

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Northumberland County Council** held at County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday 6 November 2019 at 3.00 pm.

PRESENT

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

MEMBERS

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

OFFICERS

Angus, K.	Executive Director, HR&OD and Deputy Chief Executive
Bradley, N.	Service Director: Strategic Commissioning and Finance.
Eldson, A.	Service Director, Finance
Hadfield, K.	Committee Services and Scrutiny Manager
Henry, L.	Legal Services Manager
Lally, D.	Chief Executive
McEvoy-Carr, C.	Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services
O'Farrell, R.	Interim Executive Director, Regeneration, Commercial and Economy
Roll, J.	Democratic Services Manager

Around 6 members of the press and public were in attendance.

38. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Cartie, Dunn, Foster, Moore, Rickerby and Towns.

39. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of County Council held on Wednesday 4 September 2019, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record, signed by the Business Chair and sealed with the Common Seal of the Council.

40. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Jones disclosed an interest in item 10(1) on the agenda (Council Tax Support Scheme 2020-21). This was already registered.

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

Councillor Dodd reported the recent death of former County Councillor John Morris. Councillor Morris was a past Chair of the County Council and had also served on Castle Morpeth Borough Council for many years. It had been a privilege to work with him.

Members spoke warmly of Councillor Morris and the contribution he had made to his community. He had been a very dedicated councillor and a model for what councillors should be. His work lived on in his community. Members stood for a minute's silence as a mark of respect.

Councillor Dale commented that former County Councillor Eileen Burt had died in August of this year and this had not been recognised by the County Council. Councillor Roughead advised that, similarly, the death of former County and Borough Councillor George Miller had not been marked either. The Business Chair apologised if this had been the case.

The Business Chair reminded members about the service of remembrance which would take place on Monday 11 November 2019 at 11.00 am.

The Leader wished to record his thanks to all those who had been involved in the Tour of Britain which had travelled through the County on 9 September. Feedback had been excellent from all areas of the County. Visitors had been impressed and participants had told him that this had been their favourite stage of the competition because of the reception they had received. He especially wished to thank the communities of Northumberland and the school children who had turned out in huge numbers to support the event.

The Business Chair then advised members that an additional meeting of Council had been arranged to take place on Wednesday 18 December 2019 at 10.30 am. This was about a proposal to change the Council's approach to appointing its local auditor following the letter sent to all members on 4 October. This proposal would bring the County Council in line with the majority of other local authorities in the country. Members were asked to note this, and a letter would be sent out to all members to confirm.

42. MEMBER QUESTIONS

Question 1 from Councillor Robinson to Councillor Riddle

It is nice to see that Norwich City Council has been awarded the 2019 RIBA Stirling Prize for their 100 unit social housing project with the rider off the judges, " These desirable, spacious, low-energy properties should be the norm for all council housing." Given our stated intent to build 1000 new social housing units can we have assurances that these will be built to an ambitious standard instead of being built down to a price?

Councillor Riddle congratulated Norwich City Council on winning the Stirling Prize, which showed what an ambitious council could achieve. This Authority was similarly ambitious, and he assured Councillor Robinson that the Council would not be building down to a price but would build homes that were highly energy efficient, future proof and met the needs of residents. Discussions were being held with partners around issues of modern methods of construction, available and future technologies, standards and future

legislation. Talks were also ongoing with experts in the field to look at best practice, and he would be visiting the Norwich scheme in the near future.

Councillor Robinson suggested that contact be made with Northumbria University who were currently working with George Clark to make social housing more attractive and lower running costs. Recommendations from this work could be of benefit to the Authority.

Councillor Riddle agreed that officers could look at that as the Authority was keen to build the best it could without making the cost too expensive. He understood the Norwich scheme only added about 10% to the cost which was interesting.

Question 2 from Councillor Hill to the Leader/Councillor Riddle

Does the Leader agree that Northumberland County Council could do more to help ensure proper scrutiny of Northumbria Police? If so, what are your plans?

The Leader agreed that more could be done but that didn't mean that much wasn't being done already. A lot of partnership working was already in place, and he had arranged a meeting with the new Police and Crime Commissioner. There were also regular updates between Police commanders in Northumberland and Council officers, the Police had updates with Cabinet members and the Chief Constable had attended Council meetings and he would be requested to return again. There was a member on the Police Authority Scrutiny Panel and a suggestion had been made for a meeting of this on rural crime only. Policing had become more of an issue because of increasing problems in the areas that members represented. He felt this was due to less officers on the beat in Northumberland. However, the Police Authority accounts showed that their budget was not much different to what it had been five years ago. Therefore he would be asking Scrutiny members to look at why Northumberland had fewer police officers, and what the net effect of these reductions in numbers was. The recent Government proposals to increase the number of police officers on the beat would mean an extra 187 staff in the Northumbria force area per year for the next three years. This should have a major impact, but members had to ensure that the Police were held to account.

Councillor Hill asked whether the Authority would use its member influence to suggest reforms in how the Police and Crime Panel worked. She had attended the last meeting and she felt that there was next to no actual scrutiny going on. It was made up of Labour councillors who were not likely to hold the Labour PCC to account and felt that initiatives such as recording of meetings and other transparency measures should be adopted.

