

## **NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a meeting of the **Northumberland County Council** held at County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday, 3 January 2018 at 3.00pm.

### **PRESENT**

Councillor R.R. Dodd  
(in the Chair)

### **MEMBERS**

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

## OFFICERS

Elsdon, A.	Director of Finance
Hadfield, K.	Committee Services and Scrutiny Manager
Henry, L.	Legal Services Manager
Johnson, P.	Service Director, Place
Lally, D.	Chief Executive
Mitchell, A.	Chief Internal Auditor
Roll, J.	Democratic Services Manager

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

### 57. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Kennedy, Lang, Murray, Richards, Rickerby and Swinburn.

### 58. MINUTES

With regard to Minute No.56 (Questions, Q22), Councillor Dungworth advised that she had referred to at least 11 street lights being out in her ward, not 5 as was minuted. However, there were actually 28 as she had recently counted them.

With reference to Minute No. 50 (Motion No.2), Councillor Grimshaw advised that she had not had a response to her question regarding consultation with Trade Unions. Councillor Watson provided details of the Trade Union involvement and consultation and confirmed that there had been no issues.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on Wednesday 1 November 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 regarding street lights detailed above.

### 59. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

A number of Councillors declared a personal interest in item 10(1) on the agenda (Revisions to the Council's Constitution - LGPS) as beneficiaries of the Local Government Pension Scheme, as follows:-

Councillors Bawn, Cartie, Cessford, Dale, Daley, Dickinson, Dodd, Dungworth, Dunn, Hepple, Horncastle, Hutchinson, Jackson, Jones, Ledger, Oliver, Pattinson, Riddle, Swithenbank, Towns,

Councillors Daley, Jackson, Reid and Wearmouth declared personal but not prejudicial interests in respect of item 14 on the agenda (Presentation on the review of Arch) as directors of Arch.

Councillor Sharp declared a personal interest in respect of Minute No.44 (3) of Cabinet (Potential Loan to Haltwhistle Social Welfare Centre) as Chair of that charity.

## **60. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Business Chair reported those people particularly connected with Northumberland who had received honours in HM the Queen's New Year Honours List. He advised that he would write and convey the Council's congratulations on their achievements.

He also advised members about the Holocaust memorial event which would take place on 25 January 2018 at 1.00 pm in the Council Chamber.

Councillor Flux reported back on the successful domestic violence awareness walk from Tynemouth Priory to Whitley Bay on 26 November which a number of members had attended and he expressed thanks to all involved.

## **61. CORRESPONDENCE**

The Leader reported that, following the last meeting of Council, he had written to the Government regarding the Shared Prosperity Fund and had now received a reply from both the Chancellor and the Minister for the Northern Powerhouse. He read an extract from this which confirmed the Government's commitment to the development of the Fund which was easy to access for local areas. The Government were committed to consulting widely on how the Fund would be implemented and had already met with the Industrial Communities Alliance. He was keen to ensure that as much power as possible was devolved as it was the people in the north east who were best placed to decide where to apply the funds, and he would be pushing for further devolution of this Fund before it was implemented.

## **62. MEMBER QUESTIONS**

### **Question 1 from Councillor G. Hill to Councillor V. Jones**

Does the current Administration have any evidence to suggest that the prescription of methadone, through drug recovery programmes in Northumberland, is successfully treating drug addiction and improving lives? If so, what is it?

Councillor Jones responded that methadone and buprenorphine were used in Opioid Substitute Therapy (OST). Their use was recommended by the National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) and Drug Misuse

and Dependence UK Guidelines on Clinical Management, as part of a wider treatment and recovery plan including psychosocial interventions and recovery support. To be recommended by NICE, an intervention had to be both evidence based and cost effective. There was strong evidence from research that OST could lead to reductions in the use of heroin and related harmful behaviours. Research also indicated that engagement with treatment services promoted recovery and quality of life, and improved wellbeing and social relationships, compared with those taking illicit substances. Research also showed that those in specialist treatment programmes were far less vulnerable to risk of overdose and subsequent drug related death.

The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs Recovery Committee had concluded that alongside the protective nature of OST, there was strong evidence that time-limiting OST would result in the majority of users relapsing into heroin use. Substitution therapy was crucial but was only one element in a comprehensive approach to achieve successful outcomes. In summary, there was an extensive body of research which evidenced that those drug users receiving structured treatment were safer and achieved better outcomes than those who did not. OST was provided in Northumberland as part of a wider treatment system by the Northumberland Recovery Partnership, based on evidence-based best practice.

