

# Public Document Pack



## Northumberland County Council

**Your ref:**

**Our ref:**

**Enquiries to:** Jackie Roll

**Email:** Jackie.Roll@northumberland.gov.uk

**Tel direct:**

**Date:** 10 January 2023

Dear Sir or Madam,

Your attendance is requested at a meeting of the **COUNTY COUNCIL** to be held in **COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNTY HALL** on **WEDNESDAY, 18 JANUARY 2023** at **3.00 PM**.

Yours faithfully

Rick O'Farrell  
Interim Chief Executive

**To County Council members as follows:-**

**C Ball, D Bawn, J Beynon, L Bowman, S Bridgett, D Carr, E Cartie, G Castle, T Cessford, T Clark, A Dale, W Daley, L Darwin, S Dickinson, R Dodd, C Dunbar, L Dunn, P Ezhilchelvan, D Ferguson, B Flux (Chair), J Foster, B Gallacher, L Grimshaw, C Hardy, G Hill, C Horncastle, C Humphrey, I Hunter, JI Hutchinson, P Jackson, V Jones, D Kennedy, J Lang, S Lee, M Mather, N Morphet, M Murphy, K Nisbet, N Oliver, K Parry, W Pattison, W Ploszaj, M Purvis, J Reid, G Renner-Thompson, M Richardson, J Riddle, M Robinson, G Sanderson, A Scott, C Seymour, A Sharp, E Simpson, G Stewart, M Swinbank, M Swinburn, C Taylor, T Thorne, D Towns, H Waddell, A Wallace, A Watson, J Watson, R Wearmouth and R Wilczek**



**Rick O'Farrell, Interim Chief Executive**  
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## **AGENDA**

### **PART I**

It is expected that the matters included in this part of the agenda will be dealt with in public.

#### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

#### **2. MINUTES**

(Pages 1  
- 18)

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held on Wednesday 2 November 2022, as circulated, to be confirmed as a true record, signed by the Business Chair and sealed with the Common Seal of the Council (see pages 11-28).

#### **3. DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

Unless already entered in the Council's Register of Members' interests, members are required where a matter arises at a meeting;

a. Which directly relates to Disclosable Pecuniary Interest ('DPI') as set out in Appendix B, Table 1 of the Code of Conduct, to disclose the interest, not participate in any discussion or vote and not to remain in room. Where members have a DPI or if the matter concerns an executive function and is being considered by a Cabinet Member with a DPI they must notify the Monitoring Officer and arrange for somebody else to deal with the matter.

b. Which directly relates to the financial interest or well being of a Other Registrable Interest as set out in Appendix B, Table 2 of the Code of Conduct to disclose the interest and only speak on the matter if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting but otherwise must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain the room.

c. Which directly relates to their financial interest or well-being (and is not DPI) or the financial well being of a relative or close associate, to declare the interest and members may only speak on the matter if members of the public are also allowed to speak. Otherwise, the member must not take part in discussion or vote on the matter and must leave the room.

d. Which affects the financial well-being of the member, a relative or close associate or a body included under the Other Registrable Interests column in Table 2, to disclose the interest and apply the test set out at paragraph 9 of Appendix B before deciding whether they may remain in the meeting.

e. Where Members have or a Cabinet Member has an Other Registerable Interest or Non Registerable Interest in a matter being

considered in exercise of their executive function, they must notify the Monitoring Officer and arrange for somebody else to deal with it.

NB Any member needing clarification must contact [monitoringofficer@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:monitoringofficer@northumberland.gov.uk). Members are referred to the Code of Conduct which contains the matters above in full. Please refer to the guidance on disclosures at the rear of this agenda letter.

**4. ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE BUSINESS CHAIR, LEADER OR HEAD OF PAID SERVICE**

**5. CORRESPONDENCE (IF ANY) TO DATE OF MEETING**

**6. QUESTIONS**

to be put to the Business Chair, a member of the Cabinet or the Chair of any Committee or Sub Committee, in accordance with the Constitution's Rules of Procedure No.9

**7. REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

(Pages  
19 - 24)

**Electoral Review of Northumberland Phase 2 Submission**

To update Council on phase two of the Electoral Review of Northumberland County Council being undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) and to present the Council's proposed submission on divisional patterns.

**8. REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

(Pages  
25 - 42)

**Response to the Challenge Board Interim Report 1 for the Member Oversight Group**

To consider and respond to the first interim report of the Challenge Board, provided to the Member Oversight Group on the 23.12.22 (see pages 29-46).

**9. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC AND ELECTORAL SERVICES**

(Pages  
43 - 48)

**Independent Remuneration Panel Members**

In September 2021, Council agreed the re-establishment of an Independent Remuneration Panel of three members for the duration of four years. This report recommends endorsement of the appointment of a fourth Member (see pages 47-52).

**10. REPORT OF THE INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

(Pages  
49 - 62)

**Community Governance Review – Hepscoth Parish**

To consider the outcome of a community governance review in the County

(see pages 53-66).

## **11. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Council is invited to consider passing the following resolution:

(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 items on the agenda as they involve 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
12	1 (Information relating to any individual).

AND The public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the interest in disclosure because disclosure would adversely affect the Authority's interests.

## **12. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC AND ELECTORAL SERVICES**

(Pages  
63 - 80)

### **Independent Remuneration Panel Members**

To consider the attached Appendix A under Agenda item 9 in Part 1 of this agenda (see pages 67-84).

**IF YOU HAVE AN INTEREST AT THIS MEETING, PLEASE:**

- Declare it and give details of its nature before the matter is discussed or as soon as it becomes apparent to you.
- Complete this sheet and pass it to the Democratic Services Officer.

<b>Name:</b>		<b>Date of meeting:</b>	
<b>Meeting:</b>			
<b>Item to which your interest relates:</b>			
<b>Nature of Interest i.e. either disclosable pecuniary interest (as defined by Table 1 of Appendix B to the Code of Conduct, Other Registerable Interest or Non-Registerable Interest (as defined by Appendix B to Code of Conduct) (please give details):</b>			
<b>Are you intending to withdraw from the meeting?</b>		Yes - <input type="checkbox"/>	No - <input type="checkbox"/>

## Registering Interests

Within 28 days of becoming a member or your re-election or re-appointment to office you must register with the Monitoring Officer the interests which fall within the categories set out in **Table 1 (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests)** which are as described in "The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012". You should also register details of your other personal interests which fall within the categories set out in **Table 2 (Other Registerable Interests)**.

**"Disclosable Pecuniary Interest"** means an interest of yourself, or of your partner if you are aware of your partner's interest, within the descriptions set out in Table 1 below.

**"Partner"** means a spouse or civil partner, or a person with whom you are living as husband or wife, or a person with whom you are living as if you are civil partners.

1. You must ensure that your register of interests is kept up-to-date and within 28 days of becoming aware of any new interest, or of any change to a registered interest, notify the Monitoring Officer.
2. A 'sensitive interest' is as an interest which, if disclosed, could lead to the councillor, or a person connected with the councillor, being subject to violence or intimidation.
3. Where you have a 'sensitive interest' you must notify the Monitoring Officer with the reasons why you believe it is a sensitive interest. If the Monitoring Officer agrees they will withhold the interest from the public register.

### Non participation in case of disclosable pecuniary interest

4. Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to one of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interests as set out in **Table 1**, you must disclose the interest, not participate in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest, just that you have an interest.

Dispensation may be granted in limited circumstances, to enable you to participate and vote on a matter in which you have a disclosable pecuniary interest.

5. Where you have a disclosable pecuniary interest on a matter to be considered or is being considered by you as a Cabinet member in exercise of your executive function, you must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest and must not take any steps or further steps in the matter apart from arranging for someone else to deal with it.

### Disclosure of Other Registerable Interests

6. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **directly relates** to the financial interest or wellbeing of one of your Other Registerable Interests (as set out in **Table 2**), you must disclose the interest. You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting but otherwise must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.

### Disclosure of Non-Registerable Interests

7. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **directly relates** to your financial interest or well-being (and is not a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest set out in **Table 1**) or a financial interest or well-being of a relative or close associate, you must disclose the interest. You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.
8. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **affects** –
- a. your own financial interest or well-being;
  - b. a financial interest or well-being of a relative or close associate; or
  - c. a financial interest or wellbeing of a body included under Other Registrable Interests as set out in **Table 2** you must disclose the interest. In order to determine whether you can remain in the meeting after disclosing your interest the following test should be applied
9. Where a matter (referred to in paragraph 8 above) **affects** the financial interest or well- being:
- a. to a greater extent than it affects the financial interests of the majority of inhabitants of the ward affected by the decision and;
  - b. a reasonable member of the public knowing all the facts would believe that it would affect your view of the wider public interest

You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise, you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation.

If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.

Where you have an Other Registerable Interest or Non-Registerable Interest on a matter to be considered or is being considered by you as a Cabinet member in exercise of your executive function, you must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest and must not take any steps or further steps in the matter apart from arranging for someone else to deal with it.

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# Agenda Item 2

## NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Northumberland County Council** held on Wednesday 2 November 2022 at County Hall, Morpeth at 3.00 pm.

### PRESENT

Councillor B. Flux  
(Business Chair) in the Chair

### MEMBERS

Ball, C.	Lang, J.A.
Bawn, D.	Lee, S.
Beynon, J.	Morphet, N.
Bowman, L.	Murphy, M.
Carr, D.	Oliver, N.
Cessford, T.	Parry, K.
Chicken, E.	Pattison, W.
Clark, T.	Ploszaj, W.
Dale, P.A.M.	Reid, J.
Daley, W.	Renner-Thompson, G.
Darwin, L.	Richardson, M.
Dickinson, S.	Riddle, J.R.
Dodd, R.	Robinson, M.
Dunn, L.	Sanderson, H.G.H.
Ezhilchelvan, P.	Scott, A.
Fairless-Aitken, S.	Seymour, C.
Ferguson, D.	Sharp, A.
Foster, J.	Simpson, E.
Gallacher, B.	Stewart, G.
Grimshaw, L.	Swinbank, M.
Hardy, C.R.	Swinburn, M.
Hill, G.	Thorne, T.N.
Horncastle, C.	Wallace, A.
Humphrey, C.	Watson, A.
Hunter, I.E.	Watson, J.
Hutchinson, J.I.	Wearmouth, R.W.
Jones, V.	Wilczek, R.

### OFFICERS

Binjal, S.	Monitoring Officer
Farrell, S.	Head of Service - HR/OD
Hadfield, K.	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Hunter, P.	Interim Senior Service Director
Kingham, A.	Interim Joint Director of Children's Services
Lancaster, H.	Deputy Monitoring Officer

Morgan, L.	Interim Executive Director for Public Health and Community Services
O'Farrell, R.	Interim Chief Executive
Reiter, G.	Interim Joint Director of Children's Services
Roll, J.	Head of Democratic and Electoral Services
Taylor, M.	Interim Executive Director Communities and Business Development
Willis, J.	Interim Executive Director of Finance and S151 Officer

One member of the press was present.

#### 51. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Bridgett, Cartie, Castle, Dunbar, Kennedy, Jackson, Mather, Nisbet, Purvis, Taylor. Towns and Waddell.

#### 52. MINUTES

With regard to Minute No. 45 (Motion No.1), Councillor Reid queried whether the letter from the Leader had been sent to Newcastle City Council either before or after the announcement had been made that Newcastle had been unsuccessful, or whether it had ever been sent. The Leader replied that he had raised it with the Leader of the City Council before the decision had been made.

With regard to Minute No. 47 (Revised Executive Management Structure), Councillor Morphet reported that the first line of the final paragraph on pg 23 should read "...asked **what** the remaining.....".

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of County Council held on Wednesday 21 September 2022, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record, signed by the Business Chair and sealed with the Common Seal of the Council, subject to the above amendment.

#### 53. DISCLOSURES OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Cessford declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 11 on the agenda (Community Governance Reviews) as a parish councillor for Acomb Parish Council.

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

The Business Chair reminded members about the Service of Remembrance which would take place on Friday 11 November 2022.

The Leader gave a progress report on the Challenge Board and the Members Oversight Group (MOG). This consisted of the Group Leaders and key officers working on the Caller report recommendations. The Challenge Board felt that things were progressing well on the improvement plan and that excellent progress had been made. The Challenge Board was looking forward to more 1-1 sessions with senior members and further engagement with members and external partners. The MOG had recently met and there had been encouraging progress to report on delivery of the improvement plan. Any member could speak confidentially to the Challenge Board via the link already provided.

Regarding devolution, the Leader reported that there had been recent discussions regarding Durham CC joining the LA6. This was welcomed as long as there was no detriment to the current financial proposition. The Leaders had met with Michael Gove the previous evening. Whilst he had not given an indication of which model he preferred, he felt that an LA7 was probably preferable as the authorities worked well together. Relations with the other Leaders were cordial and he hoped if an LA7 was created, that Durham would bring the same level of co-operation. Members would be given access to the deal document when it was available.

