

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Northumberland County Council** held at County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday, 6 September 2017 at 3.00pm.

PRESENT

Councillor R.R. Dodd
(in the Chair)

MEMBERS

Armstrong, E.	Lang, J.A.
Bawn, D.	Lawrie, R.M.G.
Campbell, D.	Ledger, D.
Cartie, E.	Moore, R.
Castle, G.	Murray, A.H.
Cessford, T.	Nisbet, K.
Clark, T.	Oliver, N.
Crosby, B.	Parry, K.
Dale, P.A.M.	Pattison, W.
Daley, W.	Pidcock, B.
Davey, J.G.	Purvis, M.A.
Davey, S.	Quinn, K.
Dunbar, C.	Renner-Thompson, G.
Dungworth, S.E.	Richards, M.E.
Dunn, L.	Riddle, J.R.
Flux, B.	Roughead, G.
Foster, J.D.	Sanderson, H.G.H.
Gallacher, B.	Seymour, C.
Gibson, R.	Sharp, A.
Gobin, J.J.	Simpson, E.
Grimshaw, L.	Stewart, G.
Hepple, A.	Swinburn, M.D.
Hill, G.	Swithenbank, I.C.F.
Homer, C.(part)	Thorne, T.N.
Horncastle, C.W.	Wallace, R.
Hutchinson, J.I.	Watson, J.G.
Jackson, P.A.	Wearmouth R.W.
Jones, V.	Webb, G.
Kennedy, D.	Wilson, T.S.

OFFICERS

Angus, K.
Bracken, M.

Director of Human Resources
Apprentice, Democratic Services

Hadfield, K.

Henry, L.

Lally, D.

Committee Services and Scrutiny
Manager

Legal Services Manager

Interim Chief Executive

Around 20 members of the press and public were in attendance.

32. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bridgett, Dickinson, Reid, Rickerby and Robinson.

33. MINUTES

With regard to the named vote record detailed on page 24, Councillor Richards queried why her name was not registered. The Business Chair advised this would be checked.

With regard to Minute No.23 (Correspondence), Councillor Dale advised that this should refer to the F40 Group, not the G40 Group.

With regard to Minute No.20 (Minutes), Councillor J.G. Davey commented that he understood a public question had been rejected from Mr Jones, and he asked why this was so, and where was transparency? Members were advised that the question had not been about matters which were the responsibility of the Authority or were relevant to its business. The issues related to confidential matters and it had not been felt appropriate to take the question in the interests of the member concerned and the putative complainant.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on Wednesday 5 July 2017, be confirmed as a true record, signed by the Business Chair and sealed with the Common Seal of the Council, subject to the amendment of Minute No.23 detailed above.

34. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Councillor Sanderson reported on the very welcome recent announcement from Highways England that they were supporting the green route for the dualling of the A1, which had been the Council's preferred option. Consultation and planning would begin the following year, with construction expected to take place between 2019-22.

The Leader reported on the very successful Tour of Britain cycle event through the County on Monday and thanked the staff involved in what had amounted to a feat of organisation showing the Council and its employees at their very best. The Civic Head, Councillor Murray, expressed his personal thanks to the staff

at Kielder and Blyth who had looked after him, and Councillor Dodd thanked Nigel Walsh for leading on the arrangements.

35. 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
14	1, 3 and 4 - Information relating to any individual, information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information), and information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or any contemplated consultations or negotiations in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the Authority and or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the Authority. The public interest in seeking this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure because disclosure would adversely affect the Authority's ability to conduct its affairs.

36. REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Revised Executive Management Structure

The report sought approval of a revised executive management structure for the Council (copy attached to the sealed minutes, coloured pink and marked "Not for Publication"). The report was handed out to members and time was allowed to read it.

The Leader introduced the report highlighting the importance of this decision for the Council. The last few months had identified where the Council needed to be as effective as possible and he referred to the shared positions within the structure which showed the strengths of the Council's partnerships, particularly between health and social care. The roles of Head of Paid Service and Section 151 Officer would be separated, and an executive director on the same level

as the chief financial officer was proposed to take responsibility for the delivery of front facing services.

The Interim Chief Executive reassured members that the structure adequately covered the statutory functions and that vital leadership roles were included for areas of strategic importance such as place, planning and highways.

Appropriate deputising arrangements were proposed for the head of paid service which allowed significant savings to be made.