The Leader agreed that this was a positive idea. He had had feedback that its workings were not very effective or transparent and felt the Council's scrutiny committee did have a right to look at it.

Question 3 from Councillor Lawrie to Councillor Sanderson

Given the number of motorists who think they can ignore the tidal warning signs on the Holy Island causeway and the continued problems this causes, what are we doing to address this?

Councillor Sanderson advised that the Authority had worked closely with the RNLI and the Coastguard to ensure delivery of clear and consistent messages to the public about the tides and the causeway. There had been nearly 50 rescues in the past five years so action would be taken to significantly improve the interactive signs at the entrance to the causeway, including automatic number plate recognition, which would also capture foreign number plates and provide warning messages in the relevant language.

Question 4 from Councillor Dale to Councillor Riddle

How many Planning Enforcement cases are open at the present time?

Councillor Riddle advised that 534 cases were open.

Question 5 from Councillor Dale to Councillor Riddle

How many Planning Enforcement cases have been open for more than 5 years?

Councillor Riddle advised that there were 4 in total.

Councillor Dale commented that 534 seemed a lot. She was also concerned about those that had been open for more than four years as there was an impact from that. She felt the Local Area Councils should receive an update on enforcement in their areas, which would show that real work was being done to address the problem. She also felt that Scrutiny should look at enforcement over a period of time because there had been issues of concern. Councillor Riddle reminded members that enforcement was discretionary, not statutory. The enforcement function had been understaffed when he had taken over responsibility for the portfolio, but he was happy to report that it was now up to full complement. He was happy for the LACs to have a breakdown of the figures and agreed that it was important for members that the Authority had teeth in this function.

43. CABINET MINUTES

The Leader moved the following minutes of Cabinet:

- (1) Tuesday 10 September 2019**
- (2) Tuesday 17 September 2019**
- (3) Tuesday 8 October 2019**

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

(i) Minute No. 40 (a) of the 17 September 2019 meeting relating to the Outcome of the Outline Business Case for the Haltwhistle Primary School Provision for Wise Academy Trust

(ii) Minute 49.1 of the 8 October 2019 meeting relating to Morpeth Leisure Centre

Councillor Homer commented that apologies had been submitted by herself and Councillors Oliver and Jackson for the 10 September 2019 Cabinet meeting, which had not been recorded in the minutes.

With regard to Minute No.36 (Supplementary Planning Documents Scoping Consultation: Planning Obligations and Affordable Housing), Councillor Hepple queried whether there was a delay on the Local Plan Examination as he understood there was, by some months. He asked if there was an update for members. Councillor Riddle replied that the supplementary planning documents were there now and he agreed that members could be updated.

With regard to Minute No. 34 (Expansion of Whytrig Middle, Horton Grange Primary and New Delaval Primary Schools), Councillor Dungworth queried whether the expansion would be delivered through the use of mobile classrooms, rather than school buildings. Councillor Daley advised that the mobile classrooms were very high quality units which looked like they were actually part of the school, and would quickly provide much needed additional accommodation. They were state of the art learning environments which he was very proud of. He encouraged Councillor Dungworth to view the ones already provided for herself so she could see the quality.

With regard to Minute No. 42 (Financial Performance 2019-20 - Position at the end of July 2019), and the underspend in school transport budget, Councillor Dale suggested that pupils who went to Bellingham Middle School from out of the area should have their transport costs reimbursed from this underspend. Councillor Oliver advised that the underspend was in 6th form transport so could not be applied to Bellingham Middle School.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) the Cabinet minutes of 10 September, 17 September and 8 October 2019 be received; and

(b) the following resolutions be approved:-

(i) Minute No. 40 (a) of the 17 September 2019 meeting relating to the Outcome of the Outline Business Case for the Haltwhistle Primary School Provision for Wise Academy Trust

(ii) Minute 49.1 of the 8 October 2019 meeting relating to Morpeth Leisure Centre

44. COMMITTEE MINUTES

(1) Family and Children's Services OSC

These were presented by Councillor Renner Thompson.

With regard to Minute No. 40 (Report of the Task and Finish Group), Councillor Dale asked if the main areas where there were issues with exclusions had been identified. Councillor Swinburn advised that the report was available online so could be read by all members. There were no specific indicators with regard to this, but members had asked to receive more information on a regular basis so it would be looked at in more detail.

With regard to Minute No. 31.1 (Current Performance), Councillor Dickinson advised that he had not yet received the information around the link to universal credit and the most deprived areas as requested at the meeting. Councillor Daley confirmed this would be done.

On this same item, Councillor Dungworth queried, in light of recent media reports about looked after children being placed in inappropriate accommodation nationally, what the position was in Northumberland. Councillor Daley reassured members that the Authority had appropriate placements, and robust quality measures and monitoring arrangements were in place to ensure that its looked after children were protected and in the right environments.

