

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

At a remote meeting of the **Northumberland County Council** held on Wednesday 2 September 2020 at 3.05 pm.

PRESENT

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

MEMBERS

Armstrong, E.	Kennedy, D.
Bawn, D.	Lang, J.A.
Beynon, J.	Lawrie, R.
Bowman, L.	Ledger, D.
Bridgett, S.C.	Murray, A.H.
Campbell, D.	Nisbet, K.
Cartie, E.	Oliver, N.
Castle, G.	Parry, K.
Cessford, T.	Pattison, W.
Clark, T.	Purvis, M.
Crosby, B.	Reid, J.
Dale, P.A.M.	Renner-Thompson, G.
Daley, W.	Richards, M.E.
Davey, J.G.	Rickerby, L.J.
Davey, S.	Riddle, J.R.
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.	Webb, G.
Jones, V.	Wilson, T.S.

OFFICERS

Angus, K. Hadfield, K.	Interim Acting Chief Executive Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Hand, C. Henry, L. McEvoy-Carr, C.	Executive Director of Finance Legal Services Manager Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services
McLoughlin, J.	Executive Director Regeneration, Commercial and Economy
Morgan, L. O'Farrell, R.	Director of Public Health Interim Executive Director Regeneration, Commercial and Economy

76. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Quinn.

77. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of County Council held on Wednesday 19 February 2020, be confirmed as a true record, signed by the Business Chair and sealed with the Common Seal of the Council.

78. UPDATE ON COVID

Council received a presentation from the Director of Public Health on the current position. The main points of this were:-

- Cases were increasing nationally and regionally and had been increasing since the second week of August.
- There were currently 1684 cases and there had been 30 cases in the last seven days.
- The decrease in the average age was noticeable and was now at 25.
- The cases in care homes distorted ward level data for Northumberland so in wards where there were care homes the number of cases was higher.
- The Authority's Outbreak Control Plan had been published on 30 June and the Director drew members' attention to its main points, with the focus being on protection.

- NHS Test and Trace was a work in progress. It was improving but there were concerns around the two different systems which were not linked and queries around resources being in the right place, and around quality and cultural sensitivity. However, the service was to be localised.

Members asked a number of questions including:-

- How could members be kept informed and up to date on the changing local picture? Ms Morgan advised that members would be sent the link to the website which provided the data she had highlighted by postcode.
- How could the public in rural areas access testing facilities when there was limited public transport? What measures were being put in place? Ms Morgan advised that a testing strategy was in place which identified how the Authority would respond to a localised spike and work was ongoing with Estates to identify sites in all the primary and secondary towns where a mobile testing site could be dropped in. The mobile testing units would be prepped, but not go live until needed.
- There had been regional and national recognition for the way the Authority's Executive Team had handled the ongoing crisis. Was the Administration still confident that there was the resource within the Council to deal with a potential second wave given recent changes? Ms Morgan advised that all that could be done was to plan for the worst case scenario. No-one could predict what the next few months would bring and there had been concern about having to deal with this on top of seasonal flu. However, cases of this in Australia had been quiet, possibly because of social distancing.
- Could the County's increase be attributed to anything specific? Ms Morgan confirmed that the easing of lockdown had resulted in an increasing number of cases in young people travelling abroad and socialising.
- Could the Director explain about reporting of outbreaks and how that worked, and how cross border communications were working with Scotland? Ms Morgan replied that test results were fed into a number of surveillance systems. Test and Trace picked the information up and contacted the individual so it would be difficult for visitors to cover that information up because it was automatically fed into the NHS. She confirmed there were no particular issues around Berwick. There had been a cross border exercise recently involving PHE and the local authorities, and arrangements were already in place to share information about cases, which was the case with any infectious disease. She was confident that the relationships that were already in place with Scottish Borders would allow officers to work effectively.
- What was the total number of deaths in Northumberland? Ms Morgan advised that there had been 282 deaths where Covid 19 had appeared on the death certificate, though that didn't

necessarily mean that all of those deaths were attributable to Covid 19.

- Could a timeframe be put on the second wave? Ms Morgan advised at the start of July there were about 5-10 cases per week, it was now about 8-10 cases per day. She expected that this would probably level out over the next few weeks as it had in other places.
- Were there now more asymptomatic cases? Ms Morgan replied that only people who were symptomatic should be getting tested but it was the worried well who were going and getting tested who were putting a strain on the system. The only cohort getting regularly tested at the moment were residents and staff in care homes which was picking up the odd asymptomatic case.

79. MEMBER QUESTIONS

Question 1 from Councillor Hill to the Leader

Shortly after the last NCC Elections, the new Administration vowed to be extremely transparent. How do you think you have done on that?