**55. MEMBER QUESTIONS**

**Question 1 from Councillor Hill to Councillor Renner Thompson**

The current consultation on school reorganisation within the Berwick partnership area is, as these things always are, complex and final decisions are simply incapable of pleasing everyone. Could I please have an assurance that this will not be used as an excuse for the Administration to row away from the commitment to invest £40m in new school buildings for Berwick?

Councillor Renner Thompson advised that the commitment from the Administration remained a key Cabinet priority as it had with other major school projects, and the money was in the MTFP.

Councillor Hill sought assurance that £40m would be ringfenced in the next budget for the Berwick school investment programme. Councillor Renner Thompson replied that he had not seen the exact details, but confirmed that was the case.

**Question 2 from Councillor Hill to Councillor Horncastle**

How many fixed penalty notices have been issued in Northumberland for dog fouling over the last 12 months?

Councillor Riddle replied that eleven fixed penalty notices had been issued for breaches of the current Public Space Protection Order (PSPO). Councillor Hill asked if Councillor Riddle accepted that residents would say that this was a very low number and had the Council given up trying to tackle this problem, along with many others. Councillor Riddle replied that the Authority had not given up and he didn't agree that the Council had become complacent. The Public Protection, Environmental Enforcement Team undertook regular patrols of "hot spot" areas, focusing on those areas where high levels of complaints had been received and continued to actively promote the Green Dog Walkers Scheme, which had led to a reduction of dog fouling complaints and improved responsible dog ownership. During covid, there had been a massive increase in dog ownership.

Councillor Horncastle commented that dog fouling was an issue across the County and there was only a very small team to deal with a vast geographical area. It would really help the wardens if they had the benefit of some local intelligence.

### **Question 3 from Councillor Swinbank to the Leader**

It is understood that Northumberland County Council has submitted a list of potential Investment Zone sites via the North of Tyne Mayoral Authority to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. In the interests of transparency for all Councillors and the communities they represent, please could the Council be updated today on the details of this Expression of Interest.

The Leader responded that Investment Zones, which could boost economic growth through tax incentives and "accelerated" planning, were in the early stages of development and the Council, with the North of Tyne Combined Authority, was in early discussion with Government to inform this.

The North of Tyne Expression of Interest was focussed on two existing economic corridors which spanned all three local authority areas.

The Arc of Energy Innovation focused on development sites and existing businesses where there were real opportunities to create thousands of green jobs; increase UK growth and exports; accelerate the transition to net zero; and increase energy security. For Northumberland, this included the Energy Central site. The Northumberland Line Economic Corridor would enable the reintroduction of passenger services between Ashington and Newcastle Central Station to deliver transformational change to communities and their access to jobs.

A fully up to date Local Plan and well-regarded ways of delivering major inward investments schemes through the Planning process via the Planning Performance Agreements were in place, and the Council had not submitted any proposals to streamline any environmental or community considerations in decision making.

The Government was reviewing investment zones so it was too early to say whether they would proceed or not but the Council had made its intentions clear through the two sites that if they became available, it would want to use them but with certain safeguards.

Councillor Swinbank asked if the Leader could give an absolute guarantee that planning safeguards would not be overruled in relation to investment sites. Residents expected the requirements of the Local Plan to be adhered to and the democratic process to not be overruled.

The Leader acknowledged the point being made but felt the Government needed to be given more time to decide what they wanted to do and what an investment zone would look like. The Council would make sure that its position was clear that this should not be to the detriment of the environment.

#### **Question 4 from Councillor Murphy to the Leader**

In the local press on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of October, there have been alarming reports about the perilous state of care homes in Northumberland. A local care provider has warned, "the industry is on the brink of collapse, due to the actions of NCC in recent years". This is an alarming statement, and will be causing untold anxiety to staff and residents of these homes and their families. The care provider goes on to say Northumberland County Council has refused to meet with them, refused to provide essential information to them, and is the only Local Authority in the region to have behaved this way. They also claim to have made a formal complaint of malfeasance to the Council.

Could the Leader of the council address these claims, and reassure us our homes are safe? Could he explain to us how his administration intends to help the care home sector out of this crisis? Could he tell us the implications of NCC being found guilty of malfeasance, and what penalties may apply? In the current political climate of chaos and instability, the last thing the people of Northumberland need is for our elderly and vulnerable residents to be made homeless.

The Leader responded that all local authorities were in a difficult position with staffing and he paid tribute to all care staff. Officers monitored the position in care homes and had seen nothing to suggest that the care home market was "on the brink of collapse." There were serious challenges for the care service which had increased since the pandemic and the current economic difficulties. The biggest issue was the recruitment and retention of care staff particularly those staff who cared for people in their own homes. The Council had done more than many others to support care providers, including the provision of higher fees which meant that staff could be paid higher wages and the Cabinet had recently agreed to further increase the fees paid to care home providers so higher mileage rates could be paid to staff.

The origin of the stories in the media was a press release by Care North East which represented only a minority of care homes in Northumberland. Officers did discuss fees and contract terms with them whenever changes were being considered. The press release appeared to have been stimulated by a recent correspondence between Care North East and Council officers, in which

officers repeated the Council's existing published view that there was currently no need for new care home developments in the County. This was not news, only a few months ago, officers in adult social care told the Strategic Planning Committee considering a planning application for a new care home in Ashington that in their view it was not needed. He was happy that any correspondence between the Authority and this organisation could be made available to members if they wished. However, he could not make any comments on any potential claim.

Councillor Murphy asked if the Leader could give an assurance that if any member was considering placing a loved one in a care home that members could be reassured that the home would not be closed. The Leader replied that he was not in a position to do that because he didn't know what was going to happen next in this area. However, he was meeting with key staff regularly to monitor the position and if real problems emerged, then all members would be kept informed.

**Question 5 from Councillor Dale to Councillor Pattison**

Following the concerns I raised at the last Full Council concerning the care service provision, please could you give this Council confidence that the Council officers are working closely with Care North East to ensure the future of care homes in Northumberland and that there is no loss in capacity available for those in need.

Councillor Dale advised that her question had already been answered.

**Question 6 from Councillor Ball to Councillor Renner Thompson**

As we see the last of frontline youth services delivery drift across to the community and voluntary sector, how will Northumberland County Council ensure delivery of youth services when the community and voluntary sector are under more and more financial strain as running costs increase? For clarity when I say youth services, I mean the delivery of youth clubs, diversionary activities, and the non-measurable outcomes, not the crisis point interventions that could be prevented with earlier engagement.

Councillor Renner Thompson replied a review had been commissioned in 2016 which had made a range of recommendations, one of which was the grow your own model of universal youth club and service delivery. Looking forward to today, the plan was to move the youth service staff into the family hubs which would further enhance partnership approaches to the early identification of and support to young people and their families and was a key element of the Council's plan to address inequalities. The Authority spent more on the youth service than its neighbours and he stressed cuts were not being made. Moving youth service staff to the family hubs allowed access to government funding for those family hubs.

Councillor Ball did not consider the role of a youth worker to provide career advice but to be a role model and to make sure young people did not reach crisis point. She asked Councillor Renner Thompson if he would find some funding to reinstate front line youth services, not crisis point services, through the provision of proper youth clubs in Northumberland.

Councillor Renner Thompson replied that there had been a move away from the traditional type of provision but the Council would continue to help other organisations provide those kinds of services.

**Question 7 from Councillor Ball to the Leader**

We are seeing strike action in many sectors what are Northumberland County Council doing to ensure our workers do not feel the need to strike and how are we supporting them as the cost of living, and inflation hits hard?

The Leader replied that GMB, Unison and Unite Trade Unions had submitted a pay claim for 22/23 requesting an increase of a number of allowances and a pay increase of £2,000 or the current rate of RPI (whichever is greater) on all pay points. National Employers, the body responsible for pay negotiation on behalf of local authorities, responded to the claim and made a full and final one year offer of an increase of £1,925 on all NJC pay points and an increase of 4.04 per cent on all allowances from 1 April 2022. In addition, from 1 April 2023, an increase of one day to all employees' annual leave entitlement was offered. The offer from National Employers was significantly higher than has been seen in recent years and was the highest flat-rate offer made to the public sector this year. The offer would see employees at the lower end of the pay scale receive a 10.5% increase in pay and more than three-quarters of employees would receive a 6% pay rise or more.

Trade Unions balloted their members, GMB and Unison members voted to accept the offer, Unite voted to reject the offer. However, following a meeting on 1 November, the pay award had now been accepted and this was now being actioned in employees' pay.

Firefighters had been offered a pay increase of 5% effective from 1 July 2022 by National Employers, who also negotiated pay on behalf of all Fire & Rescue Services across the UK. This offer was made following the rejection of the previous offer of 2%. National Employers were currently awaiting a response from Trade Unions.

To support employees who may be suffering financial pressure, the Council had developed a range of financial wellbeing resources, these included:

- Referral pathways to the Money Advice Network (MAN) via the Health and Wellbeing Service
- Payroll deduction scheme with Northumberland Community Bank
- Health and Wellbeing portal with signposting to free, non-profit debt advice agencies
- Access to the Psychological Wellbeing Coordinator to create a bespoke plan to support mental and physical wellbeing and undertake bespoke signposting
- A one-stop guide with details of where to find support.

Councillor Ball had concerns about some of the language being used in county hall and the cost of living and she referred to some posters which were displayed for staff in the building. The Council needed to be supporting its

staff. If staff were struggling, she feared what it was like for the wider community. The email which had gone out had been really disappointing.

#### **Question 8 from Councillor Robinson to Councillor Wearmouth**

I asked about the inflationary pressures on this year's budget about 6 months ago and was told it was something Council were aware of and were looking at how to tackle it. We then hear the initial estimate of £17M is the figure we could well be looking at. As the Financial officer advised using contingencies and savings already accrued, still leaves a figure of over 12M and we have seen the advice and changes with regard to finance which has recently come out. My question therefore this time is a bit more precise. Are we to see any change to capital projects within the new financial 'guidelines' which have been issued and of course I'm thinking about the Bedlington redevelopment in particular?

Councillor Wearmouth replied that there was a lot of flux currently in the system for various reasons including what the local government settlement would be. The capital programme would be looked at as usual but there was no plan to look at the Bedlington scheme with the aim of reducing the funding.

Councillor Robinson asked if the scheme would be delivered within this financial year or would the funding in this year be used elsewhere. Councillor Wearmouth replied that the money was in the budget and there had to be a scheme which was deliverable, Councillor Ploszaj could provide an update on its progress.

#### **Question 9 from Councillor Robinson to Councillor Ploszaj**

Given the disturbing speculation surrounding the flagship economic development at Cambois by British Volt are there any plans to ask the management to come in and explain directly to us what's exactly happening?

The Leader replied that there were no immediate plans for this because the situation was very fluid. He couldn't comment on where the company currently was but the Council had done everything it could to bring this development and BV had invested a significant amount of money into the site. He hoped there would be some kind of development soon.

Councillor Robinson commented that the buy back clause should provide the leverage to be included in any negotiations should the site move on to another party and hoped that it would be included in that.

#### **Question 10 from Councillor Hunter to Councillor Horncastle**

Northumberland County Council have only 3 testing stations in Northumberland which are based at the following locations: Hexham, Stakeford, and Alnwick to carry out all MOT's and interim tests for all taxis as well as undertaking other work. This means a taxi based in Berwick has to travel a minimum of 60 miles round trip to obtain a MOT and compliance test, however, if for any reason the Alnwick testing station has an issue and is unable to carry out tests the only other available options are approx 100- or 150-miles round trip. As Portfolio Holder, do you support



Northumberland County Council only having the identified 3 locations for the taxi/compliance tests, as this is also impacting on the carbon footprint and climate change reductions?

Councillor Horncastle replied that the role of the County Council when undertaking its duties in respect of the licensing of hackney carriages and private hire vehicles was to ensure the safety of the travelling public. It was incumbent on the County Council to ensure that it had suitable arrangements in place for the inspection of vehicles. The use of NCC Testing Stations ensured that all inspections, which exceeded the MOT standard, were carried out independently and to the agreed standard. Further, by using NCC Testing Stations, the Council was able to authorise the MOT Vehicle Testers to suspend a vehicle licence if the test requirements were not met, and thereby, protect the safety of the travelling public.

In terms of the location of those Testing Stations, it was acknowledged that there was no NCC provision in Berwick, but, subject to the overall mileage, taxis and private hire vehicles were only required to attend an NCC testing station a maximum of two times per year. In many cases that would only be once.

With regard to the "carbon footprint", through the Licensing and Regulatory Committee, the Council had recently introduced new vehicle emissions standards to reduce carbon and overall emissions.

**Question 11 from Councillor Hunter to Councillor Horncastle**

As we all know the cost of heating our homes is going to rise over the winter, which could lead to the safe central heating systems we all use becoming too expensive to use for many families. Therefore, some families may no option but to look at alternative cheaper ways to heat their homes, which could increase the risk home fires, and hopefully not the loss of life, as the alternative options may not be as safe to use as the certified heating systems. Will the Northumberland Fire & Risk Service be issuing warnings about using cheaper alternative heating and how to stay safe. We all want everybody to stay warm during the winter, however, we also, want all residents to stay safe

Councillor Horncastle replied that as part of the ongoing safety messaging and communications to our residents, NFRS would be ensuring that home safety and fire prevention messaging continued throughout the winter period, and those messages would be cognisant of the potential for people to use alternative forms of heating within their homes.