Councillor Hill didn't feel that this response provided evidence of successful treatment of drug addiction. The evidence that she had from users was that people were being kept on it far too long and that there were links to suicides. She asked that Health and Wellbeing OSC look at the relevant issues - the average length of time people were kept on methadone, the links to suicide and the commercial interests of companies by continuing to have people kept on methadone. Councillor Jones advised that she would look into that further.

### **Question 2 from Councillor D. Ledger to the Leader**

In his opening speech of this administration, the Leader praised the former CEO of the Council for leaving a 'Strong and Stable' organisation. Can the Leader, therefore, inform us why the Council accounts have not been signed off and when he predicts that process will take place?

The Leader reassured members that the accounts had now been signed off. This had been done at the Audit Committee on 22 November 2017 and the accounts were now filed. The reason for the delay had been due to the need to file the accounts, for the first time, with a qualifying statement required by Ernst Young (EY) because of a significant weakness in proper arrangements for acting in the public interest and evidence that the principles of sound values and governance had not been properly or appropriately applied to decisions taken. This related to Arch, of which Councillor Ledger had been chair at the time. Another reason for the delay was that an asset of Arch, Ashington Football Club, had had to be revalued under the instruction of EY. The previous Administration had invested around £1.5m in Ashington FC and the auditors insisted that the £1.9m valuation had to be redone, resulting in a revised valuation of £400,000 and £1.5m being wiped off the Council's assets.

This demonstrated that Arch had not been adding any real value to the Council and was still a source of real concern.

### **Question 3 from Councillor J. Foster to the Leader**

Since the Council announced an increase in Council Tax income for 2017/18 primarily due to 1500 new homes being built and a much higher new build figure predicted for this year; Can the Leader explain why pressure has been placed on Parish Councils to accept greater responsibility from NCC through current partnership arrangements and why most of the increased tax income is not being spent on the Place Directorate to enhance Services delivered by this 'All Purpose Unitary Authority' and ensure our new residents receive the services they deserve and are paying for?

Councillor Oliver commented that building extra houses not only brought in additional council tax, but also put additional strain on the Council and brought additional costs. Under this Administration, no additional pressure and no additional responsibilities had been placed on Town & Parish Councils. There were a number of current partnership arrangements in place which enhanced core services, but those core services had not changed in any location since May 2017.

Furthermore, the Administration had given an undertaking at the Town & Parish Conference in October that when setting the 2018/19 budget, no negative changes would be made to key front line services in Local Services affecting Town & Parish Councils, and the Administration was honouring this commitment.

Several growth items would be included within the proposed 2018/19 revenue budget in order to accommodate the increased demand on the waste services from housing growth to ensure this key front-line service continued to be consistently delivered to a high standard, and also to invest in improvements to both weed control and verge maintenance arrangements across the County.

He reiterated that the Administration was committed to working closely with Town & Parish Councils to make best use of the resources available, in order to deliver the best service outcomes for local communities.

### **Question 4 from Councillor G. Davey to the Leader**

Now members have been informed by letter, that the Dissington Garden Village project has reached a major strategic milestone and fully complies with its planning conditions, can the Leader explain the next steps for this 'minded to approve' project and when can we expect to see physical work commence on site?

Councillor Riddle reminded members about the need for caution as this related to a live planning application. He added that, notwithstanding the "minded to approve" resolution from Strategic Planning Committee in March 2017, the Dissington Garden Village outline planning application would need to be re-considered by Strategic Planning Committee given that the withdrawal

of the Northumberland Core Strategy in July 2017, which provided emerging policy support for the proposal, represented a material change in circumstances since the previous resolution was made.

#### **Question 5 from Councillor S. Dungworth to the Leader**

Labour members wish to thank the Council for taking steps to provide adequate educational facilities for the increase in school-age children across south east Northumberland and the rural coalfield.

However, current planning applications and population growth predictions show that this increase is not set to reduce until after 2040. As things stand, this would mean that many children in the areas expected to bear the brunt of this increase would face years of being taught in mobile classrooms. Can the Leader confirm if there are plans to build any new schools or extend existing buildings in areas of high growth such as New Hartley, Holywell, Amble, Ellington, Blyth, Bedlington or Ashington?