Councillor Jackson replied that any accusation that the Administration was not transparent was misplaced. Transparency had increased through the Local Area Councils and local planning decisions being taken closer to communities. Many meetings were open to the public and there had been regular reports to every member during the recent pandemic, and regular information to the public. Councillor Hill referred to the suspension of LACs, the silencing of whistleblowers, the refusal to hold Audit meetings and obstruction of proper processes and commented that allegiance to the party leader seemed to have become more important than the public interest.

Councillor Jackson felt that these statements were misleading and Councillor Hill had been told by the external auditor that it was too soon to have an Audit Committee because there was nothing to audit. All the processes that were being put in place were being done by virtue of the Constitution and the Monitoring Officer.

Question 2 from Councillor Hill to Councillor Renner Thompson

In light of the recent changes within the education team including the resignation of an excellent Cabinet Member, what reassurance can you give that the education of children and young people in the Berwick area and across Northumberland is in safe hands?

There were technical difficulties at this point and Councillor Renner Thompson was unable to be heard. He agreed to provide Councillor Hill with a written response.

Councillor Hill sought reassurances that there would be no threat to the £15m allocated for a new school building in Berwick

Question 3 from Councillor Kennedy to the Leader

Can you provide information covering the period 16 March 2020 to 31 August 2020

1. The number of council meetings that were planned in the period
2. The number of meetings that took place in the period
3. The number of meetings cancelled in the period
4. Can you explain why so many meetings were cancelled and why electronic meetings were not put in place, when other peer Local Authority Councils including Town and Parish Councils ensured democracy continued?

Councillor Jackson replied that the answers to the three questions were 136, 52 and 84. Meetings had been cancelled in the height of the Coronavirus pandemic in order to protect members, staff and the public, in common with councils both regionally and nationally. Virtual meetings were put in place as soon as practicable when protocols to deal with remote meetings had been developed and agreed, and when members had been trained. Business was restricted to essential matters only to begin with and priority given to maintaining the delivery of essential services. The Council's first official virtual meetings took place on 12 May 2020. Council staff had been diverted to supporting the vulnerable and shielded. Some regional comparisons had been done and in the same period, North Tyneside had held 20 meetings, Newcastle had held 32 and Northumberland had held 50. He paid credit to Democratic Services staff for getting members back online.

Councillor Kennedy commented that residents paid significant sums in Council Tax and they expected high quality democracy. He asked the Leader whether he believed democracy had been shut down and whether he thought it was coincidence that the recent scandal hitting the Council had come at the same time. Councillor Jackson disagreed and pointed out that the Council had actually had more meetings than its neighbouring authorities. Maintaining local services and getting things back up and running had been the main focus.

Question 4 from Councillor Dunn to the Business Chair

On Sunday 23rd of August ALL members received an email from what is assumed to be a Northumberland resident asking questions. This email was subsequently deleted from all members' emails. Can you advise me why this administration deems it appropriate to delete items from members' inboxes if it appears not to be politically favourable?

Councillor Dodd replied that, in the Council's interests, an email was quarantined by the Council's ICT department to enable a review to be carried out into its contents to ensure that its continued presence and circulation within the Council's email system did not raise any issues of liability for the Council. Specialist external advice obtained immediately after the quarantine had confirmed that such action was, and is, sensible in all the circumstances and should be maintained until the review had been completed and any conclusions and recommendations considered and acted upon.

Councillor Dunn asked whether members would be informed about the outcome of that review and she sought assurances that communicating and connecting with residents, which was an essential part of a councillor's role, was not being hindered by the Administration. Councillor Dodd agreed this was the case.

Question 5 from Councillor Dunn to the Business Chair

Who asked for and authorised the deletion of members' emails without their knowledge?

Councillor Jackson replied that he had asked the Head of Democratic Services to review whether this was proper use of the Council's email system. This had been a request and he was not sure who had authorised it. It had been an officer decision but the source of the email was being investigated. Councillor Dunn asked whether members could find out who had authorised it and the Leader referred Councillor Dunn to the Head of Democratic Services. Councillor Dodd advised that a written response would be provided.

Councillor Dungworth sought clarification regarding the need for members to keep their video cameras switched on during the meeting. Mr Henry advised that it was preferred but not legally required under the Regulations.

Question 6 from Councillor Dungworth to the Leader

Given the importance of the Council's Whistleblowing Policy and the recognition that all staff should be able to report concerns 'without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage' can you explain why you have behaved without regard for the policy when dealing with the Chief Executive, after she raised a number of concerns.

The Leader denied that he had behaved without regard to the policy. Issues relating to any matter of a whistleblowing nature had to be treated on a confidential basis to await their full consideration under the Council's relevant policy and it would not be appropriate for him or the Council to comment at this time. The Monitoring Officer had the ability to report to Council in an appropriate manner, respecting where necessary the confidential nature of the process, once any outcome was available.

