

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

CRAMLINGTON, BEDLINGTON AND SEATON VALLEY LOCAL AREA COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Cramlington, Bedlington and Seaton Valley Local Area Council** held in Seaton Delaval and Holywell Community Centre, Elsdon Avenue, Seaton Delaval, NE25 0BW on Wednesday, 17 January 2018 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor C Dunbar (Chair in the Chair)

MEMBERS

B Crosby
W Daley
S Dungworth
B M Flux
B Pidcock

M E Richards
M Robinson
I C F Swithenbank
R Wallace

OFFICERS

S Bucknall
G Gavin
T Gribbin

D Lally
P Jones
K Norris
N Snowdon

J Rose

L Sawyer

Highways Delivery Manager
Head of Neighbourhood Services
Neighbourhood Services Area
Manager
Chief Executive
Service Director - Local Services
Democratic Services Officer
Principal Programme Officer
(Highways Improvement)
Economic & Inclusion Policy
Manager
Business Support Officer

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor P Jackson - Leader of the Council
Councillor N Oliver - Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Cabinet
Secretary
Councillor H G H Sanderson, Cabinet Member, Environment and Local
Services
Councillor R R Dodd, Business Chair

L Langton - Chief Officer, Northumberland Community Bank
D Tweddell - Galliford Try

Press: 0
Public: 14

Chair's initials

60. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hepple and Swinburn.

61. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Cramlington, Bedlington and Seaton Valley Local Area Council held on Wednesday, 22 November 2018, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

62. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

George Arnott, Seghill Village

Mr Arnott referred to the old nature reserve in Seghill which had been commissioned in the 1990's as a joint venture between Northumberland County Council, Proctor and Gamble and Astley High School. He provided some background information and history about the nature reserve and said it should be a prime project for environmental studies and for the community. It had been sorely neglected by the authority and the village, and he asked members if they would show some support for the project.

In response the Deputy Leader said he was not familiar with the nature reserve but suggested that it could be subject to a presentation at a future meeting. The Cabinet Member, Environment and Local Services said officers would look into it and asked Mr Arnott to provide his contact details.

A member of the public added that he used to attend local SITA meetings in Seghill and the question of the nature reserve had been raised with them. SITA had said they would continue to maintain the site but nothing had been done since the landfill site closed.

The Chair reiterated that this would be taken forward to a future meeting.

Christine Savage

Mrs Savage referred to Holywell First School which her grandson attended stating that it was no longer fit for purpose. The building was in a very poor condition with a leaking roof and she asked when a replacement school would be provided. She also queried the criteria for how the budget was spent on new schools in Northumberland.

The Deputy Leader said that the same question had been asked at November's meeting and he had visited the school and the Headteacher. He agreed it was an aging school in poor condition and discussions had been held, involving the local

member, about the wider issue of Seaton Valley schools. The Council would be looking at a business plan and Holywell First School would be considered along with other schools. He added that the school had been in its present condition for a number of years and queried why questions were only being asked now.

In response Mrs Pidcock, Seaton Valley, stated that questions had not been asked previously because a new school at Astley had been promised. She then referred to money being allocated for new schools in Ponteland the previous week and questioned what assessment had been done to show that Ponteland should come before Holywell. The Leader of the Council stated that agreement for money being allocated to Ponteland had happened two years ago by the previous Labour Administration.

Eva Coulson, Governor of Holywell Village First School, said she was not interested in a political debate, she was only concerned for the children attending Holywell First School and asked when something would be done. The Deputy Leader reiterated that he was fully aware of the problems, which had not happened overnight, and would speak to officers to look at how things were progressing with regard to the business plan around certain schools in the Seaton Valley area. In response to further comments, the Deputy Leader confirmed that a business plan was not yet in place but would be developed by headteachers and governing bodies.

Steven Stanners, Chair of Seaton Valley Parish Council

Mr Stanners asked if the committee was looking at ways of ensuring that Seaton Valley got its fair share of Local Area Council meetings in the future.

The Chair replied that it was difficult to find suitable venues that were available in Seaton Valley but meetings would be rotated when possible.

Keith Dalton, Bedlington

Mr Dalton said potholes were prominent in Northumberland and asked if a substantial amount of money would be spent by the Council to rectify the situation.