Councillor Riddle responded that the local authority had processes in place to manage and monitor pupil places across the county to ensure that it fulfilled its statutory duty to provide sufficient places. Part of this process included the monitoring of new housing plans and developments where planning permission had been granted. With regard to the South East of the county, the Council had secured grant funding from the ESFA and plans had been put in place to supply additional places in Blyth (Horton Grange Primary School, New Delaval County Primary School, Newsham Primary School), Seaton Valley (New Hartley First School and Whytrig Middle School), Cramlington (Beaconhill would be extended to become a 2 form entry school from a 1 form entry school) and Morpeth (additional places were being created at Morpeth Chantry Middle School). An additional 15 places per year group at had been added at Seaton Delaval First School to address these issues.

Councillor Dungworth accepted that current needs were being addressed but asked what was being planned, as pressures were expected to grow. Councillor Riddle advised that while developers purchased land, this did not always mean that new housing would follow. Even when new housing did follow, it only yielded at the rate of 32 children per 100 houses (across all year groups - reception to year 11). It was for this reason that the local authority closely monitored school population predictions and, to eliminate the waste of limited public resources, only supplied additional places where there was a clear need to do so.

#### **Question 6 from Councillor A. Hepple to the Leader**

Can the Leader please explain whether his administration is serious about delivering a new core strategy and local plan document by 2020 and can he explain the consultation steps required to achieve completion within that timescale?

Councillor Riddle responded that the Local Development Scheme (LDS), which set out the timetable for preparation of the new Northumberland Local Plan, was endorsed by Cabinet on 23rd November 2017 representing a very

firm and clear commitment to preparation of the Plan within the timescales set out in that document. These were on the website and the Administration was very confident that those timescales could be met, or even condensed.

Councillor Hepple commented that the North of Tyne minded to approve devolution deal had a commitment to accelerated delivery of new homes and support for delivery of strategic sites. This deal, and the removal of the protection against speculative development in Northumberland, meant that there would probably be much more housing development in the County. He asked how Councillor Riddle squared this commitment with the Administration's commitment to limit development within the Plan period to 19,500 homes.

Councillor Riddle agreed that the removal of the Core Strategy had created a gap where speculative development could take place, but developers needed time to get housing developments off the starting blocks. He felt that the last Core Strategy had been destined to fail at examination in public and the new combined Core Strategy would be delivered on time, and give the Authority the protection it needed.

#### **Question 7 from Councillor I. Swithenbank to the Leader**

Can the Leader explain what process was used to halt the Click-Em-In planning project and what was the predicted benefit level to the County of Northumberland if that project had been allowed to move forward to its natural conclusion?

Councillor Riddle advised that the outline planning application for residential development on the Click-Em-In Farm site was currently being reviewed by the National Planning Casework Unit (NPCU) to inform a decision by the Secretary of State on whether he wished to call-in the application for his own determination. The application had not been halted as was being suggested, rather it was following due process in being referred to the NPCU for a call-in decision given that the scheme represented a significant departure from the current development plan. The reason it was a departure was because the land was in the green belt, it was against policy and minded to approve. It had been referred to the NPCU before the election in May, as per normal practice.

Councillor Swithenbank commented that the cross party support on an issue at Scrutiny recently had been heartening. For at least two years, members and planning officers had worked with a policy that was ten years old. He urged members to exercise caution in making statements on the use of land on particular applications because of the danger of pre-determination. Everyone had strong views, but he urged members not to make the job of planning officers and Strategic Planning members more difficult. He asked whether Councillor Riddle concurred with those principles and Councillor Riddle confirmed that he did.

## **Question 8 from Councillor G. Davey to the Leader**

As NHS funding is cut in Northumberland, it's becoming increasingly difficult for residents to get timely appointments at local GP surgeries. This is particularly noticeable in South East Northumberland where residents are voting with their feet and placing extra pressure on accident and emergency facilities especially in Cramlington. Would the member make representations to the NHS to raise the issue of availability of appointments at surgeries and would she come back to the next council meeting either with a representative from Northumbria NHS to explain what is going wrong, or come back with an action plan to deal with this acute problem which may be putting lives at risk?

