

## **NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a meeting of the **Northumberland County Council** held at County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday, 1 November 2017 at 3.00pm.

### **PRESENT**

Councillor R.R. Dodd  
(in the Chair)

### **MEMBERS**

Bawn, D.	Moore, R.
Beynon, J.	Murray, A.H.
Bridgett, S.	Nisbet, K.
Campbell, D.	Oliver, N.
Cartie, E.	Parry, K.
Castle, G.	Pattison, W.
Cessford, T.	Pidcock, B.
Crosby, B.	Purvis, M.A.
Dale, P.A.M.	Quinn, K.
Daley, W.	Reid, J.
Davey, J.G.	Renner-Thompson, G.
Dickinson, S.	Richards, M.E.
Dunbar, C.	Rickerby, L.J.
Dungworth, S.E.	Riddle, J.R.
Dunn, L.	Robinson, M.
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.
Hill, G.	Stow, K.
Homer, C.	Swithenbank, I.C.F.
Horncastle, C.W.	Thorne, T.N.
Hutchinson, J.I.	Towns, D.
Jackson, P.A.	Wallace, R.
Jones, V.	Watson, J.G.
Kennedy, D.	Wearmouth, R.W.
Lang, J.A.	Webb, G.
Lawrie, R.M.G.	Wilson, T.S.
Ledger, D.	

## OFFICERS

Hadfield, K.	Committee Services and Scrutiny Manager
Henry, L.	Legal Services Manager
Lally, D.	Interim Chief Executive

Around 15 members of the press and public were in attendance.

### 44. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Armstrong, Clark, S. Davey, Hepple and Swinburn.

### 45. MINUTES

With regard to Minute No.40 (1) Motion No.1, Councillor Davey advised that this should refer to the “amended motion”

With regard to Minute No. 37 (Member Questions, Q6), Councillor Dale advised that the figure in the third paragraph should be £160m.

With regard to Minute No. 37 (Member Questions, Q10), Councillor Dale advised that the second paragraph on pg 17 should read “...the County Council had **not** been successful with its bid....”

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on Wednesday 6 September 2017, be confirmed as a true record, signed by the Business Chair and sealed with the Common Seal of the Council, subject to the amendments detailed above.

With regard to Minute No.36 (Revised Executive Management Structure) Councillor Hill commented that the Leader had referred to this being the structure for the next four years and asked that this specific reference be included. The Leader did not agree, responding that the minutes were not verbatim and the comment not germane to the discussion.

### 46. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Councillors Nisbet, Reid, Rickerby, Dungworth and Oliver disclosed an interest in respect of item 13 on the agenda (Community Governance Reviews) as members of the town and parish councils involved in the report.

All members who were beneficiaries of the County Council’s pension fund disclosed a personal interest in respect of item 9 on the agenda (Motion No.2).

#### **47. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Business Chair advised members that work would be commencing soon to determine the refurbishment works required for County Hall.

Councillor Daley called on members to support domestic violence awareness week from 20 - 26 November in partnership with North Tyneside Council. He hoped members would join in the "DIVA" (Don't Ignore Violence and Abuse) walk from Tynemouth Priory to Whitley Bay on 26 November.

The Business Chair advised that he would be moving member questions to the end of the agenda.

#### **48. CABINET MINUTES**

- (1) Tuesday 12 September 2017**
- (2) Tuesday, 10 October 2017**

With regard to Minute No.20 (Portland Park), Councillor Dale asked that all members be provided with the original business case from Faithful & Gould, the GVA Strategic Options Review, the Ernst Young Report and other discussion papers, advising that she would send it to all members if the Administration did not agree to do that. The Business Chair responded that this would be taken on board.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of Cabinet, as detailed above be received, and the following resolutions be approved, as they involve budget or policy framework matters:-

- (a) Minute No.17(b) of the 12 September meeting (Write Offs 2016-17) relating to the amendment to finance and contract rules;
- (b) Minute No.26(1)(a) of the 10 October meeting relating to the Approval of the Business Rates Revaluation Relief Scheme; and
- (c) Minute No.26(1)(b) of the 10 October meeting relating to the Council Tax Support Scheme 2018-19.

#### **49. COMMITTEE MINUTES**

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

These were presented by Councillor Bawn.

With regard to Minute No. 16 (Annual Workforce Report), Councillor Grimshaw asked how many cases of bullying there had been in the year. Councillor Bawn agreed to send this information out..

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

## **(2) Family and Children's Services OSC**

These were presented by Councillor Renner Thompson who advised members that a task and finish group had now been set up to look at teacher recruitment and retention, consultation on education in Belford ended that day and a toolkit had been put together for schools on trans identity and gender diversity.

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

## **(3) Communities and Place OSC**

These were presented by Councillor Reid.

Councillor Gallacher expressed concern that the views expressed by the Committee at the meeting were not being properly reflected in the reports to Cabinet.

With regard to Minute 18(2) (Community Housing Fund), Councillor Davey reminded members that there was a far greater urban population than rural and that the community housing fund was available for all parts of the County. Councillor Reid responded that the the discussion had not been about disadvantaging anyone, but had focussed on empty buildings which could be converted.

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

## **(4) Health and Wellbeing Board**

These were presented by Councillor Dodd.

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

## **(5) Audit Committee**

These were presented by Councillor Hill.