Although a thorough discussion was always held with residents by NFRS Community Safety personnel and operational staff conducting Home Safe and Well visits, the staff would also be briefed to be extra vigilant for signs that residents were not following safe practices regarding home heating. Staff would liaise with Northumberland Communities Together to ensure that where necessary, those residents would be signposted to whatever additional support may be available to them.

Councillor Hunter asked that this include information about cheap heating sources and information put on the staff Facebook page so it could be shared. Councillor Horncastle replied that NFRS had its own Facebook page and this information was included on it.

### **Question 12 from Councillor Dickinson to the Leader**

After seeing some disturbing interviews from the Conservative Party conference can the Leader of the Council confirm that he does believe charities and hard-working families when they say they skip meals to feed their children?

The Leader replied that for the first time, the Council had tackling inequalities as one of its key priorities supported by an action plan and a budget. He referred to the leaflets which had been circulated by NCT to all members. There were now 147 warm hubs across the County and he expressed thanks to all partners helping on this. In 2021, 28% of parents said they would skip a meal for their children. In 2014 it was 20%, in 2012 it was 20%, in 2004 under Labour Government it was 46%. He would listen to anyone who needed help but he was grateful to the Cabinet and all members for supporting the work being done to tackle inequalities.

Councillor Dickinson thanked the Leader for reminding members about all of the good work done by NCT. It was unfortunate that demand for foodbanks was higher than ever. He asked if the Leader would join him in apologising for the recent remarks of a Cabinet Member. The Leader replied that he would not agree with something that The Journal had printed. He had complete commitment to the work being done by NCT and the work done to tackle inequalities.

The Business Chair suspended the meeting at 3.50pm due to disturbance by a member of the public. The meeting was reconvened at 4.25 pm.

## **56. REPORT OF THE INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND HEAD OF PAID SERVICE**

### **Appointment of the Preferred Candidate for the Position of Head of Paid Service, Chief Executive & Returning Officer**

The purpose of this report was to advise Council that due to the timings of the recruitment process for the Head of Paid Service & Chief Executive, it had not been possible to submit a full report for consideration by Full Council with the agenda papers for the meeting. The agenda papers for the StAC to be held on Wednesday 2nd November 2022 had been published and were available on the Council's website for members to view beforehand.

The Business Chair advised that the recommendations from Staff and Appointments Committee that morning had been emailed to all members before the meeting and copies were available in the Chamber for those who required a paper copy (copy attached to the sealed minutes).

The Leader proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Watson.

Councillor Dale asked if the Council would apologise for not including the Independent Group in the selection process for the HOPS as required by the Constitution. She had received an apology at 12.45 am by email.

The Interim Chief Executive replied that he had apologised following his return from holiday for the error, and he repeated that in the meeting. He had mistakenly indicated that it wasn't appropriate for Councillor Dale to attend the interview panels, but that it was appropriate for her to attend the StAC that morning. The Independent Group had not been excluded from the selection process however, and Councillor Kennedy had been invited to nominate a deputy in his stead, but had not done so.

Councillor Dale commented that the whole process had been conducted incorrectly and that Councillor Kennedy had not been invited until very late into the process.

The Interim Chief Executive responded that it had been a fast-moving situation and the lessons learned would be applied through the next stages of recruitment.

Councillor Hill was disappointed that there had not been an Independent Group member involved but she accepted that it was an honest mistake. She asked if the proposed candidate had scored the highest during the process and were there any questions asked of the candidate about her time as Head of Children's Services at Sunderland, and if so, could a summary of the response be given.

The Interim Chief Executive responded that the process had been very robust and there had been 0.01 of a point difference between the first and second candidate. There had been no questions asked that Councillor Hill had referred to but four different panels had asked their own questions and taken scores.

On the recommendations being put to the vote there voted FOR: 50; AGAINST: 3, ABSTENTIONS: 2. It was therefore **RESOLVED** that the recommendations from the Staff and Appointments Committee held on 2nd November 2022 be approved as follows;

- (a) To appoint Dr Helen Paterson as the full-time permanent Head of Paid Service, Chief Executive and Returning Officer;
- (b) To note Staff and Appointments has agreed the remuneration for the post of Head of Paid Service and Chief Executive will be at £199k per annum with access to staff benefits in line with all Council employees. In addition, as Returning Officer for the Council, in the event of an election, an additional fee of £12,145 will be payable; and
- (c) To note the appointment will be subject to the Council's standard pre-employment checks.

Dr Helen Paterson then addressed members briefly. The Business Chair advised that there would be a formal meet and greet session arranged in due course.

## **57. REPORT OF THE INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND SECTION 151 OFFICER**

### **Council Tax Support Scheme for 2023-24**

The report sought approval for the local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2023-24 to continue to provide support at a maximum level of 92% of council tax liability.

The report was presented by Councillor Wearmouth, detailing the key points. He proposed the recommendations which was seconded by the Leader.

The S151 Officer reminded members that this scheme had been in place since 2019-20. If members were not minded to accept Cabinet's recommendation that it be accepted, there would be a requirement to undertake a full equality impact assessment and then formal consultation. The scheme had to be agreed by 31 January so the timetable would be very tight.

There had been extensive discussion at Scrutiny about other means of financial assistance and it was agreed that officers would look to continue the hardship scheme which had benefitted more low-income households. There was a current claimant caseload of just under 25,000 of which about 10,000 were pensioner households who would automatically get 100% relief, leaving around 15,000 working age claimants. The hardship scheme would assist all of these, but returning to 100% council tax support would not, and the latter would cost roughly double.

A number of member comments were made including:-

- Councillor Dickinson commented that his group had tried unsuccessfully to have this scheme changed back for three years. The S151 Officer had referred to the rising number of claimants which was worsening with the cost of living crisis and it was very uncertain what the Government was going to do next. He stressed that the report's recommendations had only be endorsed at Scrutiny on the Chair's vote which showed that members felt it needed to be rectified.
- Councillor Dunn advised that she would continue to advocate that the support scheme be returned to 100% and felt the Council should be lobbying Government to fund it. A simpler and easier manage system was essential which didn't need to rely on emergency funding support. The Council should be supporting its residents as much as possible if it was truly committed to tackling inequalities. Scrutiny members had raised many concerns including a temporary 100% support option. 92% was not enough and she couldn't support the recommendation but would note vote against it either as she did not want to jeopardise those receiving support who needed it.

- Councillor Grimshaw reiterated her longstanding concerns about this and agreed with her colleagues that support should be at 100% given the existing pressures on low income families, in line with what Durham County Council provided.
- Councillor Oliver commented that the support being planned would be more generous and would include more people than if the 100% council tax support was returned.
- Councillor Foster asked why the planned support could not be provided alongside the 100% council tax support. It was very sad that so many people now had to rely on foodbanks to feed their children. Even those families who were working were struggling to make ends meet given the current cost of living.
- Councillor Ball supported 100% support as she expected the council tax would rise again next year. Using foodbanks was becoming normal and that was wrong. If the Council could not provide 100% support when other authorities could, then there was something fundamentally wrong.
- Councillor Ferguson commented that there was a lot of support available and the Council had a role to ensure that people were fully aware of what was available for them, rather than just simply increasing the support to a higher level. He questioned where the £1.3m would come from to fund the difference between 92% and 100%. Everything had a cost and he did not wish to see additional burden put on working people, who also needed support.
- Councillor Bowman commented it was a reality that some people had no food. This was a disgrace in a country which was the 6<sup>th</sup> richest in the world. The Council should be supporting at 100% or existing poverty levels would be worse next Spring.
- Councillor Morphet asked what the process would be if the Council did not approve the report's recommendations and would it be possible that less support would be available as a result. The S151 Officer advised that the scheme had to be approved by Council by 31 January 2023. If they did not agree it could be sent back to Cabinet to reconsider, or an alternative motion could be moved for debate. Any change to the scheme would also require formal consultation.

Councillor Wearmouth then summed up and on the report's recommendations being put to the vote there voted FOR: 33; AGAINST: 2; ABSTENTIONS: 20. It was therefore **RESOLVED** that the Council Tax Support Scheme 1 be adopted as the Council's local scheme for 2023-24.

## 58. REPORT OF THE INTERIM SENIOR SERVICE DIRECTOR

### Electoral Review – Part One Council Size Submission

The report updated Council on the Electoral Review of Northumberland County being undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) and to present for agreement the Council's Council Size Submission on part one of the Electoral Review.

The Leader thanked Group Leaders for their input on this. Members felt that 67 was about the right number but it was felt that the Boundary Commission should be asked to consider 70 as well in view of the increasing population and housing numbers. They were also to be asked to look at the Alnwick ED to see whether it should be two, not one. He proposed the recommendations, which was seconded by Councillor Dickinson.

Councillor Cessford pointed out that on page 76, there was an error in the number of councillors listed for Tynedale LAC.

Councillor Morphet asked how many members had responded to the questionnaire. Mr Hunter understood that it was around 36, but he would check.

Councillor Reid agreed that Group Leaders had worked well on this and thanked officers for their efforts. The next part would be more difficult due to the County's unique population distribution. He hoped there would be some flexibility on this and that members could work constructively together on it.

Councillor Dickinson agreed that this had been a very good piece of cross-party work which had shaped the report. It was very important that communities were recognised in the next stage.

**RESOLVED** that:-

- (a) Council note the update on the Electoral Review currently being undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE);
- (b) Council agree the Council Submission on Council Size on part one of the Electoral Review; and
- (c) authority be delegated to the Interim Senior Service Director in consultation with Leader of Council, to make necessary, final amendments to the submission document prior submitting this to the LGBCE.

## **59. REPORT OF THE INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND SECTION 151 OFFICER**

### **Treasury Management Annual Report for the Financial Year 2021-22**

The report provided details of performance against the Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) 2021-22, approved by the County Council on 24 February 2021. The report provided a review of borrowing and investment performance for 2021-22, set in the context of the general economic conditions prevailing during the year. It also reviewed specific Treasury Management prudential indicators defined by the (CIPFA) Treasury Management Code of Practice and CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities, (the Prudential Code), and approved by the Authority in the TMSS.

The report was presented by the S151 Officer. She reported that PWLB rates were now at 4.69% which was significantly higher than six months ago. It was not clear which way interest rates would continue and this was why the Autumn Statement from the Chancellor was very important. Regarding current borrowing, the weighted average rate would increase significantly as the Authority continued to borrow externally, instead of using internal borrowing. This would probably happen sooner than expected because of interest rates rising. Given the size of the capital programme, even a modest increase in the cost of borrowing had a significant impact on the revenue budget and she advised members that consideration would need to be given to the size of the capital programme going forward. She felt there would be an impact both on the current capital programme and sustaining the levels of investment in future years.

The report was proposed by Councillor Wearmouth and seconded by Councillor Sanderson.

A number of member comments were made:-

- Councillor Dickinson hoped for some stability within the Government so the Authority could work with them in confidence. He felt it was important to nail down the capital programme to a level which was affordable because of the impact on the revenue budget. He asked the S151 Officer if she could provide a figure for the covid grants which were fraudulently claimed, how much was recovered and how this would be reported back. The S151 Officer replied that a report had been made to Scrutiny on the outcome of the business grants which reported that a very low level of fraud had been detected and reported through the normal channels. A much wider national exercise was ongoing – the post payment assurance process – and she had just signed off the returns on the various grant schemes. It was expected that results would be published by the Government across the whole programme and they would feedback to the Authority if they detected anything suspicious.
- Councillor Reid thanked officers for their work on this very important report and asked if a simple member briefing could be delivered on it. Councillor Wearmouth agreed this could be arranged. The Leader suggested that training opportunities with neighbouring authorities should be investigated, or possibly a policy conference in January which would allow people to have a dialogue.

**RESOLVED** that the report be received and the performance of the Treasury Management function for 2021-22 be noted.

## **60. REPORT OF THE INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

### **Community Governance Reviews**

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

The report was proposed by the Leader and seconded by Councillor Wearmouth.

Councillor Morphet asked why the request from Allendale Parish Council to reduce the number of Parish Councillors had been rejected and an explanation was provided by Councillor Horncastle.

**RESOLVED** that:-

- (a) Council note the outcome of the Community Governance Review for Allendale Parish and agrees that the status quo be retained;
- (b) Council agree that Tasset with Greystead Parish is no longer subdivided into wards and resolves to make an Order to this effect;
- (c) Council agrees that the number of Councillors on Acomb Parish Council be increased from seven to nine; and
- (d) the Monitoring Officer be authorised to make, sign and seal the appropriate Orders by virtue of the powers contained in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

## **61. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER**

### **Appointment of Additional Independent Persons**

The report updated members on the recruitment process for two additional Independent Persons.

