

## **NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a meeting of the **Northumberland County Council** held at County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday 26 June 2019 at 3.00 pm.

### **PRESENT**

Councillor R.R. Dodd  
(Business Chair of the Council) in the Chair

### **MEMBERS**

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

## OFFICERS

Hadfield, K.	Committee Services and Scrutiny Manager
Henry, L.	Legal Services Manager
Johnston, P.	Interim Executive Director of Place
Lally, D.	Chief Executive
Scholes, A.	Interim Executive Director of Finance

Around 5 members of the press and public were in attendance.

### 19. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Castle, S. Davey, Foster, Hepple, Lawrie, Simpson, Swithenbank and Towns.

### 20. MINUTES

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the annual meeting of County Council held on Wednesday 1 May 2019, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record, signed by the Business Chair and sealed with the Common Seal of the Council.

### 21. ANNOUNCEMENTS by the Business Chair, Leader or Head of Paid Service.

Councillor Dodd reported that the following people particularly connected with Northumberland had received honours in HM the Queen's birthday honours list:-

#### **Queens Fire Service Medal**

Chief Fire Officer, Paul Hedley, Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service

#### **MBE**

Michael Ridsdale Hepple, Senior Delivery Lead, Operational Excellence, Digital Services - Automation, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. For services to taxpayers (Northumberland)

David Lockwood Mowbray. For community service in the UK and Abroad (Cramlington)

## **BEM**

Robert George Bruce Grant. For services to charity (Northumberland)

James Alexander Thompson. For services to the community in Alnwick Northumberland. (Alnwick, Northumberland)

Dorothy Anne Wonnacott. For public and political service. (Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, Northumberland)

The Leader reported the following awards and commended the staff concerned on behalf of the Council:-

Congratulations to Kelly Angus, the Executive Director of HR/OD and Deputy Chief Executive who was honoured at the CIPD Awards last week, being named 'Inspirational Practitioner 2019'. The CIPD Awards celebrated the best in HR and people management in the North East of England.

Congratulations to the Flooding and Coastal Erosion team who won the Community Partnership Award at the Flood and Coast Awards last week for the Tyne Green Project. This was a collaboration between the Council, local residents, Network Rail and the Environment Agency, and looked at reducing flood risk at Tyne Green in Hexham.

Congratulations to Active Northumberland employee Delia Evans who had recently been awarded the Outstanding Employee of the Year Award by Community Leisure UK. Delia is the catering supervisor of the cafe at Morpeth Riverside Leisure Centre and has worked there for 25 years.

## **22. MEMBER QUESTIONS**

### **Question 1 from Councillor Hill to Councillor Sanderson**

How much does Northumberland County Council charge for burials in each of the Cemeteries it owns ? (To include plot, as well as actual burial, costs). How does the average cost compare to 5 and 10 years ago? What are the reasons for any differences in charges across the County ? Is there any evidence that Town/Parish Council-managed Cemeteries charge less ? If so, why is that the case ?

Councillor Sanderson replied that Northumberland County Council had 23 cemeteries and a burial plot currently cost £2,016. Five years ago it was £1,285 and ten years ago it was £710. The Authority was not the most expensive however, and there were no plans to increase the cost in the next financial year.

Some of the smaller cemeteries which were run by town and parish councils did not have the same overheads as the Council such as maintenance,

drainage and future investment etc therefore the cost to town and parish councils was lower, and they did not have as many burials as the Council did.

Councillor Hill replied that she would appreciate a written answer in more detail and asked whether Councillor Sanderson shared her concerns that, given the cost of burials, people in Berwick were having to strim round the graves of their loved ones themselves, and that Councillor Roughead was using his members' small schemes funding to put in an additional tap in Tweedmouth cemetery. Councillor Sanderson replied that he had not been contacted about this as far as he was aware so did not know the details. Maintenance costs were high and generally the cemeteries were kept in good condition, which was appreciated by relatives.

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

What sort of things are discussed and agreed on at meetings referred to as; "Informal Cabinet"?

The Leader was not sure why this had been posed as a question for full Council as these meetings were just a normal part of the process of running a large organisation. All other Councils would have a similar process. There needed to be a mechanism for coordinating all departments of the Council and the regular meetings between senior members and officers helped to coordinate strategy. Formal decisions were then made by Cabinet and endorsed by Council.

As a supplementary, Councillor Hill asked the Leader to confirm that there were no grounds for the public to be concerned that meaningful debate was being held behind closed doors, which should be held in the public Cabinet meetings. The Leader reiterated that all important decisions were taken in public, adding that he wasn't clear what Councillor Hill's concern was.