Councillor Jones responded that while the NHS did not collect data about the number of GP appointments available, there was no reason to think that the number had been falling in Northumberland, indeed there had been a recent increase. As a result of the national programme of extending access to primary care, practices across Northumberland were required to increase their opening hours and the number of appointments available from October 2017. At least 960 additional appointments each week had been available over the past few months. The most recent national survey of patients' views of their GP practices, carried out in July 2017, found that 86% of patients had been able to get an appointment when they wanted to see or speak to a GP or nurse from their GP surgery. This was slightly above the national average of 84%. Patients' views about how easy it was to arrange an appointment did vary between practices, but there was no reason to think that this was a particular problem in the County. NHS data suggested that people in the areas nearest to any A&E department often choose to go there rather than to their GP practice because they perceive that as the quickest way to get help, regardless of the actual availability of GP appointments. The experience of the new hospital in Cramlington has followed this pattern, with people living nearby making the most use of it.

Regarding the NHS representative coming to a Council meeting, it would be the role of the Scrutiny Committee to look at any health service issues. Northumbria Health Trust was not responsible for primary care, it was actually commissioned by NHS England and the CCG, who would be doing a presentation on primary care and access to the next Health and Wellbeing OSC on 16 January. Any continuing problem with appointments would be looked at by NHS England as the appropriate regulator.

Councillor J.G. Davey asked if the portfolio holder could explain why the successful holistic team arrangements in Blyth, where GPs and associated services from several practices operated as an amalgamated group, had been shelved and the teams located in separate buildings, resulting in a poorer service. Councillor Jones replied that she was aware that a couple of practices had scored badly in patient surveys, one issue had been assistant problems. However, this was being addressed and she was happy to monitor it. Councillor Dodd commented that he had raised this at Health and Wellbeing Board recently.

### **Question 9 from Councillor L. Grimshaw to the Leader**

In September, a whistle-blower highlighted that the Arch Board were presented with detailed plans for a 4000 home super village outside Pegswood, some four months after taking control of the council and the company they've promised to scrap. Can the leader explain how using Arch possibly under a DIFFERENT name which he now controls to build thousands of homes across the county, is consistent with his promise to limit housing numbers, scrap Arch and help private sector developers to make a profit in the county?

Councillor Wearmouth replied that he had previously written to Councillors Grimshaw and Towns regarding the land between Pegswood and Ashington which had been sanctioned by Arch under the previous Administration.

On the wider question of housing, he referred to the previous Administration's plans for about 26,000 homes in the core strategy, deleting swaths of greenbelt against the wishes of local people. This had made Northumberland a developers paradise. The previous Administration had also tried to provide a taxpayer funded £75m loan to a house builder, and to sell the land at County Hall for yet another 200 homes that no one wanted, all to justify a multi-million pound new HQ.

The current Administration, by contrast, was bringing about a fit for purpose local plan and had already put back in place that greenbelt which Labour had deleted. Documents had been put in place to show the actual extent of housing requirement, far less than 26,000. Arch would be replaced with a company that was fit for purpose and would help deliver affordable houses which was what the County needed urgently.

Councillor Grimshaw felt it would be difficult to halt developers when there was no Core Strategy to do that. In fact, development could actually increase rather than reduce. She asked how the Administration planned to do that. Councillor Wearmouth replied that the new Core Strategy would be in place in a matter of years and there would be a small period of time where there was policy that needed to be put in place through consultation and the issue of draft documents, and it would begin to pick up weight very quickly. The Cabinet had already looked at housing numbers to ensure there was a robust case for demonstrable need.

### **Question 10 from Councillor S. Dickinson to the Leader**

I welcome the briefing scheduled for February relating to the dreadful implementation of Universal Credit that is planned to hit Northumberland residents this year despite calls to the Tory Government to pause and fix the issues. Will he extend the briefing invite to third sector organisations who will pick up the brunt of face to face trauma experienced by residents?

Councillor Oliver responded that there were concerns from all parties regarding the rollout of Universal Credit and he therefore welcomed the concessions announced in the Chancellor's Budget Statement. The briefings

were intended for members only as an information exercise on the roll out of the Universal Credit full service for Northumberland, scheduled for November and December 2018. An updated brief would also be done nearer the implementation dates.

In addition to this, a Universal Credit Steering Group had been set up and held its first meeting on 23 November 2017. The group consisted of representatives of services within the Council including benefits, housing, policy, welfare rights, poverty lead as well as representatives from Arch, Healthcare Trust, Places for People, CAB, Age Concern, BRIC, Housing Associations and some private sector landlords. The DWP also attended. A further meeting would take place on 17 January. As a result, there was no need to have 3rd sector organisations at the briefing as they were up to speed with developments, and already working with the Council to ensure as smooth a transition as possible.