Councillor Dungworth asked whether members could have an information note on the current arrangements as this was a difficult area. Councillor Daley agreed that this could be done, adding that the Authority was investing money into its own homes and the delivery plan for this was being brought forward to members in the coming months. He gave his own personal commitment to ensuring this was delivered.

Councillor Renner Thompson advised that the Scrutiny Committee received regular performance updates on this issue.

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

(2) Communities and Place OSC

These were presented by Councillors Reid and Gallacher.

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

(3) Health and Wellbeing OSC

These were presented by Councillor Watson.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Health and Wellbeing OSC be received.

(4) Health and Wellbeing Board

These were presented by Councillor Dodd.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Health and Wellbeing Board be received.

(5) Audit Committee

These were presented by Councillor Hill, who advised that the additional meeting referred to in Minute No.15 (a) would not now take place. The report had not yet been finalised by the external auditors so would therefore go to the next normal meeting on 27 November 2019.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Audit Committee be received.

(6) Brexit and Devolution Working Group

These were presented by the Leader.

Councillor Dickinson welcomed the fact that the Council's website had been updated with some relevant information.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Brexit and Devolution Working Group be received.

45. MOTIONS

Motion No.1

In accordance with Council Rules of Procedure No.10, Councillor Flux moved the following motion, received by the Democratic Services Manager on 22 October 2019:-

"Northumberland County Council wishes to reaffirm its condemnation of all forms of racism and hate crime.

With this issue in mind this council finds it timely to confirm the adoption of the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism as the model and mechanism for challenging any incidents of this form of racism should it occur.

The IHRA defines anti-Semitism as:

'Anti Semitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred towards Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed towards Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, towards Jewish Community institutions and religious facilities.' "

Councillor Flux commented that it had been asked on a blog of political commentary in Northumberland over the weekend whether his and Councillor Roughead's motions on the agenda were hate crimes. He found this offensive. He did not believe it had been written by a member of the Council, but perhaps

someone linked to the political circles in the County. He queried what message articles such as this sent to the Jewish community that mere adoption of the definition could be regarded as a hate crime. He was ashamed that such blatant racism was present in Northumberland today. His intention behind the motion was that Northumberland was seen as welcoming place by all parties to the Jewish community and that anti-semitism would not be tolerated or ignored.

Councillor Dungworth seconded the motion adding that there was complete agreement for this from the Labour Group. She agreed with all Councillor Flux had said in his introduction; much had been said that was out of order, and if she could do anything about that, she would.

Councillor Reid questioned when the Council had made the original affirmation to condemn all forms of hate crime and racism as he could not remember this happening. He felt the motion was pointless even if its content was to be applauded, and that it was a jibe at the Labour party to stir up political hatred.

The Leader advised that there were clear equality policies within the Council for members and officers. The Authority needed to be clear that it was open and welcoming to everyone in the County, and the motion was a mechanism by which the Standards Committee could judge where this had fallen short. The Council had been asked to do this by the Secretary of State for Housing and Local Government because this was a serious issue in some communities. The Authority therefore had a responsibility to do this and to put it into practice via the Standards Committee if there was an issue to deal with.

Councillor Flux advised that he had not made a political attack on anyone in the motion and the Council had passed its Equality Statement in 2017, which the motion aimed to reaffirm.

On the motion being put to the vote there voted FOR; A substantial majority; AGAINST: 0; ABSTENTIONS: 0.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that the County Council reaffirm its condemnation of all forms of racism and hate crime.

With this issue in mind, the Council finds it timely to confirm the adoption of the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism as the model and mechanism for challenging any incidents of this form of racism should it occur.

The IHRA defines anti-Semitism as:

‘Anti-Semitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred towards Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed towards Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, towards Jewish Community institutions and religious facilities.’

Motion No. 2

In accordance with Council Rules of Procedure No.10, Councillor Roughead moved the following motion, received by the Democratic Services Manager on 23 October 2019:-

“Following the Scottish National Party’s latest threat of an impending independence referendum, it is requested that the relevant Cabinet Members and Executive Level Officers of our Council maintain a watching brief on developments north of the Border. Specifically, policies from the Scottish Government and Scottish Borders Council that may inadvertently have an impact upon Northumberland, in terms of policies that are both positive and those that pose as potential risks or challenges for Northumberland and its Border communities; and that any such information be brought to the Council’s Brexit and Devolution Cross-Party Working Group or any Council Committee deemed appropriate to discuss the matter”.

Councillor Roughead advised that he had submitted the motion as he felt it was sensible for the Council to recognise that a potential independence referendum from Scotland posed opportunities and risks to the Council. Cross border working was absolutely essential for both sides of the border. The motion was seconded by Councillor Renner Thompson.

