

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

At a remote meeting of the **Cabinet** held on Tuesday 9 June 2020 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillor P. Jackson
(Leader of the Council, in the Chair)

CABINET MEMBERS

Daley, W.
Homer, C.R.
Jones, V.
Oliver, N.

Riddle, J.R.
Sanderson, H.G.H.
Wearmouth, R.

OTHER MEMBERS

Dodd, R.

Flux, B.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Bradley, N.

Feige, D.

Hadfield, K.

Hand, C.

Henry, L.

Lally, D.

McEvoy-Carr, C.

McLoughlin, J.

McNaughton, S.

Morgan, L.

Murfin, R.

O'Farrell, R.

Service Director – Strategic
Commissioning and Finance
Principal Ecologist and AONB
Officer

Democratic and Electoral Services
Manager

Executive Director of Finance

Legal Services Manager

Chief Executive

Executive Director: Adult Social
Care and Children's Services

Executive Director: Regeneration,
Commercial and Economy

Strategic Transport Manager

Director of Public Health

Director of Planning

Interim Executive Director: Place

Ch.'s Initials.....

101. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 12 May 2020, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

102. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Councillor Wearmouth disclosed a personal interest in item 6 (3) on the agenda (Endorsement of Conservation Area Character Appraisal for Morpeth) as a member of Morpeth Town Council, and advised that he would not take part in that item.

103. REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - STRATEGIC COMMISSIONING AND FINANCE

Summary of New Capital Proposals Considered by Officer Capital Strategy Group

The report summarised proposed amendments to the Capital Programme considered by the officer Capital Strategy Group on 1 May 2020 (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix F).

Energising Blyth - Future High Streets Funds

Councillor Wearmouth introduced the report highlighting that the regeneration of Blyth was a key goal of the Administration. He detailed some of the key projects which would contribute to this including the Northumberland Line and the creation of the Blyth relief road to ease traffic congestion in the town, working with the LEP on the remediation of the power station site, assisting the Port on the new Bates terminal and on the creation of a STEM centre to assist school leavers in accessing jobs in the offshore industry, and securing £25m of government funding from the Best Towns Fund.

Future High Streets funding was aimed at transforming town centres to make them fit for the 21st century and officers had worked very hard on this submission to the Government. The outcome was due in a few weeks and there had been a great deal of public interest in the proposals. Some of the projects under consideration included remodelling of the marketplace, conversion of the upper floors of Westgate House, the creation of another hotel in the town centre, the creation of an energy campus to link into the STEM centre and the offshore renewable Energy Catapult. Significant changes were planned to make it easier and more intuitive to go into the town centre. The scheme had to be submitted to Government by the end of July and approval was being sought to increase the budget by £7.34m with an additional £8.5m to be added to the MTFP for the energy campus as this

programme evolved. He paid tribute to the work of officers on this and urged members to support the report.

Members supported the report, speaking positively about how the improvements would link to the new cycling and walking strategy, to other important elements such as the STEM centre and education and industry, and the generally much more positive atmosphere which now existed in the town.

RESOLVED that:-

- the increased budget and funding requirements as set out in paragraph 7.27 be approved, including an additional Council funding requirement of up to £7.340 million to be met from the Strategic Regeneration Reserve provision in the existing approved capital programme.
- the indicative requirement from the 2024-2027 medium term financial plan of up to £8.500 million to underpin the delivery of the Blyth Energy Campus on the current Arriva bus depot site be noted. This will follow the acquisition of this strategic site through the 2021-2024 Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) programme. The funding strategy for the delivery of this project will seek to secure support from other Funding sources including the Town Deal, North of Tyne, and North East Local Enterprise Partnership to reduce the NCC match required.
- the submission of the Full Business Case to MHCLG by the extended deadline of 30th July 2020 be agreed.
- responsibility be delegated to the Executive Director of Finance and S151 officer, to enter into a funding agreement with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to deliver the agreed scheme as the lead partner; and
- it be agreed that each of the eight FHSF funded projects will return to Capital Strategy Group with a full delivery plan and ongoing business case (where required) prior to delivery.

104. REPORTS OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REGENERATION, COMMERCIAL AND ECONOMY

(1) 'Our Way' Vision for Cycling and Walking in Northumberland

The report provided an overview of the refreshed Northumberland vision for cycling and walking - 'Our Way', setting out Northumberland's ambition to encourage more people of all ages and circumstances to walk and cycle more often. The development of an integrated delivery plan would maximise the scope to attract external funding contributions to support the 'Our Way'

Vision (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix F, along with the report of the Communities and Place OSC).