Councillor Dale commented that it was not clear at what point the Chair of Arch had joined the meeting. Councillor Hill responded that he had joined the meeting after the private session. It was Councillor Dale's view that he should have declared an interest as Chair of Arch, and Councillor Hill confirmed that he had. Councillor Dale remarked that this had not been minuted.

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

## 50. NOTICES OF MOTION

### Motion No.1

In accordance with Council Rules of Procedure No.10, Councillor D. Ledger moved the following motion, received by the Democratic Services Manager on 23 October 2017:-

#### **Post-Brexit Regional Policy**

*“Since Britain joined the European Union, Structural Funds have co-financed a vast range of initiatives to promote economic growth, particularly in older industrial areas. With Brexit, that source of funding will disappear. This Council therefore welcomes the UK Government’s commitment to establishing a UK Shared Prosperity Fund as a potential source of new funding.*

*However, several issues are unresolved that could play a pivotal role in delivering growth and jobs in the places that need this the most. The Industrial Communities Alliance has proposed that:*

- *The Shared Prosperity Fund’s budget should be set at a level that not only compensates for the loss of EU funding (£1.5bn a year) but also provides additional resources to match the scale of the challenge to deliver growth and prosperity across Britain.*
- *The Fund should focus on narrowing local and regional differences in economic well-being.*
- *Local authorities should have a strong hand in the management of the new Fund. Local authorities are most closely attuned to local needs and should take the key decisions about spending priorities.*

*This Council agrees to write to the Chancellor, and Secretaries of State for Business and Communities, with copies to local MPs, calling on the UK Government to incorporate these proposals into the structure of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund”.*

In moving the motion, Councillor Ledger reminded members that the Industrial Communities Alliance was a cross party organisation. The motion was in support of an initiative to write to the Government calling on it to incorporate the proposals detailed in the motion into a shared UK Prosperity Fund. He urged all members to support it.

The Leader seconded the motion, agreeing on the need to put Northumberland first. There was a commitment from the Government to match

European structural funding. The important issue would be what happened with that funding as it was needed to tackle problematic issues such as regeneration projects. It was essential to have local control over this fund so it could be used to grow the area through business and jobs. The Government also needed to be made aware of the north south divide, and post - Brexit, this would be important for the whole country.

On the motion being put to the vote, there voted **FOR:61; AGAINST:0; ABSTENTIONS:1**. It was therefore **RESOLVED** as follows:-

Since Britain joined the European Union, Structural Funds have co-financed a vast range of initiatives to promote economic growth, particularly in older industrial areas. With Brexit, that source of funding will disappear. This Council therefore welcomes the UK Government's commitment to establishing a UK Shared Prosperity Fund as a potential source of new funding.

However, several issues are unresolved that could play a pivotal role in delivering growth and jobs in the places that need this the most. The Industrial Communities Alliance has proposed that:

- The Shared Prosperity Fund's budget should be set at a level that not only compensates for the loss of EU funding (£1.5bn a year) but also provides additional resources to match the scale of the challenge to deliver growth and prosperity across Britain.
- The Fund should focus on narrowing local and regional differences in economic well-being.
- Local authorities should have a strong hand in the management of the new Fund. Local authorities are most closely attuned to local needs and should take the key decisions about spending priorities.

This Council agrees to write to the Chancellor, and Secretaries of State for Business and Communities, with copies to local MPs, calling on the UK Government to incorporate these proposals into the structure of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

## **Motion No.2**

In accordance with Council Rules of Procedure No.10, Councillor J.G. Davey moved the following motion, received by the Democratic Services Manager on 23 October 2017:-

*"Northumberland Labour Group call on Northumberland County Council to reconsider the proposal to move local LGPS advice provision from*

*Northumberland to relocate it in South Tyneside. The geographical size of Northumberland necessitates 'localised advice provision' in line with the council policy to decentralise services to local communities.*

*Relocating LGPS advice services and its advisers to South Tyneside will negatively impact elderly and disabled members of the scheme disproportionately by removing local access to advice outside Northumberland. It is unfair to ask elderly and disabled members to travel to South Tyneside in order to get face to face advice with pension advisers.*

*We demand an impact assessment under the Equality Act 2010 and remind Members they have a responsibility to safeguard vulnerable adults including the elderly and infirm and that contact is made with the scheme when LGPS members are at the most vulnerable stages of their lives”.*

In introducing the motion, Councillor Davey advised that it was not about having the scheme run from South Tyneside Council (STC), its management, its amalgamation or the pooling arrangement. It was about the service to pensioners and the way in which valued advice officers would be moved out of their reach. Pensioners often had to use public transport and moving officers out of the County would make access to advice very difficult indeed at a time in their lives when they were vulnerable and in need of support the most. The Tyne and Wear pension fund had the most antiquated system in the north east and compared very unfavourably to the modern system used by Northumberland. He felt the two systems should be brought into line and all efforts should be made to ensure that valuable face to face contact was maintained by staff working from home or in one stop shops.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Foster who echoed Councillor Davey's comments regarding access to staff by elderly and vulnerable residents.

Councillor Pidcock suggested that pension fund panel minutes should be included on the Council agenda to improve democratic accountability. The Business Chair advised this would be investigated.