A number of comments were made by members including:-

- Councillor Dickinson commented that this was not new and information coming forward was something that should be expected to happen in any case. He was happy that information be brought to the Brexit, Devolution and Borderlands Working Group as there were lots of implications for Northumberland, but the important thing was that members were provided with the information, and the Working Group was the right place to receive updates. His Group had no concerns about this.
- The Leader felt that better relations with Scotland had developed in the past couple of years, particularly around the Borderlands growth deal, which brought an unprecedented amount of investment. He hoped this good working would not be lost if Scotland achieved independence, which seemed to be the aim of one of the parties. A hard border was a real threat to Northumberland which the Authority needed to be aware of.
- Councillor Dungworth expressed concern at the tone of the debate when words such as threats and concerns were being used. She recognised that that there would be challenges should Scotland become independent and she felt that the cross border work going on now was exactly the right thing to do. It was these good relationships with neighbouring authorities on both sides that would carry things through, and she urged members to keep discussions open and relationships strong.

On the motion being put to the vote there voted FOR; A substantial majority;
AGAINST: 0; ABSTENTIONS: 0.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that:-

Following the Scottish National Party's latest threat of an impending independence referendum, relevant Cabinet Members and Executive Level officers of the Council maintain a watching brief on developments north of the Border. Specifically, policies from the Scottish Government and Scottish Borders Council that may inadvertently have an impact upon Northumberland, in terms of policies that are both positive, and those that pose potential risks or challenges for Northumberland and its Border communities. Any such information to be brought to the Council's Brexit and Devolution Cross-Party Working Group or any Council Committee deemed appropriate to discuss the matter.

Motion No. 3

In accordance with Council Rules of Procedure No.10, Councillor Bawn moved the following motion, received by the Democratic Services Manager on 23 October 2019:-

"This Council applauds the progress made by this Conservative administration since the summer when it declared a Climate Emergency. Given the proactive stance it has taken, the Council should now set up a formal Climate Change Commission which will engage key partners in the delivery of the Council's Climate Change Action Plan."

Councillor Bawn introduced the motion. He felt the motion had a few things to commend it - it was short, it was specific to Northumberland and there would be a positive outcome through the establishment of the Commission. An amazing start had been made on the climate change agenda by Councillor Sanderson with real developments and positive actions and recognition as the greenest Council in the north east by Friends of the Earth. The Commission would have an ongoing job to work with partners and keep the climate change agenda on track long term. The motion was seconded by Councillor Oliver.

Councillor Gallacher moved an amendment to the motion as follows, which was seconded by Councillor Dungworth:-

This Council applauds the work of successive administrations in dealing with and leading the way on the green agenda in Northumberland. Given the proactive approach taken by this Council over recent years, all members support the creation of a climate change Commission which will engage with all key partners in the delivery of the Council's climate change plan

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

- Councillor Grimshaw supported Councillor Gallacher's amendment because this initiative had begun under the Labour Administration and the Conservative Administration could not take all the credit for it.
- Councillor Dickinson felt that the original motion was narrow and designed to cause upset. The amendment was more accurate and applauded the work of all administrations which had been involved. Climate change work had not begun in the summer, but had built on the work carried out by previous administrations.

- Councillor Dungworth felt that politics was being made out of something that members had previously agreed was above politics. She was disappointed as she thought members had genuinely moved past this. This was about work that had been done by successive administrations, about recognising the challenges ahead so that the Council could gear itself up to deliver services to reduce its carbon footprint, and about acting as community leaders. She urged the Administration to take the amendment in the spirit in which it was meant, which was about working together.
- Councillor Dale agreed on the need for a climate change emergency to be declared, and endorsed Councillor Dickinson's comments. She agreed that a considerable amount of work had been done before 2013, with massive changes made in the last six years. She urged members to work together with those already doing this work in the north east. She felt there was a need for more resources to be put in to dealing with the impact of climate change on the ground, such as blocked gullies and flooding.
- Councillor Swithenbank reminded members about the full scale tree planting programme which the Council had operated in 1977, which continued through the 1980s and 90s. This had transformed the landscape of south east Northumberland to reclaim the areas previously covered in pit heaps with the help of government grants. Millions of trees had been planted in the County by the Council and the administrations of all parties should take pride in that.
- Councillor Sanderson commented that it was one thing for members to say they wanted to do something together in this building, but another to stop malicious things appearing online. He appreciated that actions had been taken by previous Administrations, but the actions referred to in the motion were completely different.
- The Leader commented that the amendment was not significantly different to the original motion, though this did identify real action which had taken place in the last couple of years, and that was the point of the motion. A real step change had taken place with the Council now leading in the north east on the climate change agenda, and national government was taking notice of the Council's activities. The Labour Mayor on the North of Tyne CA had made a big thing of climate change, but he questioned what he had actually done about it. Real action had finally been taken and that was why he felt the Administration should the credit for that.

Councillor Gallacher then re-read the amendment, commenting that it had been a long journey to get to the current position and members of all parties had to work together or it would never happen. He stressed it was not about politics.

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

FOR: 29 as follows

Bowman, L.	Kennedy, D.
Bridgett, S.C.	Lang, J.

Campbell, D.	Ledger, D.
Clark, T.S.	Nisbet, K.
Crosby, B.	Parry, K.
Dale, P.A.M.	Purvis, M.
Davey, J.G.	Richards, M.E.
Davey, S.	Robinson, M.
Dickinson, S.	Sharp, A.
Dungworth, S.	Simpson, E.
Gallacher, B.	Swithenbank, I.C.F.
Gobin, J.J	Wallace, R.
Grimshaw, L.	Webb, G.
Hepple, A.	Wilson, T.
Hill, G.	

