

# Public Document Pack



## Northumberland County Council

**Your ref:**

**Our ref:**

**Enquiries to:** Jackie Roll

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

**Tel direct:**

**Date:** 14 March 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, 22 MARCH 2023** at **3.00 PM**.

Yours faithfully

Dr Helen Paterson  
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**



**Dr Helen Paterson, 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  
- 28)

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held on Wednesday 22 February 2023, as circulated, to be confirmed as a true record, signed by the Business Chair and sealed with the Common Seal of the Council.

### 3. DISCLOSURES 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 CHAIR OF THE STAFF AND APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE**

(Pages  
29 - 36)

**Appointment of the Council's Monitoring Officer**

Section 5 of the Local Government & Housing Act 1989 requires the Council to designate one of its Officers as Monitoring Officer. In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) Regulations 2000, matters relating to the appointment of a Monitoring Officer are reserved to the Full Council.

The purpose of this report is to consider the recommendation of the Staff and Appointments Committee held on 9 March 2023 to appoint Stephen Gerrard as the Council's Monitoring Officer (MO). This recommendation was the subject of the following published report Agenda for Staff and Appointments Committee on Thursday, 9th March, 2023, 2.00 pm - [Agenda for Staff and Appointments Committee on Thursday, 9th March, 2023, 2.00 pm - Northumberland County Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](https://www.moderngov.co.uk/2023/03/09/Agenda-for-Staff-and-Appointments-Committee-on-Thursday-9th-March-2023-2.00-pm-Northumberland-County-Council)

Mr Gerrard's CV is attached as a confidential appendix.

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

(Pages  
37 - 72)

**Council Achievements 2022-23**

To highlight key achievements of the Council in the year 2022-23.

**9. REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

(Pages  
73 - 88)

**Challenge Board Interim Report 2 for the Member Oversight Group**

To consider and respond to the second interim report of the Challenge Board, provided to the Member Oversight Group on the 3rd March 2023.

**10. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF WORKFORCE AND OD**

(Pages  
89 - 114)

**Pay Policy Statement of Northumberland County Council 2023/2024**

The Localism Act 2011 requires the County Council to prepare and publish a Pay Policy Statement. The purpose of such a statement is to articulate the Council's policies towards a range of issues relating to the pay of its workforce, particularly its senior staff and its lowest paid employees.

The Council wishes to ensure that it operates on the principles of equal pay for work of equal value, and also within the various other legislative requirements, including the Equality Act 2010.

The policy statement applies to the 2023-24 financial year. The policy will be reviewed annually and takes into account the statutory guidance on openness and transparency issued by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. (DLUHC.)

**11. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

The 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 item on the agenda as it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A of the 1972 Act, and

(b) That the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure for the following reasons:-

Agenda Item - 12

Paragraph of Part I of Schedule 12A – 1 and 2

Information relating to any individual and information which is likely to reveal the identity of an 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 CHAIR OF THE STAFF AND APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE**

(Pages  
115 -  
118)

1

**Appointment of the Council's Monitoring Officer**

To consider the attached Appendix 1 under Agenda item 7 in Part 1 of this agenda.

**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 22 February 2023 at County Hall, Morpeth at 3.00 pm.

### PRESENT

Councillor B. Flux  
(Business Chair) in the Chair

### MEMBERS

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

### OFFICERS

Binjal, S.	Monitoring Officer
Bradley, N.	Executive Director – Adults, Ageing and Wellbeing
Denyer, L.	Deputy Monitoring Officer

Elsdon, A. Hadfield, K.	Service Director, Finance Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Hunter, P. Kingham, A.	Interim Senior Service Director Executive Director – Children and Young People
Murfin, R.	Interim Executive Director for Planning & Local Services
Paterson, Dr H. Roll, J.	Chief Executive Head of Democratic and Electoral Services
Soderquest, P.	Director of Housing and Public Protection
Taylor, M.	Interim Executive Director Communities and Business Development
Willis, J.	Interim Executive Director of Finance and S151 Officer

One member of the public was present.

## **72. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors Bridgett, Cessford, Darwin, Grimshaw and Simpson.

## **73. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of County Council held on Wednesday 18 January 2023, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record, signed by the Business Chair and sealed with the Common Seal of the Council.

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

The Business Chair welcomed Dr Helen Paterson to her first meeting as Chief Executive and advised members that there would be a two minute silence on Friday to mark the first anniversary of the Ukrainian invasion.

The Leader reported that consultation on Devolution was going very well. A series of meetings were taking place across the County which would build up a full consultation picture. He also welcomed Dr Paterson to her first meeting.

The Business Chair then advised that he would be moving Member Questions (item 6 on the agenda) to the end. This would allow Council more time on the budget papers, which would be dealt with first, before returning to agenda item 8.

## **75. REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

### **Budget Consultation 2023-24**

This report provided a summary of results of the budget consultation undertaken between 6<sup>th</sup> December 2022 and 17<sup>th</sup> January 2023. The budget consultation helped to inform the Council's Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan.

The Leader presented this report. He felt the consultation had gone well. People could not be forced to respond but all members had had the opportunity to get involved. In the Spring he would be discussing with the Chief Executive a policy conference on the corporate plan and the Council's priorities so all members could have a discussion on it. He moved the report, which was seconded by Councillor Wearmouth.

Councillor Dunn felt that 209 responses was poor, and showed that the Council's engagement plan was not working. Presenting the budget at LACs was not engaging with residents as residents would only turn up to those meetings if there was a controversial planning application on the agenda. Other Councils held traditional face to face consultation and she felt more effort should be put into meeting with residents.

The Leader did not agree that the Council could be doing more and the suggestion disregarded the efforts of officers on the consultation. His Administration had done consultation in the last three years and he was aware of only one other consultation which had been undertaken in the last 13 years. He assured members he was trying as hard as he could on this but was always happy to look at other options.

**RESOLVED** that the summary results of the budget consultation undertaken between 6<sup>th</sup> December 2022 and 17<sup>th</sup> January 2023 as well as wider engagement undertaken be noted.

The Chair then advised that he was taking items 9 and 10 together. For ease of reference, officers had consolidated the recommendations from the original report and the update report, and these had been circulated in the Chamber.

## **76. REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER AND PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES**

### **Budget 2023-24 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2023-27 and Update to the Budget 2023-24 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2023-27 Report**

The report provided the Revenue Budget for 2023-24 and Revenue Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2023-27 and the Capital Budget for 2023-24 and Capital MTFP 2023-27, following the Government's Autumn Statement on 17 November 2022, and the publication of the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement on 19 December 2022. The update report updated members with matters relating to the Budget 2023-24 which had arisen

following publication of the report which was presented to the all-Member Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 13 February 2023 and then Cabinet on 14 February 2023.

The Leader thanked all staff throughout the Council for all of their work. The Administration had a big responsibility to do its best for residents and staff and to provide value for money. The budget priorities had been guided by the three key priorities. In the face of rising inflation, this budget had been difficult to manage and he was grateful to the S151 Officer and her staff for their help with this.

The key issue had been to protect frontline services so there would be no cuts in these areas, nor to the leisure centre programme or school building programme, or school support team to build on the improving Ofsted results. The care provided to older people would continue, and the budget contained additional support for this service. He detailed many other areas of support for services and highlighted the £3m pa for the next three years, (if needed) allocated to the strategic change programme which should deliver £17m per year savings on a recurrent basis. Tackling inequalities remained one of the Administration's key priorities and showed how seriously this was being taken with the signing of the Compact and investment overall of £2m to support various initiatives.

The proposed Council Tax rise of around 4% in a time of much higher inflation showed that the Administration was keen to get things working. The hardship fund and council tax support mechanism would help those who most needed it. He moved the report's recommendations, which was seconded by Councillor Wearmouth.

A number of questions were asked which included:-

- Councillor Kennedy asked how much the average Band D property council Tax would rise by. Councillor Wearmouth advised that this was set out on Page 17 of the report and was £87.91.
- Councillor Morphet asked why there was nothing in the capital programme this year for U and C roads. He asked if the proposed cut to the member small schemes programme would be reinstated between now and 2025 and he asked if it was correct that £800,000 was being taken from the EV charger installation budget. The Leader responded that there was already a significant budget in the LTP for U and C roads and two years ago £15m extra had been put into the LTP, followed by £2.5m last year. This meant roads were in a much better condition than they had been for some time, but advice was taken from Highways Area Managers regarding where the priorities were.
- Regarding the members small schemes funding, the situation was that if the pot was not spent, then it rolled over to the following year and at the end of an administration, reverted back to zero if not spent at the end of the four year period. The funding itself was not being removed. Regarding the EV chargers, he suspected the position was the same but would check that.