The Cabinet Member, Environment and Local Services referred to a new scheme whereby £100,000 had been allocated to each Local Area Council and members could put forward up to three schemes, four times per year. He acknowledged that potholes were a problem and recent weather had exacerbated those problems but officers were working very hard and doing their best to carry out repairs as soon as possible. Extra money had been allocated and more would be spent in the future.

The Vice Chair praised the new scheme stating that it had worked very well in his ward and the service had been first class.

Mr Dalton said he was also referring to surrounding areas such as the road to Stannington Station which was in a very poor state. The Cabinet Member,

Environment and Local Services, confirmed that officers were aware of the situation in that area and those repairs would be carried out. He added that potholes were not only a problem for Northumberland, other counties faced the same issues. He reiterated that the Council was doing its best and would allocate as much funding as possible.

Mary Pidcock, Seaton Delaval

Mrs Pidcock referred to the Core Strategy stating that scrapping what had been done would cost the authority £2.1 million as it would now take at least 2 years to get it approved. She asked why the new administration had chosen to do that? She also stated that every other administration had reflected the electorate but as the Cabinet was now made up solely of Conservative members that was no longer the case.

The Leader of the Council said the total time spent to have the Core Strategy in place would be the same as that for the previous process. Formal consultations on the draft document would be carried out in a few months and once that was in place the plan would have some weight for planning applications. He referred to the County Durham Plan having been rejected by the inspector and said the administration felt the same would have happened to Northumberland's previous plan. He did not recognise the £2.1 million figure Mrs Pidcock had referred to stating that, so far, no extra expenditure had been incurred.

With regard to Cabinet, the Leader stated said there had never been a politically balanced Cabinet in Northumberland. The County had voted for a conservative administration in May both nationally and locally and the Cabinet reflected that decision.

Adam Hogg, Bedlington

Mr Hogg referred to a planning application recently considered by West Bedlington Town Council in which there was some email correspondence stating that the Wansbeck Local Plan was still valid for a settlement boundary. He queried if that would be a consideration for all planning applications.

The Chief Executive asked Mr Hogg to contact her with the details and she would arrange for a response from the planning department.

Mr Hogg then referred to the on-going issue of road safety at St Benet Biscop School, Bedlington and queried if the Chief Executive had spoken to the Commissioner for Schools to take the matter further as stated at the last meeting. The Chief Executive said that, firstly, the Council's Corporate Health and Safety Manager had stated that the 'left turn only' sign and the installation of the lift up barrier and pedestrian gate etc were safe. She confirmed that she had written to the Regional Commissioner outlining concerns which had been passed to the Education and Skills Funding Agency who had asked for further clarification on a number of points. Clarification had been provided and she was waiting to hear back from them.

Nigel Hall

Mr Hall said he used to attend adult education classes at Astley Community High School which were well attended and had some of the best tutors in the area. He queried why it had been systematically dismantled, almost overnight, as people had travelled from all over the area to attend. He had raised the issue approximately two years ago at an area meeting when Councillor Richards had said she would try and find out and he had emailed the school to asked them the same question but he had received no response.

Councillor Dungworth said she was on the School Governing Body and was sorry that Mr Hall had not received a reply from the school, which she would take up with them. She said the decision to stop adult education classes had been taken by the governing body due to a lack of available funding. The school had been subsidising adult education and, as its responsibility was for children, it could no longer afford to do so. She agreed that it was a sad situation but said this was not the appropriate forum in which to elaborate further.

The Deputy Leader asked Mr Hall to provide his contact details as there was a vibrant adult education service around Northumberland which he could discuss with him later.

63. PETITIONS

- (a) Receive any new petitions:** No new petitions were received.
- (b) Consider reports on petitions previously received:** No reports to consider.
- (c) Receive any updates on petitions for which a report was previously considered:**

Request for Speed Cameras and Traffic Calming Measures in Rothesay Terrace and Victoria Terrace, Bedlington.

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Local Services referred to the last meeting when members had heard about the tragic events at Rothesay Terrace. He had written to the Police asking them to concentrate on that area and funds had been allocated, in line with the Local Council, to attempt to slow traffic down.

Neil Snowdon, Principal Programme Officer (Highways Improvement) said he and Councillor Crosby, the ward member, had visited Ms Easson, the lead petitioner, the previous week and she was pleased that speed indicator display signs would be erected. Councillor Crosby clarified that one speed indicator display sign would be erected for each direction.

