility of loaning Northumbria Healthcare Trust the money required to buy themselves out of the PFI contract currently held on Rothbury Community Hospital but with the caveat of the potential annual savings being used to re-open the beds at Rothbury Community Hospital. A similar proposal was undertaken by the previous administration with regards to Hexham Hospital.*

In moving the motion, Councillor Bridgett explained that the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) were only consulting on one option, for opening as a community healthcare hub, and little detail was included. The Private Finance Initiative (PFI) had 16 years yet to run, leading to the building being under used. It had been claimed that closing the ward would save £500,000, but other sources claimed it would be closer to £150,000. One option might be for the PFI agreement to be renegotiated. The hospital had a very large catchment area. This hospital might be only the first of many closures.

5,000 responses had been received, all against the proposals. The CCG were unwilling to discuss other options, which was why the three points of the motion were proposed. The administration had said this Council would listen, so it should listen to the residents of Rothbury.

Councillor G Davey seconded by the motion, by referring to the recent 69th anniversary of the NHS, with its three founding principles of meeting the needs of everyone, being free at the point of delivery and not based on ability to pay. Overnight hours at Wansbeck, Hexham and North Tyneside had been suspended further. If no support was provided, very little would be left of the NHS. Much Council debt was tied up in debt resulting from austerity upon the NHS. Too many services were being crammed into the Emergency Specialist

Care Hospital. Savings should be put in to save rural hospitals, and to support residents in the Coquet Valley.

Councillor Jones responded by acknowledging how much many people in Rothbury valued their community hospital, and how concerned many of them have been about the proposal to close the inpatient beds. It was a difficult decision, and many arguments had been put forward on both sides. She was not proposing to add to those arguments at this meeting because in her view this resolution was premature. The Clinical Commissioning Group had not yet considered the outcome of the consultation and made a decision about whether to proceed with its proposal to close the inpatient beds. After the CCG made its decision, there would be an opportunity in October for the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee to examine the same evidence that the CCG had considered, and to listen to representatives from the NHS and the community group opposed to the proposal.

As the resolution said, the Scrutiny Committee had the statutory power to refer the issue to the Secretary of State. That would be a major decision, with significant financial and operational consequences for the local NHS. The Committee should make it after considering the evidence carefully and in detail. It would not be proper for the Council to be premature and tell the Scrutiny Committee what it should decide. Councillor Jones therefore proposed the following amendment (*copies of which were circulated at the meeting*):

**Replace point 1 of the resolution with:**

1. Notes that Northumberland Clinical Commissioning Group will shortly be considering whether to confirm its consultation proposal to remove the twelve inpatient beds at Rothbury Community Hospital.

**Replace point 2 of the resolution with:**

2. Notes that the Council's Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee will have the opportunity to consider any decision taken by the Clinical Commissioning Group at a meeting in October, and that if the Committee is not convinced by the evidence supporting a decision, it has the power to refer the matter to the Secretary of State using the powers given to it under the Statutory Instruments No. 218, The Local Authority (Public Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Scrutiny) Regulations 2013, Part 4, Section 23, Paragraph 9.

**Delete point 3 of the resolution, based on advice from Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust that there would be no significant saving by buying out the Rothbury Hospital PFI.**

This was seconded by Councillor Flux.

Councillor Hill agreed with the original proposal, referring to concerns about other cuts and closures and possibility of 'mission creep'. It was needed, like also with Berwick, to make a stand.

Councillor Rickerby referred to the presentation to the Health and Wellbeing OSC on 27 June when information was presented. It was too early to take a decision. The Health and Wellbeing OSC was scrutinising the process undertaken, and considered it had been undertaken as required, but that residents were not told of the alternatives, should the bed ward be removed.

Councillor Bridgett explained that he wanted the Council to take a policy decision. The Health and Wellbeing OSC could look at the issue but he wanted a policy decision at Council. Some of the statistics referred to at the Health and Wellbeing OSC were inaccurate. Alternative options should be investigated.

Councillor Jones' amendment was then put to the vote. On the required number of members calling for a named vote on the proposals, the votes were cast as follows:-

**FOR: 33** as follows:-

Armstrong, E.	Oliver, N.
Bawn, D.L.	Pattison, W.
Beynon, J.A.	Quinn, K.R.
Castle, G.	Reid, J.S.
Cessford, T.	Renner-Thompson, G.
Crosby, B.	Rickerby, L.J.
Daley, W.	Riddle, J.R.
Dodd, R.R.	Roughead, G.A.
Dunbar, C.L.	Seymour, C.
Flux, B.	Sharp, A.
Gibson, R.	Stewart, G.
Homer, C.	Stow, K.
Hutchinson, J.I.	Swinburn, M.D.
Jackson, P.A.	Thorne, T.N.
Jones, V.	Towns, D.
Lawrie, R.M.G.	Wearmouth, R.W.
Moore, R.	

**AGAINST: 22**

Bridgett, S.C.	Hepple, A.
Campbell, D.	Hill, G.
Cartie, E.	Lang, J.A.
Clark, T.S.	Nisbet, K.
Davey, J.G.	Parry, K.
Davey, S.	Pidcock, B.
Dunn, L.	Purvis, M.
Foster, J.	Robinson, M
Gallacher, B.	Simpson, E
Gobin, J.J.	Wallace, R.
Grimshaw, L.	Webb, G.

