

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL
CORPORATE SERVICES AND ECONOMIC GROWTH
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a remote meeting of the **Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on Monday, 12 October 2020 at 10.00am.

PRESENT

Councillor D. Bawn
(Chair, in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

Beynon, J.
Cessford, T.
Grimshaw, L.
Parry, K.

Roughead, G.
Seymour, C.
Simpson, E.

ALSO PRESENT

Flux, B.
Oliver, N.

Wearmouth, R.

OFFICERS

Barnes, G.
Bowers, H.
Hand, C.

Jones, P.
Lally, D.
McLoughlin, J.

Nicholson, S.
Rose, J.

Revenues & Benefits Manager
Democratic Services Officer
Executive Director of Finance and
Section 151 Officer
Service Director, Local Services
Chief Executive
Executive Director: Regeneration,
Commercial and Economy
Scrutiny Coordinator
Head of Economy and Regeneration

48. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Robinson.

49. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC held on 13 July 2020, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair with the following amendment:

Minute number 46.2, page 5, (second last bullet point). Councillor Roughead's statement should read "*He hoped local planning committees could start meeting on a virtual basis*".

50. FORWARD PLAN OF CABINET DECISIONS

Members received details of forthcoming reports to be considered by the Cabinet. (Schedule enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix A.)

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

51. SCRUTINY OF CABINET REPORTS

The following reports were to be considered by the Cabinet on 13 October 2020. The Committee was asked to comment on the proposals contained in the reports. Any comments would be presented to Cabinet by the Chair.

51.1 Northumberland Climate Change Briefing

The report provided an update on the actions taken by the County Council since full Council approved the Climate Change Action Plan 2020-21 in January 2020 and sought Cabinet approval for the proposed next steps, and the associated additional revenue expenditure.

The report set out 7 priority action areas for the Council to pursue its climate change ambition which were a development of the themes set out in the Action Plan 2020-21. The original themes Energy, Transport, Carbon Sequestration and Land Management, Policy and Communications and Engagement would form the body of the report. (Report attached to the signed minutes as Appendix B)

Paul Jones, Local Services Director informed members of the Council's ambition of net zero emissions for 2030 for the county. The key recommendations and action areas in the report related to Council's policy.

The report set out a number of priorities that built on the work already undertaken on key themes. To achieve the net zero target, work would need to focus on two fronts; protecting and increasing the positive benefit from carbon sequestration e.g., tree planting; and actions that could be taken to reduce emissions in a targeted way.

Priority Action Area 1 - Council Policy. All new policy decisions should include consideration of climate change impact through the use of a carbon assessment measurement and aim where possible to be carbon neutral, and where not possible to identify suitable mitigations to reduce their impact.

Priority Action Area 2 – Engagement and Partnership. Societal changes were required, and communities and business would be brought together with significant engagement and partnership activity. A good example of this engagement activity had been the Council's free tree scheme, which was extremely popular with residents, schools and community groups.

Priority Action Area 3 – Heating Existing Buildings and New Buildings. Energy efficiency would be looked at across the county, looking at reducing heating bills and fuel poverty. A mapping exercise has been pulled together to look at individual properties by postcode to identify energy usage levels and what energy efficiency measures may be applicable to the property to help individuals and communities to improve their own homes and access grant funding. District heating schemes feasibility studies have been progressed. There were recommendations for further work on potential schemes for Blyth and Cramlington, and to undertake initial feasibility studies in other key towns to help improve efficiency of homes and commercial buildings. These were important key projects to reduce carbon emissions. There was a request in the report for an additional £69,300 to take forward a programme of studies for district heat mapping schemes.

Priority Action Area 4 – Transport. Proposals were being brought forward to introduce additional charging points for private vehicles in the county to encourage increased uptake of electric vehicles and to help address 'range anxiety' for users so that they had no concerns about access to charging points when travelling around the county.. There would be a pilot scheme for on-street charging points for those people that did not have their own private drives and the ability to charge an EV from their home. Walking and cycling continued to be supported, as well as the public transport network including the progression of the Northumberland Line railway.

Priority Action Area 5 – Renewable Energy Generation. A number of projects would be carried out; e.g. the solar car port at County Hall and several ground source heating schemes at council buildings.

