

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Northumberland County Council** held at County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday 4 September 2019 at 3.00 pm.

PRESENT

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

MEMBERS

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

OFFICERS

Angus, K.	Executive Director, HR&OD and Deputy Chief Executive
Eldson, A.	Services Director, Finance
Hadfield, K.	Committee Services and Scrutiny Manager
Henry, L.	Legal Services Manager
Johnston, P.	Interim Executive Director of Place
Lally, D.	Chief Executive

Around 7 members of the press and public were in attendance.

29. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Bridgett, S. Davey, Kennedy, Reid, Rickerby, Riddle and Webb.

30. MINUTES

With regard to Minute No. 22 (Member Questions, Question No.,6), Councillor Jones informed members that there was an Equalities and Diversity Steering Group which included herself as the portfolio holder and other members.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of County Council held on Wednesday 26 June 2019, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record, signed by the Business Chair and sealed with the Common Seal of the Council.

31. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Jackson, Wearmouth, Dunbar, Dungworth and Robinson disclosed interests in Minute No.23 of the Cabinet meeting of 9 July 2019 (Advance Northumberland Limited) and advised that they would leave the Chamber should there be any debate on the issue.

Councillor Homer declared a personal and non prejudicial interest in Minute No.31 of the Cabinet meeting of 6 August 2019, and Minute No.24 of the FACs OSC meeting of 5 August 2019, having children attending Hexham Queen Elizabeth High School.

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

Councillor Dodd reported as follows:-

- The Council's L&OD Team had been shortlisted for a Sustainable Business Award at the 2019 Personnel Today Awards. This was for work done by the Team to provide a more sustainable business partner approach across the organisation by using high quality intelligence and data on all aspects of workforce performance to help steer improvements. The Award Ceremony winners would be announced on Tuesday 19 November at the Grosvenor House Hotel, London.
- The Council's Animal Welfare and Environmental Enforcement Team had had success in the RSPCA's PawPrints Awards 2019, where the Team achieved a Gold Stray Dogs Award. PawPrints was run by the RSPCA to recognise organisations which provide higher welfare standards for animals in the services they provide.
- The Council's Communications Team had been nominated for regional Pride awards through the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) for the Discover our Land and British Travel Awards campaigns. They had also been shortlisted in the North East Marketing Awards for the Discover our Land campaign.
- Members were reminded that the Tour of Britain was to pass through the County on Monday for Stage 3 of the event, which started in Berwick and ended in Grey Street, Newcastle. The route was clearly marked out and members were all encouraged to get involved in watching the race.
- The Civic Head was having a Charity Race Night on Friday, 27 September at Ponteland Social Club. Tickets were £10 each and included Indian food. His charity was the Doddie Foundation for Motor Neuron Disease.
- Finally, congratulations to Lucy Bronze from Northumberland on her UEFA Player of the Year award. A letter of congratulation had been sent by the Leader.

33. MEMBER QUESTIONS

Question 1 from Councillor Hill to Councillor Oliver

In the last financial year, how much (in actual and percentage terms) of the money received by Northumberland County Council (NCC), through Council Tax payments during the same period, went towards;

NCC pensions - for contributions and payments to current and previous Councillors, Officers and other workforce?

Councillor Oliver advised that the total paid by the Council into the LGPS was £31.8m. Another £0.95m was paid into the fire service pension and £2m paid into the NHS pension. £180m was collected in Council Tax so the percentage was around 17%. However, it was not a question of Council Tax receipts

coming in and then being paid out. It needed to be considered in the light of the Council's overall spending, which was around £900m pa. Nothing had been paid for members' pensions as this had stopped in 2014, with nothing paid in since 2017. There were around 20 members in the scheme who had not yet reached pension age, and around another 20 ex members who were in receipt of pension.

Question 2 from Councillor Hill to the Leader

Recently, the administration have or have stated their intention to declare a "Climate Change Emergency".

How would you respond to those residents who are saying that they have much more pressing, everyday "emergencies" and problems to deal with such as how they can pay all their household bills - and that this is all meaningless posturing?