Councillor Dungworth commented this was a very different interpretation of whistleblowing to what she had, and what she believed Council staff would have. She asked how the Leader would reassure staff that they were safe to report any concerns they might have. The Leader responded that the Council had an extremely safe process; the whistleblowing policy had recently been reviewed and all cases were dealt with confidentially and safely in accordance with that policy.

Question 7 from Councillor Grant Davey to the Business Chair

What justification is there for the unseemly haste in organising a Staffing Appeals Committee to be held before the Extraordinary Council meeting, as requested by 5 members of this Council in accordance with the Constitution?

Councillor Dodd replied that the Staff Appeals Committee had full delegated authority from Council to consider and determine the matters considered at its meeting last Friday. The schedule of these meetings should not be determined by the schedule of meetings of full Council.

Councillor Davey did not feel this was a satisfactory answer and asked for a full written reply. He then referred to a number of officers who had left the Authority and suggested that another was to follow. Councillor Dodd warned Councillor Davey that if he did not desist on this line of commentary in the Council meeting then he would be muted. He continued and was then muted, and Councillor Dodd explained to the Council why he had done that.

Question 8 from Councillor Dickinson to the Business Chair

Why has it suddenly been decided that our Constitution is less important than the Local Government Act 2000? Is our Constitution fit for purpose or have we been acting outside the law?

Councillor Dodd advised that the Constitution allowed the Leader to make in year changes with the consent of the opposition group leaders. In reviewing the need to make necessary changes to the pool from which the Staff Appeals Committee was constituted to include a member of the Cabinet recommended in the JNC model procedure, it was identified that a provision in the Constitution was slightly at odds with legislation and that legislation provided that a council should accede to a group's wishes, rather than it being dependent on group leader approval. He had no reason to think the Council had acted unlawfully in the past however.

Councillor Dickinson asked that, given that the JNC framework was not being followed for the Staff Appeals Committee nor for other things related to these matters, could the Business Chair advise why the Constitution was used at all? Councillor Dodd responded that as Councillor Dickinson would be aware as a member of the Constitution Working Group, things changed, and there would be a need for a rewrite of the Constitution soon.

Question 9 from Councillor Bowman to the Leader

Does the Leader still think it was wise to remove a social media post request from the BAME NCC staff network which merely reinforced the Council's position about being an equal opportunities employer?

The Leader responded that he had had to remind officers about what the Council could and could not do. What it could not do was promote any political organisation, which the organisation in question clearly was.

Councillor Bowman asked that, in future members were informed before anything similar was done and believed the Leader had been wrong in the way he had acted.

80. SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

Councillor Dungworth advised that the agenda did not touch on any of the issues currently facing the Council nor the questions which needed to be

answered. She therefore proposed that the Council move to suspend the rules of procedure in relation to Rules 10.1, 10.4 and 11(3), which would allow motions to be heard from the floor and the order of business to be changed. The Monitoring Officer read out for the benefit of members what these rules of procedure contained, and confirmed with Councillor Dungworth that these were correct, and asked her if she wanted to specify at this stage what number of motions she wished to raise. Councillor Dungworth preferred to leave that open until later. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that a motion which was in order had been proposed, and it was seconded by Councillor Dickinson.

Councillor Dungworth advised members that she would have preferred not to do this but she had been one of the five members who had requested an extraordinary meeting of Council of the Business Chair regarding the Chief Executive being put on extended leave. Five questions had been asked in that request and she provided members with the detail of her attempts to establish from the Business Chair what the arrangements would be for the meeting and the content of the agenda, to which there had been no satisfactory answers given. Her Group had been left with no option other than the route currently being taken to have the matters they had highlighted raised and debated.

Councillor Dodd responded that he had sought legal advice about the meeting and given that it was summer holiday time, it had been agreed that the 2 September meeting already in the diary would meet the required timescales. He added that there was no difference between an ordinary meeting which was in the agreed timetable and an extraordinary meeting, which was not.

A number of members then spoke as follows:-

- Councillor Grimshaw supported the motion as she was concerned that the Leader was putting his own interests above those of the Council and the people it represented. The daily allegations were worrying and needed to be addressed in an open and transparent way.
- Councillor Reid queried whether a motion to remove the Leader would mean that all of the Administration would fall. The Monitoring Officer advised that the only motion the Council could pass in relation to the membership of the Cabinet would be to remove the Leader and no other motion would be effective.
- Councillor Dickinson advised members that the intent of the motion to suspend was to allow members to debate something that members were entitled to do. The scaremongering around whole Administrations falling was not true. He proposed members moved to the vote.
- Councillor Oliver asked why the motion had not been put in the normal way. Councillor Dungworth replied that she had covered this in moving her motion. She had asked for clarification of what was to be on the Council agenda without response, and the information about what could be legally discussed at the Council meeting had not been passed on. If this motion was not agreed today, it further

proved that the Council was operating under a veil of secrecy and collusion.