### **Question 3 from Councillor Dale to Councillor Riddle**

What is the total number of appeals this Council has received against planning decisions made by officers of this council, the Strategic Planning Committee and each Area Committee since July 2017 to date?

Councillor Riddle reported the total number of appeals as follows:-

Officer Decision	82
Strategic Planning Committee	2
Local Area Councils	18

Councillor Dale commented that some appeals had been lost and this had incurred costs of over £100,000. She asked whether information on these costs to the Council could be included in the information sent to members every month as she felt it should be publicly available.

Councillor Riddle advised he would take advice on whether this was appropriate, but added that the Authority's appeal loss rate of 1% was very low against the national target of 10%. It was not possible to be successful with

every appeal, and he reminded members that not all made appeals were actually pursued.

#### **Question 4 from Councillor Robinson to the Leader**

We were “sold” the idea about the new North of Tyne authority, and it had cross party support, on the back of the investment coming into the region which would be solely focussed on job creation and educational improvements. Also, we were told the Mayor’s role would be ambassadorial in nature and there would be no duplication of existing projects. I was increasingly concerned reading the literature the candidates for the new Mayors position put out at election time given the likely costs of their pet projects which were included, and we now see some which duplicate projects we already have running here in this county.

Having now seen the list of just some of the executive jobs offered by the new Mayor and the salaries, as he builds up a staffing contingent from the top down, I’m wondering how much of the £20M per annum will be left for us to “bid” for to try and address some of those original stated aims for our county?

The Leader responded that this echoed some concerns he had during the election campaign as some of the candidates’ comments had not reflected what the aims of the new Authority were, which were clearly defined by statute. He was conscious that the North of Tyne Authority was not there to duplicate the work already being done by Councils, such as on climate change. He was more interested in added value and this was in terms of growing business, helping people back into the workplace, encouraging a skills culture and about looking for new strategic opportunities. These all added value to what the Council already did. He did feel that the new Authority should not consume all of its budget in running costs, which were set out separately at £1.9m. This was a significant sum, but about £1m of this would come from the mayoral capacity fund given by central government. This organisation was there to deliver specific projects and should therefore keep its costs lean and low.

#### **Question 5 from Councillor Robinson to Councillor Homer**

I have just read of our intent to offer Armed Forces Family a free day access to our Active Northumberland leisure centres. Whilst I applaud this initiative can we not do a little better and offer all Armed Forces veterans free lifetime access in recognition of their service?

Councillor Homer advised that the County Council had negotiated the promotion of the offer with Active Northumberland, together with a number of other offers, to celebrate Armed Forces week within Northumberland. The County Council truly recognised the service and contribution that the armed forces personnel and veterans made and this had been recognised by the Council’s achievement of the Ministry of Defence’s Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award in 2018 for its outstanding support for the military community and the Armed Forces Covenant.

The County Council had forwarded Councillor Robinson's request to Active Northumberland, who as a charity provided Leisure Services within the Council's Leisure Centres, and this would be considered in due course by the Active Northumberland Board. She had asked to be copied into their response.

#### **Question 6 from Councillor Roughead to Councillor Oliver**

Following the recent vast expansion of 'Member Champions' at the Cabinet meeting held on 24th May 2019, and given that the scope, responsibility and powers of 'Member Champions' varies drastically across Local Authorities, ranging from; just championing their designated issue, operating a small grants system to being allocated a small budget or being used as additional de facto deputy cabinet members; moving forward, would it therefore not be pertinent, informative and good practice for the exact terms of reference of Northumberland County Council's 'Member Champions' to be added to the Council's Constitution?

Councillor Oliver replied that seven champions had been reinstated at the last Cabinet meeting and it had been six the previous year, so the increase could not be described as vast. These members did really good work and the Council had heard previously from Councillor Ledger on the valuable work he had done as armed forces champion. He felt it was important to allow these members to champion as they saw fit, and did not feel that there was a need for terms of reference, or for them to have a budget. Each member would deal with being a champion in their own way.

Councillor Roughead felt this was a poor response as many other authorities had these measures. He was also dismayed that the Authority did not have an equalities and diversity champion given the work which was carried out. Councillor Oliver advised that he would discuss this further and come back.