- Councillor Dale asked if it was correct that taking recommendations 14 and 19 together meant the Council Tax rise was nearer 5% than 4%. She also asked if the adult social care rise increase last year was built into the base budget, and whether the current 4.99% rise would be built into the core budget. Councillor Wearmouth confirmed that the council tax rise and the adult social care precept rolled forward to become part of the tax base. Each year the Government identified the amount by which councils could raise the council tax and adult social care precept. The proposed rises would go into the tax base. However, councillors were also being asked to agree that a 1% discount be apportioned to council tax payers to ease the pressure on incomes so this meant the average rise for a Band D property would be 4%.
- Councillor Hunter sought reassurances that the capital funding for the Berwick partnership would not be affected. The Leader confirmed that it would not.
- Councillor Reid asked where the £350,000 saving in the concessionary travel scheme was coming from. Councillor Riddle advised that this came from an increase in the current charge for purchasing spare seats on buses. Councillor Reid commented that price increases were not the same as efficiencies. Councillor Riddle replied that this was an excess of payment to operators so the saving related to an underspend rather than a cut to service.
- With regard to Appendix 10, the corporate equality impact assessment, Councillor Swinbank sought assurance that the budget would not result in an increase in inequality for women. The Leader felt sure this would have been taken into account in the formulation of the budget. The S151 Officer confirmed it was contained in Appendix 10.
- Councillor Robinson asked for an assurance that in future, members would have a greater role in the formulation of the budget, which would produce a more holistic result. The Leader responded that when there was a level of trust between members which allowed highly confidential information to be shared then he would agree to that. In the meantime, he was content with the current level of dialogue with Group Leaders.
- Councillor Dickinson commented that he had warned about the lack of engagement in the budget setting process at the end of last year and some of this had been outside officer control. Settlements were awaited from Government etc but officers had done their best to create a budget to meet the Administration's priorities. The basic facts of the budget were that people were being asked to pay more and get less. Town and Parish Councils were being asked to pick up the slack and were increasing their precepts to meet this shortfall. He reminded members that there was a cost of living crisis and hard working families were being asked to pay more across the board whilst cutting the services they received. The proposed cut to adult social care worried him greatly as the elderly had suffered a lot as a result of covid and young people were not being invested in either. Regarding equalities measurements, many of the proposals came in at just one point above what shouldn't be done, and this was of great concern. Regarding trust comments, he commented that there had been other discussions between Group Leaders in confidence and felt that the budget could also have been part of that.

- Councillor Kennedy was disappointed with the Leader's remarks on trust. He did not feel there had been a lack of trust between Group Leaders in meetings on other matters where confidences had been maintained. He acknowledged that setting the budget was a very difficult task, but the fact remained that £87.91 was a lot of money. The budget reflected the Administration's priorities and he didn't feel that the other groups had been properly engaged, but accepted that engaging the public could be problematic. Hexham Town Council had been successful in its market stall events and this could be something to consider.
- Councillor Reid referred to the savings which had been identified which had nothing to do with Council efficiencies. The common theme this year seemed to be about various increases rather than reviews, as in previous years. He felt the Administration could have been more proactive and tried to engage all members more at an earlier stage. The budget didn't feel like it belonged to all members. £9m had been taken out of the adult social care budget in three years but 2% had been put onto the adult social care precept. A national solution was needed to the adult social care crisis, it could not be put on the taxpayer. He would like to see a schedule of price increases in future years.
- Councillor Bawn commented that this was a sensible budget which members could not object to. The Administration was entitled to set its own budget. It met the Administration's needs and worked for the County and he urged members to support it. There had been consultation, but people could not be forced to respond.
- Councillor Oliver commented that the Government had put more money into Northumberland than he had ever seen before. This would make a real difference to people's lives and should be acknowledged. He felt it was important to look at the bigger picture. £21m was being spent in adult social care, £17m in children's services and there was a total increase in the budget of £53m. There was a really ambitious capital programme which was investing in communities - £650m in four years. The budget focussed on delivering a strong economy and he commended it to members.
- Councillor Hill commented on her belief in robust, but responsible opposition and felt it was important to be fair and give credit where it was due. The current economic situation could not be ignored and whilst she did not agree with everything in it, it was the only budget on the table. She welcomed the support for Berwick.
- Councillor Dale thanked the staff for their work on the budget. The Caller report has referred to the need for members to work together and there had been a lost opportunity to do this on the budget. The consultation had highlighted residents' wish for more to be spent on local services. In Democratic Services, the members' allowances budget should have been looked at, particularly for planning special responsibility allowances, which could free up resource for frontline services.
- Councillor Renner Thompson commented that his gross budget in Children's Services had increased by 11% thanks to the Government. Schools were being built all over the County and the Government was providing money for family hubs and for the college in Ashington. There

was a lot for Children's Services in the budget and he urged members to support it.

- Councillor Ball agreed that more funding was coming into the County but it was still less per head than many other councils. More people were living in poverty, unable to heat their homes. There were no youth workers any more, only a reactive service when people were at crisis point. Leisure centre opening hours were reducing. She had a number of concerns about the budget.
- Councillor Ezhilchelvan felt this was a common sense and compassionate budget. The increases were below inflation and there were no cuts proposed. He was disappointed that there was no constructive criticism from the opposition and no alternative suggestions. He was also disappointed that there seemed to be no appreciation of the hard work which had gone into producing the budget.
- Councillor Scott expressed her concern about the travel distance in taxis for children with special needs to the new special school in Blyth . She asked how much the Council spent on this and suggested it could be better spent on support in the existing schools.
- Councillor Wallace commented that the budget was doing nothing for the residents of Sleekburn. One of the schools in his area had been told they could not have grass for the pupils to play on because it cost too much. He pointed out that the Northumberland Line was not being fully funded by the Government as the County Council was contributing £30m.
- Councillor Watson commented that Appendix 10 was the duty of the equality impact assessment and in September the Council had pledged to have an inequalities plan which undertook to carry out equality impact assessments and not just reference the duty to do them.
- Councillor Ferguson welcomed the fact that inequalities was now on members' radar. This would take a while to embed but it was wrong to say that the budget had not been looked at through the inequalities lens. The inequalities plan would not be delivered in six months but it was happening.
- Councillor Dunn acknowledged that the budget process had been very difficult for officers this year and she thanked them for that. The budget contained some excellent external funding for various initiatives but this had had little or no impact on her ward. There had been two EV chargers installed recently but residents simply wanted to see improvements to front line services. Many of her residents couldn't afford electric vehicles and just wanted more reliable and affordable public transport, better roads etc. The very basic services that residents should expect from the Council were all increasing in cost. She could not support the main part of the budget, which would directly affect her residents.
- Councillor Swinburn remarked that every member would support an increase in expenditure on front line services and reduction in council tax. Some councils were having to declare themselves bankrupt but this Council was very responsible in how it handled its finances. The Council was subject to the same inflationary pressures as everyone else and this couldn't be ignored.

- Councillor Murphy reminded members that local government expenditure was controlled by national government. It was no accident that the Council didn't have enough money to pay for its services, it was as a result of decisions at national level. She urged the Administration to challenge its Government on the settlement and the way local government was funded and asked about the Administration's plans for income generation.
- Councillor Towns commented that the efficiencies included increased costs to the Council, which had to be passed on. If the opposition gained control of the Council in two years' time, he looked forward to his council tax being reduced and to listening to members defend a budget which would include efficiencies. This was a well considered budget and would be delivered in as fair a way as possible in the current situation.

Councillor Wearmouth responded to some of the points made as follows:-

- There would actually be an increase in adult social care spending of 16%.
- A 1% reduction in council tax was proposed so this would reduce the £87.91 increase.
- There would be a 12.3% increase in Local Services spend.
- £45m was coming from the Government for Ashington College and there was money in the capital programme for Ashwood Business Park.

The Leader then summed up.

The Business Chair referred members to the consolidated recommendations 1-42 circulated in the chamber and called for a named vote. On the recommendations being put to the vote, the votes were cast as follows:-

**FOR:** 32 as follows:

Bawn, D.	Jackson, P.A.
Beynon, J.	Jones, V.
Carr, D.	Mather, M.
Castle, G.	Oliver, N.
Chicken, E.	Pattison, W.
Daley, W.	Ploszaj, W.
Dodd, R.R.	Renner Thompson, G.
Dunbar, C.	Riddle, J.R.
Ezhilchelvan, P.	Sanderson, H.G.H.
Ferguson, D.	Seymour, C.
Flux, B.	Stewart, G.
Hardy, C.	Swinburn, M.
Hill, G.	Thorne, T.N.
Horncastle, C.W.	Towns, D.
Humphrey, C.	Watson, J.
Hutchinson, J.I.	Wearmouth, R.



**AGAINST:** 22 as follows:

Ball, C.	Murphy, M.
Bowman, L.	Nisbet, K.
Cartie, E.	Parry, K.
Clark, T.	Purvis, M.
Dickinson, S.	Richardson, M.
Dunn, L.	Scott, A.
Foster, J.	Taylor, C.
Gallacher, B.	Waddell, H.
Kennedy, D.	Wallace, A.
Lang, J.A.	Watson, A.
Lee, S.	Wilczek, R.