A number of points were made by members including:-

- Councillor J.G. Davey sought assurances that the requirements of the Local Government and Housing Act would be met in terms of a named individual responsible for the Housing Revenue Account, who tenants could rely upon to take their views into account as this was not clear from the report. Mrs Lally reassured members that the proper safeguards were in place. The Leader confirmed that sound arrangements would be in place, and that a named person would be identified further down the hierarchy.
- Councillor Dungworth queried where the responsibility for Public Health would lie. She did not support it being a shared function and would be concerned if the wellbeing ethos was lost within the Council. It was important that this ethos be embedded within all services such as housing, leisure etc so that wider public health issues were given the attention they deserved. It was also important where functions were located within the structure as they then became managed from that perspective.
- Councillor Dale looked forward to seeing the structure at the next level down. She queried the location of the election services officer, asked for more information on the role of the Director of International and queried whether Sustainable Transport would include school transport. Mrs Lally advised that a report had been agreed by Council recently which had fully explained this role. The role was about generating income through consultancy to support the delivery of services, not about exporting County Council staff. Mr Henry advised that the post of the returning officer would be appropriately allocated, as detailed in the report. It was confirmed that Sustainable Transport would include school transport.
- Councillor Hill commented that the Administration's commitment to abolishing Arch in its manifesto was not borne out by the proposals in the report, and she moved an amendment that the Chief Executive, Arch post be removed from the structure. The Leader reminded members that a major review of Arch was ongoing. Proposals would come forward from that in due course but until then, that position needed to remain. Councillor Oliver added that this role was a current one, and when the review was complete, any proposals regarding the position would be made to Arch at that point.
- Councillor Dale suggested that the proposed structure be agreed subject to the future outcome of the review of Arch, which the Leader agreed was acceptable.

On the recommendations in the report, amended as detailed above, being put to the vote there voted **FOR: 57; AGAINST: 1; ABSTENTIONS: 0.**

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that recommendations 1-10 in the report of the Leader of the Council be agreed, and the overall structure be subject to the future outcome of the review of Arch.

The press and public were allowed back into the Chamber at 15:42.

- 37. 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.

Twenty seven questions from members had been circulated.

Councillor J.G. Davey requested that questions 26 and 27 be discarded as they were libellous and fell outside the Nolan principles. Also, the answer to question 25 was already contained within the Council agenda in the Treasury Management Annual Report. Mr Henry advised that there was no provision within the Constitution for the questions to be challenged. However, if members wished to amend their questions, they could do so.

Question 1 from Councillor Pidcock to the Leader

May I ask the Leader if he has had a chance to visit the proposed site for the New Council Offices?

Councillor Pidcock advised that he now knew the Leader had visited the site. He referred to the pilings which had been driven into the portland park site, advising that these were valued at over £2m, and he asked whether the Leader knew how long it would be before these were no longer fit for purpose.

The Leader responded that the pilings had not cost £2m. He had visited the site many times and there were a number of ideas for its future use which the community would be involved in determining..

Question 2 from Councillor Dale to Councillor Horncastle

What is the total cost (including staff resources, consultations, printing, members time and overheads, etc.) of developing the Core Strategy from the beginning in 2008/09 to placing it on deposit with the Government inspectorate at the beginning of this year?

Councillor Horncastle advised that the total cost between 2009/10 to 2016/17 i.e. from the start of work on the Core Strategy up until submission to Government, was £1,191,073, which comprised specialist consultancy support, consultation and printing costs, and staffing costs for officers employed full-time on the Plan. The figure did not include any apportionment of other officers, managers or members time during the specified period as their time was not recorded. An annual breakdown of the costs could be

provided.

Councillor Dale asked why there had been no Conservative Group representative on the LDF Working Group in the past two years from the west area. Councillor Horncastle responded that it had been a decision of the Group to withdraw from the process as they had felt that the emerging Core Strategy had not mirrored the results of consultation, was not fit for the purposes of the County Council and would not protect the Council from large housing developments.

Question 3 from Councillor Hill to Councillor Sanderson

What steps are being taken to address the numerous complaints being made by residents in relation to the installation and performance of the new LED lights ?

Is NCC satisfied that there has been adequate communication to Town and County Councillors and residents on this matter?

Councillor Sanderson responded that this was a contract entered into by the previous Administration and whilst it had many plus points, it was not without its problems, including communications. Some improvements had been made but it was clear that further improvements to standards of customer care and timeliness of information were required.

Councillor Hill referred to the huge number of complaints about the street lighting programme - lights were too bright, too dark, hidden by trees, holes were dug unnecessarily and left. She asked whether the Cabinet Member was aware of the farcical situation.

Councillor Sanderson responded that he was aware of the issues and these were being addressed with the contractor. He very keen to improve the reputation of the County Council with town and parish councils, and with communities, and efforts would be focussed on responding to street lighting queries.

Question 4 from Councillor Hill to Councillor Daley

The portfolio holder for education and children's services has recently made some very robust and welcome statements about refusing to accept poor standards in schools across Northumberland. Has he got any specific plans to tackle the particular challenges in Berwick?

Councillor Daley replied that there were a number of areas of Northumberland where there were concerns about educational standards, this included the north of the county. He had asked the interim Director of Children's Services to provide an analysis and report on the key issues by the end of September. This would be a strategic document that would need to be discussed with a number of other bodies including the office for the regional schools commissioner and the department for education. An overarching strategy for school and academies would be part of the wider corporate plan which would

be developed by the new administration. Mediocrity from any type of school was not acceptable.