Councillor Dickinson welcomed that these organisations were involved in the steering group. However, despite the concessions, he feared that families being asked to wait five weeks for benefits would drive people into poverty and debt, particularly in Northumberland given its rural nature. He asked if the Leader would confirm that the Authority would not evict or penalise any family which fell into arrears because of Universal Credit.

Councillor Oliver was not sure that such a blanket commitment could be given but confirmed the Authority would work hard across all departments and with its partners to help everyone through the transition period.

#### **Question 11 from Councillor L. Dunn to Councillor C. Homer**

I understand that this administration has been reviewing library provision within the County. We have seen more 478 libraries close since 2010. Over 8,000 library workers have lost their jobs. I strongly believe that our libraries have huge local value and must be protected. They do much, much more than lend books. In Lynemouth, our library is currently only open for only two afternoons - 9 hours per week but nevertheless, we regard it as a vital facility for the village and would welcome its development to widen its attraction to potential users within not only Lynemouth but also the surrounding villages. Does Cllr Homer agree with me that libraries are indeed an essential service in our community and that this Council has a duty therefore to provide a library service that is fit for purpose?

Councillor Homer responded that the library service was in part fragmented and dysfunctional in its current form with staff working for either for Active Northumberland or the County Council in two separate departments. Some libraries were stand alone, some were integrated and some were co-located. This had impacted greatly on the level of service, on users and on staff morale. The library service review aimed to ensure that Northumberland had a modern library service which supported all residents across the County. It had been extensive and was near to reaching some conclusions and recommendations, which would be considered by Cabinet in due course. It was important to the Administration that the library service provided the most comprehensive service that it could within the resources available, and further

details of the review and its conclusions and recommendations would be made available in the very near future. She advised Councillor Dunn that if she wanted to discuss this further when the recommendations were made, she was happy to do that.

Councillor Dunn asked whether the Council would commit to providing funding for libraries in the long term, to maintaining an adequate level of resources and paid library professionals and to stopping out-sourcing of management. Would it provide a service that was acceptable to all?

Councillor Homer responded that since 2015 to May of this year there had been significant changes to the library service. Staffing levels had reduced, the footprint had reduced, visitors had fallen by over 11.5%, the number of books issued was down by 31%, membership had declined by 12% and 51% of members were inactive, but despite this there had been an increase of 52% in users registering for digital services so the picture had changed a lot in the last two years. She could confirm that the Administration wanted a fit for purpose library service, and the library review recommendations would be considered by the Council in order to get the best service possible for residents.

### **63. CABINET MINUTES**

- (1) Tuesday 7 November 2017**
- (2) Thursday 23 November 2017**
- (3) Tuesday 12 December 2017**

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

### **64. COMMITTEE MINUTES**

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

These were presented by Councillor Bawn.

**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 Councillors Wallace and Renner Thompson.

**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.

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

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

These were presented by Councillor Watson who advised that the Rothbury Hospital matter had been referred to the Secretary of State for decision, and a letter was being prepared for submission to the Secretary of State to justify that decision.

Councillor Bridgett commented that he had attended that meeting, referring to the excellent cross party working which had taken place. He thanked Councillors Moore, Lawrie, Nisbet, Simpson and Foster for referring the matter to the Secretary of State and asked if the letter could be shared with all members. Mr Henry advised it would become available once it had been issued to the Secretary of State.

With regard to Minute No. 23.2 (New National Ambulance Response Times), Councillor Dale referred to recent news headlines regarding lack of facilities in hospitals, cancelled operations and response times which were of real local concern given the ageing population and ongoing flu epidemic. She asked that NEAS be asked to provide an update to all Local Area Councils on the new response times and the issues they were currently facing. Figures on admissions and discharges would be helpful as would the ambulance audit figures from last year so comparisons could be made to those response times.

The Business Chair advised that it was too late now for the January meeting agendas, but could be considered as a possibility for the March round, particularly as services were currently working flat out. Councillor Dale asked where any further representations should be directed to. The Chief Executive advised that operational patient or family issues should be directed to NEAS or the relevant NHS provider directly. Strategic issues should be referred to the Scrutiny Committee, or for specific issues, to the Chief Executive or Vanessa Bainbridge.

Councillor Robinson commented that he would like to see a copy of the new national ambulance response times. The Business Chair advised that these would be sent out to all members and would be considered by the Local Area Councils in due course.