Councillor Watson, as chair of the Pension Fund Panel, expressed his disappointment at the motion. This initiative had been considered by the Panel for almost four years and no concern had ever been raised by any of the Labour Group since members had been reassured that all points of concern had been fully addressed. Currently, very few LGPS members sought to obtain face to face information, there had been only one face to face interview in the last ten years. The majority of information was provided either online or in paper format, or access to a Team member was provided by telephone.

The Pensions Administration Team could not give financial advice to any Scheme member and this would not change under the proposed move to a shared administration service. Access to online or hard copy written information would not change, but access to information by telephone would actually improve as STC offered a 24/7 telephone message service (with call back), and had a better resourced Team with a dedicated Communications

Team to provide information to members.

Following implementation of the proposed shared administration service, roadshows would be offered at locations within Northumberland. As STC's Pensions Administration Team was better resourced than the County Council's team, access to roadshow style communication would improve.

Responsibility for determining and reviewing ill-health retirements was an employer responsibility and this would remain with the County Council after implementation of the proposed changes. There would be no change to the services offered to LGPS members by the Council for those members facing ill-health issues.

A number of members spoke on the motion as follows:-

- Councillor Dale queried whether consideration had been given to working with North Tyneside or Newcastle Councils given the devolution proposals. Councillor Watson confirmed they were already part of the Tyne and Wear Pension Fund.
- Councillor Bawn was also disappointed with the motion as this had been in the planning for a long time, with the involvement of all political groups and the Panel had always worked on a non-political basis. The quality of service and the ability to deliver were the issues at hand here and members had been assured on these points.
- Councillor Oliver commented that not to go ahead with this would be bad for scheme members. STC were managing a much larger scheme and pooling was around the corner. Members had to support the change to a shared service and not play political games with the issue.
- Councillor Ledger commented that original discussions had been around a shared service. Members had not been told that the path of travel had moved to a full merger and this was the reason for concern. He asked when the position had changed and how staff felt about it.
- Councillor Kennedy commented that the motion had the right intention but the proposed shared service would provide a better and more sustainable service for scheme members. Northumberland had a very small service and it was difficult to deliver high quality with such small staff numbers.
- Councillor Watson reiterated that information had not been hidden and that minutes had been publicly available throughout.
- Councillor Daley commented that STC did not have an antiquated system - all information was available online and in great detail.
- Councillor Grimshaw queried whether trade unions had been involved and the Business Chair advised that a response would be made in writing.

In summing up, Councillor Davey advised that members had mixed up what the motion was about with the transfer of the service to another Council. Supporting the motion was a vote to retain people to look after pensioners in the County and members would be letting residents down if they didn't support it.



On the motion being put to the vote there voted **FOR; 22; AGAINST: 37; ABSTENTIONS: 3.**

The Business Chair therefore declared the motion lost.

Mrs Lally left the Chamber whilst the following matter was discussed

## **51. REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

### **Appointment of the Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service) and associated changes to the Executive Management Structure**

The purpose of the report was to seek approval for the appointment of a Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive) in accordance with the provisions of the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) Regulations 2001 and the County Council's constitution and to propose some subsequent changes to the underpinning executive structure.

As a consequence of the appointment of the Head of Paid Service the Director of Children's Service's Role had become vacant. The current interim Director of Children's service was due to take flexible retirement in April 2018.

In order to ensure that Children's and Adult's Services management arrangements were robust, the report sought to review and strengthen the leadership arrangements for the Council's key social care and education services. In order to strengthen the roles that underpinned the Adult Services and Children's Services roles, the report sought approval to reconfigure two current management roles and to approve one additional post (the latter post was wholly funded by the NHS).

The Leader addressed himself to the first part of the report (recommendations 1-3) regarding the appointment of the Chief Executive. A cross party meeting of the Staff and Appointments had met and unanimously agreed to appoint Mrs Lally to the permanent role and he reminded members that this was a jointly funded post with Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.

Some members expressed concern regarding the make-up of the Staff and Appointments Committee. The Leader responded that, in order to expedite the process, the committee had been slimmed down to four members representing Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat Groups. A query was also raised regarding whether Mrs Lally would receive any further remuneration above what she would receive from the NHS. The Leader responded that he could not speak for the NHS, but she would not receive anything further from the County Council.

In response to the concerns being expressed, the Monitoring Officer advised that full Council had the ability to challenge or correct any governance issues it chose, and Council could correct any potential deficiencies in decision making.

On recommendations 1-3 in the report being put to the vote there voted **FOR: 60; AGAINST: 0; ABSTENTIONS: 1.**

Mrs Lally then returned to the Chamber.

With regard to recommendations 4-9 in the report, Mrs Lally confirmed the view that it was necessary to have an appropriate structure within adult and children's services for a county the size of Northumberland. The Service Director for Integration would be a 100% wholly funded NHS post.

