

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

At a meeting of the **Cabinet** held at County Hall, Morpeth on Tuesday 11 July 2017 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

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

CABINET MEMBERS

Daley, W.
Homer, C.
Jones, V.
Oliver, N.

Riddle, J.
Sanderson, H.G.H.
Wearmouth, R.

OTHER MEMBERS

Davey, J.G.
Dodd, R.R.

Flux, B.
Renner-Thompson, G.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Hadfield, K.

Committee Services and Scrutiny
Manager

Johnson, A.

Interim DCS/Director of Education
and Skills

Jones, P.

Director of Local Services and
Housing Delivery

Lally, D.

Interim Chief Executive

Lancaster, H.

Principal Solicitor

Around 12 members of the press and public were present.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor J. Reid as Scrutiny Chair.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on Tuesday 11 April 2017, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

3. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LOCAL SERVICES AND HOUSING DELIVERY

Union Chain Bridge Restoration Project

The report sought approval for the submission of a Stage 1 Bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund in respect of the Union Chain Bridge Restoration Project, which sought to undertake essential restoration works to this important heritage asset which would safeguard its future and status as the world's oldest single span suspension bridge still open to traffic, and enhance its contribution to the local tourism economy. The report also sought a financial commitment of £755,000 from the Council's capital programme over the 3 year period from 2018/19 to 2020/21 as part of the match funding required to support the delivery of this £7.8m project (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix A, along with the report of the Communities and Place OSC).

Councillor Sanderson introduced the report highlighting this unique opportunity to work together with Scottish Borders Council. The bridge was of significant historical importance, and as the last repairs had been done in the 1970s, the bridge was now in urgent need of repair. He had recently met with his counterpart at Scottish Borders Council and representatives of the Friends of the Union Chain Bridge Group, and there was clear commitment to taking this forward, subject to Cabinet agreement today. This was the first time that the Council had worked on a significant cross border initiative like this and he thanked Communities and Place OSC for its supportive comments.

Councillor Jones sought assurances that all efforts would be made to provide the opportunities for local apprenticeships mentioned in the Scrutiny report, and that any training needs to facilitate this would be identified early in the project. Councillor Sanderson confirmed this would be built into the project.

In response to a query from Councillor Jackson regarding timescales, Councillor Sanderson advised that the report would be considered by Scottish Borders Council at the end of August and the bid submitted to HLF quickly after that. It was hoped to have the repairs completed in time for the 200th anniversary of the bridge's opening in 2020.

Councillor Homer was very supportive of the initiative. This was an object of key heritage interest in the County and she referred to the valuable

contribution also made by the Council's Culture and Heritage team in the Stage 1 bid for funding and going forward into the bid for Stage 2. Councillor Sanderson agreed and confirmed he would be working with Councillor Homer on this.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) approval be given to the submission of a Stage 1 Bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund in respect of the Union Chain Bridge Restoration Project, and to a firm commitment to a capital contribution of £755,000 towards the successful delivery of the project to be profiled as follows:

2018/19: £95,000
2019/20: £400,000
2020/21: £260,000; and

- (b) the report of the Communities and Place OSC be noted.

4. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND DIRECTOR OF LOCAL SERVICES AND HOUSING DELIVERY

Changes to Post 16 Transport Policy Payment Options

This report set out a proposal to allow more flexibility in the way that students could pay for their post 16 transport when it was provided by the Council. The remainder of the school travel policy and the actual eligibility criteria would not change during the 2017/18 academic year, but would be subject to a detailed review ahead of the 2018/19 academic year (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix B, along with the report of the Family and Children's Services OSC circulated at the meeting).

Councillor Daley presented the report, highlighting that this formed part of a strategic review which had been included as a manifesto commitment. Formal Cabinet approval of the change was required, which had already been implemented, and which would help ease the burden of the charge on parents.