**ABSTENTIONS:** 8 as follows:

Dale, P.A.M.	Reid, J.
Fairless Aitken, S.	Robinson, M.
Hunter, E.I.	Sharp, A.
Morphet, N.	Swinbank, M.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that Council:-

1. Note that the figures contained within the Budget 2023-24 within Appendix 1 are based on the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement of 19 December 2022;
2. Approve the revenue budget for 2023-24 including, the budget balancing target totalling £17.045 million contained within Appendix 1;
3. Note the Revenue MTFP covering the period 2023-27 detailed within Appendix 1 and the requirement to deliver budget balancing measures of £9.564 million in 2024-25, £18.508 million in 2025-26, and £8.954 million in 2026-27;
4. Note the estimated receipt of Revenue Support Grant of £12.430 million for 2023-24 contained within Appendix 1;
5. Note the estimated retained Business Rates and the Top-Up grant funding to be received by the Council for 2023-24 of £94.805 million and £307.453 million over the remaining period of the MTFP contained within Appendix 1;
6. Note the estimated deficit from prior years on Collection Fund Business Rates balances of £1.944 million in 2023-24 contained within Appendix 1;
7. Note the estimated receipt of Rural Services Delivery Grant of £2.745 million for 2023-24 contained within Appendix 1;
8. Note the estimated receipt of the New Homes Bonus of £0.961 million for 2023-24 contained within Appendix 1;
9. Note the estimated receipt of Improved Better Care Funding Grant of £12.496 million for 2023-24 contained within Appendix 1;
10. Note the estimated receipt of Social Care grant funding of £22.056 million for 2023-24 contained within Appendix 1;
11. Note the estimated receipt of Adult Social Care Discharge Grant funding of £1.752 million in 2023-24 and £2.920 million in 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1;

12. Note the estimated receipt of Adult Social Care Market Sustainability and Improvement grant funding of £3.563 million in 2023-24 and £5.357 million in 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1;
13. Note the estimated receipt of the Services Grant of £2.787 million in 2023-24 contained within Appendix 1;
14. Approve a 2.99% increase in Council Tax for 2023-24, noting that this is in line with the Government's assumptions regarding the Council's Core Spending Power: and, within the Government's referendum limit of 3.00%;
15. Note that the MTFP 2023-27 includes a 2.99% annual increase in Council Tax for 2024-25 and then 1.99% thereafter for the remaining years of the MTFP and, that an estimate of annual tax base growth has been included;
16. Note the non-collection rate for Council Tax purposes remains at 1.00% for 2023-24 (1.00% in 2022-23);
17. Note the estimated surplus of £2.737 million from prior years on the Collection Fund Council Tax balance for 2023-24 contained within Appendix 1;
18. Note the estimated receipt of Council Tax Support funding of £0.654 million in 2023-24 and note the intended use of the grant contained within Appendix 1;
19. Approve a 2.00% increase in Council Tax for 2023-24 for use on Adult Social Care services; raising an additional £4.530 million to support the Budget 2023-24, and note the assumed increase included in the MTFP of 2.00% for 2024-25 and zero thereafter;
20. Approve the Reserves Policy for 2023-24 detailed in Appendix 2;
21. Note the Schedule of Reserves and Provisions contained within Appendix 3;
22. Approve:

The net contributions from the Strategic Management Reserve of £12.739 million in 2023-24 and note the proposed contributions from reserves of £15.792 million in 2024-25, £6.335 million in 2025-26 and the proposed contribution to reserves of £1.032 million in 2026-27 contained within Appendix 1, comprising:

- a) non-recurrent pressures of £5.898 million for 2023-24, and note the non-recurrent pressures totalling £4.528 million in 2024-25; £0.935 million in 2025-26 and £0.159 million in 2026-27 (as detailed within Appendix 8; excluding the Adult Social Care Discharge Fund, Adult Social Care Market and Sustainability and Improvement Fund, Locality Coordinators, Council Tax Support Fund and Transformation Programme),
- b) the Active Northumberland Management fee of up to £1.000 million in 2023-24,
- c) delayed receipt of investment income from the airport of £0.957 million in 2023-24; and that interest of £0.161 million in 2024-25, and £1.191 million in 2025-26 and 2026-27 will be repaid into the reserve in this respect,
- d) revenue contribution to capital (RCCO) of £8.171 million in 2024-25 and £6.591 million in 2025-26 for investment in the Schools' Development Programme, and,
- e) contribution from the reserve of £4.884 million in 2023-24 and note the subsequent proposed use of £3.254 million in 2024-25 in order to balance the budget;

23. Approve the use of the Public Health Revenue Grant Reserve of £0.199 million in 2023-24 and note the contribution for 2024-25, to fund five fixed term Locality Coordinator posts contained within Appendix 1;
24. Note the proposed use of the General Fund Reserve of £7.850 million in 2024-25, to be set aside as a voluntary Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) to enable the Council to repay debt at an appropriate time in the future contained within Appendix 1;
25. Approve the use of the Council Transformation Fund Reserve of £3.000 million in 2023-24 and note the use of £3.000 million from this reserve in financial year 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1;
26. Approve the use of the Collection Fund Smoothing Reserve of £1.944 million in 2023-24, to part fund the 2022-23 forecast deficit of the Business Rates element of the Collection Fund, and prior year deficit on Business Rates contained within Appendix 1;
27. Note:
  - a) the Schedule of Service Specific Grants of £250.400 million contained within Appendix 4, and
  - b) the indicative 2023-24 Public Health Grant allocation of £17.366 million contained within Appendix 4, and its proposed usage.
28. Approve the Inflation Schedule for 2023-24 totalling £28.900 million detailed in Appendix 5;
29. Approve the Recurrent Growth and Pressures Schedules of £16.694 million and the additional revenue costs associated with the Capital Programme of £6.164 million for 2023-24; and note the growth and pressures of £2.422 million in 2024-25; £1.773 million in 2025-26; and, £0.392 million in 2026-27 and the additional revenue costs associated with the capital programme of £14.075 million in 2024-25; £10.098 million in 2025-26; and £6.000 million in 2026-27 included within Appendices 1, 6 and 7;
30. Approve the Non-Recurrent Pressures of £15.066 million for 2023-24 and note the non-recurrent pressures of £16.004 million for 2024-25; £0.935 million for 2025-26 and £0.159 million for 2026-27 included within Appendix 8;
31. Approve the Non-Recurrent Income of £0.157 million for 2023-24 and note the non-recurrent income of £5.601 million for 2024-25; £0.252 million for 2025-26 and £0.221 million for 2026-27 included within Appendix 8;
32. Approve the identified budget balancing measures contained within Appendix 9 of £17.045 million for 2023-24; and note those budget balancing measures totalling £10.295 million already identified for 2024-25 to 2025-26;
33. Note the Corporate Equality Impact Assessment at Appendix 10;
34. Note the Budgets by Service Area 2023-24 detailed in Appendix 11;
35. Note the receipt of Dedicated Schools Grant of £160.287 million in 2023-24; and note the revised allocation of £150.832 million for 2022-23. This is following the conversion of three schools to academy status during 2022-23;
36. Approve the Capital Strategy 2023-24 to 2026-27 contained within Appendix 12;
37. Approve the revised Capital Programme as detailed within Appendix 13 and note the reduction in the Capital Programme 2023-27 of £37.599 million detailed in Appendix 14;

38. Approve the delegation of the detail of the final Local Transport Programme and any subsequent in-year amendments to the Executive Director responsible for Local Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Local Services;
39. Approve the delegation of the detail of the capital allocation for highways maintenance investment in U and C roads and footpaths to the Executive Director responsible for Local Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Local Services;
40. Approve the Prudential Indicators based on the proposed Capital Programme detailed within Appendix 15;
41. Approve the Annual Minimum Revenue Provision Policy detailed in Appendix 16; and
42. Approve the Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2023-24 detailed in Appendix 17.

The Business Chair then adjourned the meeting at 5.04 pm and reconvened it at 5.18 pm.

## **77. REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER AND PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES**

### **Council Tax 2023-24**

The report provided Council Members with the financial information to enable the Council to calculate and set the Council Tax for 2023-24.

Councillor Wearmouth moved the recommendations, which was seconded by Councillor Jackson. On the recommendations being put to the vote there voted **FOR**: 29 as follows:-

Bawn, D.	Jones, V.
Beynon, J.	Mather, M.
Carr, D.	Oliver, N.
Castle, G.	Pattison, W.
Chicken, E.	Ploszaj, W.
Dodd, R.R.	Renner Thompson, G.
Ezhilchelvan, P.	Riddle, J.
Ferguson, D.	Sanderson, H.G.H.
Flux, B.	Seymour, C.
Hardy, C.	Stewart, G.
Hill, G.	Thorne, T.N.
Horncastle, C.W.	Towns, D.
Humphrey, C.	Watson, J.
Hutchinson, J.I.	Wearmouth, R.
Jackson, P.A.	

**AGAINST**: 20 as follows:

Ball, C.	Murphy, M.
Bowman, L.	Nisbet, K.
Cartie, E.	Purvis, M.
Clark, T.	Richardson, M.

Dickinson, S.	Scott, A.
Dunn, L.	Taylor, C.
Foster, J.	Waddell, H.
Kennedy, D.	Wallace, A.
Lang, J.A.	Watson, A.
Lee, S.	Wilczek, R.

**ABSTENTIONS:** 8 as follows:

Dale, P.A.M.	Reid, J.
Fairless Aitken, S.	Robinson, M.
Hunter, E.I.	Sharp, A.
Morphet, N.	Swinbank, M.