- Councillor Hill remarked that everyone was aware of what the motion was that would be put forward and it would provide an opportunity for Conservative members to say whether they had confidence in their Leader or not. This question simply had to be put to members.
- Councillor Castle commented that if the motion was of such significance, it should have been submitted within the required timescales so members could consider it properly, and members were being denied that opportunity now. He would not support it.
- Councillor Grimshaw supported the motion put forward because of the scurrilous rumours going around. She had no faith in the Administration being fair, transparent and open. Councillor Hill's request for an Audit Committee had been refused which was not reasonable.
- Councillor Dodd advised that the reason provided for the Audit Committee meeting request was because of Covid, and he had not believed this was genuine as it had never previously been mentioned.

On the required number of members requesting a named vote on the motion, the votes were cast as follows:-

FOR: 34 as follows:-

Bowman, L.	Hepple, A.
Bridgett, S.C.	Hill, G.
Campbell, D.	Kennedy, D.
Cartie, E.	Lang, J.
Clark, T.S.	Ledger, D.
Dale, P.A.M.	Nisbet, K.
Daley, W.	Parry, K.
Davey, J.G.	Purvis, M.
Davey, S.	Reid, J.
Dickinson, S.	Richards, M.E.
Dunbar, C.	Rickerby, L.J.
Dungworth, S.	Sharp, A.
Dunn, L.	Simpson, E.
Foster, J.	Swinburn, M.

Gallacher, B.	Swithenbank, I.C.F.
Gobin, J.J.	Webb, G.
Grimshaw, L.	Wilson, T.

AGAINST: 31 as follows:-

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

ABSTENTIONS: 0

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that Council Rules of Procedure be suspended.

Councillor Dungworth then proposed the following motion: that this Council no longer has confidence in the political leadership and therefore resolves to remove Councillor Peter Jackson from the position of Leader. This was seconded by Councillor Dickinson.

Councillor Dungworth commented this was a sad day for the County Council but the last 26 days had been unbelievable, and she related some the events which were of greatest concern including breaches of the whistleblowing policy, member emails disappearing, data breaches, various pressures being

exerted on officers, denial of meetings and changes to Committee membership. The reputation of the Council was in shreds and whilst members should be able to deal with such matters, officers were not paid to be subjected to intimidation and bullying. There was an ongoing pandemic and for the last 26 days, the Council had not been focussed on the job in hand. Staff were demoralised and frightened. The culture of bullying and intimidation came from the top, and an acceptance of behaviours which were totally unacceptable in public life seemed to have become the norm. She had received 5 emails from the Leader of the Council which offered no explanation of anything, or any assurances about what was being done as regards an investigation. This was not what she regarded as leadership. Councillor Jackson had become the story, and was causing damage to the reputation to the Council in an attempt to protect his own. She appealed to all members to put the interests of Northumberland first, not party or personal allegiances, and she moved the motion.

Councillor Jackson refuted everything had been said, adding that because of the legal processes ongoing it had been impossible for himself or Cabinet Members to clear their names. He was very proud of the achievements of his Cabinet over the last three years and he detailed some of the things which had been achieved. He assured members that there were proper and independent processes in place to look at all of the issues of concern and removing the leader now would leave the Council in chaos. He urged members to stop the petty bickering and focus on what mattered.

A number of members spoke on this including:-

- Members asked why three Cabinet Members had resigned recently if there were no problems, and asked whether it reflected on their confidence in the Leader.
- Councillor Reid commented that the Leader should have faced up to his responsibilities before now and resigned and he asked what this situation looked like to the public watching the meeting. His Administration was not the only one who had achieved anything and he referred to Ashington Leisure Centre which his own Administration had brought about. Barriers had been put in to prevent Councillor Dungworth putting valid issues on the agenda and this was the result.
- Councillor Watson advised the Council was now going through a due process. Councillor Dungworth had been aware of what was happening regarding the investigation from attending a recent training session on it. None of the allegations had thus far been proved.
- Councillor Dodd insisted that members must stop referring to ongoing investigations.
- Councillor Gallacher commented that the Administration had done nothing for Ashington in the last three years and had been massively let down by Councillor Jackson and his colleagues.
- Councillor Kennedy acknowledged that being a councillor and a cabinet member was very hard, and being leader hardest of all. But members had to look at the events of recent months, including the

resignation of three cabinet members. This was the Leader's own members who had acted against him. The public were asking what was happening and he couldn't give a satisfactory answer. Local Area Councils were cancelled and the whole situation was a shambles. The situation just could not continue because of the effect on the Council's reputation and the public's trust in it.