The report was introduced by the Business Chair. He thanked the Chair of Standards, Mr Joe Jackson and Councillor Liz Dunn and the MO for their support on this. He proposed the recommendations which was seconded by Councillor Dunn.

Councillor Hill welcomed the report and, with regard to the second recommendation about the delegation on renewal of the appointments, asked if there were any concerns would those identified make the decision in any case as only one of them was a councillor. The MO advised that this would be a delegation to the MO, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair. If there was some question over the appropriateness of the independent person, then that delegation would not be exercised. Contracts were specified in such a way to say that they were renewable after two years but would not happen automatically. Two years term of office was also was a best practice recommendation.

Councillor Hill asked if the delegation could include Group Leaders. The Leader agreed that this could be discussed at the Group Leaders meeting and if supported could come back to the next Council meeting.

**RESOLVED** that:-



- (a) the appointment of Mr Simon Openshaw and Mr Arne Beswick as Independent Persons for a two-year period until 1<sup>st</sup> November 2024, be approved, renewable for a further two-year period maximum thereafter; and
- (b) the renewal of the appointments for a two-year period from the 1<sup>st</sup> November 2024 be delegated to the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of Standards Committee.

## **62. CABINET MINUTES**

### **(1) Wednesday 21 September 2022**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes be received.

## **63. COMMITTEE MINUTES**

### **(1) Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC**

These were presented by Councillor Bawn.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes be received.

### **(2) Family and Children's Services OSC**

These were presented by Councillors Dodd and Daley.

With regard to Minute No. 30 (Family Hubs Development), Councillor Ball did not feel that the minute fully reflected the discussion on this matter. Councillor Dodd advised that he would look at this.

With regard to Minute No. 41 (Northumberland Strategic Inclusion Plan 2022-26), it was noted that Councillor Swinbank should have referred to Councillor Swinburn).

**RESOLVED** that the minutes be received.

### **(3) Communities and Place OSC**

These were presented by Councillor Reid. He referred to the remarks he had made at the last meeting regarding the purpose of the minutes being on the agenda and apologised that he had been incorrect. The Constitution referred to reports from Committees being on the agenda and Council could not verify the minutes of other Committees. The MO confirmed to members that the Constitution did not match current practice and needed to be changed.

With regard to Storm Arwen, Councillor Dodd urged members to look at trees in their patches for the effects of Ash die back which was affecting many trees in the County making them vulnerable to creating further damage in any future

storms. The Leader supported this and commended Scrutiny for the ongoing work on this.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes be received.

**(4) Health and Wellbeing OSC**

These were presented by Councillors Jones and Dodd.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes be received.

**(5) Health and Wellbeing Board**

These were presented by Councillor Ezhilchelvan.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes be received.

**(6) Audit Committee**

These were presented by Councillor Oliver.

With regard to Minute No.34 (Consideration of Going Concern Status for the Statement of Accounts for the Year Ended 21 March 2022), Councillor Dickinson commented that he had concerns about the settlement delays and the potential push into January. The Business Chair advised that he was taking comments only on the accuracy of the minutes.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes be received.

The Common Seal of the County Council

of Northumberland was hereunto affixed

in the presence of:-

.....  
Chair of the County Council

.....  
Duly Authorised Officer



## Northumberland County Council

COMMITTEE: COUNCIL

DATE: 18<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2023

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Electoral Review of Northumberland – Phase Two Submission Report

**Report of:** Cllr. Glen Sanderson, Leader of the Council

**Responsible Officer:** Philip Hunter, Interim Senior Service Director

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### **Purpose of report**

To update Council on phase two of the Electoral Review of Northumberland County Council being undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) and to present the Council's proposed submission on divisional patterns.

### **Recommendations**

**It is recommended that Council:**

- (a) Notes the update on the Electoral Review currently being undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.**
- (b) Notes the submission by the interim Senior Service Director being made on Divisional patterns.**
- (c) Delegates authority to the interim Senior Service Director to make any final changes to the Council's submission on Divisional patterns, to be exercised in consultation with Leader of the Council and all other Group Leaders, before submitting to the Boundary Commission.**
- (d) Notes that political groups, individual Members, partners, community groups, residents and other bodies may make their own separate submissions to the Boundary Commission during this phase of consultation.**

### **Link to Corporate Plan**

This report links to all aims and priorities of the Corporate Plan 2021-24.

### **Key issues**

- At the end of 2021, The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE or 'The Commission') notified the Council of its plan to undertake an Electoral Review for Northumberland County Council.

- The Council did not request the Review but instead the review has been triggered due to Northumberland meeting the LGBCE's criteria for electoral inequality in a number of its Divisions.
- Throughout the Review, the Commission invites views and submissions from the Council (as a whole), political groups and communities. The Commission will use these submissions to inform its determinations and judgements on Council size and proposed Divisional boundaries.

## **Background**

1. On 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2022, Full Council agreed a report setting out the Council size submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE). The submission asked the Boundary Commission to consider two options for Council size – maintaining the current Council size at 67 Members or a modest increase to 70 Members. Following consideration of the Council's submission and other evidence, the Commission has stated it is 'minded to' agree a Council size of 67. This position could change as a result of the current phase two of the electoral review, where the Commission consults on Divisional patterns.
2. On 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2022, the Boundary Commission opened its consultation on the Council's Divisional patterns (ward boundaries). This consultation runs until 30<sup>th</sup> January 2023. All County Council Members were invited to a briefing on this phase provided by the Commission on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2022. Town and Parish Councillors as well as other stakeholders were also invited to the briefing.
3. At the briefing session on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2022, the Commission outlined the second phase of the Electoral Review which is focusing on the County's Divisional patterns. Although the Commission expects the Council to make a submission of proposed Divisional boundaries, **anyone or any group can make their own submission as part of this consultation. This includes but is not restricted to residents, partners, individual Members and political groups.** The Commission will only consider proposals based on the three statutory criteria for proposing Divisional boundaries. These are:
  - **Electoral equality** - the aim is to achieve electorate numbers in each Division that are within, plus or minus, 10% variance of the average for the County. The electorate sizes are based on projected electorate sizes for the year 2028, which were agreed by the Commission as part of phase 1 of the Electoral Review.
  - **Community identities and interest** – Divisional boundaries should – as far as possible reflect community interests and identities, and boundaries should be identifiable. Issues to consider include for example, transport links, community groups and facilities, natural or physical boundaries, parishes and shared interests.
  - **Effective and convenient local government** – Divisional boundaries should promote effective and convenient local government. Issues to consider include for example the number of councillors for, the geographic size of, and the links between parts of the Division.

4. The Commission will not accept evidence that clearly falls outside of the three statutory criteria, including for example, political consequences, impacts on house prices or insurance premiums or arguments based simply on maintaining the status quo.
5. As part of this phase of the Electoral Review, Officers from the Elections and Information Services Teams have developed proposed Divisional boundaries for the County based on the three statutory criteria set out above. In developing the proposals, Officers have:
  - Engaged with the Group Leaders; and,
  - Met separately with the political groups and non-aligned Members to present proposals, answer questions and, consider proposals made by Members.
6. Following conclusion of this engagement, officers have made available to all Members an interactive map which outlines proposed new boundaries to be submitted to the Commission (subject to Full Council agreement) as part of this phase of consultation. This is available at the link below, which was shared with all Members on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> January.  
<https://northumberland.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=36b6bd864d4d40729612d2d8d6d193d0>
7. Where Members have any difficulties accessing or using the interactive map, Officers can make available hard copies of maps on request.
8. The Officer proposals would result in a Council size of 69 Members, with two additional Divisions proposed in the Longhirst and Cramlington areas. The proposals would also result in two Divisions in Alnwick (a single-member pattern was agreed by Full Council at its 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2022 meeting).
9. It is important to highlight three key points:
  - Members and political groups are still free to make individual submissions to the Commission on any aspect of the Divisional patterns, including responses that differ from or even contradict the Council submission. Officers can offer Members available data and reasonable, technical assistance if they wish to make separate submissions before 30<sup>th</sup> January.
  - The Boundary Commission will consider each response to its consultation on the merits of the evidence submitted as long as the evidence is based on the three statutory criteria outlined above. In this sense the Council submission will not be accorded extra weight of authority relative to other responses. It is the weight of evidence that is critical.
  - The Council submission is not the final Divisional pattern for the County. The Commission will consider the Council's submission alongside other submissions and the Commission itself will then produce a set of proposed Divisional boundaries which will be consulted on separately.

## Next Steps in the Boundary Review

10. Subject to Council agreement, the final Submission on proposals for Divisional boundaries will be forwarded to the Commission for consideration on or before 30<sup>th</sup> January 2023. Following that, the key next steps of the review include:

- Publication and consultation on draft proposals - 25 April – 3 July 2023
- Publication of final recommendations – 3 October 2023
- Parliamentary approval of recommendations – Autumn / Winter 2023
- Implementation of new electoral recommendations – May 2025

## Implications

<b>Policy</b>	This report links to all aims and priorities of the Corporate Plan.
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	Whilst this report and the Council Size Submission to the LGBCE do not contain direct financial implications, any determination by the Commission to increase or reduce the Council size would have consequent financial implications for the Council. Also, changes to Division boundaries made by the Commission may have cost implications relating to changes to electoral arrangements.
<b>Legal</b>	The Statutory Powers of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to undertake and implement a Boundary Review are contained in Part 3 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009  In accordance with Part 3 of the Council's Constitution, matters in relation to electoral arrangements are reserved to full Council.
<b>Procurement</b>	N/A
<b>Human Resources</b>	N/A
<b>Property</b>	N/A
<b>Equalities</b> (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	N/A

<b>Risk Assessment</b>	N/A
<b>Crime Disorder &amp;</b>	N/A
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	N/A
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	N/A
<b>Health and Wellbeing</b>	N/A
<b>Wards</b>	All Wards

**Background papers:**

None

**Report sign off.**

***Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:***

	Full Name of Officer
Interim Chief Executive	Rick O'Farrell
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Suki Binjal
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Jan Willis
Relevant Executive Director	-
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Glen Sanderson

Author and contact details:

Philip Hunter, Interim Senior Service Director  
Philip.hunter@northumberland.gov.uk

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## Northumberland County Council

### COUNTY COUNCIL

DATE: 18<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2023

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Response to the Challenge Board Interim Report 1 for the Member Oversight Group

**Report of:** Cllr. Glen Sanderson, Leader of Council

**Executive Director:** Rick O'Farrell, Interim Chief Executive

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#### **Purpose of report**

To consider and respond to the first interim report of the Challenge Board, provided to the Member Oversight Group on the 23.12.22.

#### **Recommendations**

County Council is recommended to:

1. Note the initial findings and suggested next steps proposed in the Challenge Board's first interim report.

#### **Link to Corporate Plan**

This report contributes to the 'delivering value for money services' priority.

#### **Key issues**

The Independent Governance Review ('Caller Review') was reported to Council at its Extraordinary meeting of 8th June 2022. The Caller Review and the Council's response to its recommendations represent a critical opportunity to revise the ways in which we work, improving and strengthening our structures, governance, culture and values.

#### **Background**

In 2021, the Leader of Council took the decision to commission an independent review of governance in the Council. The final report of the Independent Review of Governance (known as the 'Caller Report') was presented to Full Council in June 2022.

In line with the Caller Report recommendations a cross-party, Member Oversight Group, ("the MOG"), was established to oversee the development and delivery of an Improvement Plan in response to Caller.

Again, following the Caller recommendations, the Leader of the Council asked the Local Government Association (LGA) to establish an external Challenge Board of experienced local government Elected Members and Officers to advise the Council on its improvement journey as a “critical friend.”

The Challenge Board was established and met formally for the first time in October 2022. It has so far met three times and has engaged with a range of stakeholders, including:

- The Council’s Leadership and Cabinet;
- Members from across the different political groups (follow-up sessions are planned for Labour Group Members);
- The Council’s Executive Team;
- A sample of staff groups representatives and tier 3/4 managers; and,
- External partners.

Following its first three meetings, the Challenge Board drafted its first, interim report and presented its findings to the MOG on the 23.12.22. This is attached as Appendix A. These are the Board’s initial findings, based on the documents and discussions they have held so far. As the Board continues to meet with Officers and Members as well as considering other evidence, they will gain deeper insights into the progress the organisation is making on its improvement plan.

Overall, the Board’s interim report presents a positive picture of progress across the Council’s Improvement Plan. Alongside this, the Board has provided feedback and advice on six key areas of our work. These are set out below, with an initial response to these points outlined in bold.

### **Key findings**

1. The biggest challenge is the long-term need for change in culture, including the rebuilding of trust. We feel the best next step on this is for the Council to produce a longer term, 3-year, holistic, overall improvement plan which is clear about what success would look like and how the current actions (and any currently missing actions) would achieve this, especially around culture, behaviours, values and ethos. The Board would want to work with the Council to help develop this.