The Leader responded that there was cross party support for declaring a climate change emergency and that was because stewardship of the County was being taken very seriously by all. The Authority was in a good position to provide community leadership on this so that residents and businesses could follow the Council's example and do the same. These were national and international issues, but action had to be taken at a granular level first. A lot of actions would be taken which would positively affect communities such as reducing fuel poverty by making energy more affordable, influencing local procurement to reduce the carbon footprint, asset management, income generation, cost reductions to make the Council more efficient, making buildings more efficient through the planning system, and making houses more fuel efficient. There were many ways to create a win/win situation for all.

Councillor Hill suggested that the Council look at reviewing the existing policy which required Berwick taxis to travel to Alnwick for licensing. This was not environmentally friendly, given that there were two or three test centres in the locality which could do the job. Around 60 taxis were having to make this journey to Alnwick, which was a lot of unnecessary travel. The Leader responded that this had been raised previously. He understood there were technical reasons which made it difficult, but it could be looked at again.

Question 3 from Councillor Dale to Councillor Sanderson

Street Lighting Modernisation Project - how many lights are still to be replaced?

Councillor Sanderson advised that this was now almost complete. 120 lights were still to be dealt with and there were some small snagging issues in Riding Mill to be sorted.

Councillor Dale replied that there were a lot more than that in Riding Mill and she had received a number of complaints as the Council was not responding. She referred to the confidential report which had been considered by Council in May, and suggested that an update to all members was now due given the

concerns regarding its implementation of the street lighting programme and the financial implications of it.

34. CABINET MINUTES

The Leader moved the following minutes of Cabinet:

- (1) Tuesday 9 July 2019**
- (2) Tuesday 6 August 2019**

and asked members to approve the following resolution as it involved budget and policy framework matters requiring Council approval:-

(i) Minute No. 31(c) of the 6 August 2019 meeting relating to the Outcome of the Tender for the Hexham New Build Schools for Hadrian Learning Trust

With regard to Minute No. 18 (Blyth Relief Road), Councillor Swinburn thanked the Administration for finally progressing this issue. Councillor Grimshaw disputed this comment, adding that work had been going on this for a number of years, and it was unfair that the Administration were now trying to take credit for that, and for other projects.

The Leader commented that if the people in Blyth were asked whether they had felt neglected for the last 20 years, then they would agree. The current Administration was finally doing something about the congestion, and had the ear of the current Government. Blyth had also been put forward for funding from the Future High Streets Fund.

Councillor Dungworth urged members to try and keep the political comments out of the Chamber and to acknowledge that work had gone on before the current Administration took over. She asked members to move on because this kind of debate was not in the interests of the people of Northumberland, who listened to these debates to find out what was happening and what the Council was doing.

With regard to Minute No.31 (Outcome of the Tender for the Hexham New Build Schools for Hadrian Learning Trust), Councillor Cessford welcomed the proposals for the new build development provided by the Administration. The buildings had been probably the worst in the County, but the schools had still managed to achieve excellent results. He asked whether Councillor Daley could expand on the number of schools which had been upgraded during the course of the Administration in the last two years.

Councillor Daley responded that he had made a commitment from day one to invest in the County's school stock. £150m of investment had been put in covering Berwick Academy, James Calvert Spence College Amble, Astley High School, Haydon Bridge, the Seaton Valley and Blyth Partnerships, and in SEN. A huge amount of work had been done in a short space of time and he wished to place on record his thanks, appreciation and admiration to the staff

who had worked on this and other projects to ensure that they got delivered on time.

Councillor Beynon expressed his thanks to those involved in the delivery of the new Morpeth First School.

With regard to Minute No.29(3) (Forum Way Roundabout, Cramlington), Councillor Swinburn asked when the work would recommence. The Leader advised that he would get a response to him on that.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the minutes of Cabinet on 9 July and 6 August 2019 be received; and
- (b) the following resolution be approved:-
 - (i) **Minute No. 31(c) of the 6 August 2019 meeting relating to the Outcome of the Tender for the Hexham New Build Schools for Hadrian Learning Trust**

35. COMMITTEE MINUTES

(1) Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC

These were presented by Councillor Bawn.

With regard to Minute No. 15.1 (Blyth Relief Road), he reported that this had been unanimously supported by the Committee.

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.