Members welcomed the proposal to separate the S151 officer role from the Head of Paid Service and congratulated Mrs Lally on her appointment.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that:-

- (1) following a formal process, the appointment of Daljit Lally as the substantive Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service for Northumberland County Council, with effect from 1st November 2017, be approved;
- (2) the remuneration of the Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service) be as outlined within the report, and be subject to ongoing review by the Staff and Appointments Committee;
- (3) it be noted that this is currently a joint appointment with Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust in which the postholder also holds the substantive Executive Director of Delivery role on a permanent basis. This may be reviewed in time should the requirements of either organisation change. The postholder will be substantively employed by the County Council;
- (4) the changes to the underpinning Children's Services and Adult Services arrangements be approved, and the proposed wholly NHS funded additional post to the Executive Management Team Structure to support the Chief Executive, who has a joint post with Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (as outlined in Appendix 1), be approved;
- (5) these posts will be considered as suitable alternative employment as part of the current Executive Management Team restructure, and where appropriate a formal recruitment process will take place for the roles;

- (6) the remuneration for these posts will be as outlined within the report and then be subject to on-going review by the Staff and Appointments Committee;
- (7) it be noted that the Service Director for Integration is proposed as a joint appointment, which is fully funded by Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust to ensure that the Council expands on the arrangement to continue to provide the very best health and social care arrangements for its residents across integrated health and social care services in the county;
- (8) it be noted that the salaries for these posts are set at over £100,000 and be approved by Council in line with the Council's Pay Policy Statement which states the following:

“Any appointment within the Council that attracts a salary package of £100,000 or more will be considered by Full Council before it is advertised. Members will be given the opportunity to vote on whether they agree with proceeding with the recruitment for the post. Salary package in this respect includes salary and any other fees, allowances, bonuses and benefits in kind that the post holder would routinely be entitled to. This does not include the employer's' pension contributions should the post holder choose to join a pension scheme”; and
- (9) the post holders will be responsible for leading and managing a comprehensive portfolio across diverse areas of the council and its partners within the revised Executive Management Team arrangements and are therefore supported by Full Council.

## **52. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER**

### **Policing and Crime Act 2017**

#### **Request from Police & Crime Commissioner for Northumbria**

Council was asked to consider a request from the Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria to be co-opted as a member of the authority for the purposes stated in the report under statutory amendments brought into effect earlier this year by the provisions of the Policing and Crime Act 2017.

Councillor Reid commented that this was a significant decision. He moved that the Police and Crime Commissioner be invited to the Communities and Place OSC to explain her request and to give members the opportunity to question her on it. This was seconded by Councillor Davey.

**RESOLVED** that the Police and Crime Commissioner be invited to the Communities and Place OSC to explain her request and to give members the opportunity to question her on it.

## **53. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER**

### **Revisions to Council Constitution**

Council was asked to re-adopt the Constitution further to a range of changes agreed by full Council since October 2014. The constitution had been published on the Council's website with the agenda papers for this meeting, and would be updated following Council's agreement of the changes. A paper copy could be made available to any member on request after that final update.

Councillor Pidcock commented that it would be useful to have a loose leaf version of the constitution available for members. Councillor Oliver advised that it was available on the Council's website.

Councillor Dale queried under what power area committees could now be called local area councils. The Monitoring Officer repeated the advice he had given Councillor Dale previously that provision had been contained within the Local Government Act 2000 for the creation of area committees but with no prescription as to their name. There was therefore no obstacle to calling them local area councils.

**RESOLVED** that the revised Constitution, which includes all of the changes agreed by Council since the last formal adoption in October 2014, be formally adopted.

## **54. REPORT OF THE INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

### **Community Governance Reviews**

Council was asked to consider the outcome of two community governance reviews in the County.

Councillor Bridgett felt that the local councillor view should be deferred to and his/her view should be made clear in the report. The Monitoring Officer reminded members that there were other stakeholders involved in the process.

Councillor Dungworth commented that, with regard to the Blyth Town Council review, South Blyth should have been included.

**RESOLVED** that:-

- (a) the outcomes of the community governance reviews for Blyth Town Council and Corbridge Parish Council be agreed; and
- (b) the Democratic Services Manager be authorised to make, sign and seal the appropriate orders for the changes by virtue of the powers contained in

the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act.

## **55. COUNCIL MEETINGS**

Further to the decision of Council in September (Minute No. 37 refers), a cross party group of members had met to consider the arrangements for member questions at Council, and to consider specific arrangements for the submission of motions and questions for 3 January 2018 Council, to allow for Christmas holidays.

Member points included:-

- Councillor Davey felt that the proposals were excessive. There were already reduced opportunities for democratic participation due to fewer Council meetings and a one party Cabinet.
- Councillor Dale commented that it was her only opportunity to ask questions and it was necessary as members were not doing their work in that part of the County. If her questions were not to be answered then she would submit FOIs instead.
- Councillor Reid believed people were taking advantage of the current system and it was simply grandstanding. He questioned whether members of the public were aware what questions were being asked and whether they were ever given the answers. Every member of the Administration was available by email and he always received replies when he raised questions of them.
- Councillor Dungworth replied that she was not grandstanding and would be happy to receive a written response. She had not had replies to her submitted questions, hence the need to ask them at Council and she urged the Administration to circulate written responses before the meeting to speed things up.
- Councillor Daley commented that there was no need for FOIs to be submitted. He had an open door policy with all members and had offered to meet with Councillor Dale and others on any issue, which had not been taken up to date.
- Councillor Castle remarked that it had never been his intention to muzzle anyone and the system had never previously been pushed beyond what was reasonable. He fully accepted the need for member questions to be asked and felt that what was being proposed was a reasonable compromise.
- Councillor Dickinson reminded members that written responses had previously been provided before the meeting. This allowed members to

go straight to their supplementary questions which had made things more manageable.