### **Response**

**This finding is set in the context of overall positive progress on our Improvement Plan. We believe that the relationships and basis for working between Officers and Members has improved markedly over the past six months as has the level of engagement between Leadership / Chief Executive and the wider staff groups. However, we accept that embedding positive culture change is a long-term commitment and project for the Council at all levels of the organisation. We have recently received the latest feedback from the staff survey, which provides emerging evidence of the improvements seen in last six months. We have further developed our plans for culture and values and need to engage with the Board on the latest plans. We welcome the offer of the Challenge Board to help us develop a longer-term, outcomes-based culture change programme.**

2. The Council should consider the pace of some sensitive and crucial changes. Are you going too quickly on a radical restructure and transformation programme? There is clearly a need to get on and sort out the officer structure at the Council. But this should be balanced against ensuring you are taking people with you and that there is an

opportunity for the incoming permanent CEO to oversee and drive this. Otherwise, there is a risk it may need to be repeated. It needs to be done just once and properly, with the right groundwork and having explained the rationale and reasoning behind specific proposals. The current haste is leading to mistrust and suspicion.

#### **Response**

**So far, the Interim Chief Executive has led engagement (alongside the Executive Team) of staff who are potentially impacted by the ongoing restructure of tiers 3-4 of the management structure. The Council has also commissioned expert advice to ensure structure proposals reflect the most up-to-date approaches across the sector, the incoming Chief Executive has also been kept informed of the work being undertaken. However, we accept it is important the new Chief Executive has visible ownership of this process and therefore are reviewing the restructure timetable to better align with the new Chief Executive taking up her post in February 2023.**

**We have recently completed the discovery phase of the transformation programme and the strategic business case outlining key priorities and implementation will be going to January Cabinet for approval. That will provide a springboard for the launch of our communications and engagement strategy. Although delivering the savings that are required to support the MTFP over the next 3 years is a key driver for the programme, this is not the exclusive focus. It is also about finding new and better ways to deliver services for local residents, investing in our workforce and developing a fit for purpose, modern organisation. However, we accept it is important the new Chief Executive has visible ownership of this programme and therefore align the timetable for this work with the new Chief Executive taking up her post in February 2023.**

3. It is positive that a way forward for the 2023/4 budget has been identified, but the Council needs to move forward for the longer term with a clear 3-year financial plan driven by the Corporate Plan priorities. This should be developed by all members with support and advice by officers.

#### **Response**

**We accept this point and are confident the refreshed Corporate Plan will support this process moving forward. The Corporate Plan refresh process invites all Members, Officers from across all Council services, the Public, Town and Parish Councils and Business Leaders to be engaged in its development. Developing a three-year financial plan will be challenging for all Councils given the current context of inflationary pressures.**

4. The Groups should co-design and lead the delivery of effective training with members around code of conduct and behaviour, including the Nolan Principles. This should be evaluated to see how successful it has been.

#### **Response**

**We accept this point. We have further developed our plans for the code of conduct but need to do more to engage with the Board on these latest plans.**

5. The Council should arrive at an agreed protocol on appropriate access to information, including exempt information to give clarity on what members can and can't have (and why), but also defining the personal responsibility of members to respect confidentiality around this, in order to rebuild trust.

**Response**

**We accept this point. We have further developed our plans for providing access to information but need to do more to engage with the Board on these latest plans.**

6. The Council should proactively produce internal and external communications about what the Council is doing to meet its improvement challenges. The Council should be proud of the start it has made but should speak up about its ambitions and plans for further change.

**Response**

**The Leader has already outlined our improvement progress and ambition in a recent article in the trade press. This has been further evidenced in results from the recent staff survey. The Leader and Chief Executive have personally led a new approach to staff engagement – e.g. through live Q&A sessions where staff are encouraged to ask the Leader and Chief Executive anything and a number of visits across the County to meet staff. We need to share more of our current engagement with the Board, so they are sighted on this progress. At the same time, we will reflect on the Board's advice and review our approach to communicating progress and future plans to see what more we can do, particularly to those outside the Council.**

It should be emphasised that solid progress is being made by the Council across a number of these areas and the Board acknowledges they are still going through the engagement stage and getting to understand the progress made to date.

That said, it is agreed that for the Challenge Board to advise on and help shape the Council's improvement actions and to be able to be that 'critical friend' providing robust challenge, the Council needs to engage with the Challenge Board across all areas more fully.

Whilst good progress has been made in the short time the Board have been working with the Council, there is an opportunity to increase the level of collaboration and co-design, to better embrace what the Board can offer to support and shape the improvement work so as to achieve the best possible results for residents.

**Implications**

<b>Policy</b>	None
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	Value for money, transparency and accountability are key aims of the Council. Whilst this Report contains no direct financial implications, the delivery of the individual actions of the Improvement Plan will have financial implications. Any financial

	implications will be the subject of separate reports in relation to specific actions at the appropriate time.
<b>Legal</b>	Whilst this report contains no immediate legal implications, the delivery of the individual actions in the Improvement Plan may have legal implications. Any legal implications arising from the delivery of specific actions will be brought forward in future reports.
<b>Procurement</b>	None
<b>Human Resources</b>	Links to the CEO, Executive Team and Council Wider appraisal and performance framework.
<b>Property</b>	None
<b>Equalities</b> (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	None
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	Failure to implement specific actions from the Improvement Plan in response to the Caller Review recommendations could impact negatively on the Council's Strategic Risks.
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	None
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	None
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	None
<b>Health and Wellbeing</b>	None
<b>Wards</b>	All

**Background papers:**

Independent Governance Review ([02.2 NCC Governance Review finalwatermarkcopy.pdf](#)  
([moderngov.co.uk](#)))

Challenge Board Interim Report 1 for Member Oversight Group (23.12.22).

**Report sign off.**

***Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:***

	Full Name of Officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Lynsey Denyer obo Suki Binjal
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	n/a
Relevant Executive Director	n/a
Chief Executive	
Portfolio Holder(s)	

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### 1. Background

1.1 Everyone at Northumberland County Council (NCC) shares a passion for delivering on the most important things for residents and businesses. Now more than ever, as families and businesses struggle with rapidly increasing costs, they need their council to be on their side, attracting well-paid jobs to the County, delivering effective support services and investing in the future.

1.2 However a council can only sustain the best outcomes for residents when the organisation is fit-for-purpose. That is when members, senior officers and their teams are all pulling in the same, and right, direction.

1.3 It was clear to the Leader of the Council that NCC faced significant challenges to strengthen the governance of the council. Many, although not all, of these challenges stemmed from the fractured relationships between the Cabinet and some of the Council's most senior officers.

1.4 The Leader took the difficult but necessary decision to commission an independent review of governance. This reported in June 2022. As a result of that report (and as a recommendation within it) the Leader of the County Council asked the LGA to help it set up this Challenge Board. We are here to help you on your improvement journey as a "critical friend." No one organisation or individual should ever shy away from challenge.

1.5 This is a long-term process of change and of rebuilding trust that will probably take at least 3 years. The Council have made a good start by inviting in Max Caller, dealing with the senior officer leadership issues, bringing in the Challenge Board and appointing a new permanent CEO.

1.6 The Leader has shown real leadership in recognising the need for change and in pushing for results and continued pace. But this is an important process and journey for the **whole** Council and **all** officers, members and Groups should wholeheartedly buy in to it.

1.7 The Challenge Board is independent of the Council and has membership with significant and appropriate experience at both top officer and councillor level. The

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Board is chaired by Pat Ritchie CBE and has a further experienced council CEO, Wallace Sampson OBE. It has a Conservative Council Leader, Councillor Abi Brown and a Labour Council Leader, Sir Stephen Houghton CBE. It also includes an experienced Monitoring Officer: Gillian Marshall; a previous S151 Officer who also has commercial and governance experience, Neil Thornton and the regional lead for the LGA, Mark Edgell.

1.8 We are all used to operating in challenging local places, with issues around member and officer relationships, scarcity of resources and a changing world. We aim to bring those experiences and use them to your benefit.

1.9 The Board is not here to run anything, or to take over, but to provide robust challenge and act as a critical friend to advise and help to shape the Council's improvement actions. This should help you ensure focus, grip, pace and effective change; particularly as you implement the recommendations from the Independent Governance Review (the Max Caller report). The Council itself is responsible for its performance, reputation and improvement

1.10 The Aims and Objectives of the Challenge Board are, therefore, to support the Council to, quickly and effectively, re-establish what it means to be a Best Value Unitary Local Authority in its geographic area delivering appropriate services and community leadership to every resident and entity in its area, by:

- 1) Redrafting its Corporate Plan in terms of the Administration's Goals and Objectives, moderated by the capacity of the organisation and the legislative framework,
- 2) Ensuring the values by which the Council seeks to operate are lived within the organisation
- 3) Using the data it holds, collects, or needs to collect to define priorities and monitor and improve performance in a systematic way and publish the outcomes.
- 4) Reviewing and agreeing a redraft of the Constitution to ensure that decisions that should be taken at Member level, by Cabinet, Committee, Individual Member or Full Council are clearly identified and that the recording and scrutiny of officer decisions, both individually and in aggregate, is unambiguous.



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- 5) Reviewing and redrafting the codes of conduct which regulate member and officer behaviours and working relationships with each other, to make it clear what the expectations of each party should be and how robust challenge can be handled, to ensure proper accountability can be achieved. This needs to recognise the legitimate rights of Councillors for information to enable them to do their role and for Councillors to recognise that policy is the preserve of the Council unless delegated and saying no is a legitimate outcome.
- 6) Establishing a rationale for the establishment or continuation of any company established under the provisions of the Localism Act 2011.
- 7) Establishing a specific governance framework by which, for those companies wholly or partly owned by NCC, their Directors are appointed, reports on performance are presented to a Cabinet Sub-Committee, conflicts of interest and risk are dealt with and how shareholder agreements are ratified, by both the company and NCC.
- 8) Establishing an officer structure which is designed to deliver against earlier recommendations and seek to appoint permanent employees to fulfil those objectives.
- 9) Establishing a scheme of performance appraisal, starting with the Chief Executive at member level, in line with the JNC provisions, which cascades throughout the organisation so that every employee is clear about their targets and how they fit into plan delivery. As the Chief Executive is accountable to the Council as a whole for their performance, publish the targets and how they have been achieved as an annual statement to Council.

1.11 This is the Challenge Board's first interim report. We have agreed with the Council to provide reports to the MOG every 2 months

## 2. Scope and Focus

2.1 The Board sees its role as providing independent assurance (alongside advice and support) on these three interrelated questions:

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1. Is the Council's action plan appropriate and sufficient to cover the issues raised in the Max Caller report? The Board will look beyond the 9 recommendations listed above if there are legitimate areas that we feel are important in identifying underlying causes of issues, or the enabling of effective solutions for the re-creation of that well functioning and effective Council.
2. Have the actions within the improvement plan been implemented or carried out in the way intended?
3. The "so what?" question. Are the Council clear on the outcomes they are seeking to achieve by their improvement actions? When completed, will they have, or be likely to have in due course, the desired impact in terms of the changes in the systems, processes, behaviours and culture that the Max Caller report implied were needed, through his reference to the "Best Value.....Authority?"

2.2 If and when the Board feels that the answers to each of those questions is mainly positive, the Board might adopt a different approach such as through, what might be termed, an elongated peer review approach, with less frequent contact and focussing less on challenge and more on advising and on coaching and enablement of the top team, including the new senior management team. We will take stock along these lines in Spring 2023.

### 3. Initial views from the Board

#### Overview and context

3.1 The Board has engaged with a wide range of people and has been struck by their openness and constructiveness. We have been particularly heartened by the desire of Councillors from across the political spectrum to share their views with us. One thing is absolutely clear from all this: that although Northumberland County Council has been through a challenging, distracting period, there is passion for Northumberland and a clear determination from just about everyone to improve governance and behaviour and to get back to being focussed on doing the very best for Northumberland's residents, businesses and visitors.

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3.2 Receiving the Independent Review of Governance report cannot have been easy for the Council. But, to its credit, the Council accepted it, including the recommendations in full. It established a cross-party steering group to consider the way forward and as a result invited in a wholly independent Challenge Board to support it in addressing the challenges.

3.3 The Leader's decision, to invite in Max Caller, was a brave and correct one. As has been his energetic and determined response to the report's findings. Leading a council with no overall control requires fortitude, patience and the ability to bring people together, skills that are much admired and commented on in the Leader. His personal commitment to driving the improvement agenda forward is self-evident, and the arrival of a permanent strong supportive Chief Executive in the coming months will help to embed this through the establishment of a stable and permanent leadership team.

### **Progress so far**

3.4 Despite a rapidly changing economic and social environment, which is currently challenging most local authorities, with uncertainties over funding and increasing costs and demands for services, the Council has quickly put in place many actions to respond to the report. It has done this alongside a continued focus on, and energy spent, on big projects that will bring significant benefit to the County such as The Northumberland Line.

3.5 Indeed since the Independent Review was published and reviewed at Full Council in June 2022 much progress has been made by the Council including: better alignment to the Council's 3 priorities; cross party agreement, within 2 weeks, of the actions that will be completed to meet the recommendations; Officer and member (cross party) governance arrangements established; activities underway with elected members on the Constitution Working Group to update the Constitution, with support from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.