Councillor Renner Thompson reported that the change had been supported by FACS OSC.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the proposal to increase flexibility in the way that students can pay for travel supplied by Northumberland County Council be endorsed; and
- (b) the report of the Family and Children's Services OSC be noted.

5. REPORTS OF THE INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES/DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

(1) Schools Update

The report provided an update to Cabinet on specific matters currently in progress relating to school organisation within Northumberland. The report also set out specific recommendations for Cabinet approval in relation to these matters (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix C).

Members were provided with an overview of the current main issues within school organisation by Mr Johnson as follows:-

- Place planning challenges and the need to ensure an even spread of sufficient school places. A discussion document would be coming to members on this in due course. The popularity/unpopularity of some schools was a challenge resulting from parental choice.
- The fair funding policy was a major ongoing piece of work and was expected to be published in next few weeks.
- The ongoing two tier/three tier debate in Northumberland.
- Academisation challenges continued, particularly when schools became academies with a deficit budget and the impact of that on core council budgets.
- Special Education Needs - children with such needs were now living longer which placed additional responsibilities on the local authority for the provision of suitable care and education, which came at a significant cost.

Mr Johnson also highlighted the many positives within the service including the early years provision and the adult learning service. There were also a number of really good schools in Northumberland and more needed to be done to celebrate what they did and to share good practice.

Councillor Daley agreed that there were many positives to celebrate, including the virtual headteacher programme which had produced good results for the most challenging of pupils. He added that it was not acceptable to have failing schools in the County. His aim was for all schools to be good or outstanding and he was committed to delivering a plan to ensure this with partners.

Councillor Jones commented that parents in Ponteland had felt let down by the consultation on reorganisation in their area last year and that she had queried whether it could be reversed which it could not at this late stage as she acknowledged that work had already begun. However, it was important to ensure that the system worked for local pupils.

RESOLVED that:-

- 1) Cabinet note the statutory consultation being undertaken by the Governing Body of Acklington CE First School on their proposal to

- close the school with effect from 31 December 2017;
- 2) authority be delegated to the Interim DCS/Director of Education and Skills and Lead Member to respond on behalf of the Council to any possible subsequent Statutory Proposal that may be published;
 - 3) Cabinet note that should the Governing Body of Acklington CE First School agree to the publication of a Statutory Notice proposing the closure of the school, the Cabinet would be required to make the final decision on whether or not to approve the closure of the school;
 - 4) Cabinet note the progress that had been made with implementation of the decisions in relation to the Alnwick Partnership reorganisation made by the Cabinet on 12 January 2016;
 - 5) Cabinet note the issues in relation to the construction of the Year 7 and 8 block at The Duchess's Community High School;
 - 6) Cabinet note the progress that had been made with implementation of the decisions in relation to the Ponteland Partnership reorganisation made by the Cabinet on 12 July 2016;
 - 7) approval be given to the modification of the conditional date by when the granting of planning permission in relation to the construction of the new school buildings for Ponteland First School and Ponteland High School must be achieved from 31 August 2017 to 31 August 2018; and
 - 8) Cabinet note the growing number of academies in Northumberland and the potential for this to have a serious financial impact on the Council's core budget, and agree the Council's policy to charge a nominal fee to schools in relation to the costs of the conversion process.

(2) Regionalising Adoption Proposals

The report set out the background to a project to develop a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) and provided an overview of the work with partners under the working title of "Adopt NE". The RAA business entity was subject to approval by Cabinet of each of the participating local authorities: Northumberland, Newcastle, Gateshead, North Tyneside, and South Tyneside (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix D, along with the report of the Family and Children's Services OSC circulated at the meeting).

Councillor Daley introduced the report highlighting the importance of this proposal. Option two was the preferred way forward and a business case would be brought later in the year to members, subject to the agreement of the other local authorities involved.

Councillor Renner Thompson advised that, whilst FACS OSC had supported Option two, they had also felt that elements of the other options could be included and any solution not limited to Option two alone. It had been noted that a further report would be brought back to the Committee before a final decision was made.