AGAINST: 31 as follows:-

Armstrong, E.	Murray, A.H.
Bawn, D.L.	Oliver, N.
Beynon, J.A.	Pattison, W.
Castle, G.	Quinn, K.R.
Cessford, T.	Renner-Thompson, G.
Daley, W.	Riddle, J.R.
Dodd, R.R.	Roughead, G.
Dunbar, C.	Sanderson, H.G.H.
Flux, B.	Seymour, C.
Gibson, R.	Stewart, G.
Homer, C.R.	Stow, K.
Horncastle, C.W.	Swinburn, M.
Hutchinson, J.I.	Thorne, T.

Jackson, P.A.	Watson, J.G.
Jones, V.	Wearmouth, R.
Lawrie, R.M.G	

ABSTENTION: 0

Councillor Reid did not vote. The amendment was therefore lost.

Councillor Sanderson urged members to properly read what the motion said about the progress made and what would happen next, and a large part of this was inviting a Commission to challenge the Council on the next phase of work. He outlined the activity which had been undertaken in the last 3-4 months which included a public meeting, a session at King Edward High School, an all member briefing and a presentation to all the LACs. The draft Action Plan would also come to Scrutiny, Cabinet and Council in due course. The Working Groups would begin work on the five key themes this month and other partners would be included to provide their input to the Action Plan, which would detail specific actions. The Commission would be primarily made up of academics and representatives from Business Energy and Industrial Strategy. This would be the first Commission in local government and he thanked members, colleagues and officers for their encouragement, work and commitment.

Councillor Dungworth advised that her Group did not disagree with the Commission or the motion, apart from the Administration not acknowledging that it was building on work already done like developments at Port of Blyth, solar panels, renewable energies and charging points. She felt it was a sad indictment of where the Administration were that they would not remove the word "Conservative" from the motion and were all about talking credit for themselves.

Councillor Bridgett advised that he would support the motion and referred to the Great Northumberland Forest reports in the media. Whilst he did fully support it, 1,000,000 trees would be a very small number in the Wooller, Bellingham or Rothbury Divisions which had over 200,000 acres of forestry anyway. If the Commission was to be set up, then the Council should be looking at what it could do on its own land and he also suggested that other partners be brought in such as the Ministry of Defence.

Councillor Grimshaw commented that she wished to express her thanks to colleagues and officers for work carried out on climate change in previous administrations.

The Leader replied that they were talking to the MoD about their land and the 1,000,000 trees was just a start, the ambition was much greater than that. Government had asked the Authority to form a Northumberland Forestry Partnership.

Councillor Dale commented that the Commission would engage key partners in its work and she suggested that the word "all" be included to ensure that all key partners were involved. She asked that the information that came out from the Commission be sent to all members so that everyone could benefit from it and make a difference.

Councillor Reid commented that there had been a good opportunity at this meeting to get everyone to agree to the Commission but the key partners had not been identified, and he queried who they would be. He hoped that it would not become a talking shop as it was action that was needed, not an action plan. He asked what the leading members in the Administration were doing individually to tackle climate change, and whether they would be getting electric cars. He urged them to make some individual commitment.

Councillor Homer reported to members on progress made by the Cycling and Walking Board. This had now been revitalised with a number of significant partners and a new vision created for cycling and walking in Northumberland after a period of inactivity. She was proud that the Board was behind the statement of importance for cycling and walking in Northumberland, and officers and Board members would present a delivery plan in the new year to back that up. Work was also ongoing on infrastructure plans for the whole of the County, and she stressed that this Administration did deliver progress.

Councillor Hutchinson applauded the work done in the past by all Administrations. Councillor Reid also applauded what had been done in the past but the speed of progress was the issue now and the need to focus attention on a whole range of activities, including housing. It was not just about planting more trees.

Councillor Gallacher commented that this was an important issue for Northumberland and was not about political gain. The Labour Group would support the motion to show their commitment to the climate change agenda.

Councillor Bawn reiterated his motion as originally written. The Administration had declared the climate change emergency and had taken action to join together lots of strands of activity to create an action plan. The Commission would police the action plan going forward.

On the motion being put to the vote there voted FOR; A substantial majority; AGAINST: 0; ABSTENTIONS: 0.

Councillor Reid did not vote.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that the Council applaud the progress made by this Conservative administration since the summer when it declared a Climate Emergency. Given the proactive stance taken, a formal Climate Change Commission will now be set up which will engage key partners in the delivery of the Council's Climate Change Action Plan.

46. REPORTS OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR:STRATEGIC COMMISSIONING AND FINANCE

(1) Council Tax Support Scheme for 2020-21

The report sought approval for the local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2020-21 (enclosed with the agenda as Appendix 1).