#### **Question 7 from Councillor Roughead to Councillor Oliver**

The Local Government Act 2000 forced the former Northumberland County Council to change its executive arrangements to either an 'Elected Mayor and Cabinet' model, subject to a referendum or a 'Leader and Cabinet' model, with the latter being the one that was adopted and the model which was then inherited by the current Northumberland County Council, a Unitary Authority created in 2009 upon the abolition of the former County, Borough and District Councils. Given that the introduction of the Localism Act 2011 allows principal authorities to revert to a 'Committee System'; has there since 2011, ever been a report or review undertaken by this Council to analyse the merits and drawbacks of the various models of executive arrangements available to Northumberland County Council?

Councillor Oliver confirmed that there had not. Councillor Roughead then asked whether, as there was currently no majority mandate, this should be reviewed. Councillor Oliver saw no reason to do this as three different Administrations had now been happy with the current arrangements.

## **23. CABINET MINUTES**

The Leader moved the following minutes of Cabinet:

**(1) Friday 24 May 2019**

**(2) Tuesday, 11 June 2019**

With regard to Minute No.s 3 and 4 of the 24 May meeting, the Leader was pleased to report the awarding of the building contract for the new leisure centre in Berwick, and the business case for the new Northumberland Rail Line project had been put forward to the Transforming Cities Fund, agreed as a regional priority, and was now on the main priority list. This was really pleasing news for the whole County.

He also referred members to Minute No.10(2) of the 11 June meeting (Responding to Climate Change) and was pleased to note the progress which had been made already. Carbon dioxide emissions had been reduced by over 30% in the last ten years, but there was still much more to do, and the public needed to be made aware of what the Council was doing on their behalf. The Council had a moral duty to lead on being carbon neutral by 2030, and a steering group would be set up to ensure that actions were delivered which the Council could be held to account for, and which would make a huge difference. He hoped all members would support this.

A number of comments were raised by members on this including:-

- Councillor Dale welcomed the positive response but felt that the issues of emissions from refuse recycling vehicles and cutting back on energy use needed to be addressed.
- Councillor Gallacher welcomed the report and hoped that the Groups could work in tandem on this as Labour had issued statements on this topic long before the Authority had decided to do anything. The Council also had to look to its local authority neighbours to see what was being done there.
- Councillor Grimshaw asked that the Council share information with the town and parish councils so they could formulate ideas to work with the Authority on this.
- Councillor Sanderson commented that, as far as he was aware, the Council was ahead of the game already but he was happy to speak to other Councils. The Authority was working closely with town and parish councils, and they had responded very well to a recent invitation to visit the facility at West Sleekburn. They were very much part of how the green agenda programme would be rolled out. The steering group would include various outside partners and would report back, there would be scrutiny of targets and actions, and the bullet points in the minutes made it clear what the target timeframes were. These were very big asks, but the steering group would plot some actions which could be taken at an early stage to get things up and running, and the actions and targets would be scrutinised. He sincerely hoped all

members would get behind this, and if money had to be found to meet this then it would be, as this work was vital for future generations.

- Councillor Dungworth was disappointed that the steering group would not have cross party representation, and that the only elected member on it would be Councillor Sanderson, given her Group's support for the issue from the start.
- The Leader advised that Scrutiny was the correct cross party mechanism for this. Regarding energy use, the Authority had been investing in solar panels for years but this could be looked at. The Council's buildings would be part of the action plan and the refurbished County Hall would be a lot more energy efficient than it was now. Opportunities were also being investigated for installing solar panels in the back car park which could potentially produce 0.8 of a megawatt of electricity, making the building and site more than energy self sufficient. He acknowledged that the Authority had not been doing enough on recycling and action would be taken to increase this.
- Councillor Gallacher commented that the Council should be working as one on this and not excluding groups from the debate. He felt the reference to increasing recycling "by 10% in the next year or so" was too vague if real progress was to be made.
- Councillor Dickinson commented that the Labour Group wanted to support this, but Scrutiny was very different to a steering group. This group needed to have cross party involvement so there could be continuity of the green agenda into future Administrations.
- Councillor Sanderson accepted that a 36% recycling rate was not good enough and whilst the commitment was there to improve recycling rates, it had to be acknowledged that this might take longer than anticipated. It was not known yet what results the glass recycling pilot would produce, but it was hoped to achieve a 50% rate overall within five years.
- Councillor Kennedy supported the initiatives and felt the Council should challenge itself more by the use of e-meetings, which had been done at HMRC for years. This would reduce costs and carbon emissions.
- Councillor Dale asked that an event be arranged to give all councillors the opportunity to put their ideas forward to officers. Councillor Sanderson advised that a blue sky day had been arranged for all members in the Autumn.
- The Leader agreed with Councillor Kennedy's point that more needed to be done. New ways of working were being implemented by officers and members did need to do more, though video conferencing technology would have to be more widely available to enable this to happen. Regarding the steering group, he did want this to be inclusive, so he would meet with the leadership of the minority groups to take the issue forward after the meeting.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of both meetings of Cabinet be received.