- Councillor Foster felt this was a knee jerk reaction to one incident.
- Councillor Oliver commented that an excessive number of member questions was taking up a significant amount of officer time. Often the information was already known and this was wasting public resources. There were many opportunities for members to have their questions answered such as calling or asking for a meeting. He encouraged any member to contact him if they felt they weren't getting an answer from a Cabinet member.

On the recommendations contained within the agenda letter being put to the vote there voted **FOR: 38; AGAINST: 22; ABSTENTIONS: 2.**

Councillor Dungworth asked that the situation be kept under review.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that:-

**(a) Member Question Time**

(i) A number of questions on the same topic should be assimilated.

(ii) 20 minutes be allocated to deal with member questions in accordance with the running order of the agenda. Any not dealt with within that time be dealt with at the end of the meeting.

(iii) The deadline for submission of member questions be brought into line with that for public questions i.e. midday, five working days before the day of the meeting.

(iv) The number of member questions per member be brought into line with that for public questions i.e. two as a general guide, though the number of questions to be asked by any one member to remain at the discretion of the Chair, as per the Constitution.

(v) the Monitoring Officer be authorised to make the necessary changes to the Constitution arising from this proposal.

**(b) Deadlines for January 2018 Council**

The deadline for submission of motions, public questions and member questions for 3 January 2018 Council be agreed as midday on Monday, 18 December 2017.

The Chair adjourned the meeting for a comfort break at 16:46 pm and reconvened it at 16:52 pm.

## 56. QUESTIONS

### **Question 1 from Councillor B. Crosby to Councillor C. Homer**

Recently you announced that the residents of Rothbury would be able to enjoy their sporting facilities for just £24.00 per month, thereby bringing it into line with other smaller facilities in Hirst, Bedlington and Druridge. When will you be increasing the facilities in Bedlington thereby bringing it into line with other larger facilities eg in Rothbury?

Councillor Homer responded that the board of ACTIVE Northumberland would be considering a range of existing pricing structures/decisions implemented during the previous administration as part of its full service review. At the moment there were no plans to increase service provision at Bedlington, however, the board were working with local centre managers to increase awareness of and access to the existing facility and would consider the longer term plans for development in response to the review findings.

Councillor Crosby commented that there scant facilities in Bedlington outside of school hours and he asked whether the Board should now consider further discounts. Councillor Homer replied that work was currently ongoing on a new 3G pitch. Active Northumberland had to ensure there was a robust business case as part of its review but she would take Councillor Crosby's points on board and come back to him.

### **Question 2 from Councillor G. Hill to the Leader**

Does the administration at Northumberland County Council support the aims of the campaign group RAGES (Rail Action Group, East of Scotland) and recognise the significant benefits for Berwick-upon-Tweed and the wider county, if they were successful?

The Leader advised that the key aims of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland (RAGES) relevant to Berwick-upon-Tweed was the aspiration to improve the rail service between Edinburgh, Dunbar and Berwick-upon-Tweed as well as an ongoing campaign for a Newcastle to Edinburgh local service calling at all stations en route.

The County Council fully supported these aims and recognised the importance of Berwick as a gateway to the strategic rail network, a key destination in itself and as a local service centre for communities on both sides of the border. It was important that Berwick at least maintained its existing strategic connectivity and sought to improve local connectivity to stations either side of the border. The Council would continue to lobby Network Rail to provide the infrastructure required to facilitate timetable improvements as well as franchise operators to consider the inclusion of local stopping services in future timetables.

Councillor Hill asked in what ways the Council would show its support. Help was needed to lobby the Transport Minister and Scottish Government to ensure action as early as possible. The Leader responded that the Berwick Regeneration Commission had now been established to make recommendations to the North Northumberland Local Area Council who would then take them forward. If Councillor Hill felt there was anything specific which could be done he asked her to raise it with him outside of the Council meeting.

### **Question 3 from Councillor G. Hill to the Leader**

Does the administration agree that Councillor attendance at Council (full, Local Area and Committee) meetings should be publicised, and regularly updated, on every member's web page on the NCC website?

The Leader agreed and advised that this would be actioned. Councillor Hill asked in what ways this information would be visible as low attendance was not acceptable. The Leader replied that this would have to be looked at.

### **Question 4 from Councillor M. Robinson to Councillor Oliver**

First let me say how disappointed I was to read the about the actions we are taking with regard to the Arch investigation. Not because of what has happened but because we as members were not informed prior to the press being informed.

I don't think that is correct procedure and I would have thought anything which might impact onto the reputation of this council should be given to members at least at the same time as a press release! I am not asking for the full information to be relayed only the action being taken in our name! My question therefore is, shouldn't members be informed about such actions before any press release?

Councillor Oliver stressed that there had been no press release from the Council, rather it had been a response to an enquiry from the newspaper. This had only been given as the police had made a short statement following their own receipt of a press enquiry. However there was an extremely short amount of time between the media enquiry being received by the Council and the article subsequently being published online.

The Council were not told whether the story would be run or not and as a result whilst police investigations were ongoing, he had not wanted to escalate the issue by sending an information note to all members. During this time the priority was to ensure Arch staff received relevant information and reassurance ahead of any article appearing in the media and an Arch release was sent to Arch staff.