The Chair commented on the benefits of wired in panels rather than solar panels which had been stolen in her ward.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

64. LOCAL SERVICES ISSUES

This item enabled Members to raise issues about services provided by the Local Services group with the area managers from Technical Services and Neighbourhood Services.

The following issues were raised:

The Chair requested that she be provided with an update on the 20 mph scheme in Eastfield Dale and Eastfield Chase.

The Vice Chair referred to the traffic survey request for Nedderton Village which had been misplaced and requested confirmation that this would not be put to the end of the list.

RESOLVED that

- (i) The Principal Programme Officer (Highways Improvement) would provide Councillor Dunbar with an update on the 20 mph scheme in Eastfield Dale and Eastfield Chase as requested.
- (ii) The Principal Programme Officer (Highways Improvement) would ensure that the speed survey request for Nedderton Village was not put to the end of the list and was placed appropriately.

DISCUSSION ITEMS - CORPORATE

The Chair re-ordered the agenda and items were discussed as follows:

65. REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - PARTNERSHIPS AND DEVOLUTION

Northumberland Community Bank

Lauren Langton, Chief Executive of the Northumberland Community Bank, was in attendance to provide a presentation about the financial products and services of the Northumberland Community Bank that were available to all residents. She thanked members for allowing her the opportunity to give her presentation and thanked Tony Kirsopp, the Council's Community Regeneration Manager, for providing the comprehensive briefing note. (A copy of the report is attached to the signed Minutes as Appendix B.)

Mrs Langton made the following points:

- The Community Bank had an ambitious business plan, its key goal was to be self sustaining and in order to do so it must grow substantially. This

would be a challenge but the people of Northumberland deserved to have a local ethical lender.

- The next step would be a formal launch to inform the people of Northumberland about the bank.
- New products would be available, savings accounts and loans would be offered and focus would be on helping people to budget.
- Efficiency was essential. The bank would need to be more automated with the use of technology whilst retaining a personal touch. They were in the process of looking at a number of policies and procedures and good governance was not negotiable.
- Business development was very important and increasing the bank's level of deposits was critical. There would be increased targets for 2018 and they were confident that the bank could become self sustainable.
- Regular savings were very important and would be encouraged.
- Promoting the bank was essential and the Council was helping to signpost people to them.
- It was an aspiration to set up branches in local areas and build up a network.

Following the presentation questions were invited and the following comments/ responses were made:

- The Leader congratulated Mrs Langton and her team for their efforts to improve financial services across the county as there was currently a mismatch in people's needs and what banks offered. A community bank could fill that gap and get people to avoid using disreputable lenders. The Council was working with them on a day to day basis and wanted to help them to be successful.
- In response to a question about the bank's relationship with the credit union, Mrs Langton explained that the Community Bank had taken over the south east credit union and had a good relationship with the one in Morpeth. In Northumberland they worked together, they were not threatened by each other and did not see each other as competition. For years credit unions had got along with the help of volunteers but there was only so much they could do.
- The Deputy Leader offered to discuss promoting the bank in Northumberland schools.
- 'Linked' bank accounts referred to in bullet point 2 of paragraph 1.2 was about new products. They wanted to offer a current account linked to the Community Bank. Many people did not have a bank account and universal credit would have a massive impact on them. This was about financial inclusion.
- The Community Bank was very tightly governed and money on deposit was 100% safe. Only a small amount could be deposited and only a small percentage of that could be used for loans.
- It was pointed out that not everyone had access to websites and it was suggested that notices were posted in libraries, community centres and with community groups as well as Parish/Town Councils to promote the Community Bank. The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Cabinet

Secretary stated that the Council was working with the Community Bank regarding communication.

- In response to a question regarding bonus, Mrs Langton stated that all credit unions would like to pay dividends to their members who had made deposits but in order to do so they would need to generate sufficient income to cover costs and have money left over.

The Chair thanked Mrs Langton for her presentation.

RESOLVED that the presentation be welcomed and noted.

66. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Corporate Plan, Medium Term Financial Plan and the Budget 2018-19

Councillors P Jackson, Leader of the Council, and N Oliver, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Cabinet Secretary, were in attendance to present the above report and give a presentation to advise the Local Area Council as to the content of the draft Corporate Plan and the proposed budget strategy for the Medium Term Financial Plan, and its implications for setting the Council's budget for 2018-19. (A copy of the presentation and a copy of the report (Appendix A) are attached to the signed Minutes.)