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

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

These were presented by Councillor Dodd.

With regard to Minute No.16.1 (Safeguarding Adults Annual Report), Councillor Dickinson welcomed the improvement in performance for 2016-17 and expressed his thanks to the Chair Paula Mead for her efforts.

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

## **(6) Audit Committee**

These were presented by Councillor Hill who referred to Minute No. 18(a) (Review of Inspection Reports - Adults and Children's Services) and explained that the Committee had discussed not just financial, but a range of risks that followed when schools became academies, and consideration had been given to the production of a report to FACS OSC on this. However, she had since become aware that this had been the subject of a report to the Audit Committee previously.

With regard to Minute No.16(a) (Treasury Management Mid Year Review Report), second bullet point, Councillor J.G. Davey queried whether this related to the Dissington Garden Village scheme and if so, it appeared that the issue had been pre-determined. Councillor Oliver suggested that it was the car park which was referred to. The Business Chair advised that clarification of the minute would be sought and Councillor Davey asked that this be provided in writing.

Councillor Dale commented on the Annual Audit Letter, hoping that all members had read it. She noted that a review had recently been done and no issues had been found by EY, though it had been commented that the Council's budget could be prepared in a better way. There were also no issues regarding value for money. She was glad to see that in the Statement of Accounts reference had been made to dissolve Arch, though the Council had to consider the decision of the Arch Board before making appropriate recommendations to its own decision making process. She hoped this would happen and that members would be able to be involved in it.

Councillor Dale also referred to the proposed expenditure for a new car park in Hexham and asked whether the Administration was having further thoughts on that. Councillor Oliver referred back to an earlier point made regarding no issues being found by the external auditors which was clearly not correct as two significant issues had been found - the qualifying statement in the Council's accounts and the revaluation of an asset wiping £1.5m off the Council's balance sheet. Councillor Dale responded that no issues of impropriety had been found.

Councillor Hill commented that the governance of Arch had been shocking and that there would be an audit of Audit and what went wrong. However, nothing more could be said because of the Police investigation.

Councillor Dale replied that it had been noted in the Auditor's report that the Audit Committee were looking at a review of Arch governance in the coming year.

## **(7) Devolution Working Group**

These were presented by the Leader.

A number of members spoke on this item as follows:-

- Councillor Reid expressed disappointment that, in his opinion, the minutes did not reflect the mood of the meeting. The investment fund was not £20m per year for thirty years as stated on pg 142. It was £20m for five years and the cost of the mayor's office of around £1m would need to come from that figure. There was no real critique of the proposal and there was a lot wrong with it. He did not support an elected mayor and felt they would not be properly representative of all of the residents of the area as a whole. He added that Northumberland would lose membership of the transport committee because the new Authority would only have three places and one of those had to be the Mayor. Also, the architects of this deal - the present leader and previous leader were both on the working group which he felt was wrong. He suggested that their role should be to respond to questions from the working group only.
- Councillor Hill queried whether the consultation process would involve a public referendum.
- Councillor Roughead reminded members that the name of the new Authority was still to be determined and he hoped that the working group would also look at the Borderlands Initiative. This, together with the devolution deal, would allow Berwick to get funding from both sides of the border and be recognised as the true gateway between England and Scotland.
- Councillor Dale felt it was important for Northumberland to have an input into transport to ensure that concessionary fares did not get lost. Regarding the £20m revenue per year, she reminded members that since 2008, £180m had been taken out of the Council's revenue fund with another £30m to be found by 2020, and she hoped that the Mayor would fight for a better deal for all three Councils as she did not feel it was a good deal.
- Councillor Dickinson felt that having the current and previous leaders on the working group was beneficial in fighting for Northumberland's case.
- Councillor Reid advised that the Mayor would be in charge of strategic housing and would decide where where houses were built and if there was no Core Strategy in place, this could put the Council in jeopardy. He urged members to read Appendix G of the report to Cabinet on 12 December 2017 for the detail.
- The Leader responded that extensive powers were being devolved to this small area and the Mayor would be accountable to the electorate and Cabinet of the three authorities. The success of these deals in other parts of the country could be seen where Mayors could speak to Government with the voice of authority and get better deals for their areas. The reason for the working group was to allow the detail to be presented to members to keep them well informed about all the money available, including further education funding. There would also be funding to build affordable housing and houses for rent. The deal would enable the Authority to be part of the first Rural Growth pilot in the country which would be a massive boost to Northumberland to resurrect towns which were much in need of it. There would be no referendum as this was part of Government policy.
- There was nothing within the deal that gave the Mayor powers over strategic housing; it related to delivery of existing housing development and the Mayor was only a small part of the deal. Both himself and Councillor Davey had fought very hard to retain the inclusion of the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne line which would open up the whole of South East Northumberland. He was willing to talk to anyone about the detail of the deal and hoped the debate would continue.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Devolution Working Group be received.