3.6 We have heard a widespread view that the recent changes at the most senior officer level has had a positive impact on the atmosphere in County Hall. We were also told that the behaviours across all Groups were feeling better, with less antagonism. But that there is still some way to go

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3.7 Credit should go to both the Leader and Interim CEO as people talk about the two of them having improved visibility and relationships inside the Council with staff and also outside the Council. Although these relationships are, in some cases, more limited than partners have with other councils. The Leader's style is seen as consultative and positive which is particularly important in Councils with no overall control.

3.8 It is commendable that the Council has wanted to be seen to be responding quickly to the report. Much of this has been down to the drive and focus of the Leader. There has been a real effort to respond effectively and put the right things in place. This has seen quick progress on some key issues, such as the recruitment of a new permanent CEO and the process to recruit the full top team. His drive for pace is understandable and commendable.

3.9 However we have heard many voices saying that this will be a longer improvement journey than was originally hoped, or planned, for. Perhaps of around 3 years. Some voices are also asking whether the council is too focussed on ticking off the "mechanistic" actions implied by the 9 Caller recommendations actions without a clear eye towards the longer term values, culture and behaviour change required to be an effective, Best Value, Council.

3.10 The challenge is bigger than some think. Some things have not yet been tackled, nor are there clear plans in terms of how they will be approached. Values and culture are a key issue and yet we heard that values are only really discussed at appraisal time. The key is to rebuild trust. This can't be done overnight and is a longer term project. It will be harder to achieve if some are excluded, or not effectively involved, in the process of rebuilding.

3.11 Several people have asked whether some of the change work is being done so quickly that the act of doing it has not engaged with a sufficiently wide range of people, even those internal to the council. Another doubt is why some change is being done without a clear narrative for its purpose or an explanation about why it is being done in a certain way and to what end. The work on the shape of the Council, may sensibly need to be repeated after a period of reflection over impact, probably after the arrival of the new Chief Executive. Indeed it may make more sense to delay this until the arrival of the new CEO as the current haste is generating a degree of

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mistrust and questions about what is the rationale for the change being proposed and how does it fit with the Council's priorities and who is driving it and why.

3.12 We are not saying slow down for sake of it and certainly not on everything. Indeed you should be proud of the pace of improvement so far. To some extent this will aid the need to move on from the past. But the pace with which you are doing some things, or the way in which you are doing them, may not deliver the results you need.

3.13 There is also a fundamental question about whether and how the various streams of improvement are being coordinated and linked in an overall "plan." There appears to be a lot of activity but it is unclear how it is knitted together, particularly flowing from the Council's 3 priorities and how those are driving the new structure, budget decisions and other improvement plans.

3.14 Currently there is a Caller Improvement Plan and a "Strategic Change Programme." The latter appears to be focussed on financial control and reductions. There is nothing wrong with that but we need to be clear where the work on values, behaviour, culture and ethos is. We haven't seen an overall plan in spite of asking for it.

3.15 The way to bring all these actions together would be to start by being clear on the outcomes you are seeking. How would YOU define and measure the results you are seeking to achieve? What would success from your Improvement journey look like? There needs to be a longer term improvement plan which joins up the current streams of change and transformation etc, is clear about how they all fit together and the outcomes being sought in terms of culture and behaviour change.

### **Areas for Improvement: Looking Backwards**

3.16 There is a lot of wanting to go back. Clearly people need to be allowed to vent, grieve, whatever. But when will it be possible for all members, and indeed officers, to draw a line; leave the past in the past and move on? Time will clearly aid the healing, but individuals, groups and teams need to try to accelerate the healing of the antagonism over the past and whatever they feel happened and whoever they feel was responsible, park that and move on together.

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### **Areas for Improvement: Involvement of ALL members**

3.17 All members need to have a role in leading the Council forward. This is normal in a good council. They need to find places within the governance arrangements to be able to do that, to influence, to hold to account, in a constructive cross-party way. We question whether this is being facilitated currently.

3.18 The new Policy Conference approach is an innovative way of seeking to engage with councillors to seek to ensure there is a genuine dialogue with all members over policy? We have heard that Overview and Scrutiny is not as effective as possible. But what should its role be and what is being done to ensure it fulfils that role and potential, with a real member-directed focus? Will the Policy Conference approach abstract from the role of Overview and Scrutiny, or is its purpose distinctly different?

3.19 Have members really been involved in a conversation on the overall vision for Northumberland, the priorities and of what sort of Council they want? Where is the planned work with members and officers to understand what a member led, officer managed organisation is and the roles of members and officers in that?

3.20 The recent appointment process for the CEO appears to have us to have been thorough and professional and to have reached a good decision. However a small element of the process could have been handled better - the inclusion of the Independent Group

3.21 Questions have been raised over the Chairing of Full Council and the perception that the current arrangements are partial. Whether this is true is not for us to judge but NCC does seem to have a different model to almost every other Council, where a Civic Chair or Ceremonial Mayor would oversee the meeting. Perhaps this should be looked at as part of the review of the Constitution

### **Areas for Improvement: Current Behaviours**

3.22 The Board heard a strong view that the pride of being part of council is still currently affected by the behaviours of some members. There is clearly a common shared passion to serve and progress Northumberland. Why is this not matched by shared positive behaviours, which can help rebuild trust across the whole Council? This can still happen alongside constructive challenge. All officers, members and Groups should be playing their part in positive change.

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3.23 The recent leaking of papers linked to some standards complaints was clearly unacceptable. From wherever these leaks originated, it is clear that some individual/individuals are deliberately not aiding progress. They should consider their role in slowing improvement in the Council.

3.24 The use of social media by councillors has been raised with us, including where councillors might be doing this anonymously. We do feel that such use needs to be responsible and to not feed conspiracy theories or the focus on the past or personalities. It is probably something we will come back to.

3.25 It is undoubtedly the case that, as in many Councils, Covid got in way and exacerbated any existing member-member or member-officer issues. Could the day-to-day fraternising of members such as via the members lounge, which was lost during Covid, again help to build relations and understanding?

3.26 For some members, there is the need to consistently get back to normal human interaction: basic niceties, avoiding intimidation or suspicion (and what some would see as “bullying”). Agreeing to disagree on some things but in a constructive, cordial, respectful way. Focussing debate on priorities, policies and performance not on personalities.

3.27 We welcome the plans of the Council to run a session with Councillors on how to embed the values consistently into member to member (and member to officer) interactions and behaviour, as well as the consideration of the Nolan Principles. We hope this can be led as a cross-party process.

### **Areas of Concern: Complaints**

3.28 The delay over progressing some complaints that have been on the books for many months has aided suspicion. The sooner they reach the right conclusion (whatever that is) the better. The standards process, where it has to be used, needs to be fair, swift and as transparent as it can be to help build trust. It is recognised that the council has very little flexibility on the range of sanctions available to it.

3.29 There appears to have been a weaponising of the Code of Conduct over recent months. We have heard of large numbers of complaints. Some being seen to have been done on a tit-for-tat basis. Only the individuals responsible can take the action to stop this. They should. This does not negate the right to speak truth to power. It

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also does not reduce the responsibility of Groups to ensure their members show appropriate behaviour.

3.30 The Monitoring Officer (MO) must be recognised as independent of all Groups and indeed staff, and be allowed to get on with the job, without fear or favour. Complaints about the MO do little to assist the smooth processing of conduct complaints. The need to externalise complaints because allegations have been made against the MO has not assisted in resolving historic issues. The new appointment must be a turning point in addressing some of this.

### **Other considerations**

3.31 The Council is moving forward with a review of the Constitution and Codes of Conduct. The key to success will be how you involve people from across the Council in arriving at the new documents so they fully reflect hopes and fears but most importantly can improve overall governance, efficiency and culture. There will also need to be effective training and development around the new documents. The training available to councillors, even induction sessions for members, seems limited and ad hoc.

3.32 Communication between members and officers needs improving. Indeed members say they are often receiving information only at same time as the press. Members aspire to a system that allows them to know what's going on in their ward. We also heard of disappointments over casework response rates.

3.33 Are officers doing what they need to do to properly advise and support members? We heard of poorly written reports, with lack of clear advice. Is enough being done to support and enable cabinet members to effectively carry out their role?

3.34 The Council has some great people working for it, with talent across the whole organisation. It has been a turbulent time for them too. Many of them talk about having to get on with their jobs in spite of the turmoil at the upper echelons of the Council and of their need to act as a buffer for their teams. Staff have a huge passion for, and loyalty to, the County and for doing their jobs properly. Most also live within the County and have faced questions from family and friends over the reputational damage caused by recent events. Some press coverage has been different to what staff have been told internally; if indeed they had been told anything at all. Some staff talked of seeing recent changes in the right direction. They had a



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hope it continues, but also need proper reassurance and support through this period, as well as effective communication and engagement.

3.35 The Council is going through a transitional phase. On the senior officer side, the whole team is interim in their current roles. Whilst they are clearly doing their best individually and collectively, the uncertainty and lack of permanence is not conducive to them working as an effective team and them taking a strong lead on the improvement and changes needed. This is unlikely to be resolved until after the new CEO joins in February and she starts to build her team.

### 4. Next steps

4.1 The Board is still going through the engagement stage and getting to understand the Council. We have only just started our thinking about some of the 9 recommendations in 1.10. We are genuinely impressed by the way the Council has initiated, gripped and made progress on its improvement. This is particularly the result of the focus and drive shown by the Leader.

4.2 Whilst the Board acknowledges that it has been given access to many people. We have been disappointed by the level of some attendance and we have been slow to be provided with some of papers for which we have asked. For us to advise on and help shape the Council's improvement actions and to be able to be that critical friend providing robust challenge (that the Leader wrote about in his LGC article) the Council needs to **really** engage with us, to embrace what The Board can offer to support and shape your improvement work so as to achieve the best results.

4.3 In the meantime there are some issues we feel the Council needs to quickly address:

- the biggest challenge is the longer term need for change on culture, including the rebuilding of trust. We feel the best next step on this is for the Council to produce a longer term, 3 year, holistic, overall improvement plan which is clear about what success would look like and how the current actions (and any currently missing actions) would achieve this, especially around culture, behaviours, values and ethos. The Board would want to work with the Council to help develop this.

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- the Council should consider the pace of some sensitive and crucial changes. Are you going too quickly on a radical restructure and transformation programme? There is clearly a need to get on and sort out the officer structure at the Council. But this should be balanced against ensuring you are taking people with you and that there is an opportunity for the incoming permanent CEO to oversee and drive this. Otherwise there is a risk it may need to be repeated. It needs to be done just once and properly, with the right groundwork and having explained the rationale and reasoning behind specific proposals. The current haste is leading to a degree of mistrust and suspicion.
- It is positive that a way forward for the 2023/4 budget has been identified, but the Council needs to move forward for the longer term with a clear 3 year financial plan driven by the Corporate Plan priorities. This should be developed by all members with support and advice by officers.
- the Groups should co-design and lead the delivery of effective training with members around code of conduct and behaviour, including the Nolan Principles. This should be evaluated to see how successful it has been.
- the Council should arrive at an agreed protocol on appropriate access to information, including exempt information to give clarity on what members can and can't have (and why), but also defining the personal responsibility of members to respect confidentiality around this, in order to rebuild trust.
- the Council should proactively produce internal and external communications about what the council is doing to meet its improvement challenges. The Council should be proud of the start it has made but should speak up about its ambitions and plans for further change.



## Northumberland County Council

### COUNCIL

DATE: 18 JANUARY 2023

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#### INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL MEMBERS

Report of Councillor Richard Wearmouth

Officer: Head of Democratic and Electoral Services

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#### 1. Purpose of report

In September 2021, Council agreed the re-establishment of an Independent Remuneration Panel of three members for the duration of four years. This report asks for ratification of the appointment of a fourth Member and endorsement of the two appointments.

#### 2. Recommendations

It is recommended to Council that:

2.1 The appointment of a fourth member of the Panel be ratified; and

2.2 The appointments of Eric Richards and Hayley Hall as Independent Remuneration Panel Members for a period of four years from 18 January 2023 until 17 January 2027 be endorsed.

#### 3. Link to Corporate Plan

The report is relevant to all of the priorities included in the NCC Corporate Plan 2021-2024.

#### 4. Key Issues

The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 state that a scheme can only be amended by a Local Authority after considering the recommendations

of an Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) and that the IRP must consist of at least 3 Members appointed by the Council.

## 5. Background

In September 2021, Council agreed to the re-establishment of an IRP of three members for a duration of four years and endorsed the appointment of John Anderson CBE as Chair of the Panel and Allison Thompson as Panel Member.

Delegated authority was given to the Head of Democratic and Electoral Services in consultation with the Monitoring Officer and political group leaders to process the appointment of a third Panel Member.

This was duly carried out and a third Panel Member appointed, and meetings arranged. Unfortunately, that member was unable to attend most of the subsequent meetings of the Panel and was informed that her services would no longer be required.