- Councillor Dale commented that it was vital to have a happy and well-resourced staff to deliver the Council's services. The breakdown in the relationship between the Leader and the Chief Executive, and the departure of two senior cabinet members had had a very unsettling effect. As EY had reported previously, the politics of the Council made it difficult for management to carry out their daily job, with a potential serious impact on the Council's governance. Under the current leadership, staff did not feel appreciated and were working in very difficult circumstances. Since 2017 there had been an unprecedented loss of senior staff at significant cost to the taxpayer. If things were to change then a thorough, independent investigation needed to be done.
- Councillor Hill acknowledged that the Conservatives had done more for Berwick than had been done for decades but power had definitely gone to the head in this situation. The Leader had to take responsibility for the current mess and whilst the situation was regrettable, this was about leadership and accountability and the Leader needed to step down so the Council could move on.
- Councillor Hepple commented that the reputation of the Council was in a terrible mess and the public were justifiably asking what was going on. If people lost confidence in the Council, then the Leader had to take responsibility for that.
- Councillor Bridgett commented that staff were not happy because of the toxic working environment. He did not want to see the destruction of the Conservative Administration, but a hand was needed to steady the ship and Councillor Jackson was not that steady hand.
- Councillor Riddle felt this was a very sad day for democracy when members were trying to bring down a very good Leader. He had been a councillor for a long time but was not very political, and the accusations which had been made about him he had only found out about in the press, without the benefit of any further information. There was a process in progress and if it was conducted in a full and transparent manner, he had nothing to fear. He did not think the Council was in chaos as services were still being delivered as normal without complaint.
- Councillor Foster commented that members had spoken to staff and they were unhappy and scared. She urged members to think of the staff and residents when they voted on this motion. If Councillor Jackson was removed as Leader, this wouldn't stop planned developments taking place from the Conservative Administration.
- Councillor Towns felt this was just a political move and nothing more. He believed in due process and the fundamental principle of innocent until proven guilty was sacrosanct. Nobody deserved to be removed from their democratically elected position based on headlines. Also, the reason Cabinet Members had resigned was a matter of public

record as their resignation letters had been published. During the course of the meeting he had witnessed at least two members chatting on their mobile phones for several minutes and he asked the Monitoring Officer if they could still take part in the vote. The Monitoring Officer advised that as long as members could affirm that they had heard the full debate notwithstanding any distractions, he did not see a problem.

- Councillor Wallace commented that the situation had been fuelled by rumour, hearsay and insinuation. He called on the Cabinet Members who had resigned to share whatever information they had, but what the Council did not have were facts and until then he urged members to get on with what they were elected for and not get embroiled in demeaning politicking.
- Councillor Oliver commented that he had been proud to serve as part of this Administration. Councillor Jackson had been a good and strong leader, and a strong leader would always upset people. Sometimes tough decisions had to be made and he felt old scores were being settled here. He had read in the press about allegations being made about him, but wasn't aware of any whistleblowing allegations yet. It was only fair that he should be told what these were if there were any, and that there should be a proper investigation of any as per the whistleblowing policy. He asked members to respect the rules of natural justice and deal with this issue once those investigations were complete.
- Councillor Wearmouth commented that Councillor Jackson had demonstrated incredible leadership in the last three years and had put the County on the map through many initiatives. He agreed this looked very bad from the outside and reminded members that there were established processes in place which had to be gone through.
- Councillor Dickinson agreed this was very much about fairness – for staff and residents, and about making sure that councillors did the right thing by listening to staff and the public. There needed to be confidence in due process and no political interference, and members needed to be able to select a leader from the majority party that the whole Council could have confidence in.
- Councillor Dungworth advised members this wasn't about bringing down Councillor Jackson or settling scores. This had not been orchestrated by opposition members, who had simply watched events unfold in the press. This mess was the responsibility of the current Administration. Councillor Jackson had brought himself down, along with members of his Cabinet. She was not asking for details of any investigations, all she had asked for consistently since 8 August was an explanation of what was happening in terms of investigations. Members needed assurances that business was being carried out correctly, and at the moment, they did not have that. Members also had a responsibility for ensuring that the budget was spent correctly and she questioned why £833,000 per vote was good value for money because that was what the Bedlington vote had cost today. The public were not fools, and she urged Councillor Jackson to leave, for the good of the Council.

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

FOR: 33 as follows:-

Bowman, L.	Hepple, A.
Bridgett, S.C.	Hill, G.
Campbell, D.	Kennedy, D.
Cartie, E.	Lang, J.
Clark, T.S.	Ledger, D.
Dale, P.A.M.	Nisbet, K.
Daley, W.	Parry, K.
Davey, J.G.	Purvis, M.
Davey, S.	Reid, J.
Dickinson, S.	Richards, M.E.
Dunbar, C.	Rickerby, L.J.
Dungworth, S.	Simpson, E.
Dunn, L.	Swinburn, M.
Foster, J.	Swithenbank, I.C.F.
Gallacher, B.	Webb, G.
Gobin, J.J.	Wilson, T.
Grimshaw, L.	