Mr Johnson confirmed that a further meeting was being held in September with the other authorities to agree a final option and the comments of FACS OSC regarding the value of elements of the other options would be taken into account.

Councillor Homer acknowledged the validity of FACS OSC's comments regarding improving outcomes and timeliness, and looked forward to seeing a re-worked Option two in due course.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Cabinet endorse the outline proposals for the continued development of the Adopt NE Regional Adoption Agency (RAA);
- (b) Cabinet endorse the preferred business model option for Adopt NE in the form of a Local Authority owned Joint Venture;
- (c) Cabinet note that a full business case will be presented for consideration to Cabinet in late summer/autumn 2017; and
- (d) the report of the Family and Children's Services OSC be noted.

6. NOMINATIONS TO OUTSIDE BODIES

Cabinet was asked to make its nominations to the outside bodies detailed in Appendix E (copy attached to the signed minutes).

RESOLVED that the nominations detailed in the report be agreed.

7. NOTES OF THE CAPITAL WORKS PROGRAMME CABINET ADVISORY GROUP

Cabinet was asked to consider the notes of the Capital Works Programme CAG meeting of 13 April 2017 and the recommendations detailed at Minute No.s 50 (b) (1, 2 and 4 as follows) (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix F):-

- (1) Riverside Centre Ground Source Heat Pump**
- (2) Stakeford Depot Ground Source Heat Pump**
- (4) Queen's Hall, Hexham**

Councillor Homer welcomed the proposals for Queen's Hall, Hexham which she felt represented a workable solution and would be of benefit to the trustees, whilst also being in line with the Administration's vision for community hubs.

The Leader referred to the recommendation regarding James Calvert Spence College at Minute No.50 (b)(3) and advised that this was not being supported by Cabinet, and that it would be considered as part of the wider review of school and college developments in Northumberland. There was no detailed business case yet for this investment programme, though £1.2m had been spent recently on a repairs backlog on the school buildings, and full support would be given to the school to access funding through the proper channels.

RESOLVED that the recommendations detailed at Minute No.s 50 (b) (1, 2 and 4 (detailed below) be agreed (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix F):-

- (1) Riverside Centre Ground Source Heat Pump
- (2) Stakeford Depot Ground Source Heat Pump
- (4) Queen's Hall, Hexham

At this point Councillor Edgar from Scottish Borders Council and an officer arrived at the meeting. The Leader welcomed them to the meeting and advised that Cabinet had given its full support to the proposals for the Union Chain Bridge, and members looked forward to working their counterparts at Scottish Borders Council.

Councillor Edgar advised that they were attending to show support for the project and to get the desired result. Scottish Borders also looked forward to working with the County Council on the project which would be of benefit to everyone.

8. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:-

- (a) That under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item on the Agenda as it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A of the 1972 Act, and
- (b) That the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure for the following reasons:-

Agenda Item Paragraph of Part I of Schedule 12A

- 11 3 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)
The public interest in seeking this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure because the proposed SLA agreement is linked to the commercial arrangements for the acquisition of the Alnwick Playhouse which is still under negotiation.

9. REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Proposed SLA with Northumberland Theatre Company

The report sought approval to enter into a Service Level Agreement with the Northumberland Theatre Company (NTC) to provide a 10 year programme of live performances across Northumberland (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix G, coloured pink and marked Not for Publication, along with the report of the Communities and Place OSC).

The Leader reported that this had been under discussion for some time and making progress during the summer recess would prevent disruption to the performances programme.

Councillor Sanderson referred to the issues raised at Communities and Place OSC as detailed in paragraph two of its report, and suggested that the report's recommendations be agreed, subject to the assurances sought by Scrutiny being satisfactorily met. Members accepted this amendment.

RESOLVED that the recommendation detailed in the report be agreed, subject to the assurances sought by Communities and Place OSC regarding the ownership of the building, building maintenance arrangements and performance against the SLA, being provided.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....