The Head of Democratic and Electoral Services then advertised again for a third member and two candidates were interviewed. Both were considered to be very suitable for appointment and scored equally at interview making it very difficult to choose between them.

Delegated authority was only granted for a third panel member, however Group Leaders were emailed on 16 November to seek agreement to a fourth member being appointed. Four members would allow for flexibility and add experience. Group Leaders were provided with redacted CV's (copies provided under separate cover to this report).

All Group Leaders subsequently agreed that both applicants be appointed for a 4-year period from the date of their appointment letter, subject to employment checks and ratification of the appointment of a fourth Panel member. The Panel Chair was also informed of this.

## 6. Implications

<b>Policy</b>	No significant implications
<b>Finance and value for money:</b> e.g: What are the financial implications and how will this be funded.	Members' allowances are included in the Council's current revenue budget. Should the IRP recommend a change to the value or number of allowances, the impact of these recommendations on the current budget will be costed and included in the next report to Council once the work of the IRP has concluded and the financial implications of any recommendations made can be assessed. The remuneration rate of £600 per panel member is payable upon conclusion of this review and any other reviews which are required within the duration of their appointment.
<b>Legal</b>	The legislative framework with regard to Members' Allowances is contained within the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, the Local Government Act 2000 and the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003. Guidance

	on the process is available at <a href="http://https://www.gov.uk/hmrc-internal-manuals/employment-income-manual/eim65960">http://https://www.gov.uk/hmrc-internal-manuals/employment-income-manual/eim65960</a>
<b>Procurement</b>	N/A
<b>Human Resources</b>	Employment checks have been carried out.
<b>Property</b>	N/A
<b>Equalities: aimed at protected characteristics: compliance with legislation, policies etc</b> (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	Issues relating to equalities are reflected, where appropriate, in the report.
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	N/A
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	N/A
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	N/A
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	N/A
<b>Health and Wellbeing</b>	None significant
<b>Wards</b>	ALL

7. **Background papers**

8. **Author and Contact Details**

Jackie Roll, Head of Democratic and Electoral Services:

[Jackie.roll@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:Jackie.roll@northumberland.gov.uk)

01670 622603

Mob: 07827 954589

**Report Sign Off:**

**Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of this report.**

	Full Name of Officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Lynsey Denyer for Suki Binjal
Executive Director of Finance	Jan Willis
Relevant Executive Officer	Rick O'Farrell
Chief Executive	Rick O'Farrell
Portfolio Holder	Councillor R. Wearmouth

**NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**  
**INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL**

Northumberland County Council is looking to appoint a member of its Independent Remuneration Panel.

The County Council is required to establish and maintain an Independent Remuneration Panel, the purpose of which is to make recommendations to the Authority about the allowances to be paid to Members. The Panel will make recommendations about the level of basic allowances and to whom they should be paid and on whether dependents' carers' allowance, travel and subsistence allowances and co-optees' allowance should be paid and the levels of these allowances.

Members of the Panel cannot be Members of any Local Authority in respect of which that Panel makes recommendations or a member of a committee or a sub-committee of an authority in respect of which the Panel makes recommendations. This includes Co-opted Members. Anyone who would be disqualified from being an elected member of a Local Authority (Section 80 of the Local Government Act 1972 and sections 79 and 83 (ii) of the Local Government Act 2000) is also disqualified from being a Member of an Independent Panel.

The responsibilities of the post are likely to require a minimum commitment of one meeting per year. There is an allowance attached to the role, but more importantly you will have the satisfaction of making an important contribution to public service standards in Northumberland.

An extract from Government guidance on the role of Independent Remuneration Panels is attached to provide further information.

Please complete the attached application form and return this to Jackie Roll, Head of Democratic and Electoral Services, County Hall, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 2EF or email [Jackie.Roll@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:Jackie.Roll@northumberland.gov.uk)

Closing date for applications is **30 September 2022**

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## Northumberland County Council

### COUNCIL

18 JANUARY 2023

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### COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW – HEPSCOTT PARISH

#### Report of Interim Chief Executive

#### Purpose of report

To consider the outcome of a community governance review in the County.

#### Recommendations

It is recommended that

- (1) **the number of Parish Councillors on Hepscoth Parish Council be increased from seven to nine.**
- (2) **Hepscoth Parish Council should not be divided into wards for the purpose of electing Councillors**
- (3) **the Monitoring Officer be authorised to make, sign and seal the appropriate Orders by virtue of the powers contained in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.**

#### Link to Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the “Living’ and ‘How’ priorities included in the NCC Corporate Plan 2021-24

#### Key issues

1. In 2022 Northumberland County Council resolved to undertake a Community Governance Review (CGR) of Hepscoth Parish in Northumberland County in the light of changes required as a result of the Community Governance Review in relation to Morpeth, Hebron and Hepscoth 2020 (‘the Morpeth Review’)

#### Consultation

2. On 8 September 2022, the Council published terms of reference (attached as **Appendix 1**) to conduct a Community Governance Review of the Parish to consult on what the consequential electoral arrangements for Hepscoth Parish should be to ensure that effective local governance arrangements that promote community cohesion were maintained or improved.

3. The terms of reference timetable published on 8 September was then amended to include the publication of draft and final recommendation reports to be published in order to allow for reasonable periods for consultation with local electors and stakeholders.
4. Initial consultation commenced on 8 September 2022 for a four-week period involving the Division County Councillor (H.G.H. Sanderson) and Hepscoth Parish Council. A press release was issued to cover interested electors with articles appearing in the media, and information given on how to make representations. Relevant information was also published on the Council's website.
5. Draft recommendations were published, and a further period of consultation took place from 18 November to 19 December 2022 when the draft recommendations were published on the Council website and interested parties provided the opportunity of commenting further on the proposals. There were no further comments. The final recommendations were published on the Council's website on 23 December 2022.

### **Analysis of responses**

6. Three responses were received as part of the consultation process. Comments (attached as **Appendix 2**) arising from the consultation process indicated there was unanimous support from the existing Parish Council members, a former Chair of the Parish and a member of the public for an increase in the number of Councillors to be elected to Hepscoth Parish Council. The additional Members would be required to ensure adequate representation for the South Fields Estate which was yet to be completed and for parts of the large Parish area which could not currently be reached by the existing Parish membership. **This proposed increase does fall within the guidance and is supported.**
7. Further comments relate to the ward arrangements for the Parish. In 2025, the area of land that was Hepscoth Stobhill Manor ward will become part of Morpeth Town Council area following the Morpeth review in 2020. Moving forward as a result of this change, Hepscoth Parish does not feel that the division into wards is beneficial for the Parish and has requested that its remaining area (currently Hepscoth Parish ward) should not be divided into wards for the purpose of electing councillors. **This proposal is supported as several Parish Council's within Northumberland are un-warded and can be managed as part of the election cycle.**

### **Summary**

8. Hepscoth Parish Council was established in 2011 by way of an electoral changes order that set out a Parish of seven councillors divided between two wards, Hepscoth ward with five councillors (1053 electors) and Hepscoth Stobhill Manor ward with two councillors (299 electors).
9. In January 2021, Northumberland Council agreed to a community governance request to move an area from Hepscoth Parish to Morpeth Parish, which effectively removed Hepscoth Stobhill Manor ward from Hepscoth Parish. Despite losing 299

electors as a result of this change, Hepscott Parish will grow by 177 electors as a result of new build in the Parish area, giving them a potential 1230 electors.

## **Background**

10. In undertaking the review, the Council will be guided by Part 4 of Chapter 3 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (referred to as ‘the 2007 Act’), the relevant parts of the Local Government Act 1972, Guidance on CGR’s issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England in March 2010. Also, the following Regulations which guide consequential matters arising from the review: Local Government (Parishes and Parish Councils) (England) Regulations 2008 (SI2008/625).
11. Following the guidance on community governance reviews referred to above, a CGR must reflect the identities and interests of communities and should take account the impact of community governance arrangements on community cohesion and the size, population and boundaries of a local community or parish.
12. Before making any recommendation or publishing final proposals the Council will take full account of the views and suggestions of by local people and organisations and will comply with the statutory consultation requirements by:
  - Consulting local government electors and other persons or bodies who appear to the Council to have an interest in the review.
  - Considering any representations received in connection with the review.
  - Notifying consultees of the outcome of the review; and,
  - Publishing all decisions taken and the reasons for such decisions.
13. In particular, the Council consulted:
  - Local government electors/residents in the Parish of Hepscott.
  - The Parish Council of Hepscott.
  - Northumberland County Councillors (as appropriate)

## **Timeline and key stages**

8 September 2022	Issue press release and publish terms of reference and notices within the Parish
7 October 2022	Deadline for any comments/objections
18 November 2022	Publication of draft proposals
23 December 2022	Publish final recommendations
18 January 2023	Report to Council informing it of the outcomes of the review and making recommendations for Council to resolve upon
Spring 2023	Making of the relevant order, subject to the Council's decision

## Electoral Forecasts

14. When considering the electoral arrangements of the parish, the Council must comply with the 2007 Act and consider any likely future change in the number or distribution of electors within five years from the day the review commences.
15. The review will use the latest electorate figures available at a parish level together with the estimated delivery of new dwellings within the five-year period taken from the Council's most recent statutory development plan.
16. Information from the Council's land and property gazetteer indicates that predicted new build in the Hepscott Parish area (South Fields estate) will result in an additional 104 new properties completed within the review period, giving an additional 177 electors.

## Considerations

17. Legislation requires that the Council must ensure that community governance within the area:
  - reflects the identities and interests of the communities in the area,
  - is effective and convenient and takes into account any other arrangements for the purpose of community representation or engagement in the area.
18. In considering proposals for change, the Council will take the following into account:
  - Parish status (council or meeting)
  - Electorate – existing and forecast growth.
  - The review aims to ensure that parishes reflect community identity and interest and that they are viable administrative and democratic units.
  - Parishes with 150 or fewer local government electors cannot have a council and can only be a parish meeting (unless the parish already has a council).
  - Between 151 and 999 local government electors the review can recommend that the parish should have a council (optional) and where the parish has 1000 or more local government electors the review must recommend that the parish has a council.

## Council size (number of councillors)

19. The minimum number of parish councillors that a council can have is five. A quorum for a parish council is three or a third, whichever is the greater number. National research guidance suggests the following levels of representation for parish councils:

<b>Electorate</b>	<b>Councillor Allocation</b>
Less than 500	5 – 8
501 – 2,500	6 – 12
2,501 – 10,000	9 – 16
10,00, - 20,000	13 – 27
Greater than 20,000	13 – 31

20. Government guidance is that each area should be considered on its own merits having regard to population, geography, and the pattern of communities. The Council will pay particular attention to existing levels of representation and existing council sizes which have stood the test of time.
21. In considering requests to change the number of councillors on any individual parish council, the Council will review the electoral history for the parish including the number of contested elections that have been held, the number of vacant seats following normal parish elections (every 4 years) and the history of co-options (i.e., has the council been able to fill vacancies).

### **Implications**

<b>Policy</b>	N/A
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	None. There were no additional costs incurred in the community governance review other than officer time.
<b>Legal</b>	The relevant legislation is detailed within the report.  The Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 confirm that the matters within this report are functions reserved to Full Council
<b>Procurement</b>	N/A
<b>Human Resources</b>	All the work can be carried out by existing employees who possess the necessary skill and expertise.
<b>Property</b>	N/A
<b>Equalities</b> (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	N/A
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	The items raised pose a minimal risk to the organisation.
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	There are no crime and disorder implications.
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	The proposals should improve the governance of the local community.
<b>Health &amp; Wellbeing</b>	N/A
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	N/A
<b>Divisions</b>	<b>Longhorsley</b>

### **Background papers**

Community Governance File

**Report sign off**

	Full Name of Officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Suki Binjal
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Jan Willis
Relevant Executive Director	N/A
Interim Chief Executive	Rick O'Farrell
Portfolio Holder(s)	Richard Wearmouth

**Author and Contact Details**

**Jackie Roll, Head of Democratic and Electoral Services**  
**01670 622603 Jackie. [Roll@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:Roll@northumberland.gov.uk)**

**Northumberland County Council  
Community Governance Review 2022  
Terms of Reference**

**A Review of the electoral arrangements of the Parish of Hepscott  
under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007**

**Background**

Northumberland County Council has resolved to undertake a Community Governance Review (CGR) of Hepscott Parish in Northumberland County.

In undertaking the review, the Council will be guided by Part 4 of Chapter 3 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (referred to as 'the 2007 Act'), the relevant parts of the Local Government Act 1972, Guidance on CGR's issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England in March 2010. Also, the following Regulations which guide, in particular, consequential matters arising from the review: Local Government (Parishes and Parish Councils) (England) Regulations 2008 (SI2008/625); Local Government Finance (New Parishes) Regulations 2008 (SI2008/626).