AGAINST: 32 as follows:-

Armstrong, E.	Oliver, N.
Bawn, D.L.	Pattison, W.
Beynon, J.A.	Renner-Thompson, G.
Castle, G.	Riddle, J.R.
Cessford, T.	Robinson, M.
Crosby, B.	Roughead, G.
Dodd, R.R.	Sanderson, H.G.H.

Flux, B.	Seymour, C.
Gibson, R.	Sharp, A.
Homer, C.	Stewart, G.
Horncastle, C.W.	Stow, K.
Hutchinson, J.I.	Thorne, T.
Jackson, P.A.	Towns, D.
Jones, V.	Wallace, R.
Lawrie, R.	Watson, J.G.
Murray, A.H.	Wearmouth, R.

ABSTENTIONS: 0

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that the Council no longer has confidence in its political leadership and Councillor Peter Jackson be removed from the position of Leader.

The meeting then adjourned at 17.56 and reconvened at 18.10.

Councillor Flux then proposed to Council that Council consider the election of a new leader at the next Council meeting. This was seconded by Councillor Hill.

Councillor Bridgett sought clarification that the current Deputy Leader would act as interim Leader in the meantime and the Monitoring Officer confirmed this would be the position.

Councillor Dodd advised that a Council meeting would be arranged swiftly to deal with this matter and members indicated by a show of hands, that they endorsed this approach.

RESOLVED that a further meeting of Council be arranged to elect a new Leader.

81. CABINET MINUTES

RESOLVED that:-

(a) the following minutes of Cabinet be received:

- (1) **Tuesday 11 February 2020**
- (2) **Tuesday 10 March 2020**
- (3) **Tuesday 12 May 2020**
- (4) **Tuesday 9 June 2020**

- (5) **Tuesday 23 June 2020**
- (6) **Tuesday 7 July 2020; and**

(b) the following resolutions be approved as they involve budget and policy framework matters requiring Council approval:-

- (i) **Minute No. 94.1 and 94.4 of the 10 March 2020 meeting relating to recommendations from the Capital Strategy Group.**
- (ii) **Minute No. 117.4 and 117.5 of the 7 July 2020 meeting relating to the recommendations from the Capital Strategy Group.**

82. COMMITTEE MINUTES

(1) Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC

These were presented by Councillor Grimshaw, who referred to Minute No.40 (Debt Recovery Arrangements – Support to Customers with Financial Difficulties) and asked whether the reference to pursuing outstanding debts referred to businesses who had filed for administration, as well as individuals. Councillor Dodd assumed that the Council would do that but a written response would be provided.

With regard to Minute No.47.1 (Annual Update Report for Workforce), Councillor Grimshaw hoped that the Administration confirm that they would look into bullying cases and address the issues of concern without being biased, and she asked that members be kept updated.

With regard to Minute No.46.2 (Covid Recovery), Councillor Seymour asked what work had been to refresh the VCS contract as mentioned. Councillor Dodd advised that a written response would be provided.

Councillor Robinson commented that he hadn't attended the meeting but he had submitted a number of questions which weren't referenced in the minutes. He queried whether members could ask questions if they could not attend. Councillor Dodd agreed to find out.

Councillor J.G. Davey referred to Minute No.45 (Disclosures of Interest) and asked a question regarding Councillor Oliver's disclosures of interest form and whether a business grant had been made to a company in June in which Councillor Oliver was involved with that had gone into administration in March 2020. Councillor Oliver confirmed that the answer was no. Councillor Davey asked that a written answer be provided on where it had gone.

Councillor Grimshaw commented that various updates had been sought and asked when these would be provided.

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.

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.

Regarding Minute No.46.2 (Community Safety and Anti-Social behaviour), Councillor Grimshaw asked whether anything was being done to address the issue of "car gatherings" in council car parks as this was a significant problem in a number of places, and often canisters of drugs were left behind. She asked that the Council consider putting cctv cameras into these areas as soon as possible. Councillor Reid advised that the County was working with Blyth Town Council to get cameras in Blyth where it was a particular nuisance so this may come down to partnership working with town councils and the Police. He was happy to take the issue to Committee but it would be up to the Administration to allocate funding.

With regard to Minute No. 46.2 (Street Lighting LED Project), Councillor Dale commented that this was still not finished in her ward. Before the contract was signed off every street needed to be checked. She was also concerned about the extra cost and that the governance of the project needed to be looked at carefully.

Councillor Reid agreed but added that this would have to be done through Chairs Group. If there were any other unfinished areas of work he asked members to let him know. Councillor Bridgett indicated that this was the case in his ward.

Councillor Dungworth commented that the car parks issue was wider than just the gatherings, it was the racing along the roads which was also a problem and she felt that some structural changes were needed such as had been done in North Tyneside to physically slow vehicles down.

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

(4) Health and Wellbeing OSC

These were presented by Councillor Watson, who highlighted the regular updates on Covid which had been received, which had been prompted by Councillor Dungworth.

Comment was made about the contribution from communities to the Covid response, including local churches.