On becoming the substantive motion, on the required number of members calling for a named vote on the proposals, the votes were cast as follows:-

**FOR: 34** as follows:-

Armstrong, E.	Oliver, N.
Bawn, D.L.	Pattison, W.
Beynon, J.A.	Quinn, K.R.
Castle, G.	Reid, J.S.
Cessford, T.	Renner-Thompson, G.
Crosby, B	Rickerby, L.J.
Daley, W.	Riddle, J.R.
Dodd, R.R.	Roughead, G.A.
Dunbar, C.L.	Seymour, C.
Flux, B.	Sharp, A.
Gibson, R.	Stewart, G.
Homer, C.	Stow, K.

Hutchinson, J.I.	Swinburn, M.D.
Jackson, P.A.	Thorne, T.N.
Jones, V.	Towns, D.
Lawrie, R.M.G.	Wallace, R.
Moore, R.	Wearmouth, R.W.

## **AGAINST: 21**

Bridgett, S.C.	Hepple, A.
Campbell, D.	Hill, G.
Cartie, E.	Lang, J.A.
Clark, T.S.	Nisbet, K.
Davey, J.G.	Parry, K.
Davey, S.	Pidcock, B.
Dunn, L.	Purvis, M.
Foster, J.	Robinson, M
Gallacher, B.	Simpson, E
Gobin, J.J.	Webb, G.
Grimshaw, L.	

**RESOLVED** that Councillor Jones' amendment be agreed and Council note that:

(1) Northumberland Clinical Commissioning Group will shortly be considering whether to confirm its consultation proposal to remove the twelve inpatient beds at Rothbury Community Hospital; and

(2) the Council's Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee will have the opportunity to consider any decision taken by the Clinical Commissioning Group at a meeting in October, and that if the Committee is not convinced by the evidence supporting a decision, it has the power to refer the matter to the Secretary of State using the powers given to it under the Statutory Instruments No. 218, The Local Authority (Public Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Scrutiny) Regulations 2013, Part 4, Section 23, Paragraph 9.



## **17. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE RESOURCES**

### **Procurement and Appointment of External Auditors**

This report outlined the outcomes of a collaborative procurement exercise for a local (external) auditor undertaken jointly by Northumberland County Council, North Tyneside Council and Newcastle City Council. Northumberland County Council had acted as the lead contracting Authority in this collaborative arrangement. The report explained the recommendation of the Independent Auditor Panel (convened as required by statute to advise on the selection of local auditor) that Ernst and Young be appointed by full Council as Northumberland County Council's local (external) auditor, for the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2023. The report also explained the value for money that this procurement would be likely to deliver for all three Authorities involved in this collaborative procurement.

#### **RESOLVED** that

- (1) the outcomes from the collaborative procurement exercise for a local (external) audit undertaken between Northumberland County Council, North Tyneside Council and Newcastle City Council be noted; and
- (2) the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel be endorsed, and the selection and appointment of Ernst and young as the Authority's local (external) auditor from 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2023 be agreed.

## **18. REPORT OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES MANAGER**

### **Local Area Council Boundaries**

Further to the decision of Council on 5 July 2017, and following consideration with the local members involved, Council was asked to agree changes to the Local Area Council boundaries.

**RESOLVED** that Stakeford Electoral Division move from Cramlington, Bedlington and Seaton Valley Local Area Council into Castle Morpeth Local Area Council, and Bothal Electoral Division move from Castle Morpeth Local Area Council into Ashington and Blyth Local Area Council.

## **19. INDEPENDENT MEMBERS ON AUDIT COMMITTEE**

The Council's Audit Committee currently had two non voting independent members, Mr A. Haywood-Smith and Mrs I. Walker, who had served on the Committee since December 2012. Independent members brought additional skills and experience to the work of the Audit Committee and their inclusion on the Committee reflected best practice.

It had recently come to light that the existing term of office of the independent members had expired. In order to provide some continuity and to maintain the effectiveness of the Committee, Council was asked to agree a recommendation on continuing both their term of office and special responsibility allowances.

**RESOLVED** that it be agreed that the term of office of the two existing members and their special responsibility allowance continue until 6 September 2017, when Council will then be asked to review the existing arrangements for independent members.

## **20. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ARMED FORCES CHAMPION**

Councillor Ledger introduced the report by explaining how it was a culmination of four years' work. He thanked Jackie Roll and Nichola Turnbull in Democratic Services for all their support and also thanked the new co-chairman Lieutenant col. J Smith and Colonel A Hadfield. Two years ago the Covenant Silver Award had been received by Northumberland and a bid had been submitted for the Gold Award. He also welcomed Councillor Castle to his new role as Veteran champion and looked forward to working with him.

Councillor Ledger also referred to the Merchant Navy Day on the weekend of 2 September.

Councillor Castle also thanked Councillor Ledger and looked forward to working with Councillor Ledger as Armed Forces Veteran Champion.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

The Common Seal of the County Council  
of Northumberland was hereunto affixed  
in the presence of:-

.....  
Chair of the County Council

.....  
Duly Authorised Officer