The Northumberland (Electoral Changes) Order 2011 made changes to the electoral arrangements for the county of Northumberland. The Order made specific reference to the parish of Hepscott by abolishing the then existing wards and replacing them with 2 new wards, namely

- Hepscott Ward and
- Hepscott Stobhill Manor Ward

The Order also set out that Hepscott parish would have a representation of 7 councillors with 5 for Hepscott ward and 2 for Hepscott Stobhill Manor ward.

Northumberland County Council has a duty to keep parish arrangements under review and in the light of changes made by The Northumberland Council (Reorganisation of Community Governance) (Morpeth and Hepscott) Order 2021, it is considered timely to conduct a CGR in the parish of Hepscott to consider the consequential electoral arrangements for Hepscott Parish and ensure that effective local governance arrangements that promote community cohesion are maintained or improved.

Section 81 of the 2007 Act requires the Council to publish its Terms of Reference for the Review which clearly set out the focus of the review. This document, when published, will fulfil this requirement.

The Council is required to have regard to guidance issued by the Government and the publication 'Guidance on Community Governance Reviews' issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England in March 2010 has been used in drawing up the Terms of Reference and timetable for the review.

### **What is a Community Governance Review?**

A CGR is a legal process whereby Principal Authorities (Northumberland County Council in this instance) can consider the following:

- creating, merging, altering or dissolution of parish councils.
- the naming of parishes and the style of any new parish councils,
- the electoral arrangements for parish councils, i.e., the ordinary year of election, council size, the number of parish councillors and parish warding
- grouping of parishes under a common parish council or de-grouping parishes.

A CGR must reflect the identities and interests of communities and should take account the impact of community governance arrangements on community cohesion and the size, population and boundaries of a local community or parish.

### **Who will undertake the review?**

As the principal authority, Northumberland County Council is responsible for undertaking CGRs within its area. The Council has also extended the terms of reference to include electoral registration and boundary matters to oversee the review process and to make final recommendations to the Council for approval following extensive consultation.

The primary contacts for the review are:

- Lesley Bennet, Senior Democratic Services Officer.
- Helen Lancaster, Senior Manager – Legal Services.
- Mark Crawford, Elections Manager.

### **Consultation**

Before making any recommendation or publishing final proposals the Council will take full account of the views and suggestions of by local people and organisations and will comply with the statutory consultation requirements by:

- Consulting local government electors and other persons or bodies who appear to the Council to have an interest in the review.
- Taking into account any representations received in connection with the review.
- Notifying consultees of the outcome of the review; and,
- Publishing all decisions taken and the reasons for such decisions.

In particular, the Council will consult:

- Local government electors/residents in the Parish of Hepscoth.
- The Parish Council of Hepscoth.
- Northumberland County councillors (as appropriate); and
- Northumberland Association of Local Councils (NALC)

Information about each stage of the review will be published on the Council's website and available for inspection at Northumberland County Council, County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF. Press releases and other publicity will be issued where appropriate.



## **Timeline and Key Stages**

8 September 2022	Issue press release and publish terms of reference and notices within the Parish
7 October 2022	Deadline for any comments/objections
18 November 2022	Publication of draft proposals
23 December 2022	Publish final recommendations
18 January 2023	Report to Council informing it of the outcome of the review
Spring 2023	Making of the relevant order, subject to the Council's decision

## **Electoral Forecasts**

When considering the electoral arrangements of the parish, the Council must consider any likely future change in the number or distribution of electors within five years from the day the review commences.

The review will use the latest electorate figures available at a parish level together with the estimated delivery of new dwellings within the five-year period taken from the Council's most recent statutory development plan.

## **Scope of the Review**

The Review includes all aspects of community governance arrangements of existing parishes, including:

- To consider the names of any existing parishes/parish councils
- To consider the boundaries of any existing parish and whether any existing parishes should be split or amalgamated to constitute any new parish or if any new parish councils should be created along with the number of parish councillors to be elected for any parish council, whether new or existing.
- To consider whether any new or existing parish council should be divided into wards (or continue to be divided into wards), including the number and boundaries of any such wards, the number of councillors to be elected for any such ward, and the name of any such ward.
- If considered desirable to effect any changes, whether or not any alterations should be made to the ordinary year of election for any new or existing parish/town council.
- To consider whether or not any recommendations should be made to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England for any subsequent alterations to the electoral divisions of Northumberland County Council.

## **Considerations**

Legislation requires that the Council must ensure that community governance within the area:

- reflects the identities and interests of the communities in the area,

- is effective and convenient and takes into account any other arrangements for the purpose of community representation or engagement in the area.

In considering proposals for change, the Council will take the following into account:

- Parish status (council or meeting)
- Electorate – existing and forecast growth.
- The review aims to ensure that parishes reflect community identity and interest and that they are viable administrative and democratic units.
- Parishes with 150 or fewer local government electors cannot have a council and can only be a parish meeting (unless the parish already has a council). Between 151 and 999 local government electors the review can recommend that the parish should have a council (optional) and where the parish 1000 or more local government electors the review must recommend that the parish has a council.

### **Parish boundaries**

The Council will consider the effect of new and forecast development activity on existing parish boundaries. Parish boundaries should be easily identifiable and reflect the separation of settlements recognised locally as having their own identity. These boundaries should generally reflect the areas between communities with low populations or physical barriers such as rivers or man-made features such as railways or motorways.

### **Council size (number of councillors)**

The minimum number of parish councillors that a council can have is five. A quorum for a parish council is three or a third, whichever is the greater number.

National research guidance suggests the following levels of representation for parish councils:

<b>Electorate</b>	<b>Councillor Allocation</b>
Less than 500	5 – 8
501 – 2,500	6 – 12
2,501 – 10,000	9 – 16
10,001 – 20,000	13 – 27
Greater than 20,000	13 – 31

Government guidance is that each area should be considered on its own merits having regard to population, geography, and the pattern of communities. The Council will pay particular attention to existing levels of representation and existing council sizes which have stood the test of time.

In considering requests to change the number of councillors on any individual parish council, the Council will review the electoral history for the parish including the number of contested elections that have been held, the number of vacant seats following normal parish elections (every 4 years) and the history of co-options (i.e., has the council been able to fill vacancies).

### **Parish Warding**

The Council is required to consider the following points when deliberating whether a parish should be divided into wards for the purposes of elections:

- whether the number or distribution of the local government electors for the parish would make a single election of councillors impracticable or inconvenient,
- whether it is desirable that any area, or areas, of the parish should be separately represented on the council.

The Government's guidance is that warding of parishes may not be justified for largely rural areas based predominantly on a single centrally located village. Conversely, warding may be appropriate where a parish encompasses a number of villages with separate identities or where there has been urban overspill at the edge of a town into a parish.

In considering parish wards the Council will ensure that electoral equality is retained (the principle that each person's vote should be of equal weight so far as is possible). This will be achieved by keeping the councillor/elector ratio similar across any warded areas.

### **Parish names and alternative styles for parishes**

The Council will endeavour to reflect existing or historic place names and will consider any ward names proposed any local interested parties. The Council will be mindful of Section 75 of the Local Government Act 1972 with regards to changing the name of a parish and subsequent notification and to Sections 87 and 88 of the 2007 Act and related guidance.

Alternative styles for parishes were introduced by the 2007 Act which could replace the 'parish' style – community, neighbourhood, or village. Town status continues to be available to a parish (S247 of the Local Government Act 1972) but for as long as a parish has an alternative style it will not be able to have the status of a town and vice versa.

At the request of a parish the County Council as principal authority can change the name of a parish to reflect the style adopted.

If an existing parish is under review the Council will make recommendations as to whether the geographical name of the parish should change but it will be for the parish council or meeting to resolve whether the parish should have one of the alternative styles or retain the 'parish' style.

### **Grouping of parishes**

Under Section 91 of the 2007 Act a CGR can recommend the grouping or de-grouping of parishes. In some instances, it may be appropriate to group parishes to allow a common parish council to be formed. De-grouping may also offer the reverse possibility where local communities have expanded.

Any grouping or de-grouping needs to be compatible with the retention of community interests and it would be inappropriate to use it to build artificially large units under single parish councils. However, it could offer a possibility for parishes with less than 150 electors to be grouped with other parishes under an elected parish council despite being unable to form a parish council in their own right.

### **Ordinary year of election**

As the County Council is elected every four years on an 'all out' basis it is proposed to keep the ordinary year of election for parish councils on the same date.

### **Reorganisation of Community Governance Orders and Commencement**

The review will be completed when the Council resolves to accept the final recommendations and authorises completion of the Reorganisation of Community Governance Order.

Copies of the Order, supporting maps and documents setting out the reasons for the decisions taken will be placed on deposit at Northumberland County Council, County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF, on the Council's website and otherwise publicised in accordance with the requirements of the 2017 Act. Hepscott parish will be notified of the outcomes of the review.

Copies of the Order will be sent to:

- the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
- the Local Government Boundary Commission for England
- the Office of National Statistics
- the Director General of the Ordnance Survey
- the Audit Commission
- Northumberland Association of Local Councils (NALC)

### **Consequential matters**

In the interests of maintaining coterminous boundaries of principal authority electoral areas and the boundaries of parishes, recommendations may be made to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to make related changes to county electoral area boundaries.

Setting up new parish councils or grouping/de-grouping councils may require additional consequential provisions including:

- the transfer and management or custody of property
- the setting of precepts
- provisions with respect to the transfer of any functions, property, rights, and liabilities
- provisions for the transfer of staff

In these matters the Council will be guided by the relevant legislation.

### **Date of Publication**

These terms of reference will be published on 8 September 2022.

**HEPSCOTT COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW  
Consultation Responses**

**1** *"I am writing as Chairperson for Hepscoth Parish in response to your letter dated 26 August 2022.*

*At present we have 7 working Councillors, I would like to propose we increase this to 9.*

*All of our active Councillors play a vital role in the community.*

*2 Councillors cover the Southfields Estate which will house around 460/480 houses when complete. Our Councillors have an extensive list working with Barratts, Green Belt and the County Council to ensure that residents requests are listened to and the development is up to building standard. As the estate is so big I am proposing that we recruit another Councillor but from Phase 2.*

*Our present Councillors all play a key role in the below areas:*

<i>Andrea Ranyard</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>Chairperson and Southfields representative</i>
<i>Benjamin Thompson</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>Southfields representative</i>
<i>David Kennedy</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>Southfields representative</i>
<i>Fred Dye</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>Speed Watch</i>
<i>Malcolm Paton</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>Construction and planning</i>
<i>David Cowans</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>Heritage and planning</i>
<i>Anne Colver</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>Hepscoth and Parish Committee</i>

*Hepscoth Parish covers a vast area that our current Councillors do not reach, therefore proposing 2 new councillors means we can reach out to our community and ask them to join us. We cover Coalburn, Shadfen, Clifton Lane and other areas. It would be great as a parish to reach out and have them on board.*

*At present we have 2 wards, Hepscoth Stobhill Manor and Hepscoth Hepscoth. In 2025 we will lose Hepscoth Stobhill Manor and just have the one ward. We are proposing to keep the parish as just one ward. I do not feel we need to segregate areas into wards, as this feels like we are neglecting them as a community and not being as one.*

*As our area continues to grow and flourish it will be key to have the right number of Councillors on board.*

*I hope that this request is acceptable to Northumberland County Council."*

2. *“I am writing as a parishioner of Hepscoth Parish but also as a former Councillor and Chair of HPC (2013 to May 2022) to say I support HPC’s request to increase the number of councillors. Don’t forget that Hepscoth Parish covers a large area and is actually geographically bigger than Morpeth.*

*Hepscoth Parish Council has always been a hard-working and enthusiastic Council and our County Councillor, Glen Sanderson, has confirmed this in his evidence to the 2021 CGR.*

*I support HPC’s request on the grounds that the workload is increasing as the number of properties lost will be far exceeded by the numbers gained; the South Fields estate is a young growing estate that requires greater attention than the more mature areas of the Parish; and there are substantial and growing efforts being made by HPC to involve South Fields and other areas in the wider Parish.*

*The previous Community Governance Review (January 2021) will transfer less than 120 houses in Stobhill Manor Hepscoth to Morpeth Town Council and confirmed that South Fields estate remains in Hepscoth Parish. Southfields has grown from open fields in 2016 to about 200 dwellings at the time of the previous CGR and is due to reach well over 400 dwellings when complete. I have to say that the workload for Councillors has grown substantially and will continue to grow until the South Fields estate reaches maturity. Stobhill Manor Hepscoth on the other hand is a mature 20+year estate with fewer demands on HPC, and most of the efforts of the current 7 Councillors have concerned matters outside of Stobhill Manor, and that will continue in future. We are already seeing great efforts to engage with the wider Parish and involve the community.*

*I entirely agree with Andrea’s comments on how key the number of Councillors will be and ask that the Review takes these points into account.”*

3 *“I note that the pre existing Hepscoth PC had 5 Members for the 1000 population. With the imminent completion of Southfields, this population of 1000+ has just 2 Members creating an inequitable representation.”*

By virtue of paragraph(s) 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A  
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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By virtue of paragraph(s) 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A  
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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