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 Councillor Dungworth.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Standards Committee be received.

83. DELEGATED DECISIONS

RESOLVED that the delegated decisions taken since those reported to County Council on Wednesday, 1 May 2019 be received.

84. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PLANNING

Review of Planning Functions of Local Area Councils

Council was asked to review the delegated decision of the Chief Executive dated the 10th May 2020, which agreed a number of urgent constitutional and governance measures in response to the Coronavirus pandemic through the exercise of the Chief Executive's residual powers under the Council's Constitution.

In response to a query from Councillor Dale, Councillor Riddle advised there would be an all member workshop before the consultation on the Planning White Paper was submitted.

Councillor Dale raised problems with enforcement issues and asked that members be informed if there was a real concern on enforcement.

Councillor Dungworth asked why the public could not be allowed to present representations to Council committees virtually. It was secure and manageable and happened elsewhere, and should be offered to those who wanted to take that opportunity. Councillor Dodd advised that this would be looked at within the restrictions of a possible second wave.

Councillor Dunn agreed with the report, but had not seen any prior reference to no more than three applications per committee, which she was surprised at being a planning chair. Councillor Dodd acknowledged this but confirmed that

three items took three hours. Councillor Riddle added that this suggestion had come from feedback from Strategic Planning and officer recommendation.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Council agree to reinstate with immediate effect the powers of the Local Area Councils in relation to the determination of planning applications and related matters. This measure relates to the powers temporarily transferred to the Strategic Planning committee as detailed in the delegated decision of the Chief Executive dated 10th May 2020;
- (b) Council agree to continue to extend the Chief Planning Officer's ability to determine planning applications which might otherwise fall to be determined by Committee under the relevant Terms of Reference where in the opinion of the Chief Planning Officer (Director of Planning), following written consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of that Planning Committee to whose views he should have regard, an application should be determined by the Chief Planning Officer for the reason that it does not raise issues of strategic, wider community or significant County Council Interest. This provision will not apply to decisions which would, in the opinion of the Chief Planning Officer, represent fundamental departures from the Local Plan, or fundamental departures from Made Neighbourhood Plans or Statutory Consultee advice;
- (c) Council agree to continue to amend the Council's Public Speaking Protocol at Planning Committees so as to suspend for a period until May 2020 the ability of third parties (including parish councillors, members of the public, planning applicants and their agents) to make verbal representations at meetings of the Council's Planning Committees (including Strategic Planning Committee) and to replace this ability with an alternative written representations process as set out in the copy of "Public Speaking Protocol - May 2020" ; and
- (d) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive to make any changes they consider necessary to the planning delegation scheme in light of changing circumstances in consultation with the portfolio holder and Chairs of Planning.

85. REPORTS OF THE INTERIM ACTING CHIEF EXECUTIVE

(1) Community Governance Review: Amble

Council was asked to consider the outcome of a community governance review in the County.

The report was introduced by Councillor Oliver who drew members' attention to a slight error in the report in that two objections from Hauxley parishioners had been included in the appendix, but not highlighted in the covering report. Hauxley PC had asked that the whole matter be withdrawn, but because the

information was there in the appendix and members' attention was being drawn to it, there was not a need to withdraw the whole item. He detailed the main points of the report and its recommendations.

Councillor Reid agreed with the report's recommendations as it was he who had initially highlighted the potential problems associated with the new housing in Hauxley being in two different parishes.

Councillor Watson advised that he was a parish councillor at Warkworth and Amble. This had been opposed by a large majority of people in Warkworth as well as the Parish Council, there was no logical reason for it and he favoured that the existing boundaries be maintained. He did ask that the request for additional Amble Town Councillors be considered by whatever was the appropriate process. He had no comment to make on Hauxley. Councillor Clark objected to the Hauxley proposal, as did local residents and the Parish Council in the same way as Warkworth had. It was his understanding that if a Parish Council objected to a boundary change, then the matter should be closed. Hauxley PC had developed a neighbourhood plan to mirror the existing civil parish boundary, which had received significant local support. The affected area in Hauxley would soon have development begin on it, and 60 houses would fall within Hauxley's boundary, which had been taken into account in the preparation of their neighbourhood plan.

Councillor Dickinson commented that Councillor Clark had consulted with residents and the Parish Council on this matter. This proposal didn't suit them or the needs of their village and he therefore supported Councillor Clark's stance.

There was no dissent from members regarding recommendation one in the report. However, regarding recommendation two and three, a named vote was requested. The required number of members supported this and the votes were cast as follows:-

FOR: 22

Castle, G.	Renner-Thompson, G.
Cessford, T.	Rickerby, L.
Dodd, R.	Riddle, J.
Flux, B.	Robinson, M.
Homer, C.R.	Roughead, G.
Jackson, P.	Sanderson, H.G.H.
Jones, V.	Seymour, C.
Lawrie, R.	Stewart, G.
Oliver, N.	Stow, K.
Pattison, W.	Towns, D.
Reid, J.	Watson, J.G.