Councillor Oliver introduced the report highlighting that it was a requirement to come to Council each year. He advised that no changes were proposed to the existing scheme. An 83% collection rate was forecast, collection to 31 August was 40.4% versus 41.9% last year. Support mechanisms remained in place and he proposed that members accepted the scheme as it currently stood.

A number of members spoke on this issue including:-

- Councillor Dungworth opposed this and felt that no changes should have been made to the previous scheme. In the Blyth Valley area there were over 3,000 children living in poverty; £126,000 was owed in rent arrears; 30% of this was due to people on universal credit but the Council would still not give a commitment not to evict. This would be reversed when her Group got back into power.
- Councillor Grimshaw reiterated her opposition to this scheme and was proud to have had the previous scheme in place. 34% of children in the Wansbeck area were living in poverty. Between 2017 and 2018, 5909 children were deemed as meeting the criteria, in Bothal ward alone it was 21% . There had been an increase in foodbank use in Wansbeck of 46% in the last year. She could not support the scheme.
- Councillor Dickinson commented that Northumberland and Durham were unique in terms of their rurality which brought additional challenges for working families, including additional travel costs to access services. Many households in his area had been affected by the revised scheme and there had been a significant increase in the use of foodbanks. There was also opposition to the revised scheme from those who did not receive any council tax support, having seen the effect it had on families.
- Councillors Wilson reported that 29% of children in his ward were living in dire need.
- Councillor Simpson advised that her ward had the highest levels of child poverty in Northumberland at 46% and she would not support it.
- Councillor Parry reported that in his ward, after housing costs, the level was 39%. It was a sad situation.
- The Leader did not feel there was a need to reopen the entire debate. The Administration had pledged that the level of support would not be reduced this year and it hadn't been. The reason it was before members today was because there was a statutory duty to do so. He reminded members this remained one of the most generous schemes in the country and that the Labour Group had written plans to implement a 50% reduction in support. This scheme would not have been necessary if the Council's finances had not been left in such poor shape by the Labour Administration.

- Councillor G. Davey strongly denied that this was something the Labour Group would ever have accepted. Officers may have written it speculatively, but the Group would never have adopted it.
- Councillor Campbell appealed to the Administration to look at this issue again. For some children in Northumberland, a foodbank was the only supermarket they knew. The poor were being punished and £8 was a lot of money to those who had nothing.
- Councillor Wearmouth disputed the Labour Group's assertion that they had not known about the plan for a 50% reduction in CT support. It had been included in the budget, and the finances had been left in an absolute mess when the Conservative Administration had taken over, with £1.5bn of debt. He did not see how the former Administration could not have known about the proposed 50% cut in support.
- Councillor Webb commented that ten years ago, there had been 57 food banks, now there were over 400. 94% destitute in the last few years and this would add to that.
- Councillor Bawn reminded members that realistic measures had to be taken to balance the budget and he questioned why Labour members were not being critical of the Labour run authorities in the region which had far less generous CT support schemes. Regarding the 50% CT support reduction, the evidence had been there in papers prepared by the previous Administration and Councillor Oliver had offered to provide them. Members should be proud that the Authority still had one of the most generous schemes in the north east. The position could have been much worse, but the decision had been made to identify savings from across a range of areas.
- Councillor Dale was appalled at the debate. She felt that many areas had levels of deprivation and asked the Administration to reconsider and find the funding from another area.
- With reference to an earlier comment made about creating more jobs, Councillor Nisbet commented that many people were now on zero hour contracts, were working three jobs and could not afford to get onto the property ladder. Cowpen and Croft were two of the most deprived wards in the UK and she asked what the Administration was going to do to help the people living in those areas.
- Councillor Oliver advised that the current Administration had been shown a proposal from the previous Administration regarding CT support. He had offered to show this to members and no-one had taken it up. The former Chief Executive had known about it, which meant that either the previous Administration had known about it, or they hadn't, in which case the Cabinet had not been in control of things because this had been a significant proposal due to come forward three months later. This decision had not been taken lightly but savings had to be found from a range of areas, and the figure of £6.16 per month for a single person in a Band A property was felt to be reasonable. Less than 10% of Councils across the country maintained 100% relief. The Administration was addressing issues in a number of areas - educational underperformance, job creation and economic opportunities especially in South East Northumberland. He recommended that members accept that the proposal go forward to form part of the Council budget in February 2020.

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

FOR: 34 as follows:-

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

AGAINST: 26 as follows

Bowman, L.	Hill, G.
Bridgett, S.C.	Kennedy, D.
Campbell, D.	Lang, J.A.
Clark, T.S.	Ledger, D.
Dale, P.A.M.	Nisbet, K.
Davey, J.G.	Parry, K.

Davey, S.	Purvis, M.
Dickinson, S.	Robinson, M.
Dungworth, S.	Simpson, E.
Gallacher, B.	Swithenbank, I.C.F.
Gobin, J.J	Wallace, R.
Grimshaw, L.	Webb, G.
Hepple, A	Wilson, T.

ABSTENTION: 0

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that the Council Tax Support Scheme, included with the agenda as Appendix 1, be adopted as the Council's local scheme for 2020-21.