**1. County Council RESOLVED**

a. That the Council Tax Requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2023-24 (excluding Parish Precepts) is £218,689,232;

b. That the following amounts be calculated for 2023-24 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Act:

i. Being the aggregate amount of gross expenditure which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31 A (2) of the Act taking into account all precepts issued to it by parish councils: £858,904,271.

ii. Being the aggregate of the gross income which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31 A (3) of the Act: £629,921,180.

iii. Being the amount by which the aggregate at (b) i) above exceeds the aggregate at (b) ii) above, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 31 A (4) of the Act as its Council Tax requirement for the year. (Item R in the formula in Section 31B of the Act) (including Parish Precepts): £228,983,091.

iv. Being the amount at (b) iii) above (Item R), all divided by Item T, above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act as the basic amount of its Council Tax at Band D for the year (including Parish Precepts): £2,078.79.

v. Being the aggregate amount of all special items referred to in Section 34 (1) of the Act (total all Parish Precepts): £10,297,521.

vi. Being the amount at (b) iv) above less the result given by dividing the amount at (b) v) above by Item T, above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34 (2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax at Band D for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no Parish Precept relates: £1,985.30;

c. That the Council Tax for 2023-24, excluding the Police Precept, will be increased by 4.99% (including the Adult Social Care Precept of 2.00%), equating to a charge per Band D household of £1,985.30 (excluding Special Expenses). For other bands different proportions will apply. For example, Band A properties will be charged 6/9 (two thirds) of a Band D property and Band H properties will be charged 18/9 (double) of a Band D property.

The relevant valuation bands are as follows:

Valuation Band	Northumberland Adult Social Care County Council £ : p	Precept £ : p	Total £ : p
A	1,147.33	176.20	1,323.53
B	1,338.56	205.57	1,544.13
C	1,529.78	234.93	1,764.71
D	1,721.00	264.30	1,985.30
E	2,103.44	323.03	2,426.47
F	2,485.89	381.77	2,867.66
G	2,868.33	440.50	3,308.83
H	3,442.00	528.60	3,970.60

d. Under Section 52ZB of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 that the Council's basic amount of Council Tax for 2023-24 is not excessive in accordance with principles approved under Section 52ZC(1) of the Act (i.e. the proposed Council Tax increase for 2023-24 means that the Council does not need to hold a referendum on its proposed Council Tax. The regulations set out in Section 52ZC of the Act requires all billing authorities (Council and precept authorities (i.e. Fire and Police authorities)) to hold a referendum on their proposed level of basic Council Tax each year if they exceed government guidelines which are set out annually. For 2023-24 the guideline increase for Northumberland is 5.00% (including the Adult Social Care Precept).

As the Council is proposing a Council Tax increase of 4.99% (including Adult Social Care Precept and Special Expenses) for 2023-24 then the above regulations have no impact for 2023-24.

2. **County Council APPROVED:**

a. That the matters listed in section 3 (c) of this report are identified as Special Expenses and that all other matters which might otherwise be considered to be Special Expenses under the prevailing legislation are deemed to be General Expenses;

b. That the Council Tax Leaflet continues to be made available via the Council's website, rather than enclosed with Council Tax bills, and that the final document is delegated to and finalised by the Section 151 Officer;

3. **County Council NOTED:**

a. The Police and Crime Commissioner has agreed the recommended level of precept of £18,598,114 for 2023-24. This represents an increase of 9.75%, equating to an additional £15.00 on a Band D property; the resulting valuation bands will be as follows:

Valuation Band	Northumbria Police Authority £: p
A	112.56
B	131.32

C	150.08
D	168.84
E	206.36
F	243.88
G	281.40
H	337.68

b. The Aggregate of Council Tax requirements, including that of Northumbria Police Authority, the Council's own requirement and that for Adult Social Care purposes (excluding Parish Precepts), are as follows:

Valuation Band	Northumberland County Council	Adult Social Care Precept	Northumbria Police Authority	Total
	£ : p	£ : p	£ : p	£ : p
A	1,147.33	176.20	112.56	1,436.09
B	1,338.56	205.57	131.32	1,675.45
C	1,529.78	234.93	150.08	1,914.79
D	1,721.00	264.30	168.84	2,154.14
E	2,103.44	323.03	206.36	2,632.83
F	2,485.89	381.77	243.88	3,111.54
G	2,868.33	440.50	281.40	3,590.23
H	3,442.00	528.60	337.68	4,308.28

c. The total amount of Parish Precepts requested is £10,293,859 and is detailed in Appendix 1. This represents an increase of £424,290 when compared to 2022-23;

d. Kielder Parish Council has not yet set its precept. The Parish Clerk has indicated that this should be done at the parish meeting on 13 February 2023. However, the Clerk has verbally indicated that the precept will most likely be set at £5,000. If the precept changes a report updating the position will be tabled at the County Council meeting on 22 February 2023;

e. Special expenses of £3,662 are applied to North Sunderland Parish only in relation to play area inspection and maintenance. This has increased from £3,351 in 2022-23.

#### 4. **County Council NOTED**

a. The basic Council Tax valuation bands are shown in paragraph 3 (b).

b. The detailed Council Tax calculations are set out in Appendices 2 and 3. Analysis of the Council Tax by parish is provided at Appendix 2 excluding Northumbria Police Precept. Appendix 3 shows the total Council Tax charge by parish (including the Council only element and Adult Social Care Precept, Northumbria Police Precept, Special Expenses and Parish Precepts).

**78. REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER AND PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES**

**Revenues and Benefits Policies for 2023-24**

The report updated Members on the policies governing the administration of Revenues and Benefits and sought approval for the updates and amendments highlighted.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Wearmouth and seconded by Councillor Reid.

Councillor Morphet asked about the second homes council tax premium applying to properties which were let in a furnished state between tenants. Some landlords relied on the income from their second homes which they used exclusively for rental purposes and would struggle to pay 200% council tax when they were struggling to find a tenant. He asked if the premium would disadvantage landlords like those.

Councillor Swinbank asked, in relation to this, whether an impact assessment would be done to determine whether the aim of reducing the shift in emphasis from principal residences to second homes had been achieved in the longer term.

Councillor Wearmouth responded that this depended on what was meant by impact but this was a valid question. It could be measured through council tax collection figures and he agreed that it would be sensible to understand the impact more generally.

In response to Councillor Morphet's question on second homes, the S151 Officer advised that by definition, there was no residence, so this would not apply to properties which had been let. Furnished lets for periods between tenants did come under this definition but the guidance was not very clear on this point so the detail in the Bill would need to be checked.

Councillor Hunter asked if there would be financial support available to areas where there were a high number of second homes which had suffered as a result of this. Councillor Wearmouth said this could be looked at, but it would depend on what income came in.

Other queries were raised by members on the second homes premium and the definition of second homes which could not be answered at this stage until the Bill was issued. Members were generally supportive of it.

Councillor Kennedy asked whether the income could be ring fenced for a specific purpose rather than it just being put into the general fund. Councillor Wearmouth responded that this was a debate to be had for a future budget.

On the recommendations being put to the vote by show of hands, the votes were cast as FOR: a substantial majority; AGAINST: 2; ABSTENTIONS:0.



**RESOLVED** that:-

- (a) the Revenues and Benefits Policies attached as Appendix 1 to Appendix 9 be approved;
- (b) Council approve (subject to the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Bill receiving Royal Assent by 31 March 2023) implementing the 100% Empty Homes premium after one year from 1 April 2024; and
- (c) Council approve (subject to the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Bill receiving Royal Assent by 31 March 2023) implementing a 100% premium for second homes to increase the council tax charge to 200% from 1 April 2024.

**79. REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER AND PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES**

**Council Tax Discretionary Discount and Council Tax Support Hardship Schemes 2023-24**

The report proposed that Members implement:

- a) a one-off discount equivalent to a 1.00% reduction in Band D council tax (Northumberland County Council element of council tax only) for households that do not receive Council Tax Support (subject to a number of exclusions shown at paragraph 4.9). The discount will be equivalent to £17.21 in 2023-24 and will be applied to council tax bills once all other discounts have been applied.
- b) a Council Tax Support Hardship Scheme for 2023-24 where a reduction of up to £175 will be made to council tax bills for all working age Council Tax Support claimants; and those pensionable age Council Tax Support claimants that do not receive 100.00% Council Tax Support, once all other discounts have been applied.
- c) These reductions to the council tax bills will be made in order to alleviate financial hardship and cushion the impact of the Government's recommended 2.99% council tax increase.
- d) The discount and hardship payments will be funded from the surplus remaining in the Collection Fund Smoothing Reserve which the Council was required to set aside as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is proposed that a reserve entitled Council Tax Support Hardship and Discretionary Discount Schemes Reserve is created to cover the cost of these schemes.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Wearmouth and seconded by the Leader.

A number of questions and comments were made including:-

- Councillor Robinson asked if residents would have to claim or would the discounts be applied automatically. Members were informed that both discounts would be automatic.
- Councillor Morphet asked about the transfer of £6.6m into a dedicated reserve to cover the three expenses identified. The S151 Officer replied that she was estimating what the cost would be at the moment but the proposal was to transfer the whole of the balance into a separate reserve to fund the schemes. If there was money left in the reserve at the end of the year, that would be for Council to decide how it should be used.
- Councillor Dickinson welcomed any support scheme for residents and to help those most in need.
- Councillor Reid remarked he would have preferred a plan for an alternative use of this funding rather than it being used to discount council tax bills.
- Councillor Hill supported the proposals and suggested that it would be helpful to see details of what town and parish councils spent their precept on, as there were cases where the majority of it went on staffing and administration.