Councillor Hill commented that Berwick had a “perfect storm” of factors and asked what the cabinet member was doing to acquaint himself with Berwick’s unique position. Councillor Daley advised that he had already consulted with a number of partner leaders in the area. The issues were on his radar and would be dealt with.

Question 5 from Councillor Dale to the Leader

How long have you been a director of ARCH and how many meetings have you missed over this period?

The Leader responded that he had been a director since Dec 2011 and had missed 11 meetings during that period.

Councillor Dale queried whether the Leader, as a member of the Audit Committee, had raised at that Committee the issue of Arch being dubious on its operations. The Leader replied that he had raised it at Arch Board level many times.

Question 6 from Councillor Dale to Councillor Sanderson

Please could you inform the Council how many potholes there are at present in the County that require filling?

Councillor Sanderson replied that there were currently 1,868 potholes which were in the process of being repaired.

Councillor Dale asked where the £60m in the medium term financial plan for highways and the £100m fund to improve the roads in the next four years would be funded from. Councillor Sanderson replied that this would come from the LTP and extra government funding.

Question 7 from Councillor Dale to Councillor Oliver

How many apprenticeships does the Council have at the present time?

Councillor Oliver replied that there were currently 160.

Councillor Dale asked how many of these apprenticeships were for WASPI ladies and how had they been advertised. Councillor Oliver replied that no distinctions in age were made for the apprenticeship programme and whoever wanted to apply could.

Question 8 from Councillor Dale to Councillor Riddle

How many Neighbourhood Plans are in place at the present time in Northumberland?

Councillor Riddle advised that there were currently three "made" neighbourhood plans (Allendale, Morpeth, Alnwick & Denwick) with a further 22 in various stages of preparation. The most advanced of these was Ponteland which was due to go to referendum on 28th September 2017.

Councillor Dale referred to the weight given to neighbourhood plans commenting that she had asked for counsel's brief on this topic. It was important to have this in writing so that people could be made aware of the total weight behind neighbourhood plans.

Councillor Riddle agreed that made neighbourhood plans currently carried full weight in planning decisions and the withdrawal of the core strategy did not affect the ability to refuse planning applications on the basis of being contrary to a neighbourhood plan.

Question 9 from Councillor Dale to Councillor Wearmouth

How many houses have been built in the green belt in the last five years in Northumberland?

Councillor Wearmouth advised that this was 246

Councillor Dale sought clarification of the number of homes built on the green belt within her electoral division. Councillor Wearmouth agreed to provide this information in writing.

Question 10 from Councillor Dungworth to Councillor Daley

On Monday 13 March this year Northumberland County Council held a public meeting at Astley Community High School in Seaton Delaval to open consultation on the building of a new secondary school to serve the children of Seaton Valley.

Parents, students, staff and governors from the Seaton Valley Federation and the feeder first schools were given a presentation of options and shown examples of the schools recently built in Northumberland and told that the process would begin in earnest after the purdah period.

It is now nearly three months since the General Election so please could the portfolio holder update myself and the residents of Seaton Valley of the progress with these plans?

Councillor Daley responded that, in order to understand the status of this project it was important to put it in the context of other capital projects planned or agreed to be funded from the Council's medium term capital programme.

There were several significant education capital projects under discussion in April 2017 and funding came from a variety of sources, some ring fenced, others linked to the corporate plan. The Council's medium term plan (2016/19) identified £103m to fund capital developments in schools. Initially this was identified to be spent on three school partnerships - Ponteland, Morpeth and

Hexham. Following consultation and a development of business cases, it was agreed that £57m was allocated to Ponteland for reorganisation.

A project to provide a new build school for Hexham Queen Elizabeth had not been progressed as the County Council had been successful with its bid to have the school included in the national school replacement building programme called Priority School Building Programme (PSBP). It was the Council's intention to wait until the Education Funding Agency (EFA) had completed their feasibility work which would determine the scope of works and funding allocation. Now the funding allocation was known, the plan would have been for NCC to investigate with the EFA whether funding that had been allocated to this project could be used as a contribution to a larger complete new build scheme. NCC did put a proposal to the Secretary of State (SoS) for Education to close Haydon Bridge and build a new school that could accommodate all the pupils from Hexham and Haydon Bridge but this had been rejected.

The unallocated balance of funding therefore stood at £40.3m in May. There were a number of projects where it was agreed a business case would be developed in order to go through the democratic approval process. Two projects involved the development of additional places for children with special educational needs, one at the Priory School in Hexham and one at a site in Ashington. Both had recently been agreed following examination of the business cases.

Other projects, including Astley High School were not as far advanced. Each project had to go to the officer Capital Strategy Group (CSG) for discussion and so that various briefings/business cases could be created. Projects then went to the Member Capital Working Group and then to Cabinet for final approval. The Astley High project did not reach this stage and a detailed business case was not in place. The election then took place and no further work was developed. The new administration had discussed a number of these fledgling projects, including Astley High School, and Cabinet Members had requested that further work on a business case for Astley be developed by officers. It was expected that a business case would be worked up by the end of September and presented to Cabinet for a decision as to whether a more detailed project plan should be developed.