Regarding Minute No. 14.3 (Elective Home Education), he advised that members were disappointed that the Bill had not progressed through Parliament. However, Anne Marie Trevelyan MP had taken an interest in this topic, and the Vice Chair had had a meeting with her to progress matters. He would report back on this.

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

(3) Communities and Place OSC

These were presented by Councillor Gallacher.

With regard to Minute No. 11.1 (Public Protection Service Requests), Councillor Dale expressed great concerns regarding the state of service being delivered by the building control sector, which was not mentioned. She asked that Communities and Place OSC investigate this. Councillor Gallacher agreed to raise this with the Chair.

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

(4) Health and Wellbeing OSC

The minutes of 4 June 2019 were presented by Councillor Moore.

With regard to Minute No.09 (Ambulance Response Time Performance Update), Councillor Dale advised that Riding Mill did in fact have a defibrillator, which was noted.

Councillor Dungworth advised that, in response to a challenge she had made at the meeting, a list had been circulated to the Committee of where the community access public defibrillators were actually located, and she asked that it be circulated to all members for information, which was agreed.

The minutes of 2 July 2019 were presented by Councillor Watson, who drew members' attention to Minute No. 24 (the Joint Musculoskeletal (MSK) and Pain Service (JMAPS)), and he read from the second paragraph regarding the service which would be provided under the new model. All members had received an email on this issue from a member of the Council with statements about the future of the service, which were untrue. He felt it was important that all such communications should be based on the truth.

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. 06.3 (Provision of Dental Services in Rothbury and Hadston), Councillor Dickinson asked, as the Board member concerned, whether the letter had been sent by the Director of Public Health, and if so, whether a reply had been received. Councillor Dodd agreed to pursue this and respond.

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. 10(a) (ISA260 Annual Accounts), and advised that these had not been signed off yet because Ernst & Young were investigating a whistleblowing complaint.

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. 21 (Committee on Standards in Public Life), Councillor Robinson expressed concern at the comment that councillors should be presumed to be acting in an official capacity in their public conduct, including statements on publicly accessible social media. Members did have responsibilities as elected members, but they were also private individuals and had a right to freedom of expression. He felt this comment from the Committee curtailed that, because members operated under guidance, but private individuals did not. Mr Henry advised that this was not advice as such, but it was for information. The Standards Committee had agreed with the sentiment expressed by the Committee for Standards in Public Life in their report, but for this to be brought into force would require government legislation. This had not yet been scheduled and he did not know when it would be. However, if it did, it would be a difficult area to legislate in, so he was unsure whether the recommendation would ever come into fruition.

Councillor Dungworth commented that the Committee had accepted that people who stood for public office would be perceived by the public as public figures, whatever they were doing. The public had certain expectations of public figures, whatever their office might be, and members needed to recognise that fact in how they conducted themselves. This was not new and came from the Nolan Principles.

Councillor Hill agreed with Councillor Robinson's comments and felt there were many things wrong with this, including the presumption that officers could do nothing wrong, only members. She queried the outcome of the discussion regarding the appointment of a second Independent Person. Mr Henry replied that the Committee had not reached an absolute conclusion on this point but recruitment would soon begin for the appointment of a new Independent Person, which Council would be asked to consider in due course. It was at that point that the Committee would be asked to make a recommendation on the number of Independent Persons, and the duration of their term of office.

Councillor Castle agreed with Councillor Dungworth on this. A member couldn't stop being a member and what the member said in public was a public statement. Members would be judged as a member on those statements and should expect to be. The Nolan Principles would apply in such cases.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Standards Committee be received.

36. MOTION

Motion No.1

In accordance with Council Rules of Procedure No.10, Councillor S. Dungworth moved the following motion, received by the Democratic Services Manager on 21 August 2019:-

“This Council notes that Neighbourhood Services are essential to the health, well-being and viability of local communities. Neighbourhood Services are those delivered at a neighbourhood level by local councils; services such as refuse and recycling collections, highways maintenance and repairs, parks and street cleansing, local leisure services and even school meals. These are all services highly valued by the public.