On the recommendations being put to the vote by show of hands, the votes were cast as FOR: a substantial majority; AGAINST: 2; ABSTENTIONS:0.

## **80. REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER AND PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES**

### **Budget 2023-24 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2023-27 for the Housing Revenue Account**

The report sought Council approval for the updated Budget 2023-24, Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2023-27 and 30-year Business plan for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Wearmouth and were seconded by Councillor Watson and Councillor Wearmouth detailed the key points.

Councillor Dickinson asked, of the 70% of residents who received council rent benefit, was that 100% of their rent, or was it 70% up to the cap, and did the rise of 7% take many people up to the cap position. The Head of Housing advised that those receiving benefits would either be getting 100% now or partial contribution to the rent so the rental increase would still qualify for additional benefits so there would be no adverse impact on those residents. Regarding the 30% of tenants who did not have housing benefit or universal credit, they may be impacted by virtue of them moving up to those benefit areas. At this point in time, he could not provide a definitive answer. The granular detail of residents' income was not held within the Authority but the uptake of the hardship fund would be monitored.

Councillor Reid commented he could not support a 7% rise when the Government had told local authorities to reduce rents by 1% and he did not agree that tenants should pay for a mistake the Government had made. He queried the Deputy Leader's introductory comments on the report that the affordable homes target could not be met if the rents were not raised and felt this was wrong.

Councillor Horncastle reported that there would be some in depth training for members on affordable housing as it was a complex subject.

Councillor Hill reiterated the need for more social housing.

On the recommendations being put to the vote there voted FOR: 30;  
AGAINST: 20; ABSTENTIONS: 2.

**RESOLVED** that:-

- (a) Council approve the Housing Revenue Account 2023-24 budget as detailed within Appendix 1, which will reduce the balance on the HRA reserve from £29.809 million at 31 March 2023, to £29.121 million at 31 March 2024; and note the indicative budgets to 2026-27 which will reduce the balance of the HRA reserve to £9.294 million;
- (b) Council note that from 1 April 2023, due to current rises in inflation, the government has imposed a rent cap on social housing rent increases of 7.0%, moving away for one year from the previously agreed Rent Standard of consumer price index (CPI) +1.0% (11.1%). The budget detailed in Appendix 1 assumes that rents will rise by the revised Government capped rate of 7.0%, with recoverable service charges rising by CPI 10.10% plus 1.0% for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024;
- (c) Council approve the increase of 7.0% for Housing rents from 1 April 2023;
- (d) Council approve the increase of 11.1% for Housing Service Charges from 1 April 2023;
- (e) Council approve the Non-Recurrent Growth item Hardship fund of £0.350 million for 2023-24 to support NCC tenants who may, due to their income, not be eligible to receive any financial assistance through existing benefits (Housing Benefit/Universal Credit/Discretionary Housing Payment) (detailed in point 9 &16);
- (f) Council note the indicative 30-year Housing Revenue Account business plan as detailed within Appendix 1;
- (g) Council approve the estimated pay inflationary increase for 2023-24 of 4.0% totalling £0.418 million (detailed in point 15);

- (h) Council approve the Non-Pay Inflation Schedule for 2023-24 totaling £0.738 million (detailed in point 15);
- (i) Council approve the Recurrent Growth as follows:
  - a. Housing Disrepair of £0.250 million for 2023-24 to cover costs of housing disrepair mitigation/resolution (detailed in point 16).
  - b. Additional staffing budget of £0.424 million for 2023-24 (detailed in point 16);
- (j) Council approve the Recurrent Saving in relation to the Introduction of phased Service Charges for Sheltered Housing tenants, with estimated additional income of £0.100 million in 2024-25 (50.0%), £0.155 million in 2025-26 (75.0%) and £0.212 million 2026-27 (100.0%) (detailed in point 17); and
- (k) Council note that £45.017 million has been set aside over the 4-year period 2023-24 to 2026-27 in the HRA Capital programme to invest in Affordable Housing. Details are set out in Appendix 1.

## **81. REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER AND PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES**

### **Political Proportionality**

Council was asked to determine the political proportionality of the registered political groups on the council and to allocate seats on committees in accordance with that proportionality in accordance with the provisions of Sections 15 and 16 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

Councillor Wearmouth moved the report's recommendations which was seconded by Councillor Reid.

### **RESOLVED** that:-

- (a) Council note that following the notification by the Independent Group Leader of changes to the number in the Independent group, the total number of councillors in each political group on the County Council was now Conservative 33, Labour 20, Independent 7, Liberal Democrat 4, Green 2 and 1 un-grouped member;
- (b) Council confirm that the political proportionality of the Groups was as follows: Conservative 49.25%, Labour 29.85%, Independent 10.45%, Liberal Democrat 5.97%, Green 2.99% and un-grouped 1.49%;
- (c) Council agree to continue to use the method for determining allocations to Committees as agreed by Full Council at its meeting of 30 March 2022;

- (d) Council approve the provisions of Appendix 1 which set out the proportional allocation of places on committees in accordance with the proportionality approved above;
- (e) Council agree the allocation of seats to Northumberland County principal/decision making Committees set out in Appendix 2 to the report;
- (f) Council agree allocations to advisory/non-decision-making committees set out in Appendix 3 to this report; and
- (g) Council agree that Group Leaders will appoint members to fill the committee places allocated to their respective Groups and agree that Group Leaders will provide a finalised list of members for each committee (in line with their respective allocations) to the Monitoring Officer to fill the allocated positions.

## **82. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND INTERIM HEAD OF HR/OD**

### **Approval of Voluntary Redundancy Requests**

The report asked Council to receive and consider the report and the recommendations of the Staff and Appointments Committee in respect of approving two voluntary redundancies. The Staff and Appointments Committee met on 20 February 2023 and due to the timings it was not possible to include their recommendations in advance of deadlines for papers to be submitted. The report outlining their recommendations had been circulated to all members in the Chamber (copy attached to the sealed minutes).

The report's recommendations were moved by the Leader and seconded by Councillor Watson.

**RESOLVED** that Council approve the recommendation from the Staff and Appointments Committee held on 20 February 2023 to grant the voluntary redundancy requests of:

- (a) the Director of Housing and Public Protection, Mr Philip Soderquest; and
- (b) the Revenues and Benefits Manager, Mr Graeme Barnes.

## **83. REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER AND PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES**

### **Delegated Decision - Capital investment for Schools Broadband service improvement**

The report informed Council of a delegated decision made by the Council's s151 Officer and Executive Director of Finance under the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules.

**RESOLVED** that the delegated decision be noted.

**84. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR OF COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Council was requested to appoint a Chair of Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee in place of Councillor Reid.

Councillor Nick Oliver was nominated by the Leader and seconded by Councillor J. Watson.

**RESOLVED** that Councillor Oliver be elected Chair of the Communities and Place OSC

**85. REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

**Appointment of the Preferred Candidate for the Position of Executive Director of Transformation & Resources and S151 Officer**

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) Regulations 2001, matters relating to the appointment of a Section 151 Officer are reserved to the Full Council. The report asked members to consider the recommendation of the Staff and Appointments Committee held on 30 January 2023 to appoint Jan Willis to the role of Executive Director – Transformation & Resources and Section 151 Officer (S151).

The Leader proposed the report's recommendations, which was seconded by Councillor Oliver.

**RESOLVED** that

- (a) Council approve the recommendations from the Staff and Appointments Committee held on 30th January 2023 to permanently appoint Jan Willis to the role of Executive Director – Transformation & Resources and Section 151 Officer;
- (b) Council note that the Staff and Appointments Committee has agreed that the remuneration for the post of Executive Director – Transformation & Resources and Section 151 Officer will be at £162,285 per annum with access to staff benefits in line with all Council employees; and
- (c) Council note the appointment will be subject to the Council's standard pre-employment checks.

## 86. MEMBER QUESTIONS

### **Question 1 from Councillor Purvis to the Leader**

Given the challenges in Adult Social Care and Northumberland residents feeding back it was the one of the most concerned areas for them, could the Leader clarify how he plans to make millions of pounds worth of cuts without affecting care?

### **Response from Councillor Pattison**

Through this Budget, we are significantly increasing the budget for Adult Social Care by 16% (from £111m to £129m (net)) because the Council is committed to tackling inequalities and helping people most in need. That delivers on what residents told us in the Budget consultation. None of the proposals would lead to people being denied care which they have been assessed as needing. In fact, the budget proposes many positive things such as continuing the scheme we introduced last year to pay the Real Living Wage to care services workers because the Council is committed to good-quality jobs.

The main saving included in the adult social care budget is based on continuing the programme in which a specialist team reviews existing individual care plans to ensure that the risks to people with complex needs are being managed in a way which doesn't restrict their independence any more than is necessary. This is not about reducing the volume of services to individual clients where that service is required to meet their assessed needs. However, it does lead to better value for money in the use of resources in Adult Services.

Councillor Purvis referred to the £1.1m efficiency in vacant posts. This was a significant figure and demonstrated the problems in recruiting and retaining staff. He asked what more could be done to attract staff like care assistants and social workers, such as increasing the hourly wage rate. Councillor Pattison noted these concerns.

### **Question 2 from Councillor Nisbet to the Leader**

Does the Leader of Council realise how much a Council House rent increase of 7% will affect the most vulnerable in Northumberland's Communities?