## 65. NOTICE OF MOTION

### Motion No.1

In accordance with Council Rules of Procedure No.10, Councillor G. Davey moved the following motion, received by the Democratic Services Manager on 18 December 2017:-

*“This Council notes the emergence of various strands of social media as both a positive and negative way of communicating the role of councillors and the policies of council. Many local authorities have specific policies to explain and regulate the use of social media and this Council supports the proposal to form a cross-party councillor group to bring forward a 'social media policy' which will provide transparency and certainty in the use of social media across the council and its partners. Currently, there is no overarching policy to provide a framework for the authorised use of social media in developing and communication policies and actions of the county council which creates a significant risk for the authority”.*

In introducing the motion, Councillor Davey referred to the live streaming of the Council meeting, and advised that there was a need to determine who owned the resulting photographs, how they would be used and how to deal with those who misused them to mislead the public. Policies needed to be updated to reflect current needs and to ensure the Authority was properly equipped.

The Leader seconded the motion as being non-political and in the best interests of the Council as a whole. Whilst there was a guidance note for members on the use of social media, this needed a refresh and he welcomed the idea of a cross party working group to look at the whole issue.

Members spoke in support of the motion.

**RESOLVED** that Council note the emergence of various strands of social media as both a positive and negative way of communicating the role of councillors and the policies of council. As many local authorities had specific policies to explain and regulate the use of social media, the Council supported the proposal to form a cross-party councillor group to bring forward a 'social media policy' which would provide transparency and certainty in the use of social media across the council and its partners. Currently, there was no overarching policy to provide a framework for the authorised use of social media in developing and communication policies and actions of the County Council which created a significant risk for the authority.

## **66. REPORTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE**

### **(1) Revisions to the Council's Constitution - LGPS**

The report recommended two amendments to the NCC Constitution to update it for changes in relation to administration of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS).

**RESOLVED** that:-

- (i) with effect from 29 January 2018, the requirement to *assess and determine applications regarding the disposal of lump sum death benefits* be removed from the Staff (Appeals) Committee's terms of reference; and
- (ii) Clause 7 (Pensions), which makes reference to councillor access to the LGPS, be removed from Part 7 (Members' Allowances Scheme) of the Constitution.

### **(2) Treasury Management Mid Year Review Report for the Period 01 April to 30 September 2017**

The report provided a mid-year review of the activities of the Treasury Management function for the period 1 April 2017 to 30 September 2017, and performance against the Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) 2017-2018 - as approved by the County Council on 22 February 2017. The report provided a review of borrowing and investment performance for the period set in the context of the general economic conditions prevailing so far 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.

With regard to paragraph 7.1 of the report, Councillor Hepple referred to the reduction of some £35m in capital expenditure for schools and asked where the proposed expenditure of £17.35m for schools would be focussed. Councillor Oliver was not able to provide specific details but advised that an ambitious investment programme was planned to improve education across the County which would be revealed as part of the budget process.

**RESOLVED** that:-

- (a) the report be received and the performance of the Treasury Management function from 01 April to 30 September 2017; be noted and
- (b) the report be approved.

## 67. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

### **Appointment of Parish Council Representatives to the Standards Committee**

The report apprised members of the progress made with the appointment of the three Parish Council representatives to the Standards Committee and sought agreement to make the relevant appointments.

Councillor J.G. Davey supported the report's proposals and the parish council representatives proposed, as well as commending previous representatives for their excellent efforts.

Councillor Roughead supported the report but proposed an amendment to recommendation (iii) as follows:-

"To agree to amend the Council's Constitution to **change** the requirement for an area based appointment **to be desirable but not essential** in respect of these **and future** appointments. This was seconded by Councillor Jackson.

Councillor Reid advised that Parish Councillor Tebbutt was a personal friend and he queried whether he needed to declare an interest. Mr Henry advised that he didn't, unless he was likely to favour or disfavour Parish Councillor Tebbutt because of that friendship in respect of this particular appointment.