This Council further notes that:

- *Over 80% of the public want to see more money spent in their local area by their local council. This shows the value that the public place on the services that councils provide.*
- *Whilst just 11% of the public trusting private companies to deliver our public services there is real support for councils with near half of the population placing their trust in local councils.*
- *Whilst the public rate social services highly as a local public service they would also like to see extra funds spent on other services including road maintenance (which ranked marginally higher than social care) alongside support for affordable housing, waste and recycling services, footpath maintenance, street cleaning, school meals, winter gritting, parks, leisure centres, and street lighting.*
- *Since 2010 decisions made by government(s) on how local councils are funded has resulted in a loss of around £6 billion in Neighbourhood Services spending by UK councils.*

Therefore this Council:

- *Agrees to adopt a neighbourhood services champion to act as a voice in support of neighbourhood services*
- *Agrees to endorse the APSE campaign for fair treatment and fair funding for Neighbourhood Services.*
- *Commits to raising awareness amongst the local community and local businesses about the neighbourhood services provided by this council and how we are working to preserve them for future generations.*
- *Recognises that the consequences of Neighbourhood Services being lost to communities and delivered at the most minimal level is ultimately damaging to communities and a false economy.*
- *Calls upon Government administrations across the UK to ensure that funding settlements to local councils reflect the need for adequately funded Neighbourhood Services and agrees that this can only be achieved if funding to local councils is fair and provides the resources they need to support their local communities.*
- *Commits to raising awareness amongst the local community and local businesses about the neighbourhood services provided by this council and how we are working to preserve them for future generations”.*

Councillor Dungworth introduced the motion stressing the importance of neighbourhood services, and the people who provided them, to residents. Good quality services mattered to everyone from cradle to grave, and they were often not really noticed, but were just expected. The motion was about promoting this work. She stressed that she was not saying this did not happen now, but felt the opportunity should be taken particularly around the 18th October date. There was a correlation between physical and mental health, and the environment in which people lived. This was well proven. These services ensured that society worked and improved the quality of life for everyone - services provided by cleaners, caretakers, administrators, school cooks, people who looked after the environment and the roads - all the issues which were raised with members at surgeries. All the major services were supported by these kinds of staff, and could not be delivered without them.

In moving the motion, she urged members to support it and Local Services Day, and made particular reference to points 2 and 5 in the motion about fair funding. She asked the Administration to make sure that the issue of fair funding for local government was constantly raised with the Government so the people involved in these services could be remunerated accordingly. The motion was seconded by Councillor Dickinson.

The Leader remarked that there were statements within the motion which had not actually been talked about, which was why many would not be able to support it. The Administration had prepared an amendment which encapsulated the things which had been talked about which were pertinent to Northumberland. This was a national APSE motion and not really relevant to Northumberland. These staff had done a fantastic job of making the County presentable again and the service would remain firmly in-house, unlike other Councils. For example, contractors were no longer been used for weed spraying, the roadside verge cutting programme had been turned around and new parking spaces were being delivered across the County. A modernisation programme had been carried out in the country parks and staff had reacted magnificently to the very bad weather experienced last winter.

He felt that the underlying thrust of the motion was critical and not correct. The overall spending figure had stayed roughly the same for a number of years. Statements about the consequences of neighbourhood services being lost to communities and delivering the minimal level was damaging to communities and implied that the Authority was doing a bad job in Northumberland, which was not correct. He moved the amendment as follows:-

“This Council notes that Local Services are essential to the health, wellbeing and viability of local communities. Local Services are those delivered at a neighbourhood level by local councils; services such as refuse and recycling collections, highways maintenance and repairs, parks and street cleansing, local leisure services and even school meals. These are all services highly valued by the public.

This Council, and each and every member of it, recognises and applauds the officers and staff within Northumberland County Council Local Services and the high quality of their work throughout the County”.

The amendment was seconded by Councillor Sanderson, who welcomed the fact that the motion had been raised by the Labour Group as it provided the opportunity to thank the staff for the excellent service they provided.

Councillor Dale echoed Councillor Sanderson’s comments on the quality of the staff but urged the Administration to ensure that staff had the equipment needed to do their job properly, otherwise they had to work harder just to keep on top of things. She urged all members to consider what the issues were for neighbourhood services in their areas, and added that she had asked Councillor Sanderson to come and see for himself what those issues were in her area.