The Leader made a short introduction to set the context of the Corporate Plan stating that the new administration had faced £65 million inherited pressure. He said they would have to address that over the next 3 years and had also faced £1.5 million potential debt if the Council had stuck to the same budget. He referred to increased service demand, overspend of the children's services budget and the large percentage of elderly people in Northumberland who needed to be looked after across the County.

Councillor Oliver then provided the presentation stating that the Corporate Plan was a high level document setting out the Council's vision and aims over the next 3 years.

- The approach involved operating principles (financial prudence, resourceful, listening and considering, empowering, collaborative), service integration, new ways of working and income generation.
- The five key themes of the administration were:
 - Living (residents to feel safe, valued and part of their community);
 - Enjoying (residents to live in distinctive, vibrant places, which they value and in which they feel proud);
 - Connecting (Residents can easily get to work, to learn, and to the various facilities and services they want to use);
 - Learning (Residents regardless of their age, have the right qualifications and skills to secure a good job that pays well and provides the prospect of a rewarding career);

- Thriving (Businesses are booming with the Council doing everything in its power to create the right conditions for economic growth).

With regard to the Budget 2018-2019 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2018-2022, details of the following were provided:

- The inherited position of £64.23 million
- the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement
- Council Tax Proposed 2.99% Increase
- Funding Analysis 2014-2022
- Gross Expenditure by Service 2018-2019
- Summary of Identified Savings by Category 2018-2020
- MTFP Cumulative Savings
- Capital Programme 2018-2021
- Capital Investment
- Capital Spend Comparison
- Debt Servicing Costs 2019-20
- Summary (financial prudence, maintaining key services, Investing in infrastructure, a fair deal for the whole County, a County that works for everyone)
- The Next Steps:
 - Invite views from Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Local Area Councils
 - Final version to be considered by full Council in February 2018 alongside the Medium Term Financial Plan
 - Subsequent preparation of Service Planning Frameworks

Following the presentation some heated discussion took place regarding its political content. In response it was stated there had always been some political content in budget presentations but a level of respect was usually afforded by the politicians and public in that regard.

Questions/comments/responses included the following:

- In response to a question the Leader could not confirm the exact figure the administration would borrow, but said that borrowing would be prudent and a considerable amount of the capital programme was being delivered by outside agencies.
- With regard to Ashington Football Club, the Leader said there were ongoing investigations into the affairs of Arch. Around £1.5 million had been invested in the football club by the previous administration and, in the accounts, it was valued at £1.9 million. The auditors had looked at that valuation and said it should be valued at market value which was between £250,000 and £400,000 so an adjustment was needed in Arch's assets, wiping out £1.5 million of Council assets.
- In response to comments about valuing against depreciation in market value, the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services stated that market value was the usual way of valuing fixed assets and had nothing to do with future costs.

- In response to a query about the Arch MRP figure of £19.54 million, the Leader stated that figure was in relation to capital repayment and clarified the meaning of minimal revenue protection.
- A member referred to part 5 of the Council constitution which stated that a state of area debate would be held annually and, as that had not happened, queried if the administration was setting an illegal budget. In response the Leader stated that a state of the area debate had not been held every year in the past. However, this budget presentation was part of the state of area debate process.
- In response to concerns about business rates, the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services acknowledged that it would be a challenge over the next few years to create more businesses. He stated that figures in the Medium Term Financial Plan were based on prudent assumption which could only be made on the latest available information which was what had been done.

The Chair thanked the Leader and the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services for their presentation.

RESOLVED that the report and presentation be received.

67. REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - PARTNERSHIPS AND DEVOLUTION

North of Tyne Devolution

Janice Rose, Economic and Inclusion Policy Manager, provided a presentation outlining the content of the North of Tyne devolution deal recently announced by Government and detailing the processes for the subsequent creation of a North of Tyne Combined Authority and the election of a Mayor in May 2019. (A copy of the presentation is filed with the signed Minutes.)

The presentation covered the following areas:-

- 15 months ago a previous deal with seven North East Councils had collapsed.
- In November 2017 a Northumberland, North Tyneside and Newcastle deal was announced to form a North of Tyne Combined Authority.
- Deal Content:
 - Governance - directly elected mayor from May 2019 (no public consultation). The mayor would not have autonomy over certain powers, there would be a Cabinet and would have to be a majority vote.
 - Investment Fund - £20m pa over 30 years to help long term planning and would be aligned geographically, giving opportunities to local people.
 - Themes - inclusive growth, industrial strategy, housing, digital connectivity, maximising impact of Great Exhibition for the North, N T Rural Productivity Plan.
 - Transport - protecting the current arrangements is central to the deal. Business as usual approach.