Councillor Dungworth advised that she knew nothing of these developments and felt sure that Astley High School did not either. She asked that the Federation be involved in the discussions and business planning, and that the people of Seaton Valley be informed about what was happening as capital expenditure in this area was well overdue.

Councillor Daley accepted this and confirmed that a robust business case was in place. He appreciated the passion people felt about new schools but added that this passion also needed to be directed towards driving up standards.

Question 11 from Councillor Gibson to Councillor Sanderson

Does the portfolio holder welcome the extra funding from central government - £5m - to fix our business routes, mainly close to Kielder forest?

Councillor Sanderson advised that he very much welcomed the extra funding from government to improve the C200, C207 and C192 as improvements to rural roads were much needed. He thanked officers for their work to secure this funding in the face of tough competition.

Question 12 from Councillor Dale to the Leader

How many employees of Northumberland County Council are working at County Hall Morpeth at the present time?

The Leader had responded that this was 1,245. Councillor Dale commented that this did not match up with information provided earlier and asked that the correct figure be emailed to her.

Question 13 from Councillor Dale to the Leader

What are the business rates for County Hall?

The Leader replied that, in the current financial year 2017-18, the business rates for County Hall were £395,927.88.

Question 14 from Councillor Dale to the Leader

When is work starting on the long term maintenance required on County Hall?

The Leader advised that refurbishment options were currently being drawn up and costed. Once a preferred option was approved, the design team would create detailed plans and a refurbishment programme would set out a phased timetable for the works and necessary internal staff moves, as it was intended that the building would remain operational during the works. Allowing sufficient time for detailed design and tendering of the works, it was not anticipated that any work on site would commence before Summer next year.

Councillor Dale referred to the GVA report which priced the County Hall refurbishment programme at £21m and asked whether this report was being used or another. The Leader advised that the Council had instigated another report from Faithful and Gould which had priced the refurbishment programme at £7m over 5 years.

Question 15 from Councillor Dale to Councillor Wearmouth

When will a report be ready following the review of ARCH?

Councillor Wearmouth advised that he could not give an exact date. Any such report would have to be considered by the Arch Board first and there were also external partners to take into account. Hopefully, it would be before the next Council meeting.

Question 16 from Councillor Dale to Councillor Oliver

What is the oldest debt this Council has with regard to the Council's Treasury Management Strategy?

Councillor Oliver advised that the oldest loan was a PWLB annuity, which was taken out in 1948 for 80 years. The current balance on this loan was just over £3k and the interest rate was 3%

Councillor Dale queried why this had not been paid. Councillor Oliver explained that it was an 80 year loan and was therefore not due yet.

Question 17 from Councillor Dale to Councillor Jones

Where is the extra funding for social services agreed in the last budget being used?

Councillor Dale clarified that she was referring to the additional 3% Council Tax precept and the additional one-off adult social care grant of £1.5m included in the Council's February budget. Councillor Jones advised that this latter funding had not been ringfenced and had gone into the general revenue budget. None of the money had actually come to the Authority.

The majority of the funding from the council tax had been allocated to meet the cost to care providers of the April 2017 increase in the National Living Wage, and other cost increases linked to inflation.

The increased funding for adult social care in the Government's Spring Budget, was to be added to the "improved Better Care Fund". Northumberland was receiving £6.4m by this route in 2017/18, though the amount of additional funding would then fall in each of the following financial years, to £4.3m and then £2.1m.

Plans for the use of this funding had to fulfil one of three purposes set out in grant conditions:

- Meeting adult social care needs
- Reducing pressure on the NHS, including supporting more people to be discharged from hospital when they are ready
- Ensuring that the local social care provider market is supported

Plans for using this funding had to be agreed with the local NHS Clinical Commissioning Group, and be included in the joint Better Care Fund Plan, a first version of which had to be submitted to NHS England by the end of the week.

Much of this funding was required to address existing budget pressures resulting from demographic and legislative change, which had been covered in recent years through the use of non-recurrent funding, and to avoid the need to make undesirable budget savings which would otherwise have had to be

considered. In the current year, £4.5m of the total funding had been provisionally allocated for these purposes.

£1.5m had been allocated to fund restructuring of the fees paid to care providers, aiming to stabilise a care market which had been under increasing pressure. A report would be presented to Cabinet on 12 September setting out how £1m of this total had been used to restructure the fees paid to care homes for older people. The remaining sum would be used to support a number of smaller-scale developments.

The draft Better Care Fund Plan which the Council and the Clinical Commissioning Group were required to submit by the end of the week would set out further detail of these proposals. It would be circulated for discussion at the Health and Wellbeing Board meeting next week.

Question 18 from Councillor Dale to the Leader

Do you think that it is good for scrutiny that the largest political party chair the majority of the Overview and Scrutiny committees?