A number of comments were made by members, including:-

- Councillor Grimshaw commented that the motion was not political, it was just an attempt to strengthen Local Services’ position, to support valued staff and to encourage them to be their best. She would not support the amendment.
- Councillor Watson commented that he was pleased at the way in which the County Council had taken on the role and services previously delivered by the district councils, as well as its own. SLAs with the parish councils had resulted in better services and he was glad that putting work to contractors had been resisted.
- Councillor Bawn supported the amendment and agreed with the sentiment of supporting staff. The amendment removed the politics of the motion and Local Services already had a champion in Glen Sanderson as portfolio holder. He suggested that the motion be put to the vote.
- Councillor Castle agreed with the sentiments behind the motion as the staff performed well and there were good levels of response to member requests, which was very impressive. He could not accept what the motion was asking members to do as it was not correct; neighbourhood services were not being lost, they were being improved.
- Councillor Hill felt this was another meaningless motion and queried whether the amendment would negate the original motion, and therefore whether it should be allowed. Mr Henry confirmed that this would not be the case. Council Rules of Procedure allowed words to be inserted or deleted, provided that they did not negate the original motion. In his view, whilst it was a significant amendment to the original, he had concluded that it did not negate the original motion and that was his advice to members.
- Councillor Dunn agreed that all members appreciated the efforts of staff and the quality of that work, but she did not agree that communities were getting better. There were numerous issues in her ward which needed attention including litter, weeds and footpath reinstatement to name a few. In some places, things were just not working and she invited Councillor Sanderson to attend one of her parish council meetings where these matters were often raised.
- Councillor Bowman commented that he was often told by officers there was no money to deal with issues he raised.

- Councillor Sanderson commented that the benefit of the amendment was that it presented a positive note to the staff and it didn't help when members raised issues in the Chamber which they could easily sort out themselves. He was happy to attend parish council meetings, and did so already. Of course not everything could be done that was requested, but there were opportunities for members to put forward schemes into the LTP, and for projects from members small schemes funding. He cited the example of Berwick Cemetery, which had been raised by a member at the last meeting and which was now being sorted.

Councillor Dungworth was disappointed but not surprised that the Administration had used the meeting for political purposes. There was nothing in the original motion which had been critical of staff, and it had in fact praised them. The motion had simply asked that people in authority push for better funding for these services because there had been a reduction in funding under the austerity programme. Some shortfall had been made up from increasing charges to town and parish councils but she felt the Administration could never support anything which argued for her Group's corner. SLAs and partnership agreements had been spoken of as a positive thing by another member. These had been introduced by the Labour Administration and had proved very successful, not just because of the quality of the workforce but because the members involved had agreed to make compromises and put in additional funding.

She would ask her Group to support the amendment because they did not have sufficient numbers to defeat it, and if they didn't support it the Group would be accused of not supporting Local Services staff. However, Labour Group would use its influence outside of the Chamber to fight for fair funding and recognition of Local Services and its employees.

On the amendment being put to the vote there voted **FOR:** a substantial majority; **AGAINST:0; ABSTENTIONS: 1.**

On the motion, as amended, being put to the vote, there voted **FOR:** a substantial majority; **AGAINST:0; ABSTENTIONS:0.**

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that this Council notes that Local Services are essential to the health, wellbeing and viability of local communities. Local Services are those delivered at a neighbourhood level by local councils; services such as refuse and recycling collections, highways maintenance and repairs, parks and street cleansing, local leisure services and even school meals. These are all services highly valued by the public.

This Council, and each and every member of it, recognises and applauds the officers and staff within Northumberland County Council Local Services and the high quality of their work throughout the County.

37. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Community Governance Reviews

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

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) the outcome of the community governance reviews for Cartington, Rothbury and Thropton Parishes and Rothbury and Whitton & Tosson Parishes be agreed as follows:-
 - Cartington Parish Council be abolished and its area split between Rothbury and Thropton Parish Councils as indicated on the plans attached to the report.
 - The boundary between Rothbury Parish Council and Whitton & Tosson Parish Council be amended to include Jubilee Crescent and the gardens of 1-2 Cobble Court and Banklands, South Terrace within Rothbury Parish.
- (2) the Democratic Services Manager 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.

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

in the presence of:-

.....
Chair of the County Council

.....
Duly Authorised Officer