- Governance Review - it was a complicated process as would need to leave existing North East Combined Authority.
- Consultation (between 14 December 2017 and 5 February 2018)
- Provisional Timetable.

The Chair thanked Ms Rose for her presentation.

Discussion followed and it was noted that:

- The two Local Authority representatives from Northumberland would be the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council.
- The £20 million per year, over the 5 year term, was dependant on the authority hitting benchmarks set by the Government.

The Deputy Leader said the deal gave a once in a lifetime opportunity for the Newcastle, Northumberland and North Tyneside area. It was a chance to put politics aside and work together for local people. He referred to education and encouraged people to look up the 'London Challenge' which had transformed education in London with amazing outcomes. The Policy Manager added that jobs would be generated for local people and would also impact on the South of the Tyne. She encouraged everyone to take part in the consultation and agreed it was an opportunity for the County to transform the lives of young people.

The Policy Manager confirmed that there would be an opportunity for other authorities to join the North of Tyne Combined Authority at the next mayoral election in 5 years time but emphasised that all 7 authorities would still work together.

Further comments included:

- There had not been enough publicity about the consultation which had started before Christmas. Insufficient paper copies had been left in libraries etc, not everyone had access to websites.
- £20 million a year over 30 years was not enough, Northumberland was being sold short.
- Benefits were marginal.
- A mayor would have considerable influence, if he disagreed with the Cabinet he could ask for a review.

In response it was pointed out that other funding would be unlocked as part of the devolution deal. Work was currently taking place on a potential bid to Central Government but that money would not be available without the deal. There was no down side to having extra money.

There was an opportunity to put forward opinions through the consultation process.

RESOLVED that the presentation be received and information noted.

68. STREET LIGHTING

Lynsey Sawyer, Business Support Officer and Dawn Tweddell, Customer Liaison Officer, Galliford Try were in attendance to give members a verbal update about street lighting in Northumberland. They referred to the new subcontractor, AA Lighting, and the updated programme which had been issued to all Parish/Town Councils. Work was due to begin in Bedlington in March but more detailed information would be published on the specific programme.

Ms Sawyer reported that the other Local Area Councils had given positive feedback about the newly procured sub contractor and everyone had been working very hard to deliver the programme with improved customer service, timescales and communications.

In response to questions the following information was provided:

- The date for completion of work in Bedlington had been revised until the end of June.
- Local members would be contacted 2 weeks before work commenced in their area and that would be the same for all areas.
- Street lighting was either fed through a cable from the Northern Powergrid or Northumberland County Council. Northern Power Grid had a 30 day turn around to rectify issues which would not affect the programme but could sometimes affect outages.
- Wrap around notices would be placed on street columns to indicate that the issue had been reported and was in the process of being addressed.
- Work was due to commence in Cramlington in March.

A Member stated that there should be some way of exerting pressure on the Northern Power Grid to complete repairs as quickly as possible as Councillors received a lot of complaints in that regard. The Business Support Officer advised that two additional members of staff had recently been employed in the street lighting section which had allowed her more time to chase up issues with Northern Power Grid. The system for recording data was currently being reviewed and a marked improvement would be seen shortly.

In response to comments that only one streetlight could be reported at a time on the website, the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services said that version one of the new website would allow more functionality to enable easier reporting for councillors and residents. A considerable amount of work was being carried out to improve communications.

Reference was made to streetlight no. 1946 in Beresford Road, Seaton Sluice which had been waiting to be fixed for 18 months.

The Cabinet Member, Environment and Local Services said that a few months ago there had been serious issues about street lighting and, in comparison to some

private companies, the Council was doing well. He thanked the Business Support Officer and Customer Liaison Officer, Galliford Try for the work they had done.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

69. LOCAL AREA COUNCIL WORK PROGRAMME

Members received the latest version of agreed items for future Local Area Council meetings. (A copy of the report is filed with the signed minutes as Appendix C.)

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

70. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, 20 February 2018 at Netherton Social Club, Bedlington (time to be confirmed).

CHAIR _____

DATE _____