### **Response from Councillor Horncastle**

Having good-quality Council Homes for rent is a vital part of delivering on the Council's tackling inequalities priority. That means we are committed to maintaining existing services to tenants, carrying out essential maintenance, meeting regulatory obligations as well as building new, affordable homes. And, to do all that we have to increase rents. We are not alone in this, for example Newcastle City Council have increased rents by 7% for their tenants, and Karbon Homes have also just announced a 7% increase in their rents.

However, just over 70% of our tenants are in receipt of benefits which will increase to offset the proposed increase in rent. They will also be able to claim Discretionary Housing Payments should they experience financial

difficulties. And, for those tenants who don't receive any benefits and may experience difficulties paying rent as a result of this increase, we are proposing a hardship fund of £350,000.

Alongside this, the Housing Operations team will continue to provide support and advice on welfare benefits and debt to help tenants manage their finances. During this financial year alone, the Team have helped secure an additional £449k including securing water discounts and maximising housing benefits for tenants.

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

Can he tell Council whether the cut to children's services will impact SEN provision?

### **Response from Councillor Renner Thompson**

The budget will impact positively on SEN provision and indeed, this is a key part of this Council's commitment to tackling inequalities. And, it's important to highlight this Budget increases Children's Services funding. Gross expenditure is increasing from £239.379 million to £256.787 million (an increase of £17.408 million). High needs funding had increased by 54% since 2010.

He then detailed a number of other support measures.

Children's Services overall is funded from multiple budgets and this proposal will make better use of those existing funding pots, aligning them to fund SEN services and posts. It will also make better use of digital platforms which will give greater reach into schools. These changes do not impact negatively upon SEN.

Councillor Scott asked the Cabinet Member to include the children of Prudhoe in the next plans for building special needs schools. Councillor Renner Thompson responded that this was covered by the SEND place planning strategy. Of the 330 pupils in the west of the county with these needs, 240 were educated in the west area and it was recognised that this was an issue. There was a large piece of work ongoing on special educational needs transport. If the numbers in any one part of the county supported the need for a stand alone school, that is what he would commit to do.

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

Can the Leader tell us over the last year how much money has been spent on external legal costs?

### **Response from Councillor Wearmouth**

The total legal fees for the previous 3 financial years has been provided as a comparator and is as follows: -

20/21 circa £700k - (£712,073.51)

21/22 circa £800k - (£812,177.80)

22/23 circa £800k - (£816,115.90)



External legal fees are considered to be those relating to either the instruction of external legal firms or Counsel (including KC's, formerly QC's). External legal spend fluctuates each financial year depending on the complexity of matters. In the past the Council has instructed to cover large scale projects such as the Northumberland Line, complex adult and children's social care matters, complex governance and employment matters and planning matters. As the Council works through the matters highlighted in the Caller review and moves back to business as usual, embedding the 'best ways of working ' it is envisaged the external legal spend will reduce in time.

Councillor Murphy suggested that it would be better to develop the required expertise in house which would ensure that consistent advice was there when needed. Councillor Wearmouth responded that the in house legal team was very good but each area of law had its specialism and sometimes very specific support was needed from outside. Whenever things could be done in house, then they were.

#### **Question 5 from Councillor Ball to the Leader**

A large part of County Hall is currently stood empty, with no signs of redevelopment work, and from what I can see it is being used for old furniture storage, this will have a cost implication for the running of the overall site. We proposed small incubator business opportunities in 2021 to utilise the space to support startups and local businesses. What is the leader's vision and plan for this wasted, unloved section of this building?

#### **Response from the Leader**

As well as what has been delivered so far, we have committed £3.1m in the Capital Programme to re-purpose Blocks 5 and 6. He commended the work which had been done on the refurbishment of county hall and appropriate measures had been put into place to ensure that the unused part of the building was kept safe for the moment.

Councillor Ball responded that office space was a premium in this area and she urged the Administration to be forward thinking and look at what could be done with this excellent business opportunity.

The Leader responded that proper consideration was being given to the most appropriate use of this space and part of the work of the strategic change programme would be to look at the Council's assets. He urged members to be patient and reiterated that £3m in funding had been allocated to repurpose that part of the building in the next year or so.

#### **Question 6 from Councillor Wallace to the Leader**

How many Council Houses does the Leader plan to build with this budget given the 2017 election pledges have not been met?

#### **Response from the Leader**

Through this Budget, we have ringfenced £45m which will deliver 400 new, affordable homes for rent. I would also highlight we have recently obtained planning permission for 12 Dementia-friendly bungalows in Blyth which is

great news and supports independent living. Planning permission has just recently been granted for a further scheme to build nine affordable bungalows at New Hartley.

1,657 affordable homes had been delivered in the past six years and he committed to maintaining this level of progress through the rest of this Administration.

Councillor Wallace welcomed this figure and asked when his ward was going to get some. The Leader undertook to provide Councillor Wallace with a written answer.

#### **Question 7 from Councillor Wilczek to the Leader**

Town and Parish Councils are already picking up services to deliver tidy communities for residents, what areas of the local services does he think will be affected by the cuts he proposes?

#### **Response from Councillor Riddle**

The County Council is not proposing any cuts to grounds maintenance and street cleansing services across the county. Indeed, we have agreed service standards that ensure high quality local environments are maintained in our towns, villages and public spaces. We are also investing over £25m in our fleet over the next four years.

Through consultation, our residents have told us local services are very important to them and this Budget reflects what is most important to residents.

The County Council already works closely in partnership with Town and Parish Councils. We visit Parish Councils on a much more frequent basis, and my officers regularly attend training and support sessions, helpfully coordinated by NALC. At these sessions we listen, as well as inform, and I am pleased that closer working seems to be far more the norm now.

As there are no proposed changes to the core standards of service delivery for grounds maintenance and street cleansing, the well-established arrangements between the Council and towns and parishes remain unaffected by our Budget proposals.

#### **Question 8 from Councillor Dunn to the Leader**

Over recent years we have seen an increase in HMOs throughout the whole of the county, many of which house the more vulnerable in our society – homeless persons, asylum seekers, those in need of rehabilitation to achieve independent living. Often they are situated in residential areas and spring up in local communities without any warning. The Caller Report made several references to elected members not being given information they are entitled to. Does the Leader agree with me therefore that, if out of nothing more than courtesy and respect, elected members and Parish Councillors (bearing in mind that our recently refreshed Charter does state that this council “will engage with Town & Parish Councils on all issues that are likely to affect their

area”) should be informed of matters like these which without a doubt impact the residents they represent?

### **Response from Councillor Horncastle**

Local Members and Parish Councillors are already engaged in the development of HMOs because, in all but a limited number of cases, before an HMO can be licensed it must receive planning permission. The planning process provides for consistent consultation with members, parish councillors and the public. Notifying members of other potential HMOs does present some challenges, especially when they are established through existing permitted development rights, but Officers will work with the Member to explore what options are available to do this whilst avoiding undue, additional demands on staff. Finally, the Council is required to keep a public register of all licensed HMOs which is available to view all now on the Council's website. He acknowledged there had been some problems in Blyth recently which he was happy to discuss with Councillor Dunn.

Councillor Dunn responded that Blyth was not her area but Councillor Horncastle's explanation did not mirror her experience. Lack of information could cause immense aggravation and worry when neighbours discovered what was happening. She asked what the Council's expectations were of the companies who set up HMOs, where were they found and how did the Council ensure that everyone could co-exist in a safe, managed environment. She asked if the Leader could commit to a policy change to better inform members so they could adequately support both existing and new residents.

Councillor Horncastle responded that he could not commit to a policy change now, but he was happy to discuss specific problems with Councillor Dunn. The Leader suggested that a policy conference on housing could be a good idea in light of the points being made.

### **Question 9 from Councillor A. Watson to the Leader**

Where is the inequality impact assessment on this year's budget, given the inequalities plan aims for everything the council does to be viewed through an inequalities lens?

### **Response from the Leader**

An Equality Impact Assessment had been duly completed for the budget. The Administration had demonstrated its commitment to equalities and members were going through specific areas of the budget to find a tool by which an inequalities impact assessment could be done at the same time as an equalities impact assessment. He stressed that work was underway.

Councillor Watson recognised that a long term plan was in place but the commitment to move from one plan to the other was this year. In appendix 10 in the current equality impact assessment, it stipulated that any budget proposals which needed further equality impact assessment would be considered. She therefore asked that those budget proposals be prioritised for inequality impact assessments, and that this be carried out for next year's budget as other Councils had done. The Leader responded that the ambition

was to create an integrated impact assessment which would look at equalities, inequalities and climate change to be in place for next year.

**Question 10 from Councillor Wilczek to the Leader**

Given the news about the firm Tolent being in financial difficulty, what assurances to us and communities can he provide about any work being carried out by them in Bedlington and the wider Council area?

**Response from Councillor Ploszaj**

Following the administration of Tolent Construction, Advance Northumberland have been working to secure and make safe the construction site and are now meeting with all of the Tolent supply chain who were engaged on the Project in order to establish the cost of completing the project and required timescales. Following receipt of costs and the required due diligence and approval process we aim to restart Phase 1 works (Greggs Unit) by the end of March 2023 with Phase 1 completion in June 2023. This will enable Greggs to 'fit out' their new unit and open during summer 2023.