Councillor Homer introduced the report highlighting that the County readily lent itself to cycling and walking and this should be the natural choice for all short journeys in the County. The Strategy was ambitious and aspirational and she was delighted to bring it to members. It was a joint piece of work with the Northumberland Cycling and Walking Board and she thanked the officers who had been involved in the production of the Strategy, which was underpinned by the Delivery Plan and the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPS) for the 12 major towns in the County.

It had been a significant effort to develop these 12 plans, which would provide a blueprint to target investment and support real behaviour change. These were “shovel ready” schemes so that when a funding opportunity was identified, they could be put forward. Schemes varied from town to town, reflecting the unique environments of those towns. Over the next 18 months progress would also be made on the design of a number of corridors to link towns and attractions across the County.

The infrastructure plans gave the Council the ability to influence future investment, including through the LTP, they gave weight to maintenance decisions and allowed investment into infrastructure with new developments as part of the Local Plan process. Bids would also be made for funding to accelerate behaviour change as part of the Council’s climate change agenda. The LCWIPS would be showcased over the summer for further feedback and engagement.

Councillor Jackson felt this report was particularly timely as more people than ever had been walking and cycling during the lockdown period, which contributed to both the green and the health agenda. These plans would put the Council at the front of the queue for the funding from central Government recently announced.

Councillor Daley commended the report, which had been received well by Scrutiny Committee and felt it was important to link this work into every element of the Council. Children’s Services would be working closely with the Plan to increase the number of journeys to school by foot or bicycle. He was particularly pleased that it included a route map which showed how it could be used for the County’s economic benefit to bring more people back. This would future proof the County as the place to visit for walking and cycling. It was an evolving document and he was excited about involving all of the County’s schools in playing their part in it.

Councillor Oliver felt that the report showed real ambition in terms of taking a joined up approach across all Council services which would help the local economy, improve residents’ health and have a major environmental impact. He felt the Council should encourage bus and train companies to incorporate

more cycle storage into their stock, and more cycle storage needed to be provided at stations. He also welcomed the opportunity to connect Corbridge and Hexham but acknowledged this would not be easy.

Councillor Homer advised that the response from Scrutiny to the report had generally been very positive. Reassurance had been sought on communication and messaging and about involving a wide age range of people, and a commitment had been given to do all of this.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the Northumberland vision for cycling and walking as proposed by the Northumberland Cycling and Walking Board attached at Appendix 1 be endorsed;
- (b) the development of an integrated Delivery Plan that will outline an investment programme to deliver short and medium and long term priorities be welcomed;
- (c) it be acknowledged that whilst this delivery plan will provide a robust mechanism for maximising the securing of external funding contributions, it will also define the future investment programme for cycling and walking to be met from the Local Transport Plan (LTP); and
- (d) the report of the Communities and Place OSC be endorsed.

(2) Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2020-24

Cabinet was asked to consider formal adoption of the Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan 2020-24 (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix B, along with the report of the Communities and Place OSC).

The report was introduced by Councillor Riddle who advised that a lot of work had gone into this very important document, which was required to be updated every five years by law. The environment was key to tourism in Northumberland but the Management Plan was far wider than just tourism, and addressed issues such as history and culture, second homes, etc. He commended the Plan to members.

Members fully supported the Plan.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the draft Management Plan be adopted by Northumberland County Council as the Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan for 2020-24; and
- (b) the report of the Communities and Place OSC be noted.

105. UPDATE ON COVID-19

Cabinet received a verbal update from Liz Morgan, Director of Public Health.

- Overall, officers were cautiously positive from a Northumberland perspective. There had been a downward trend in the number of daily cases from 6-8 per day a month ago, to three or less currently. There had been no outbreaks in care homes over the last week which was very important.
- Nationally, infections in the community had reduced from about 1:400 to about 1:1000. Deaths were also decreasing locally and nationally.
- The NHS Test and Trace programme recently introduced was still a work in progress, but PHE were working hard to ensure the programme connected properly with the Council and that the data flows started to emerge. The testing data would be very important for the Authority in terms of assessing transmission and work was already planned on how this data could be used to identify hot spots.
- The Authority had a role in managing the consequences of the contact tracing activity where the consequences might be high profile, or significant or problematic. A control mechanism to impose any local measures would have to be identified to be implemented where needed. Every Authority had to develop this outbreak control plan by the end of June. This would pull together all of the roles and responsibilities and would make recommendations on local decisions to impose control measures.
- Regarding public engagement, the member led engagement board which Councillor Jones was to Chair would be critical in making sure that messages to the public were clear and consistent.
- There were concerns from Directors of Public Health that the easing of lockdown restrictions were being done on multiple fronts in a short period of time. She stressed there was no room for complacency on this. Everyone needed to follow the rules on social distancing, on hand washing and on self isolating and testing where symptoms appeared.
- Plans were in place to keep a close eye on the infection in the County. There were 11 beacon authorities in the country, including Newcastle and Middlesborough who were taking a lead on particular areas of the outbreak control plan, and the Council was working closely with them.