As the Council's response to the media enquiry was restricted to a one-line statement, a briefing to all members providing the context and background



would not have been appropriate on this occasion.

He recognised the frustration of members who were naturally keen to understand exactly what had gone on in Arch, however the police needed time to conduct their investigations.

#### **Question 5 from Councillor M. Robinson to the Leader**

One of the reasons I voted to withdraw the Core Strategy was that it lacked any real economic guidance, hopefully that will be addressed when we see the revised version! The lack of a clearly defined business strategy for the County seems apparent unless we have one and it's hiding somewhere?

My question is do we have a holistic business strategy for the County, if so where is it, if not is anyone working on one and who would fulfil that remit?

The Leader responded that an Economic Strategy had been published in 2015 but this was not sufficiently robust. Alongside the revisions to the Core Strategy now being undertaken, the Economic Strategy would also be refreshed in 2018 following completion of the new NCC Corporate Plan.

#### **Question 6 from Councillor C. Seymour to Councillor G. Sanderson**

The Old Berwick Bridge, was one of the star attractions in the recent Netflix production filming of 'the Outlaw King' about Robert the Bruce recently this month. The Grade 1 listed structure was the largest bridge constructed in the UK in the 17th Century, built from red sandstone quarried at Tweedmouth.

Concerns from residents about the protection/structure of the Old Bridge have been ongoing with some short-term stabilisation repairs on large cracks in 2011. Much of the sandstone lower down, close to the pavement is also in poor shape and needs some attention.

I understand that over the last few years NCC have been doing some surveying and condition assessments on all of its bridges throughout the county and I have seen some of the team here in Berwick and have mentioned concerns about the deterioration of the Bridge.

As this is an important heritage working structure for the town, is there a scheduled plan of repair and restoration to protect this Bridge for generations to come to be put in place in the near future?

Councillor Sanderson agreed this was a delightful bridge and plans were being actively worked up at the moment. As part of the masonry arch refurbishment programme, works had already been undertaken earlier this year and additional investigation works had also been carried out to inform a feasibility study in order to identify the most appropriate interventions and remedial works to address all of the issues.

It was anticipated that the feasibility study would be completed by early 2018, as extensive consultation with Historic England would be required. Consultation would also take place with the Town Council, the Berwick Regeneration Commission and the North Northumberland Local Area Council. The timing of any repairs would be dependent on the nature and extent of the works and the level of funding required.

**Question 7 from Councillor Dale to Councillor Dodd**

The Council over many years has worked with many schools during democracy week and every Councillor has always had the opportunity to take part in the events organised by the Council. Please could you let me know why this year not all County Councillors were given the opportunity to take part in the events organised by the Council?

Councillor Dodd advised that arrangements this year had been no different to any other. Group Leaders had been consulted about potential participants as was the usual practice. Councillor Dale sought clarification that unaligned independents had not been asked, which Councillor Dodd confirmed was the case, as in previous years.

**Question 8 from Councillor Dale to Councillor Wearmouth**

Following my question at the last Full Council meeting concerning the review of Arch please could you give the Council an update as to when the review will be finished?

Councillor Wearmouth responded that as referred to earlier, the police had had to be called in to deal with some of the issues encountered in Arch. The current situation was that comments were awaited on a comprehensive report prepared by audit and counter fraud from the police. These comments would essentially determine what could be released to members without putting at risk future prosecutions.

His expectation was now that the report would come to Audit first and then to full Council. The aim was for this report to have as little redaction as practical so that members could understand the nature of the issues being encountered. In due course members would all need to come together and understand why the checks and balances had failed. He was sure as the former chair of Audit, Councillor Dale would be keen to flag where she thought with hindsight things could have been done better.

Councillor Dale replied that she would be interested to see the minutes of the Arch Audit Committee and asked whether all members could be informed of the findings of the Arch Audit Committee. Councillor Wearmouth responded that hopefully, that would be the case.

### **Question 9 from Councillor Dale to Councillor Wearmouth**

The development of the Hexham BID is of concern to businesses and residents of Hexham and the surrounding area. Over the last four years this Council has invested Hexham including the alterations of the Queen's Hall, the new fire station, the new wedding venue at Tynedale House and the new bus station and we all want Hexham to flourish. What lessons has this Council learnt as a partner in the development of the Hexham BID ?

Councillor Wearmouth advised that the Administration had inherited a number of BIDs from the previous administration. His view, and that of the Cabinet, was that the Council should support BIDs where local traders wanted to establish them, but that it was not for the Council to interfere with them and their running. The key lesson was that BIDs performed best when they were not political footballs and were allowed to flourish with minimum interference from the Council and Councillors.

Councillor Dale referred to business rate information being passed to the BID and asked that Councillor Wearmouth look at that and talk to the Hexham BID. Councillor Wearmouth asked Councillor Dale to write to him to clarify what she was asking and would ensure a response was provided

### **Question 10 from Councillor Dale to Councillor Daley**

Everyone will welcome the recent improvement in the schools funding formula however the funding is not enough to sustain many of our schools in Northumberland. Will you support me in writing to the Secretary of State for Education and also all our M.P.s in Northumberland asking their support for a further review of the funding formula in Northumberland.