In parallel to the above Phase 2 will be retendered with a view to starting work as soon as possible in summer 2023. In the meantime, we are keeping local Members briefed and will continue to do so.

Councillor Wilczek asked how much it was costing the County Council and Advance to provide support. Councillor Ploszaj replied that this was still being established. Councillor Wilczek asked that members be informed about this, which the Business Chair agreed.

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

### **COUNCIL**

**22<sup>nd</sup> March 2023**

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#### **Appointment of the Council's Monitoring Officer.**

Report of the Chair of the Staff and Appointments Committee.

Lead officer – the Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service.

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#### **Purpose of the Report**

Section 5 of the Local Government & Housing Act 1989 requires the Council to designate one of its Officers as Monitoring Officer. In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) Regulations 2000, matters relating to the appointment of a Monitoring Officer are reserved to the Full Council.

The purpose of this report is to consider the recommendation of the Staff and Appointments Committee held on 9 March 2023 to appoint Stephen Gerrard as the Council's Monitoring Officer (MO).

This recommendation was the subject of the following published report [Agenda for Staff and Appointments Committee on Thursday, 9th March, 2023, 2.00 pm - Northumberland County Council \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#)

Mr Gerrard's CV is attached as a confidential appendix.

## **Recommendations**

It is recommended that Full Council:

1. Accept the recommendation from the Staff and Appointments Committee to appoint Stephen Gerrard as the Council's Monitoring Officer for a fixed period of two years.
2. To note that the effective date of commencement of employment is to be confirmed following all the necessary pre-employment checks. The commencement date has been provisionally agreed as 5 June 2023.

## **Council is requested to note the following:**

1. On the 9<sup>th</sup> March 2023, Staff and Appointments Committee resolved to appoint Stephen Gerrard as the Director of Corporate Law and Governance.
2. The Committee further resolved that he should receive staff benefits in line with the Council's pay and staff benefits policy and remuneration of £140,000 per annum which is a spot salary at the top of pay band 17 (inclusive of the 2023/24 pay award). This cost excludes employer's national insurance and employer's pension contributions. To clarify, the remuneration is for both the role of Director of Corporate Law and Governance and the Monitoring Officer.

## **Links to the Corporate Plan**

This report is relevant to all areas of the Corporate Plan as it relates to ensuring that the Council is compliant with the constitution and fulfilling its legal duties and requirements to ensure that there is an effective and fit for purpose staffing establishment.

## **Key Issues**

1. The Council engaged Suki Binjal on an interim basis to act as the Monitoring Officer in late 2021.
2. On 15th December 2022, Staff and Appointments Committee agreed the appointment process for the recruitment of a permanent team of Executive Directors including a Monitoring Officer. The report contained a Director of Corporate Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer job description, the salary range, recruitment process and selection methodology.

3. On 27th January 2023, a selection process took place that identified a preferred candidate. A conditional job offer was made to this candidate but was subsequently declined. At the meeting of the Staff and Appointments Committee on 30 January 2023, it was noted that consideration would be given to how this post could be filled in the future.
4. During the early part of February 2023, the Council's recruitment partner (Penna) commenced a further market search in respect of an appropriately experienced Monitoring Officer. This confirmed that the availability of good quality and experienced candidates is extremely limited and as such the Council needed to act quickly and decisively to secure the resource required.
5. It also became evident that events of the recent past have adversely affected the ability of the Council to attract interest from candidates within existing substantive positions in other local authorities.
6. Nevertheless, Penna did identify two candidates from within the interim and fixed term market for consideration. Following a shortlisting exercise and a technical assessment, a suitably experienced and strong candidate (who was known also to be available when required) met informally with the Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service), Executive Director of Finance (section 151) and the current interim Director of Law & Governance (MO). The conclusion of the statutory officers was that the candidate was high quality and keen to join the Council as soon as practicable.
7. Accordingly, two further informal meetings were convened. The first was held on 23 February 2023 and comprised the Leader, relevant Portfolio Holder (who is also the Deputy Leader) and Chief Executive. The Leader and Portfolio Holder/Deputy Leader supported an appointment of the candidate and recommended he meet informally with the other Group leaders.
8. The Leaders of the Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green parties met the candidate on 24 February 2023 (the Leader of the Independent Group was invited but was unable to attend). They similarly concluded that the candidate should be offered the position and that that this should be considered by the Staff and Appointments Committee as soon as possible, given the competition for securing such resource.
9. Staff and Appointments Committee considered the preferred candidate on 9th March 2023 and resolved subject to there being no objection from the Leader or Cabinet to the appointment, to recommend to full Council that Stephen Gerrard be appointed as the Council's Monitoring Officer for a fixed period of two years.

10. The appointment will be subject to the Council's standard pre-employment checks. The commencement date has been provisionally agreed as 5 June 2023.
11. Stephen Gerrard was given a conditional offer of appointment on 28th February 2023, subject to the recommendation of Staff and Appointments Committee and subsequent Council approval. He has indicated he would accept the appointment, should a formal offer of appointment be made.
12. The Officer Appointment Rules have been followed as per the Constitution of the Council. Under the Constitution the proper officer designated for this purpose is the Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service. No objections to the appointment have been made by the Leader or Cabinet.



**Implications:**

<b>Policy</b>	Oversight of HR Policies and Procedure
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	A fixed term appointment is deemed to be appropriate as it is a statutory requirement that the Council has a Monitoring Officer in situ and this will offer better value for money than the current interim arrangement. The cost of the appointment will be met from the Council's revenue budget.
<b>Legal</b>	<p>Section 5 of the Local Government &amp; Housing Act 1989 requires the Council to designate one of its Officers as Monitoring Officer.</p> <p>In Autumn 2022, a top tier (tiers 1 &amp; 2) management structure review agreed that the Director of Corporate Governance and Law will be designated as the Council's Monitoring Officer.</p> <p>Staff and Appointments Committee (StAC), discharges the Council's functions of the employer in relation to Chief and Deputy Chief Officers.</p> <p>Chief Officers is defined as the Head of Paid Service, the Monitoring Officer and any officer as defined in S2 (1) (b) (c) and (d) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.</p> <p>StAC also determines the terms and conditions relating to employees of the Council including the remuneration and terms of employment for the Head of Paid Service and Chief and Deputy Chief Officers.</p> <p>However, the appointment and designation of the Monitoring Officer is a matter reserved to full Council.</p> <p>All other legal implications have been addressed within the body of this report.</p>
<b>Procurement</b>	Agreed via the procurement process to commission Penna PLC to support the recruitment and assessment process.
<b>Human Resources</b>	The appointment has been made in line with the appropriate employment recruitment processes and market conditions. Relevant legal implications have been set out in the body of this report.
<b>Property</b>	N/A

<b>Equalities</b> (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A X	The recruitment for this process has been in line with best practice in relation to promoting equality and diversity within the Council's recruitment processes.
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	Consistent with the Independent Corporate Governance Review (Caller Report)
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	There are no crime and disorder implications within this report.
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	There are no specific customer consideration implications within this report.
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	There are no carbon reduction implications within this report.
<b>Health and Wellbeing</b>	The recommendations will support the health and wellbeing of Council Employees at varying levels within the organisation
<b>Wards</b>	The recommendations do not relate to any particular ward but cover the whole of Northumberland.

### **Background information**

N/A

### **Linked Reports.**

15 December 2022 Staff and Appointments Committee report prepared by the Interim Director of HR/OD - providing further details of the proposed recruitment process.

30th January 2023 Staff and Appointments Committee report prepared by the Interim Director of HR/OD - providing details of preferred candidates.

9<sup>th</sup> March 2023 Staff and Appointments Committee report prepared by HR Consultant - providing details of the preferred identified candidate.

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Confidential and exempt – Mr Gerrard's CV

**Report sign off.**

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

	<b>Full Name of Officer</b>
Monitoring Officer / Interim Director of Governance	Suki Binjal
Executive Director – Transformation & Resources (S151)	Jan Willis
Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service	Helen Paterson
Portfolio Holder(s)	Staff & Appointments Committee

**Authors and Contact Details**

Helen Paterson – Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service

Steve Crosland– HR Consultant

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## Northumberland County Council

COMMITTEE: COUNCIL

DATE: 22 MARCH 2023

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Council Achievements 2022-23

**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 highlight key achievements of the Council in the year 2022-23.

### **Recommendations**

**It is recommended that Council:**

1. Note the achievements of the Council in the year 2022-23.

### **Link to Corporate Plan**

This report links to all three Council priorities.

### **Key issues**

- It is important for Members to consider key progress and achievements against the Council's priorities, alongside the Council's performance reporting.
- Commencing with this Report, it is proposed to bring a 'Council Achievements Report' in March every year. This will be followed by an annual performance report after quarter four of the performance cycle.

### **Background**

1. Starting in September last year, Officers have worked with Members to refresh the Council's Corporate Plan. This included a Policy Conference focused on the Corporate Plan, held in January 2023. Further engagement with Members on the Plan is planned for the coming months.
2. The refreshed Corporate Plan will set the overall strategic direction for the Council, setting the context for service planning, appraisal and capital investment. Therefore, it's important for Members and Officers to understand Council delivery and performance in the context of the Corporate Plan priorities. This helps Members to

track progress against the Council's priorities and informs debate on resources, action-planning and policy development.