The Leader advised that the structure and governance of the Council was significantly different this year to last. Other Groups had been offered chair and vice chair places and he was proud of the way things were working. Councillor Dale reminded the Leader of a motion dating back to 2013.

Question 19 from Councillor Dale to the Leader

How many of the Conservative Group do not receive Special Responsibility allowances?

The Leader responded that three members did not.

Question 20 from Councillor Dale to Councillor Homer

When will the cost of membership for Waterworld and Wentworth Leisure centres be reduced?

Councillor Flux advised that there was an ongoing review of Active Northumberland. A business plan needed to be in place first and strategic decisions would be taken after that.

Question 21 from Councillor Dale to the Leader

There was a signed contract between NCC/Arch and Galliford Try to build the then proposed new headquarters at Ashington at a cost of approximately £32m. Has this contract been broken and if so what are the penalties?

The Leader explained that the contract had not been broken. The contract would be varied to exclude the building of the head-quarters but continue with the infrastructure works including roads, drainage and utility services for the

development plots. Negotiations with the contractor had not yet been concluded.

Councillor Dale queried whether the Leader agreed that the original cost of the headquarters was £32m not £80m as he had claimed. The Leader responded that the total contract price as advertised in the EU Journal was £80m. Councillor Dale asked for a written response from the Leader.

Question 22 from Councillor Purvis to the Leader

Can the Leader of the Council clarify what the actual cost for the now halted new council hub building in Portland Park, Ashington was - £32m as quoted by NCC or £80m as quoted by the Conservative party?

The Leader replied that the total cost allowed in the tender for the wider Portland Park Development was £80m, of which the cost for the new Council Headquarters including furniture and fit out was £34m.

Councillor Purvis reiterated that the Leader had referred to the cost of the headquarters as being £80m. The Leader refuted this adding that he had been very careful in his choice of language.

Question 23 from Councillor J.G. Davey to Councillor Riddle

The Local Government Association have highlighted a new 'stealth tax on planning' which is being proposed by the Conservative government. The cost for planning applications was traditionally set nationally and uniformly but now the government propose to 'allow' local council's to set their own planning fees. The LGA expect the cost that will fall on local taxpayers to top £1billion. Will the Leader inform residents and the council whether he is in agreement with locally set fees and whether he sees this as a potential stealth tax on Northumberland's residents?

Councillor Riddle advised that current planning fees were set nationally and did not cover the full cost of processing a planning application. The question seemed to imply that increasing planning fees would cost taxpayers upwards of £1bn. However, that was a misrepresentation of what was being suggested by the LGA.

The LGA had estimated that the full cost of processing planning applications nationally was currently around £200m short of that generated by application fees and therefore, without any increase in fees, a £1bn deficit could be facing Local Authorities over the next five years which would need to be met by taxpayers at the expense of other Council services.

There were proposals in the Housing White Paper published in Feb 2017 to allow Council's to increase planning fees by 20% which were yet to be followed through, and it also contained mention of local fee setting to allow Council's to recover actual costs. Both proposals would be strongly welcomed to help reduce the current gap between a planning application fee and the

actual cost of processing an application, thereby reducing the cost to the taxpayer.

Councillor Davey surmised from this response that the Administration supported a potential increase of 20% and local setting of charges, and asked what future plans the Administration had for planning fees. Councillor Riddle responded that this had not yet been considered by Cabinet or Council, adding that increased fees were needed to offset costs incurred.

Question 24 from Councillor Hepple to the Leader

Since Conservative Leader Peter Jackson and his coalition removed the core strategy which protected Northumberland we've seen a number of applications submitted for green belt land. At Strategic Planning yesterday we saw applications which meant that nearly 2000 homes were being put forward for acceptance by a Conservative council which promised to 'halt the march of the developers'. How does Cllr Jackson square his claim to be 'halting the march of the developers' with a 'surge in planning applications' which will see thousands of new houses built in Alnwick, Bedlington, Ashington, New Hartley and Cramlington? Cllr Jackson's decision to scrap the core strategy isn't halting developers, it's encouraged them to 'sprint' for thousands of homes.

The Leader responded that many of the applications considered by Strategic Planning Committee the day before related to sites that had either had outline planning consent previously, or had a "minded to approve" resolution from Committee pre-dating the Core Strategy withdrawal and required reconsideration.

The current Administration had been left with a developers' paradise. There were 12,500 consented plots but only 1000 homes per annum were being built. Action was needed to develop a clearer and more structured look at the situation in Northumberland. Councillor Hepple commented that since the withdrawal of the core strategy, there was now no defence in the County against speculation from developers, He asked had the core strategy not been withdrawn, how many of those applications would not have been considered or upheld. The Leader replied that the withdrawal of the core strategy would have had no influence of the applications considered by Strategic Planning the previous day.

Question 25 from Councillor Lawrie to the Leader

What magnitude of debt has this administration inherited from the previous administration?