AGAINST: 22

Bowman, L.	Hepple, A.
Cartie, E.	Lang, J.

Clark, T.	Ledger, D.
Davey, J.G.	Nisbet, K.
Davey, S.	Parry, K.
Dickinson, S.	Purvis, M.
Dungworth, S.	Richards, M.E.
Foster, J.	Simpson, E.
Gallacher, B.	Swithenbank, I.C.F.
Gobin, J.J.	Webb, G.
Grimshaw, L.	Wilson, T.

ABSTENTIONS: 15

Armstrong, E.	Kennedy, D.
Crosby, B.	Murray, A.H.
Dale, P.A.M.	Sharp, A.
Daley, W.	Swinburn, M.
Dunbar, C.	Thorne, T.N.
Gibson, R.	Wallace, R.
Hill, G.	Wearmouth, R.
Hutchinson, I.	

As the votes for and against were tied, the Monitoring Officer reminded the Chair that he had a casting vote, though he did not need to cast it in the same way he had done previously. The Chair confirmed that he wished to cast his vote in the same way, i.e. in support of recommendations two and three, and the final vote on the matter was therefore **FOR: 23; AGAINST: 22; ABSTENTIONS: 15**. It was therefore **RESOLVED** that

- (a) Council note the outcome of the community governance review for Amble Town Council and agree that the status quo be retained in relation to the proposed boundary change with Warkworth Parish Council, and that the number of Councillors on Amble Town Council remain as at present;
- (b) Council agree the proposed boundary change with Hauxley Parish Council; and
- (c) Council authorises the Head of Democratic and Electoral Services Manager to make, sign and seal the appropriate order for the boundary change with Hauxley Parish Council by virtue of the powers contained in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act.

(2) Request to Local Government Boundary Commission for Related Alteration Order - Pegswood and Bothal Electoral Divisions

Council was asked to consider requesting the Local Government Boundary Commission to make a Related Alteration Order to realign the boundary of the Pegswood and Bothal County Divisions with the boundary between Pegswood and Ashington Parishes, as revised in 2012.

Councillor Oliver advised that this was a procedural matter and commended the recommendation to members. Councillor Towns, as one of the Local Ward members, stated that he had received no comments from residents regarding this and was happy to support the recommendation.

RESOLVED that a request be made to the Local Government Boundary Commission for a Related Alteration Order to realign the boundary of the Pegswood and Bothal County Divisions with the boundary between Pegswood and Ashington Parishes, as revised in 2012

86. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND S151 OFFICER

Treasury Management Annual Report for the Financial Year 2019-20

The report provided details of performance against the Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) 2019-20, approved by the County Council on 21 February 2018. The report provided a review of borrowing and investment performance for 2019-20, set in the context of the general economic conditions prevailing 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.

Councillor Oliver introduced the Annual Report stating that this once again reflected the excellent work by the Treasury Management Team which had been consistent throughout all Administrations of the Council. He advised that the strategy for the year had been to use cash rather than borrowing, as the return on investments was low. Advantage had been taken of long term borrowing rates and spreading out the risk when borrowing reached redemption so it did not all need to be redeemed or re-borrowed at the same time. It had been thought that the economy was set to improve, however with the arrival of Covid this had become very precarious. He remained optimistic for the bounceback in Northumberland in particular because of tourism and other speciality sectors such as offshore wind in Blyth. Within the portfolio of the Council in 2019/20, borrowing had risen by £93.5m, however investments were up by £95m with a net reduction of £1.5m. He was pleased to advise for the third year in a row that the Council's performance was very good in comparison to other Local Authorities with an aggregate debt now of 2.85%.

Following a query from Councillor Gallacher in respect of scrutiny of the report prior to Council noting it, it was clarified that the report had already been considered at the Council's Audit Committee, as was the normal process for this report. Councillor Dungworth welcomed the comment from Councillor Oliver, recognising that staff were apolitical and worked consistently and

conscientiously for the Council whoever was in control. Councillor Dale highlighted that this report was for the financial year 2019/20 and Covid only started having an effect in March 2020 which was at the very end of the financial year. The next year would be very difficult and the Council needed to understand the position it was going to be in going forward.

RESOLVED that Council receive the report and note the performance of the Treasury Management function for 2019-20.

87. PORTFOLIO AND COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

It was advised that no appointment had yet been made to the Cabinet portfolio which had previously been held by Councillor Homer.

RESOLVED that Council:

- (1) note the appointment of Councillors Renner Thompson and Watson as Portfolio Holders for Children’s Services and Adult Wellbeing and Health respectively; and
- (2) note the appointment of Councillor Sanderson as Deputy Leader

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

in the presence of:-

.....
Chair of the County Council

.....
Duly Authorised Officer