The Leader took the opportunity to thank the Director and all Council staff who had worked incredibly hard over the last 12 weeks to deal with this crisis

which had come completely out of the blue. The County Council had been central in dealing with the crisis and key to supporting communities. The Northumberland Communities Together operation to support the vulnerable had been very successful, and a lot of work had been done to support care homes through the provision of financial help and advice and PPE. Efforts were now being directed towards recovery plans so the economy of Northumberland could get back up and running in a safe way. Great support continued to be provided by officers from all departments, which he commended.

106. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

Financial Performance 2019-20 Provisional Outturn

The report provided members of the Cabinet with the Council's 2019-20 provisional outturn position for the Revenue and Capital budgets, the Housing Revenue Account, and details of the movement in reserves and provisions (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix A).

The report was presented by Councillor Oliver. A £2m underspend was testament to the hard work of officers in all departments in managing their spending, given the overall size of the budget. The proposal was that £200,000 of the underspend would be put into land compensation provision, £200,000 into delivery of the Local Plan, £400,000 into economy and regeneration and £1.1m into the general fund. There was an accrual of around £20m received from the Government for the additional costs of dealing with the effects of Covid-19, £10m of this would be spent next year. £8.5m had been removed from the strategic reserve account for the progression of the Northumberland Line, £11m of capital reprofiling into next year and beyond, and a £1m underspend in the Darras Hall schools project would be moved into the Ponteland schools and leisure project.

He then detailed some of the areas of variances in the budget and the reasons behind them. It was worth noting that the adult social care budget, which was sizeable, had come in on budget whilst delivering incredibly important services. He also drew members' attention to the additional grant funding received detailed on page 15 to help deliver the Council's key projects. Officers had worked hard to deliver savings plans, and £11.3m of recurrent savings in the year whilst still improving Council services, which should be acknowledged. He also mentioned the Council's capital spending projects during the year, which were considerable.

Councillor Daley commented that this report clearly demonstrated that, despite everything that was happening, the Authority had not taken its eye off the ball and that service delivery continued. There were plans in place to deal with the pressure on the Children's Services budget for out of county placements which included investment into support for young people in

County. He reminded members about the Ofsted inspection of Children's Services just before the outbreak which had judged the Authority as "Good" which meant that going into the crisis, the Authority had been in a good place to support its most vulnerable young people.

Councillor Riddle added his acknowledgement of the way staff had continued to deliver services, noting particularly the efforts of refuse collection staff who he felt were unsung heroes. Regarding the budget, to come in with a £2m underspend and to deliver what had been delivered in challenging times was exceptional, and he commended Councillor Oliver and the staff who had managed the budget.

The Leader agreed that central services had been maintained across the County with waste collections, grass cutting etc all carrying on. Staff had done a wonderful job in keeping things going and should be thanked for that.

RESOLVED that:-

- a. the report be noted;
- b. the projected underspend of £2.069 million be noted;
- c. the following use of the underspend be approved:
 - Creation of a provision for £0.190 million to meet claims under the Land Compensation Act

There are a number of claims that have been received in relation to a depreciation of property values under the Land Compensation Act Part 1 which have not yet been settled. The estimated value of these claims is £0.190 million.
 - Increase in the Planning Delivery Grant Reserve of £0.203 million

Approval has now been received by the Council that the Local Plan can progress to the next stages of the examination. An increase to this reserve of £0.203 million is requested to meet the anticipated costs of an additional Inspector, the second hearing sessions and adoption of the plan.
 - Create a reserve for Economy and Regeneration Investment commitments totalling £0.435 million

For a number of years the Regeneration Service has carried forward across financial years unspent balances for investment in future projects managed by the service. Schemes totalling £0.435 million have been identified by the service that will require funding over the next few years. It is recommended that a reserve is created in order to draw down this funding for individual projects

when they are delivered. Details of the schemes totalling this sum are included at Appendix P.

- Creation of a reserve for tackling problematic empty properties for £0.050 million

The Council agreed on 8 January 2020 to use additional Council Tax collected from void properties to fund repairs to bring empty homes back into use. The creation of a reserve for £0.050 million in order to enable the Council to progress the interventions required to tackle problematic empty properties would avoid the need to use Council Tax receipts and provide the funding to draw down in the financial years that it was required;

- d. the balance of £1.191 million remaining be noted:

| | £m |
|---|-------|
| 2019-20 Underspend | 2.069 |
| - Provision for compensation claims | 0.190 |
| - Planning Delivery Grant Reserve | 0.203 |
| - Economy and Regeneration Investment Reserve | 0.435 |
| - Reserve for tackling problematic empty properties | 0.050 |
| Balance Available | 1.191 |