## **24. 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 Councillor Renner Thompson who drew members' attention to the review of the implementation of the new post 16 transport policy, which had shown an increase in take up, and to Opportunity North East, which schools were benefiting from.

**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, who commented that he hoped the Committee would in future be able to look at the Council's plans for dealing with Brexit.

With regard to Minute No.6 (Market Strategy), Councillor Gallacher commented that it was good to see the Council helping local businesses which paid rates to the Council.

Councillor Dale remarked that modern markets were very different to how they used to be, and that it was often difficult to maintain a healthy budget. She asked whether there would be any exchange of ideas with other authorities in developing the Strategy. Councillor Sanderson advised that this had been discussed at the Scrutiny meeting but efforts were being made to see what could be done to make markets cost neutral. However, it was up to the public to make them successful.

In response to a query from Councillor Dungworth, Councillor Sanderson advised that the two markets which were struggling were Ashington and Morpeth, but they did have greater overhead costs. Councillor Dungworth felt this was a far wider issue than struggling markets, and was about other issues such as austerity, the economy etc. These factors needed to be borne in mind when the Strategy was being developed. Councillor Sanderson disagreed and felt that people were going to markets to find niche products, and not just to fill bags.

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

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

These were presented by Councillor Watson.

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

**(5) Health and Wellbeing Board**

These were presented by Councillor Dodd.

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

**(6) Audit Committee**

These were presented by Councillor Hill.

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

**(7) Standards Committee**

These were presented by the Vice Chair, Councillor Armstrong.

With regard to Minute No.17.2 (R (Harvey) v Ledbury Town Council), Councillor Hill had three points to raise. She pointed out that any member just reading the minute would not be aware that Herefordshire Council cleared the councillor of all the allegations, so the minute should include that. There was a comment that the Ledbury situation was unlikely to happen in Northumberland because the Monitoring Officer and chief NALC officer were in regular contact. The problem in Ledbury was the very poor advice given to them by NALC, though that had been a different branch. Regarding the Committee on Standards in Public Life - Review of Ethical Framework, she pointed out that the requirements of this in relation to the appointment of the Independent Person were not being adhered to by the Council.

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

**(8) Brexit and Devolution Working Group**

These were presented by Councillor Jackson.

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

**25. REPORT OF THE RETURNING OFFICER**

Council noted the election of Councillor Les Bowman to the Holywell Electoral Division on 2 May 2019. Councillor Dodd welcomed Councillor Bowman to his first meeting of Council.

## **26. REPORT OF THE INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF PLACE**

### **Update to Planning Schemes of Delegation, Terms of Reference of the Local Development Framework Working Group and Neighbourhood Plans Status**

This report was withdrawn to allow for further consideration by the Chairs of Strategic Planning and the Local Area Council Chairs and Vice Chairs (Planning).

## **27. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

### **Request to Local Government Boundary Commission for Related Alteration Order - Newsham and Seghill & Seaton Delaval Electoral Divisions**

Council was asked to consider requesting the Local Government Boundary Commission to make a Related Alteration Order to align the boundary between Blyth and Seaton Valley Parishes with the Newsham and Seghill & Seaton Delaval Divisions.

Councillor Reid commented that this should have been done when the parish boundaries were changed. He suggested that when planning applications were submitted, boundary checks should be done at that point to determine whether any changes were needed.

**RESOLVED** that Council agree to a request being made to the Local Government Boundary Commission for a Related Alteration Order to align the boundary between Blyth and Seaton Valley Parishes with the Newsham and Seghill & Seaton Delaval Divisions.

## **28. CASTLE MORPETH LOCAL AREA COUNCIL**

Council was requested to elect Councillor Liz Dunn as Vice Chair (Planning) in place of Councillor Scott Dickinson.

**RESOLVED** that Councillor Liz Dunn be elected as Vice Chair (Planning) of Castle Morpeth Local Area Council in place of Councillor Scott Dickinson.

The Common Seal of the County Council  
of Northumberland was hereunto affixed

in the presence of:-

.....  
Chair of the County Council

.....  
Duly Authorised Officer