The Leader replied that the overall net debt figure was £760m, with a capital programme totalling £1.2bn, which was unsustainable.

Councillor Lawrie queried what impact the lending to Arch had had. Councillor Oliver advised that the current debt was £257m, including interest of £13.3m.

This resulted in a net deficit to the Council of its lending to Arch. He added that there was no evidence of any £25m dividend from Arch.

Question 26 from Councillor Armstrong to the Leader

Councillor Armstrong had taken advice and was prepared to amend her question to delete the last seven words so the question read as follows:-

Can the Leader confirm that on May 4th the Council were still pursuing a loan of £8.5 million to Alnwick Gardens?

In response to the amended question, the Leader reminded members of his Group's opposition to the proposed loan when it had been discussed at Council, and of his shock to learn that it was still being actively worked on after the election. He confirmed that progress had been stopped on 5 May 2017.

Question 27 from Councillor Armstrong to the Leader

Councillor Armstrong advised that she was prepared to amend her question to delete the words "to Lugano" from her question so the question read as follows:-

Can the Leader confirm the rumour I have heard that the previous administration had intended to make a loan of £75 million to finance the Dissington Garden Village project?

In response to the amended question, the Leader advised that there was significant evidence of the Authority making an offer of £75m to a private developer for a development that did not have planning permission. Councillor J.G. Davey asked to see this evidence and the Leader agreed to share it in private.

Councillor Castle raised a point of order regarding the number of member questions which had been submitted, which he felt was excessive. Public questions were limited to two per person and he asked that Council give consideration to whether unlimited member questions was appropriate. The Business Chair agreed there was a duty to expedite Council business whilst at the same time allowing members to ask questions. He suggested that a small working group of members consider the issue and report back to Council in November.

On a related issue, the Business Chair highlighted that the 3 January 2018 Council meeting presented some difficulties in administering the deadlines for submission of motions and questions due to the Christmas holidays. He suggested that proposed deadlines for this meeting only be prepared for agreement by Council at its next meeting.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) a small working group of members consider proposals for the efficient management of member question time, and make recommendations to Council; and
- (b) proposed deadlines for the submission of motions and questions to the 3 January 2018 meeting of Council be submitted for Council's agreement.

The Chair then called for a short comfort break. The meeting was adjourned at 16:52 and reconvened at 17:06. Councillor Homer arrived at 16:52.

38. CABINET MINUTES

- (1) Tuesday 11 July 2017**
- (2) Thursday 27 July 2017**

With regard to Minute No.5 (1) (Schools Update), Councillor Dale expressed her concerns about the development of deficit budgets in schools which had become academies. She queried when the portfolio holder was to meet with the schools' commissioner, particularly regarding Bright Tribe. Councillor Daley suggested that Councillor Dale meet with him individually to discuss any concerns she might have. As regards the commissioner, he had already met with her but not to discuss Bright Tribe. However, he reiterated the Administration's commitment to raising educational standards everywhere and repeated his offer to meet with Councillor Dale on any specific queries.

RESOLVED that the minutes of Cabinet, as detailed above, be received.

39. COMMITTEE MINUTES

- (1) Family and Children's Services OSC**

These were presented by Councillor Renner Thompson.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Family and Children's Services OSC be received.

- (2) Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC**

These were presented by Councillor Bawn who referred to Minute No.4 (Debt Write Offs 2016-17) and inaccurate media reporting of the situation which he dismissed given the Authority's relatively healthy position compared to others.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC be received.

(3) Communities and Place OSC

These were presented by Councillor Swithenbank who highlighted the good news story detailed at Minute No.8 (Proposed SLA with Northumberland Theatre Company).

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Communities and Place OSC be received.

(4) Health and Wellbeing OSC

These were presented by Councillor Watson who drew members' attention to Minute No.05 (Rothbury Community Hospital Consultation) and the inclusive discussion which had taken place. This matter would come back to Committee in future.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Health and Wellbeing OSC be received, and the recommendation detailed at Minute No.17 regarding the establishment of Northumberland, Tyne and Wear and North Durham Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee under the terms of the Health and Social Care Act 2012, be approved.

(5) Audit Committee

These were presented by Councillor Hill who drew members' attention to Minute No.6 (a) (Draft Statement of Accounts) and the reference on page 95 to a dividend of £25m, adding that a figure had not been identified. A report would be made to a future meeting of the Committee on payments being made by Arch. Also, the delegated authority on treasury management borrowing was being reviewed.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Audit Committee be received.

(6) Health and Wellbeing Board

These were presented by Councillor Dodd.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Health and Wellbeing Board be received.