Councillor Daley responded that he welcomed any member working in partnership with the Administration who would champion the case for Northumberland. Councillor Dale advised that there were Partnership issues in her area and she asked if Councillor Daley would meet with herself and the Headteacher to see what could be done to help. Councillor Daley confirmed that he would do this and referred to the funding coming to Northumberland under the Schools Funding Formula. However, improvements were not just reliant on funding, but also on structures and place planning and he referred Councillor Dale to a recent speech by Anne Marie Trevelyan in the House of Commons on the subject, which all members would find of interest.

### **Question 11 from Councillor Dale to the Leader**

At the last Full Council meeting you informed me that you had missed 11 meetings since Dec. 2011. You also informed me that you had raised the issue of ARCH being dubious at Arch Board level many times. Please could I have the dates of the meetings and the minutes of those minutes at which you raised the issue of ARCH being dubious?

The Leader advised it would require permission from Arch to access meeting minutes and that could lead to the motives behind such a request being questioned. Councillor Dale remarked that the Council was a major shareholder in the organisation.

#### **Question 12 from Councillor Dale to Councillor Oliver**

The roll out of Universal Credit has caused concern in the area and this has been compounded by the cuts in the funding of services delivered by the CAB. The CAB is a well revered service delivered in part by experienced well respected volunteers. Please could you monitor the number of residents contacting the Council concerning the roll out of Universal Credit especially where the CAB has had to cut its presence in the towns such as Prudhoe? It could be that the Council should be helping to further fund the CAB taking into account value for money and the issues raised.

Councillor Oliver advised that the Authority had not cut funding to Citizens Advice and had continued to support their valuable services by maintaining the level of funding in recent years. Through ongoing meetings between officers and the CAB, he was aware that Citizens Advice Northumberland had made changes to the way it provided advice to enable it to meet the challenges created by changes in the way people accessed the service. Although changes had been made to service delivery, Citizens Advice Northumberland has not withdrawn from towns, including Prudhoe.

Roll out of Universal Credit in Northumberland would start in summer 2018 and as that date approached, the Council would be meeting partners to discuss making arrangements to support residents of Northumberland. As part of this, the Authority would be discussing monitoring arrangements to see what was feasible. It could be difficult to know the exact total of enquiries about Universal Credit roll out because these could be received via several routes into the Council and other organisations.

#### **Question 13 from Councillor Hepple to the Leader**

The new Conservative administration promised to 'halt the march of the developers' 6 short months ago. In those six months, the council has granted permission to build over 2,500 with more than 20,000 already granted. Since Cllr Jackson scrapped the core strategy', the Council have lost a planning appeal in New Hartley and have seen over 700 houses proposed for Amble. The Planning Inspector issued a damning report on New Hartley laying the blame of the failure to defend a planning decision squarely on the shoulders of Cllr Jackson's administration for scrapping the core strategy. My question is simple - how many more houses does Cllr Jackson predict will be built on top of his Core Strategy when it's finally implemented which may be as far away as five years from now?

As Councillor Hepple was not present, it was agreed that a written response would be provided to him.

**Question 14 from Councillor Gallacher to the Leader**

Can the new Conservative administration confirm when it will transfer jobs and services from County Hall to the market towns of the county into the one stop offices they promised to develop?

The Leader advised that, to some extent, the process had started already and would be accelerated when work started on County Hall. No market town strategy had been developed by the previous Administration and there had been no information on where Council staff would work.

Councillor Gallacher asked if the Leader could confirm whether Ashington was a market town or a town with a market. The Leader could not confirm that, but advised that it did not have a market charter.

**Question 15 from Councillor Pidcock to the Leader**

Now that the Council cannot prove a five year land supply through the removal of the core strategy from inspection by Government, Can Cllr Jackson tell the people of Ponteland what will happen with the Dissington Garden Village application now?

The Business Chair advised that as this related to a live planning application, any comment could be perceived as pre-determination and it would not therefore be discussed.

**Question 16 from Councillor Grimshaw to the Leader**

Prior to the local elections in May, Councillor Jackson promised to halt the development of a new council hub facility in Portland Park, Ashington. Can Councillor Jackson confirm what the total cost is for that decision in terms of jobs not now coming to Ashington town centre and whether the Council has conducted a retail impact survey on Ashington high street?

The Leader believed more jobs would come to Ashington than from the original proposal. A retail survey had been completed and public consultation undertaken, including the Town Council and the Town Team.

Councillor Grimshaw replied that new and existing businesses had made investments on the strength of the proposed new hub. She asked if the Leader felt this had been money well spent and how such businesses would be supported. The Leader responded that time would bear this out but he believed Ashington would be a thriving place and that a proper town centre would be developed, which it currently did not have.

### **Question 17 from Councillor G. Davey to the Leader**

Councillor Jackson recently released a statement alleging Labour had promised a £70m loan to Lugano linked to Dissington Garden Village. Can Councillor Jackson provide the public of Northumberland with any evidence to substantiate that claim was the policy of the Labour administration or was it another fantasy figure made up by the people who brought you the mystical £80m new council building in Ashington?

The Leader commented that he was surprised Councillor Davey had raised this issue again in public when he had been offered the opportunity to see the relevant information in private. The information would be public as soon as possible, but in the meantime, Councillor Davey or his group members could see it privately.

