

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the **Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday, 30 October 2019 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor J. Reid
(Chairman, in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

Beynon, J.
Cartie, E.
Dunbar, C.
Gallacher, B.

Gibson, R.
Pattison, W.
Swithenbank, I.C.F.

CABINET MEMBER

Sanderson, H.G.H.

Environment and Local Services

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

L. Little
S. Nicholson
P. Soderquest

Democratic Services Officer
Scrutiny Co-ordinator
Head of Housing & Public Protection

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

M. Hardy
L. Weller

Chief Executive Officer (NIFCA)
Chair (NIFCA)

Press : 1

25. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors E. Armstrong and E. Dunn.

26. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Communities and Place OSC held on 2 October 2019, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors E. Cartie and W. Pattison advised that they sat on the Northumberland Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Committee.

28. FORWARD PLAN OF CABINET DECISIONS

The Committee considered the Forward Plan of key decisions (November 2019 to February 2020). (Schedule enclosed with the signed minutes as **Appendix A**).

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

29. OVERVIEW

Northumberland Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authority (NIFCA) Annual Plan 2019-20

The Chair welcomed and introduced Mike Hardy, Chief Executive Officer, and Les Weller, Chair, of NIFCA to the Committee. A briefing note and copy of the NIFCA Annual Plan attached as **Appendix B** to the signed minutes and the latest copy of the Resources Report had been circulated prior to the meeting. Mr. Hardy advised that the Annual Report for 2018/19 was to be finalised very shortly and would be published on their website and submitted to the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). The importance of communications with stakeholders and interested parties was also highlighted with the largest proportion of funding from NIFCA coming from the County Council.

In response to a request to explain why NIFCA reserves were so high it was explained that the lifespan of a patrol vessel was 10/12 years and with a lack of availability to source grants for the replacement of such vessels it had been thought prudent to establish a fund to save for this eventuality a number of years ago. The patrol vessel fund made up the majority of the reserves with approximately 10% of the fund available for other matters. Whilst Councillors welcomed the foresight, it was suggested that it might be beneficial to show the two items separately in order to allow movement between funds and prevent any confusion.

The Committee was advised that on the five times NIFCA had been out on patrol with the Environment Agency (EA) no instances of sea trout being caught in salmon nets had occurred.

In relation to Brexit, Members were advised that a large part of the area's fishing industry was the export of live shellfish to Europe, although some was now being sold and flown to China through from Carlisle. DEFRA had published information on what paperwork would be required which included veterinary input when landing live shellfish. In relation to vessels encroaching into UK waters it was clarified that NIFCA only patrolled to a six mile limit and whilst the Marine Maritime Organisation (MMO) did not own their own vessels they did charter vessels to patrol to the edge of UK waters and it might be that NIFCA would be called on for vessels.

Mr. Soderquest, Head of Public Protection and Housing advised that the Food Inspection Service worked closely with all the principal exporters within

Northumberland who were aware that if they wished to continue to export to Europe would need to have appropriate verification arrangements in place. It was clarified that a “Competent Person” could include a qualified Environmental Health Officer and was not limited to a Vet. This would be a matter of choice for the business, but in either case they would be required to attend and inspect the product prior to export. The Council would continue to work with businesses to see what was required. It was possible that additional funding from DEFRA linked to Brexit would be available. NIFCA confirmed that whilst it was not within their remit to provide information to the local fishing industry on Brexit, they were happy to act as a conduit.

The formula for the setting of the precept from Northumberland and North Tyneside was set in law. It was confirmed that whilst the governance was very different in Scotland and there were some issues at Eyemouth and Berwick, NIFCA had a very good relationship with Marine Scotland. With the imposition of national legislation within England which did not apply to Scottish Fishermen coming south of the Border, it had been necessary for NIFCA to introduce a local By-Law to ensure that all were subject to the same regulations.

Members were advised that in relation to the EMFF grant for the purchase of the RIB, its use would be monitored and vetted for five years to ensure that it was being used for the purpose it was purchased i.e. Enforcement/Inspection from shallow waters up to 20 miles out to sea. The high speed vessel could travel from its base in Amble to either end of NIFCA’s borders in an hour. If a breach of the conditions of the grant occurred then funding could be subject to clawback. An invitation was extended by Mr. Hardy and Mr. Weller to all Members of the Committee to go out for a trip on either of the NIFCA vessels.

NIFCA was one of the smallest of the 10 NIFCAs in England and there had previously been discussions that Northumberland should join with the North East IFCA to create one Northern IFCA. It had been a victory to keep NIFCA due to the totally different species and coastline here to other parts of the Country. It was confirmed that NIFCA was not detailed as a separate precept on Council Tax bills, but it was important that the public were aware of its existence and role.

Members were advised that an offer of £30,000 funding for V-notching of lobsters (which had been previously been carried) and made by EDF had been refused. Due to the Government’s legislation regarding the protection of berried lobster hens v-notching could not be used on them. EDF had offered funding to v-notch male lobsters however, following many discussions Members had been clear and had voted at their meeting on Monday 28 October to reject the offer.

Councillor Sanderson, Cabinet Member for Local Services and the Environment advised that an options report on addressing problems encountered at Lynemouth Beach had been carried out with all potential solutions being very expensive. The Council were looking for any funding streams available to allow work to be undertaken.

The Chair thanked Mr. Hardy and Mr. Weller for their attendance.

RESOLVED that the information provided be noted.

30. REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATOR

Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme and Monitoring Report

The Committee reviewed and noted its work programme for the 2019/20 council year. (Report attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix C**).

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator reported that Cabinet had accepted the report in relation to overview and scrutiny following the issuing of new Government guidance. Members were advised that if they wished the Committee to examine a particular issue, they should contact him or the Chairman or Vice-Chairman for consideration.

The Business Chair would look to see if any changes were required to the Committee timetable in view of the upcoming General Election.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Chairman _____

Date _____