- e. the transfer of the remaining balance to the General Fund (provisional figure £1.191 million) be approved, noting that this balance may change and is subject to the impact of any technical accounting adjustments required in finalising the statement of accounts, including the calculation of the outturn collection fund, and, as a result of the Covid-19 crisis;

- f. the creation of the following reserves be noted:

- Covid-19 Grant Funding for £10.025 million

Government grant for Covid-19 received in 2019-20 which will be spent in 2020-21

- Haltwhistle Repairs Reserve for £0.013 million

To fund future repairs on the property occupied by Adult Services clients in independent supported living accommodation

- Northumberland Line for £8.500 million

Cabinet agreed on 11 February 2020 to transfer £8.500 million from the Strategic Management Reserve to meet the costs of the Rail

Network Enhancements Pipeline design stage for the Northumberland Line capital project. A separate earmarked reserve has been created to enable the costs to be tracked;

- g. the level of reserves at 31 March 2020 are £248.754 million as detailed in Appendix O be noted;
- h. the level of provisions at 31 March 2020 are £8.703 million as detailed in Appendix O be noted;
- i. net reprofiling of £11.119 million (£18.941 million reprofiling from 2020-21 into 2019-20 and £30.060 million from 2019-20 into 2020-21) to the capital medium term financial plan be approved, which is in addition to £678.505 million that was approved by Council on 19 February 2020 as part of the 2020-2023 Medium Term Financial Plan. Total reprofiling of £36.191 million was previously approved by Cabinet on 17 September 2019 as part of the Financial Performance 2019 - Position at the end of July 2019 report;
- j. up to £1.000 million underspend in relation to demolition and playing field reinstatement works at Darras Hall Primary School capital scheme to be used towards the Ponteland Secondary School and Leisure Centre scheme be approved and the budget adjusted accordingly;
- k. the virements at Appendix A be approved;
- l. the new grants and amendment to existing grants at Appendix B and the required changes to the budgets be approved;
- m. the delivery of the approved savings at Appendix C be noted; and
- n. the Executive Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services, be authorised to finalise the outturn figures once the Statement of Accounts has been prepared and the external audit has been concluded.

107. REPORTS OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REGENERATION, COMMERCIAL AND ECONOMY

(1) Endorsement of Conservation Area Character Appraisal for Kirknewton

The report explained the need for a Conservation Area Character Appraisal for Kirknewton, the background to this and the benefits of doing so (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix C).

Councillor Riddle introduced the report, explaining the purpose behind conservation area character status which ensured protection and management of an area in a positive and sustainable way. Much of the area in question lay within the boundary of the national park, and would be the first such Conservation Area in the national park. The appraisals were a transparent tool which could be used in planning and were a clear statement for any potential developers. He commended the report.

RESOLVED that the contents of the Kirknewton Conservation Area Character Appraisal be noted, and its use as an evidence base to inform Council decisions be endorsed.

(2) Endorsement of Conservation Area Character Appraisal for Morpeth

The report explained the need for a Conservation Area Character Appraisal for Morpeth, the background to this and the benefits of doing so (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix D).

In accordance with Minute No.102 above, Councillor Wearmouth took no part in the discussion or vote on this item, and left the meeting.

Councillor Riddle commented that this was proposed for very different reasons to the previous report. Morpeth was one of the biggest market towns in the County and subject to significant development pressure. The appraisal set out a clear development plan which could be used in planning decisions to ensure that high quality standards were maintained in the town.

RESOLVED that the contents of the Morpeth Conservation Area Character Appraisal be noted, and its use as an evidence base to inform Council decisions be endorsed.

108. LOCAL AREA COUNCIL FEEDBACK

Cabinet was asked to consider feedback from the last round of Local Area Council meetings. Two of the meetings in that round had been cancelled (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix G).

RESOLVED that the feedback be received.

109. 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:-

| Agenda Item | Paragraph of Part I of Schedule 12A |
|--------------------|--|
|--------------------|--|

| | |
|----|---|
| 11 | 3 - Information relating to (the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). The public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the interest in disclosure because of the importance of ensuring that the Council is able to make use of commercially sensitive information shared by care providers, and because of the need to ensure that the fairness of the forthcoming procurement process is not compromised. |
|----|---|

110. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Procurement of Specialist Adult Care and Support Services

The report sought approval to commence a procurement exercise for specialist providers of services for people with learning disabilities, autism or a mental health condition, in line with the NCC's finance and procurement rules. It described the rationale for this, including a need to increase the number of specialist providers for people with the most complex needs (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix H, coloured pink and marked not for publication, along with the report of the Health and Wellbeing OSC).

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) recommendations 1-5 in the Report of the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services be approved; and
- (b) the report of the Health and Wellbeing OSC be noted.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....