Councillor Davey commented that FOIs were in existence regarding the cost and value of the new HQ building and he asked if the Leader could confirm that the £80m figure was a fantasy as the actual cost was £32m. The Leader reiterated the previous reply that the £32m figure did not include the whole project costs such as the road infrastructure, the car park, the ground source heating pumps and other associated works. The advertised figure for the contract had been £80m.

### **Question 18 from Councillor Swithenbank to the Leader**

Can Councilor Jackson explain why significant variations to the council budget such as the cancellation of the £32m capital spend on the new HQ in Ashington have not been reported to full Council?

The Leader advised that there would be a report to Council as part of the proper process. The Administration was currently formulating its budget and medium term financial plan for both revenue and capital. Any changes to the previously agreed capital plans would be taken into account as part of this process and would be reported to Full Council in February 2018.

### **Question 19 from Councillor Foster to the Leader**

Can Councillor Jackson, a long standing director of Arch, reveal how many charitable donations have been made and the value of those donations from the company to Active Northumberland?

The Leader replied that there had been three charitable donations:

2014-15 £150,000

2015-16 £1,000,000

2016-17 £1,000,000

There had been no dividend payments from Arch to the Council.

**Question 20 from Councillor Ledger to the Leader**

Prior to the local elections, the Conservative party promised to 'nationalise' Arch Homes by taking over 1,000 homes into council ownership. When will this happen and how will the council fund this through the housing revenue account?

The Leader replied that Arch was owned by the County Council, so their homes were owned by the County Council and managed by Arch. This meant they were privately owned by the Authority and not subject to the rules of the Housing Revenue Account as Councillor Ledger was aware. He suggested that Councillor Ledger ask officers what the implications of ownership were.

**Question 21 from Councillor Dungworth to the Leader**

As we approach Remembrance Day, when we remember the sacrifices made the armed forces now and in the past, please can you tell me what the Council and its partners are doing to support those service personnel and their families who live in Northumberland?

The Leader responded that the County Council did a fantastic amount of work to support the Armed Forces community. A detailed report of the Armed Forces Champion (Dave Ledger) was submitted to the Council meeting in July which explained the progress made since the Armed Forces Community Covenant was signed in 2012 and why Northumberland was now recognised as one of the most forward leaning authorities and Armed Forces Forum Networks within the North East, if not the country, proactively supporting the Armed Forces Community.

Northumberland's Forum, Co-Chaired by Dave Ledger and Lt. Col Jules Smith, Queen's Own Yeomanry, and supported by the Democratic Services Manager, had gone from strength to strength over the years leading to the prestigious MOD Silver Award in 2015, the Chronicle Champion's Award in 2016, and a letter of commendation from the Secretary of State for Defence after narrowly missing the gold award this year.

Recently, Northumberland and Durham had been awarded £260,000 Covenant Grant support for the employment of two Outreach Workers in each County who would provide a single point of contact and further enhance the positive work already carried out to date.

Northumberland also hosted the North East Armed Forces Forum on behalf of the 12 local authorities in the region, the work of which had been nationally recognised.

With pro-active forums across the region and dedicated member and officer champions, the Authority shared best practice with partners and was proud of the excellent support provided in spite of the current financial climate and increased demands for services.

He encouraged Councillor Dungworth to attend a meeting of the Forum and see for herself the good work being done. He also reminded members about the Remembrance Service being held at County Hall on Friday 10 November 2017.

Councillor Dungworth replied that she was more interested in practical help to make the lives of armed forces personnel easier, such as discounts for leisure services etc. The Leader replied that this information would be provided and efforts made to see what more could be done.

Councillor Ledger commented that efforts had been made to get Active Northumberland involved in the covenant but it had been difficult to make any progress. Councillor Homer advised that a report was being made to the Active Northumberland Board the following month as this was not just about active personnel. She would report back on that.

#### **Question 22 from Councillor Dungworth to Councillor Sanderson**

The largest single casework issue that I am dealing with relates to street lighting faults and the local Member of Parliament and Parish Council report a similar trend. Please can you tell me how many street light faults are currently reported in the Blyth Valley Constituency and how long repairs are currently taking? I am referring to normal faults, not those relating to the street light modernisation programme.

Councillor Sanderson responded that, out of 15,400 street lights in total, there were a reported 49 general NCC lighting faults. Latest performance showed faults across the County were on average being repaired within 3.5 working days, against a target of 5 working days, and performance at the same time last year of 5.72 days. He accepted that there were issues around the contract for the street lighting modernisation programme, which he apologised for and which had to be taken into the equation. The main issue had been around responses to queries so he had asked for a review to be carried out. A new sub contractor had now been appointed and information on this would come to the January round of Local Area Councils.

Councillor Dungworth was sceptical about the reported figures as there were at least five lights out in her ward alone, and some had been out for some time. She asked the portfolio holder to look at her ward to identify those lights



which exceeded the performance target for repair, and then confirm what would be done about them.

Councillor Sanderson commented that it would have been helpful if Councillor Dungworth had contacted him direct about the situation. He had acknowledged that the responses had been slow which was now being addressed, and suggested that the lights which were out were probably under the remit of Galliford Try. He asked Councillor Dungworth to write to him with the details and he would resolve the issue.

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

.....  
Chair of the County Council

.....  
Duly Authorised Officer