40. NOTICES OF MOTION

(1) Motion No.1

In accordance with Council Rules of Procedure No.10, Councillor J.G. Davey move the following motion, received by the Democratic Services Manager on 9 August 2017:-

"Northumberland County Council notes that:

- NJC basic pay has fallen by 21% since 2010 in real terms*
- NJC workers had a three-year pay freeze from 2010-2012*

- *Local terms and conditions of many NJC employees have also been cut, impacting on their overall earnings*
- *NJC pay is the lowest in the public sector*
- *Job evaluated pay structures are being squeezed and distorted by bottomloaded NJC pay settlements needed to reflect the increased National Living Wage and the Foundation Living Wage*
- *There are growing equal and fair pay risks resulting from this situation*

This Council therefore supports the NJC pay claim for 2018, submitted by UNISON, GMB and Unite on behalf of council and school workers and calls for the immediate end of public sector pay restraint.

NJC pay cannot be allowed to fall further behind other parts of the public sector.

This Council also welcomes the joint review of the NJC pay spine to remedy the turbulence caused by bottom-loaded pay settlements.

This Council also notes the drastic ongoing cuts to local government funding and calls on the Government to provide additional funding to fund a decent pay rise for NJC employees and the pay spine review.

This Council therefore resolves to:

- *Call immediately on the LGA to make urgent representations to Government to fund the NJC claim and the pay spine review and notify us of their action in this regard*
- *Write to the Prime Minister and Chancellor supporting the NJC pay claim and seeking additional funding to fund a decent pay rise and the pay spine review*
- *Meet with local NJC union representatives to convey support for the pay claim and the pay spine review”.*

Councillor Davey introduced the motion which he had submitted in support of all workers in the County, as well as Council workers and their pay claim. Moderately well paid people were having to use foodbanks, having suffered a 20% fall in wages and wages had stagnated across the country in all areas of work. Councillor Pidcock seconded the motion adding that the government had victimised workers in the last ten years. He appealed to members to support people who were the poorest.

Councillor Swithenbank commented that most local government staff had suffered in the last ten years and the differences between the spinal column points had become seriously compressed, leading staff to question why they should improve themselves when the differences between points were so small. This issue was about how skills were rewarded and the government had ignored the problem of eroded differentials for years.

The Leader felt all members would support the sentiments expressed but queried whether a motion put forward by a national union and debated at other Councils should be accepted. He did not agree that basic pay had fallen in real terms by 21%, nor that local terms and conditions had been undermined. The previous Administration had agreed to a £20,000 pay rise for the former Chief Executive without any additional duties. He could not therefore support the motion as it could have a serious effect on those who delivered services. He proposed an amendment to the motion as follows:-

“Northumberland County Council recognises the essential contribution our staff make towards supporting individuals and communities in all parts of our County.

We reaffirm our commitment to pay the Living Wage while supporting the LGA in national negotiations relating to any potential changes to pay structures”

This was seconded by Councillor Watson.

Councillor Swithenbank questioned the validity of the amendment. The Legal Services Manager confirmed that it was valid.

Councillor J.G. Davey commented that the motion would allow the Council to pay more staff the living wage and change how it saw its workforce. It had been written by the TUC not himself. The amendment would kill off the meaning of the motion, and only threaten to implement the living wage, which would not protect the poorest in society.

Councillor Dungworth opposed the amendment adding that the TUC had a right to further the needs of its members so these motions should not be prevented from coming forward. This was about ordinary people who were just about managing and who had been squeezed the most in the last ten years. The original motion would put pressure on local government to properly fund its staff, which the amendment did not, and the excuse of not providing services could not be used to not pay people what they were worth.

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

FOR: 32 as follows:-

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

Dunbar, C.L.	Riddle, J.R
Flux, B.	Roughead, G.A.
Gibson, R.	Sanderson, H.G.H.
Hill, G.	Seymour, C.
Homer, C.	Sharp, A.
Horncastle, C.W.	Stewart, G.
Hutchinson, J.I.	Swinburn, M.D.
Jackson, P.A.	Thorne, T.N.
Jones, V.	Watson, J.G.
Lawrie, R.M.G	Wearmouth, R.W.

AGAINST: 24 as follows:-

Campbell, D.	Lang, J.A.
Cartie, E.	Ledger, D.
Clark, T.S.	Nisbet, K.
Crosby, B.	Parry, K.
Davey, J.G.	Pidcock, B.
Davey, S.	Purvis, M.
Dungworth, S.E	Richards, M.E.
Dunn, L.	Simpson. E.
Foster, J.	Swithenbank, I.C.F.
Gallacher, B.	Wallace, R.
Gobin, J.J.	Webb, G.
Grimshaw, L.	Wilson, T.S.

ABSTENTIONS: 1 as follows:-

Dale, P.A.M.	
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Members agreed to accept this as the substantive motion.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that Northumberland County Council recognises the essential contribution its staff make towards supporting individuals and communities in all parts of the County.

It reaffirms its commitment to pay the Living Wage while supporting the LGA in national negotiations relating to any potential changes to pay structures.