(2) Council Tax Empty Homes Premiums

The report sought approval to amend the Council Tax Discount Policy to include additional empty homes premiums (EHP) for council tax for properties that are unoccupied and substantially unfurnished, to take effect from 1 April 2020 and 1 April 2021.

The report was introduced by Councillor Oliver who advised that there were currently 673 properties which fell into this category. Councillor Reid queried whether the proposals would have retrospective effect and how much was expected to be raised. Councillor Oliver advised that this was difficult to say, but the aim was to get properties back into use, rather than make money. The policy applied from the point the property became empty.

Councillor Reid commented that there were properties which had been empty for a long time and it was difficult to collect the council tax as it stood. He supported the initiative but felt that it could cost more than was anticipated. Councillor Oliver agreed that it would be difficult, and some cases would have to go to court. This policy would accelerate the rate at which these properties could be brought back into use by building on existing policies.

Councillor Dale commented that, of the 673 houses, 417 of those were in Band A, paying the lowest level of council tax so it would be very difficult to get the funds in, and might end up costing the Authority a lot more. Councillor Oliver replied these properties would have already had a bill so there would be no extra cost there. The existing outturn rate for AHP properties was 91.6% so even if the Authority fell short of that, it would still be collecting more money.

Councillor Dickinson commented that this seemed to be the natural progression of things. Some of these properties could be used for those on the

housing waiting list. His Group supported this incentive to landlords and property developers to actually do something to improve empty properties.

Councillor Nisbet asked about properties that could not be brought back into use, citing an example in her own ward where this was an issue. She queried whether these would fall within this policy. Councillor Oliver advised this applied to all houses and suggested that the enforced refurbishment policy would apply in the case she mentioned.

Councillor Bawn advised that there was no risk to the Council that it would be out of pocket as it could repossess properties if people did not pay.

Councillor Hepple felt that empty properties could be a blight on a neighbourhood and therefore supported the report. He asked whether the Authority was making full use of empty property orders and whether any tenure analysis of the 673 had been done to establish whether any belonged to the County Council. Councillor Oliver advised he would find this out and provide Councillor Hepple with the information.

RESOLVED that the Council Tax Discount Policy attached at Appendix 1 to the report be approved, which introduces the following:

- An increase in the current 50% EHP to 100% for property unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for two years or more, but less than 5 years, with effect from 1 April 2020
- A 200% EHP for property unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for 5 years or more from 1 April 2020.
- A 300% EHP for property unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for over 10 years with effect from 1 April 2021.

47. INTERIM REPORT OF THE CONSTITUTION WORKING GROUP

Council was asked to consider a report from three meetings of the Constitution Working Group.

The report was introduced by Councillor Oliver, who drew members' attention to the changes proposed to paragraph 10.3 and 12.4 of the Council rules of procedure.

Councillor Hill expressed her disappointment that it was over a year since Councillor Roughead had submitted a motion proposing a review of the Constitution, which she had seconded. She felt it was discourteous and unusual that neither the proposer nor seconder of the motion had been asked to be involved in the working group when other members were, who did not really want to be. Very little had been done for 15 months, and the areas which had been focussed on seemed of little importance compared to other areas which needed review. The extension to the deadline for motions was pointless

because dialogue between the parties would not take place. She felt it had been a tick box exercise and disappointing.

Councillor Dungworth drew members attention to the Working Group's other recommendations at the end of the report regarding outside bodies, scrutiny training and options for holding meetings. She supported the report's recommendations but felt this last one was particularly important in light of the climate change agenda. Alternative ways of holding meetings would also assist those of working age in becoming councillors and would modernise the way the Council worked.

Councillor Oliver agreed and, with regard to Councillor Hill's comments, felt that things worked pretty well.

Councillor Flux felt that the work carried out by the Group had been useful with a lot of co-operative working across the parties. He had not had any communication from Councillor Hill expressing concerns. He commended the members for their work to date, which would continue.

Councillor Roughead supported Councillor Dungworth's comments regarding the future and use of technology. He was concerned that there was an equalities issue with the current constitution and that it was potentially discriminatory to those who did not identify as male or female. He asked members to authorise the Monitoring Officer to update the Constitution to ensure that it was gender neutral, which members supported.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the recommendations of the Working Group set out in the body of the report be accepted; and
- (b) the Monitoring Officer be authorised to update the Constitution to ensure that it is gender neutral.

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

Children and Young People's Plan 2019-2022

Council was asked to approve the draft Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) 2019 - 2022.

Councillor Daley introduced the report. He advised members that there was no statutory obligation to have such a plan now but the Authority did have this multi agency plan, which had been informed largely by young people. The plan had been completely reformatted, partly to make it more accessible to children, young people and families, partners and Council employees. He drew members' attention to the six key themes and measures and hoped members would support the report. This was an evolving document and would continue to be informed as it went along.

Councillor Dickinson welcomed the report as he felt it was timely for a refresh. He was pleased to see the continued engagement with young people and agreed that it was an evolving document; flexibility was important.

Councillor Dale supported the report and suggested that the work of the previous working group on the Marmot Review should be revisited.