Priority Action Area 6 – Natural Resource Bases Carbon Sequestration. Northumberland was uniquely placed to maximise the use of the county's natural assets. A lot of work was being taken forward with flagship projects - Northumberland Forest and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy pilot. A lot of work was taking place behind the scenes such as the Borderlands programme.

Priority Action Area 7 – Reducing Waste. Northumberland had a good recycling rate, but the Council were conscious that they needed to do more and were looking at how it could support efforts to design out waste, maximise return, reuse and recycle more.

A great deal of work was being carried out by the county and NCC in taking forward climate change action plans, and it was expected that an updated action plan would be approved next year by Cabinet to take forward the action plan for 2021/23.

Members were referred to the list of recommendations in the report.

Councillor Oliver referred to the current impact of COVID and stated that the Council was determined to continue to pursue the climate change agenda which would improve the economy and achieve climate change ambitions and create additional green jobs across the county.

Councillor Wearmouth added that praise should be conveyed to the Local Services Director and to the Corporate Services Director for the detailed proposals and credit also be given to members and officers. He referred members to carbon maps on Twitter for Northumberland and stated that Northumberland was consistently the

best for carbon intensity, and while Northumberland were targeting net zero it would be difficult for neighbouring authorities such as Newcastle and North Tyneside. He further added that there would be the opportunity for a significant amount of jobs in offshore and other technologies.

In response to questions, members were advised that:

- Regarding electric charging points at all car parks. Work that had been undertaken looked at both level, demand and geographic spread to identify gaps in coverage and these locations were picked as a priority. It was still proposed to enhance and provide additional charging points across a number of car parks across the county. On street charging points was a big issue in Northumberland with large parts of communities not having access. It was hoped through the pilot scheme to find a model that worked best for Northumberland.
- In relation to fuel poverty – there was a good evidence base where fuel poverty existed. The next step was to create a 3-year action plan and work out a direct strategy and link with colleagues and public health in a targeted way.
- Regarding reduction in business mileage claims and participation in future virtual meetings. Councillor Oliver explained that was being partly led by Government during Covid and he was not sure if this had been resolved in the longer term. He was keen that this could happen and as Democratic Services was within his portfolio, he hoped this could be made as easy and possible for those people who could not attend a meeting or without the need to travel. This would be followed up.
- In response to the comment regarding heat maps in Berwick. District heat schemes needed heat users as close as possible to the heat source, whether from ground source heating or industrial processes to get heat as efficiently and cheaply as possible. Urban areas were most viable.
- Regarding carbon assessments. When making key decisions, the carbon impact would have to be identified and considered whether it was positive or negative and this process then enabled an informed decision to be made.

RESOLVED that Cabinet be advised that this committee supports the recommendations as outlined in the report.

51.2 Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal Investment Programme

The report sought approval for the inclusion of the first phase of the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal Investment Fund for the Alnwick Garden Lillidorei; Ad Gefrin Distillery; and Energy Masterplan projects, in accordance with the Council's role as accountable body for the Growth Deal Investment Fund awarded by the UK Government in England with the Council's capital and revenue budgets. (Report attached to the signed minutes as Appendix C).

Councillor Sanderson informed members that the Borderlands Initiative had been progressing well and the Partnership would bring benefits to the county.

The report was presented by Janice Rose, Head of Economy and Regeneration who informed members that as the accountable body, the Council was responsible for effectively administering the capital investment allocation to projects which would be added to the Council's capital programme.

Two projects within the Deal were anticipated to be approved by the Government in this financial year and as such needed to be added to the Council's capital programme. These were Alnwick Garden Lillidorei and Ad Gefrin Distillery. The Borderlands Strategic Low Carbon Energy Master Plan project also required approval.

In response to questions, members were advised that:

- Regarding future programmes and projects. Heads of Terms had been signed last year with the Government which specified the areas the Government would invest in. More details on these will be reported to Cabinet early in 2021 as part of the signing off of the full Deal. Councillor Sanderson suggested a presentation be made to the Committee giving members the background to the project and the next steps. It was suggested that this take place in a workshop/brainstorming session. The Scrutiny Officer would liaise with the Head of Economy and Regeneration to arrange.

RESOLVED that Cabinet be advised that this committee supports the recommendations as outlined in the report.

51.3 Approval of the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2021-22

The report sought approval for the local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2021-22 to continue to provide support at a maximum level of 92% of council tax liability. (Report attached to the signed minutes as Appendix D).

