

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

At a meeting of the **Cabinet** held at County Hall, Morpeth on Tuesday 12 September 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

Bawn, D.
Dodd, R.R.
Flux, B.
Ledger, D.

Moore, R.
Renner-Thompson, G.
Wallace, R.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Aviston, S.	Head of School Organisation and Resources
Barnes, G.	Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services Manager
Hadfield, K.	Committee Services and Scrutiny Manager
Henry, L.	Legal Services Manager
Jones, P.	Director of Local Services and Housing Delivery
Johnson, A.	Interim Director of Children's Services
Lally, D.	Interim Chief Executive
Turner, M.	Head of Property and Capital Programming

Three members of the press and public were present.

Ch.'s Initials.....

15. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on Thursday 27 July 2017, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

16. REPORT OF THE INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Education in Belford

The report set out a request from the Governing Bodies St Mary's CE Middle School Belford and Belford First School to carry out consultation on reorganisation of the system of education in Belford. The consultation would include a proposal to close St Mary's CE Middle School and extend the age range of Belford First to include Years 5 and 6. A recommendation was set out in the report to request that Cabinet agree to permit consultation on this proposal. It was noted that Cabinet could be requested to permit the publication of Statutory Proposals in relation to one or both of the above proposals at a future date following the outcomes of consultation (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix, along with the report of the FACS OSC circulated at the meeting).

The report was introduced by Councillor Daley who highlighted that this was a request from the Governing Bodies of the schools involved.

Councillor Wallace presented the report from Family and Children's Services OSC, highlighting the main points and referring to member discussion on the position of staff potentially affected by the proposals.

Mr Johnson reminded members that this was only the start of a lengthy democratic process of consultation and should not be interpreted as any decisions being made. He outlined the statutory process briefly for the benefit of members.

RESOLVED that

- (a) consultation take place as requested by the Governing Bodies of St Mary's CE Middle School and Belford First School the following model of organisation:
 - extend the age range of Belford First School from age 4 to 9 to age to 11 with effect from 1 September 2018;
 - close St Mary's CE Middle School with effect from 31 August 2018;
- (b) the decision to undertake further consultation on either proposal, if necessary, be delegated to the Interim DCS in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services;

- (c) a further report following consultation be submitted to a meeting of the Cabinet at which a decision on whether or not to issue a Statutory Proposal in relation to the proposal set out at Resolution (a) above will be made; and
- (d) the report of the Family and Children's Services OSC be noted.

17. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE RESOURCES

Write Offs 2016-17

The report detailed debt written off during the 2016-17 financial year, and sought approval to an update of Section 6 of the Finance and Contract Rules regarding write off delegations (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix B, along with the report of the Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC).

The report was introduced by Councillor Oliver, who referred to recent sensationalist and erroneous reports in local media on the position. Debts were only written off as an absolute last resort when they were no longer collectable and he reminded members that the Authority's performance compared favourably to its benchmarked counterparts.

Councillor Bawn presented the Scrutiny report. The Committee had looked at this issue in great detail and had welcomed both the overall healthy position and the downward trend.

To put the scale in context, Mr Barnes advised that £175m in council tax and £82m in business rates had been collected last year, showing that £2m was a small percentage overall.

The Leader commented that the improved collection rates should be recognised and detailed figures comparing performance to other local authorities would be welcomed. Councillor Bawn suggested that the healthy position should be promoted on the Council's website which Councillor Oliver agreed to follow up.

Councillor Riddle commented that the position had significantly improved in recent years and he commended the work of Mr Barnes and his team.

Councillor Sanderson suggested that the portfolio holder be notified in advance of each proposed write off, which Councillor Oliver supported.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the content of the report be noted;
- (b) Cabinet recommend to Full Council that paragraphs 6.7 to 6.13 of Section 6 of the Finance and Contract Rules (Other Financial Accountabilities) under Part 8 of the Council's Constitution be amended in line with paragraphs 6.7 to 6.16 at Appendix 1; and
- (c) the report of the Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC be noted.

18. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ADULT AND COMMUNITY CARE SERVICES

Home Care Fees

The report informed Cabinet of a decision made under delegated powers to offer a new fee structure to care homes for older people in the County (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix C).

Councillor Jones advised that the funding for this proposal is through the Better Care Fund arrangements. Premiums had been introduced to support homes providing specific services eg dementia care and for smaller care homes.

Mrs Lally advised that 50 out of 70 care home providers had now signed up to long term contracts which gave better coverage across the county. Those who had not signed up were in the majority taking placements on an on the spot basis.

In response to a question from the Leader, Mrs Lally confirmed that the provision of excellent service could qualify for extra payments and this would involve not just CQC ratings, but where care homes had provided the additional quality of experience on a number of issues such as feedback from families and adherence to governance requirements eg health and safety policies.

RESOLVED that the report be received.

19. 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 items on the Agenda as they involved 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
9	3 Information relating to the business or financial affairs of a particular person including the Authority holding that information. The public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the interest in disclosure because the report contains financial information on the value of potential contractual claims which could prejudice future negotiations by contracted parties.
10	3 Information relating to the business or financial affairs of a particular person including the Authority holding that information. The public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the interest in disclosure because disclosure would prejudice the Council's ability to negotiate with partners.

20. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PROPERTY SERVICES AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME

Portland Park

Following the recent local elections on May 4th 2017 and the subsequent change in Administration, it was necessary to review the Council's strategy in relation to the current County Hall site and the Portland Park Development in Ashington (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix D, coloured pink and marked "Not for Publication" along with the report of the Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC circulated at the meeting).

The Leader introduced the report highlighting that the intention was to find a positive way forward for both the resolution of the contract and the future use of the site at Ashington. He made a number of points:-

- The Conservative's manifesto pledge had provided the opportunity for a fresh look at this project. The proposal to move a large number of jobs from one town to another had not been supported by his Group.
- A sound business case had never been made and recent issues showed this needed to be revisited.
- A decision had been taken to continue with the site preparation and developing the road infrastructure and this was now well advanced. The potential for the site was enormous. A 4 year refurbishment programme of County Hall was proposed and reports on this would come to Cabinet

and Council in due course. A reconfiguration of space was also proposed, which should release some for rental use and income generation.

- This was a significant development opportunity for a key site in the middle of the town to create a whole new town centre. This would involve community uses and not just retail development, and private sector interest had already been expressed. Ideas were still being developed but local consultation would begin on 21/22 September and would be an ongoing process.

Mr Turner highlighted the key issues in the report. Councillor Bawn introduced the Scrutiny report and requested Cabinet to consider the issues contained in it. Questions had also been submitted separately which the Leader was to respond to. The Leader advised that the issues from Scrutiny would be taken into account going forward and he reiterated the cross party support for the progression of the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne line.

Councillor Daley commented on the inaccurate data on which the business case for moving to Ashington had been based. He felt it was time to promote all areas of the County and to encourage people to come here. The Administration's aim was to support the individual economies of both Ashington and Morpeth.

Councillor Wearmouth thanked Mr Turner and officers of Arch for their work, and Galliford Try for their approach in the negotiations. He had not supported the previous Administration's plans for the new HQ and multi storey car park in the town centre, but he commended the work which had been done by the Labour and Liberal Democrat Administrations in assembling the land needed.

In light of the information provided by Mr Turner at the meeting, the Leader proposed an amendment to the figure in recommendation one. This was seconded by Councillor Wearmouth.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) recommendations one and two in the report, as amended, be agreed; and
- (b) the issues highlighted in the report of the Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC be taken into account as the project progresses.

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

Agreement to Process a Neighbouring Authority's Recyclables through the Council's Waste PFI Contract

The report sought approval to process dry recyclables from a neighbouring authority through the Council's waste PFI contract (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix E, coloured pink and marked "Not for Publication").

The report was presented by Councillor Sanderson who highlighted the main points and advised that negotiations were continuing to resolve the outstanding issues.

RESOLVED that the recommendation, as detailed in the report, be agreed.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....