Councillor Dungworth welcomed the report and valued the very good work done by Children's Services but point 2 was made very difficult to do under the cuts imposed on the Council by the Government. Croft and Cowpen were in the top 1% of the most deprived wards in the country, making it very difficult to meet the aims of the Plan in those areas. The issues here were not about black holes but about government austerity. She gave the Administration credit for the action that was being taken now, but £11.5m of cuts to education over the past five years in Blyth Valley equated to £296 per pupil and did not represent a good education. These were political choices by the Government which the Administration seemed reluctant to challenge. She assured members that outrage within the Labour Group about what had been done to the County's communities in the name of politics in the last ten years was very real.

Councillor Daley responded that things had moved on from the Marmot review of four years ago. When the Conservative Administration had taken over in 2017 there had been a significant backlog of building maintenance, £150m had now been invested into a capital programme of school building and refurbishment. On school revenue, there had been an announcement to level up school funding. Each primary pupil would receive £3,750 and secondary pupils would receive £5,000. He was delighted to report that Northumberland was now the second top performer in first and primary in the north of England which showed that the County's teachers and families were doing a great job. He urged members to stop talking the County down. There was still work to do on secondary, but there were areas of improvement in various places.

Councillor Campbell thanked officers for the report. She acknowledged that officers were very passionate about the subject and wished the government felt the same. Poverty affected children in the home but it was the role of Government to put that right. Some of the children's comments showed very clearly what was going on. She hoped that the children who had participated would have their dreams fulfilled by 2022 and that the numbers of those in poverty would be zero by 2022. The Council owed it to those children to do all it could to take them out of poverty.

Councillor Grimshaw echoed these comments and felt that the Government should remedy the situation. She asked members what could be done to address the problems of children not having proper school uniform or shoes, or insufficient food.

Councillor Daley agreed that the school uniform point was an important one, and there was a move to end this requirement, which he supported. He reminded members that the Authority now employed a poverty co-ordinator who engaged with communities to address these kind of issues. He advised

that he would circulate a summary for all members so everyone was aware of what was happening.

RESOLVED that the draft CYPP be adopted as the Council's strategic planning tool for driving partnership-wide improvement forward.

49. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Community Governance Reviews: Longhoughton Parish and Newton by the Sea Parish

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

Councillor G. Davey asked that clarification be sent to him regarding why Longhoughton Parish was not getting an additional councillor as a result of the changes.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the outcome of the community governance reviews for Longhoughton and Newton by the Sea Parishes be agreed; and
- (b) the Democratic Services Manager be authorised to make, sign and seal the appropriate orders for the changes by virtue of the powers contained in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act.

50. REPORT OF THE RETURNING OFFICER

Polling Districts and Polling Stations Review

Council was asked to consider the outcome of Northumberland County Councils Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2019, and to authorise the Returning Officer to move to alternative polling stations when required.

Councillor G. Davey sought reassurances that all polling stations were booked. Councillor Oliver advised that the team were working on venues now and if there were any issues, members would be informed.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the Returning Officer's proposals in relation to each of the points raised by consultees, contained in the right hand column of the supporting documents in Appendix 1 to the report, be agreed;
- (b) regarding household notification, Council support both options identified in the report, namely:
 - (i) all households affected be sent a letter detailing the change of polling place, costing £800.00; and

- (ii) all electors to receive a poll card during the lead up to the next election. This will detail the new polling station address, and will include text on all poll cards, drawing attention to the change. There is no cost associated with this option;
- (c) Council agree the following:
 - (i) the Council designates each polling district as the polling place;
 - (ii) following this review and during the five year period until the 2024 Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places, the Returning Officer be authorised to designate alternative polling places. If any changes are made, the Returning Officer will report these changes to the Leader and the Chief Executive of Northumberland County Council; and
 - (iii) during the 2024 Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places, the Council will consider the results of the consultation exercise and ratify any changes that have been implemented over the preceding 5 years.

51. APPOINTMENTS

(1) Vice Chair of Licensing and Licensing and Regulatory Committee

Council was asked to agree the appointment of Councillor Ken Parry as Vice Chair of the above Committees in place of Councillor Rupert Gibson.

RESOLVED that Councillor Ken Parry be elected Vice Chair of Licensing and Licensing and Regulatory Committees in place of Councillor Rupert Gibson.

(2) Family and Children's Services OSC - Co-opted Members

Council was asked to agree the appointment of the following on FACS OSC to fill current co-opted member vacancies:-

Paul Rickeard, Diocese Director of Education - C of E Representative

Julie Parkin, President NASUWT Northumberland - Teacher Union Representative

RESOLVED that these appointments be agreed.

52. JANUARY 2020 COUNCIL MEETING

Last year Council agreed a change in the deadlines for submission of member questions to allow for the Christmas holidays. Council was recommended to again agree that the deadline for submission of motions, public questions and member questions for 8 January 2020 Council was noon on Thursday 19 December 2019.

RESOLVED that the deadlines be agreed as detailed above.

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

in the presence of:-

.....
Chair of the County Council

.....
Duly Authorised Officer