(2) Motion No.2

In accordance with Council Rules of Procedure No.10, Councillor G. Roughead moved the following motion, received by the Democratic Services Manager on 28 August 2017:-

“With Northumberland County Council, Newcastle City Council and North Tyneside Council intending to withdraw from the North East Combined Authority to pursue a devolution deal for the 'North of Tyne' area, it is therefore proposed that:

Council establishes a Cross-Party Working Group for 'North of Tyne' Devolution with terms of reference and Membership to be agreed;

Council write to Her Majesty's Government, namely the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and the Prime Minister, to request an update on the current state, progress and their proposed timeline for 'North of Tyne' Devolution;

Council write to Northumberland's Members of Parliament requesting that as a means of promoting our County and the wider region in Westminster, they work collaboratively with MPs representing constituencies in the Newcastle and North Tyneside Authorities and create an All-Party Parliamentary Group for 'North of Tyne' area;

Council advocates and to request that should an All-Party Parliamentary Group for 'North of Tyne' be formed, that in addition to the Leaders of the three Councils, an additional 2 Members from each (Northumberland, Newcastle and North Tyneside) also become non-voting Members of said All-Party Parliamentary Group;

Full Council is guaranteed the opportunity to debate and vote on the final proposed 'North of Tyne Devolution' deal before signing any agreement”.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Hill.

- Councillor J.G. Davey supported the motion.
- The Leader also supported the motion and the devolution of extensive powers to the region which would allow local people to decide on the region's future and how funding was spent. He anticipated skills funding

investment and better jobs coming into the region which would provide growth and infrastructure investment.

- Councillor Dale agreed on the need for infrastructure investment to ensure opportunities could be grasped.
- Councillor Oliver commented that the regional economic strategy had identified that housing growth was not required for economic growth.
- Councillor Roughead welcomed the support for his motion expressed by members.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** without dissent that, in light of Northumberland County Council, Newcastle City Council and North Tyneside Councils' intention to withdraw from the North East Combined Authority to pursue a devolution deal for the 'North of Tyne' area, that:

- Council establishes a Cross-Party Working Group for 'North of Tyne' Devolution with terms of reference and membership to be agreed;
- Council writes to Her Majesty's Government, namely the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and the Prime Minister, to request an update on the current state, progress and their proposed timeline for 'North of Tyne' Devolution;
- Council writes to Northumberland's Members of Parliament requesting that, as a means of promoting our County and the wider region in Westminster, they work collaboratively with MPs representing constituencies in the Newcastle and North Tyneside Authorities and create an All-Party Parliamentary Group for 'North of Tyne' area;
- Council advocates and requests that, should an All-Party Parliamentary Group for 'North of Tyne' be formed, that in addition to the Leaders of the three Councils, an additional 2 Members from each (Northumberland, Newcastle and North Tyneside) also become non-voting Members of said All-Party Parliamentary Group; and
- Full Council is guaranteed the opportunity to debate and vote on the final proposed 'North of Tyne Devolution' deal before signing any agreement.

41. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE RESOURCES

Treasury Management Annual Report for the Financial Year 2016-17

The report provided details of performance against the Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) 2016-2017, approved by the County Council on 24 February 2016. The report provided a review of borrowing and investment performance for 2016-17, set in the context of the general economic conditions prevailing during the year. It also reviewed specific Treasury Management prudential indicators defined by the (CIPFA) Treasury Management Code of Practice and CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities, (the Prudential Code), and approved by the Authority in the TMSS.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the report be received and the performance of the Treasury Management function for 2016-17 be noted; and

(b) the report be approved.

42. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

Renewal of the Appointment of Independent Person Section 28 Localism Act 2011

The report asked members to renew the appointment of the current independent person under section 28 of the Localism Act 2011 to ensure compliance with prevailing statutory requirements.

Councillor Hill queried how often the independent person and the monitoring officer had disagreed in the past and could not support the proposal in the report unless the position had been re advertised and members be involved in the process to ensure that there could be public confidence in it.

Councillor Oliver replied that the position had not been re advertised. The person in place had done a good job and things were working well.

The Leader added that sufficiently qualified people were not easy to find. The proposed two year extension would allow time for another such person to be found. On the recommendations being put to the vote there voted **FOR:** a substantial majority; **AGAINST: 1; ABSTENTIONS: 3.**

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that the appointment of Mrs Judith Common as the Council's independent person under Section 28 of the Localism Act 2011 be extended for a period of two years from the date of the meeting.

43. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE RESOURCES

Independent Members of the Audit Committee

The report explained the requirement for a short further extension (of 22 days) to the tenure of the current independent / co-opted members of Audit Committee, in order to allow sufficient time to undertake advertisement and recruitment of new independent members ahead of the November Audit Committee meeting.

Councillors Hill and Watson both spoke warmly in support of the current independent members who had made an excellent contribution to the work of the Audit Committee.

RESOLVED that a short further extension to the tenure of the current independent / co-opted members of Audit Committee be approved from 6 September 2017 to 28 September 2017, in order to allow sufficient time to advertise the roles, attract the widest range of suitable candidate and to recruit to the positions, going forward.

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

.....
Chair of the County Council

.....
Duly Authorised Officer