Councillor Oliver detailed the main points of the report:-

- Pensioners on the low-income element would continue to receive up to 100% of their council tax
- The Council Tax Scheme for 2020-21 had a maximum support level for working age claimants of 92% which meant that all working age claimants would pay a minimum of 8% of their council tax and £6.50 per month in Band A.
- It was not proposed to make any changes to the scheme in 2021/22
- The cost of the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2020/21 was forecast to be £26,599,006
- Up to £150 would be administered to vulnerable people and households in 2020/21 if the bill was greater than £1875 and if less the 8% would be paid in its entirety
- 13,000 had received 100% of grants which meant no bill to pay which had cost £2.2 million. A similar scheme was proposed next year which would use some remaining money and it was expected that that the discount would rise from 92% to 97.5%

In response to questions, members were advised that:

- Regarding deferring the report to December. As part of the budget setting a decision was needed from Cabinet at its meeting on 13 October to enable statutory consultation to take place

RESOLVED that Cabinet be advised that this committee supports the recommendations as outlined in the report.

52. SCRUTINY REPORTS

52.1 Capital Programme 2022-21 – Position at the end of July 2020

The reported informed the Scrutiny Committee of the progress made to date in delivering the Council's capital programme for 2020-21. (Report attached to the signed minutes as Appendix E).

Councillor Oliver gave an update on the capital programme:-

- A number of schemes had been delayed as a result of COVID-19 and lock down.
- There had been a capital expenditure of £24 million during the year up to 31 July
- The major areas of capital investment during the first four months of the year were:-
 - £7,341 million in transport
 - £10,191 million in education, improving schools
 - £1,464 in leisure facilities
 - £0.915 in Council housing
- Due to COVID, there had been an impact in delivery of some projects causing delays and affecting working practices. As a result, it was forecasted that there would be a £67 million underspend with significant reprofiling from 2020-21 into 2021-22.
- The Cabinet were requested to approve the reprofiling and amend the Medium-Term Financial Plan accordingly
- There had been some slippage from this year into future years with additions to the programme, e.g., Blyth investment from the future high street funds into Blyth town centre and also money coming in from Borderland and reallocations from programmes

In response to questions, members were advised that:

- Regarding leisure facilities for Bedlington. Funds had been earmarked for the development of a scheme under the Getting Building fund
- Thanks were conveyed for the temporary carpark in Newbiggin which had been made permanent
- Progress was being made in Bedlington town centre. COVID had had a major impact on high street retail and the Government had come forward with funds administered by the LEP with projects ready. A rethink was needed for Bedlington with perhaps a focus toward leisure facilities
- Regarding the impact of COVID – the Council faced pressures as did other councils. It was uncertain how long the virus would last, and this would have an impact. Detailed budgeting was taking place looking at all aspects of revenue and capital expenditure. A better picture would be known in February and it was hoped that projects would still be delivered.

RESOLVED that the progress made to date regarding the delivery of the capital programme be noted by members.

53. Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme and Monitoring Report

Members received the committee's work programme and monitoring report for the 2019/20 council year. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix F.)

The Scrutiny Coordinator would liaise with Janice Rose to provide the Committee with an overview on Borderlands in the New Year. The Chairman further reported that he was working with the Scrutiny Co-ordinator and the Vice-Chairman on a number of issues which would be added to the work programme in due course.

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

54. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on Monday, 9 November 2020 at 10:00 am.

55. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Chairman explained that a report needed to be considered for the Enterprise Zone – Northumberland Energy Park East Sleekburn (NEP1). The press and public would need to be excluded in order to consider those documents in private.

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
13	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 disclosure would prejudice Advance Northumberland's ability to negotiate with partners and give its competitors a commercial advantage.

56. Enterprise Zone – Northumberland Energy Park East Sleekburn (NEP1)

The report informed Members of the increase in costs for the delivery of the NEP1 Enterprise Zone site, and to obtain approval to the revised funding package to enable completion of the works.

During the private discussion, a member sought clarification on page 3 about business rates generated from Enterprise Zones. The Chair requested that the report be amended to the correct authority.

RESOLVED that Cabinet be advised that this committee supports the recommendations as outlined in the report.

Chair _____

Date _____