**RESOLVED** that:-

(i) the position thus far with the appointment process relating to the vacancies for the three Parish Council representatives on the Council's Standards Committee be noted;

(ii) the following parish councillors be appointed to the three vacancies on the Council's Standards Committee:-

(a) Councillor Bryn Owen of Craster Parish Council;

(b) Councillor Andrew Tebbutt of Morpeth Town Council and

(c) Councillor Alex Wallace of East Bedlington Parish Council

and in doing so

(iii) the Council's Constitution be amended to change the requirement for an area based appointment to be desirable but not essential in respect of these and future appointments;

(iv) the Council's gratitude be expressed to the recently retired former incumbents of these positions for their contribution to the work of the Standards Committee over the last number of years; and

(v) the Council's Constitution be amended to remove from the Council's Standards Committee the responsibility for granting dispensations to Parish and Town Council members from requirements relating to Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.

## **68. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING SERVICES**

### **Proposed Changes to the Strategic Planning Committee Terms of Reference and Powers**

The report sought approval to a change in the terms of reference for Strategic Planning Committee to allow for planning applications linked to the Council's statutory duties under non-planning legislation, where issues of strategic importance were raised in terms of allowing the Council to fulfil its statutory duties, to be considered at a County-wide level rather than by Local Area Councils.

Councillor J.G. Davey objected to the proposal to take away consideration of the statutory duties, detailed in bold, from Local Area Councils (LACs) He referred to a recent application where the local member lived 100 yards away from the application site but had not received notification of it, and would not have known other than from the LAC agenda. Items of local need should remain with LACs so local people could have the opportunity to debate them and decide on them.

Councillor Riddle was aware of the application to which Councillor Davey referred and hoped that it would come back to the LAC for reconsideration. However, the report in front of members was about the future and he felt it was right that applications of strategic importance should go to the Strategic Planning Committee. Terms of reference had been changed in the past and the proposal was not unusual.

Member comments on this issue included:-

- Councillor Bawn advised that he was informed by email of every planning application in his ward. He was concerned if that was not the case for every member.
- Councillor Wilson advised that he had not been informed about this application by the Authority and many people had not known. He was very supportive of the new school but the parking issues were of concern.
- Councillor Towns had concerns about the wording of the general terms of reference which he felt needed clarification and consistency. Mr

Henry advised that the Head of Planning would make the appropriate interpretation and allocate to the correct Committee accordingly.

- Councillor Dale queried what was meant by “strategic” and did not wish to see such planning applications lost to local people.
- Councillor Dickinson felt this was piecemeal removal of powers which had been given to LACs by the Administration after the election and should not have come forward.
- Councillor Castle commented that a major application was of course of great concern to the local area, but that did not mean that they should determine it. They would still be able to have their say, but strategic decisions should be made strategically.

Councillor Riddle responded that if an issue was in the corporate plan, then it was a strategic issue. He supported the LACS, but that did not exclude input into Strategic Planning also.

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

**For: 32** as follows:-

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

**AGAINST: 28** as follows:-

Campbell, D.	Hepple, A.
Cartie, E.	Hill, G.
Clark, T.S.	Ledger, D.
Crosby, B.	Nisbet, K.
Dale, P.A.M.	Parry, K.
Davey, J.G.	Pidcock, B.
Davey, S.	Purvis, M.
Dickinson, S.	Reid, J.
Dungworth, S.E	Sharp, A.
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:-

Bridgett, S.	
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It was therefore **RESOLVED** that the revised terms of reference for Strategic Planning Committee, detailed in the key issues section of the report (proposed change shown in bold), be agreed for immediate implementation.

The Business Chair then adjourned the meeting at 17.05 pm. It was reconvened at 17.13 pm. Councillor Reid left the meeting.

**69. 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:-

<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Paragraph of Part I of Schedule 12A</b>
14	3 - Information relating to any individual, information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) The public interest in seeking this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure because disclosure would adversely affect the Authority's ability to conduct its affairs.

**70. PRESENTATION FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

Council received a presentation from the Chief Executive on the recent review of Arch. A number of questions were asked by members with answers provided by the Chief Executive and Chief Internal Auditor.

**RESOLVED** that the current position be noted.

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

.....  
Chair of the County Council

.....  
Duly Authorised Officer