- Appendix 1 of this Report outlines the key achievements. These are set out against eight Cabinet Portfolios and cross-referenced against the Council's three priorities of Tackling Inequalities; Delivering Economic Growth; and Achieving Value for Money. These achievements are summarised below.

## **Summary of key achievements**

### **4. Tackling Inequalities**

- Following the adoption of the Tackling Inequalities Plan by Full Council in September last year, the Inequalities Plan has now been signed by key partners across the County and beyond.
- In June 2022, around 200 community groups received funding from the Council's £70k Queen's Platinum Jubilee fund which was launched to help communities celebrate the Jubilee.
- Continuing to support the refugees who have fled their homeland as a result of the war in Ukraine. Currently the county has 160 hosts supporting 460 refugees.
- In February this year, County Council approved a budget focused on protecting frontline services, investing in the future and looking after the most vulnerable. The average Council Tax increase residents will pay next year is 3.6%.
- Continuing the Council Tax Support unchanged for the next year - with the Council's scheme still one of the most generous in the region at a maximum level of 92%.
- The Council issued 126,835 payments of £150 under the Government's Energy Rebate Payment scheme and some 25,475 payments totalling £0.651 million were issued under the Council's own Discretionary Energy Rebate scheme.
- The Council has processed and funded 18,242 Hardship payments of up to £175 (£2.063 million in total) to reduce Council Tax liability in 2023-24 for those eligible.
- The Council has processed and funded 124,635 payments of £17.21 (£2.145 million in total) for households, not in receipt of Council Tax support, and not an empty property or a second home to reduce their Council Tax liability for 2023-24.
- Last year, the Council commenced a new food waste recycling trial, with thousands of homes taking part. As the Council continues its drive to becoming carbon neutral by 2030, the new pilot scheme involves collecting the weekly food waste from around 4,500 households across four areas within the County.
- There are currently 11 Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIP) projects active in Northumberland. Some projects will start their construction phase during 2023 while some others are under early preliminary design stages.
- In September last year, Ofsted Inspectors praised Northumberland's Children's Services for their work to provide young people with safe and secure long-term care. This followed the last full inspection in 2020, when Ofsted rated Children's Services at as "good" across the board.
- Work is underway on the Gilbert Ward Academy in Blyth, a new, special free school for Northumberland.

- The Council has already approved a multi-million investment in the Coquet Partnership of schools, including a new building for James Calvert Spence College (JCSC).
- In December last year, planning permission was granted for a new school that is set to transform education for young people in Seaton Valley for generations to come.
- Following extensive consultation, a £40m project will see Astley Community High School and Whytrig Middle School rebuilt on a new shared campus to create a state-of-the-art learning environment for over 1,000 students
- In March this year, the vast majority of Northumberland pupils moving up to middle and secondary schools in September received offers for their first-choice school (95.45%).
- A record 89.6% of schools are rated good or outstanding. This is above national average for school performance and represents the best performance ever for the County.
- The Council secured additional Government funding to help give children in Northumberland the best start in life after the Council was recognised as a “trailblazer” in the development of Family Hubs.
- At a time when many councils are closing sports & leisure facilities, the Council has in the past year continued to invest in modern facilities and leisure services that meet the changing demands of residents and visitors to the County including in Berwick, Newbiggin and Morpeth.
- Last year, some eleven Northumberland parks were awarded prestigious Green Flag Awards by environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy, which recognises them as some of the very best in the country.
- Improvements in libraries across the County have started with new looks at Bedlington, Ashington and Newbiggin which will be rolled out across Northumberland.
- As part of the Big Northumberland Gear Change over 8,200 people visited our Bike Festival in Blyth.
- The Council has used a range of approaches to help create more affordable housing in areas of identified housing need. The Council has allocated £45m which will be used over the next five years to create some 400 affordable homes.
- In February this year major works to tackle historical pollution on the coast at Lynemouth received all the necessary planning and regulatory consents, meaning the scheme can get underway later this year.
- In April last year, the Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) was recognised by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) as fully discharging all recommendations made in its report published in 2021.
- With partners, the Council has helped create a network of over 150 warm, safe spaces where residents can enjoy a hot drink, have conversations with others or join in activities.
- The Council distributed The Government's Household Support Fund (HSF) to those who need to help with food, energy and water and other essential household costs.
- Families continued to receive vouchers during the school holidays towards food, energy and other essential costs.

- Delivering a £1.35m three-year programme of works to improve the standard of all of the 54 public toilets in the county.
- Since April 2022, the Council has been offering all the organisations it commissions to provide Adult Social Care services additional funding in return for a commitment to pay care workers the Real Living Wage.
- Two social workers from Northumberland were shortlisted for the Social Worker of the Year Awards 2022.
- Northumberland County Council's Joint Equipment Loans Service has installed a state-of-the-art industrial cleaning machine which enables independent living equipment to be recycled and reused, and will also contribute to the Council's climate goals.
- Planning permission has been granted for 13 Dementia friendly affordable bungalows which will be built at Lyndon Walk in Blyth as part of Northumberland County Council's overall commitment to increase the availability of housing to meet the needs of all residents.
- The Council procured a long-term contract to provide 25 x faster connections across its corporate sites, 262 km of new fibre in the ground and helps address digital exclusion, by providing access to ultra-fast broadband to over 120,000 properties.

#### **4. Delivering Economic Growth**

- Main construction work has now started on the Northumberland Line rail scheme, with six new stations granted planning approval. This follows the closure of passenger services some sixty years ago. The line's construction work alone has created almost 100 high-skilled jobs and apprenticeships.
- In March this year the Council awarded Commsworld, the UK's largest independent network provider, a 20-year contract worth £22m. The contract is forecast to attract £114m of private investment into the region to transform and support the County's digital infrastructure.
- The Council has continued to work with businesses and partners to facilitate the building of a gigafactory at Blyth which will secure thousands of high-quality jobs. The recent acquisition of *British Volt* by *Recharge Industries* has now been concluded.
- In a significant milestone for the Borderlands Growth Deal, the Ad Gefrin Distillery in Wooler is on track to open to the public in March. Attracting thousands of visitors and providing good-quality local jobs, Ad Gefrin will bring a boost to the local economy.
- In October last year, the Council's Cabinet approved a new programme to help reinvigorate Ashington town centre. The Ashington High Street Innovation Programme which will see a range of projects delivered in the Town over the coming months, worth over £2.3m.
- In February this year, the Council has welcomed Government's announcement on investment to level up Blyth by upgrading housing, tackling health inequalities, improving access to local jobs and cutting crime. This includes an £18 million boost which will repurpose run-down and empty homes into high-quality affordable housing to rent and convert under-occupied offices into new apartments. There will also be £1.5 million to fund new high-tech training equipment at the tTown's Energy Central



Campus, providing local young people with a route to high-quality jobs on their doorstep.

- This additional investment will support the Town's transition to a leading clean energy port. Since 2019, the Council has secured Government investment in Blyth of over £56 million.
- The Government announcement for Blyth follows the Council's Cabinet approving, in December, over £1million extra funding to support a scheme to restore and revitalise Hexham's historic Town Centre.
- Work started in February to make way for a new state-of-the-art-learning facility, the Energy Central Learning Hub at the Port of Blyth. The new 2,396 sqm hub is phase one of Energy Central Campus and will build upon the success of the existing industrial training cluster in Blyth.
- As part of the ongoing commitment to the NCC apprenticeship programme the council has recruited 66 apprentices in the last 12 months. And, the Council has attracted over 200 attendees to apprenticeships events. Engagement in NCC campaigns has reached 300,000+ impressions with over 10,000 engagements.
- Last year also marked the completion of the Bates Clean Energy Terminal, where the Council was accountable body, working in partnership with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and Port of Blyth.
- We also saw in the past year the completion of the new dock at Cambois by Advance which facilitated the arrival of *JDR Cables*. The Council and the LEP joined to invest in the scheme which otherwise would have seen the site left empty and unused.
- In February this year, Members were informed of the Northumberland Stewardship and Rural Growth Investment Plan supported by the North of Tyne Combined Authority. The £9 million funding secured from NTCA for Northumberland will be used to provide help across Northumberland including targeting the most difficult to reach parts of the County.
- Since the Great Northumberland Forest was announced in 2019, over 700 hectares of woodland creation and 240,000 trees have been planted.
- In July 2022, the Council launched a pilot of electric vehicle (EV) chargepoints as part of our ongoing commitment to make electric vehicles more accessible. On-street chargepoints were installed at seven locations across the county including in Ashington, Felton, Berwick, Alnwick, Haltwhistle, Corbridge and Bellingham.
- The Council has continued work to develop district heating networks which could utilise mine water from the former Bates Colliery as a heat source to provide low carbon heat to commercial and domestic properties around Blyth.
- The commencement of the County Hall Solar Car Port is a significant investment in renewable energy for the Council and one of the largest of its kind in the UK.
- The Council has continued its free tree scheme with 15,000 being made available during the Winter months. This hugely popular scheme encourages residents to get directly involved in achieving Northumberland's target to become carbon neutral by 2030.

- In June last year, a new pilot boat for the Port of Berwick was delivered after the Council's Cabinet approved a £60,000 grant from its Strategic Regeneration Budget to the Berwick Harbour Commission for a replacement boat.

## **5. Achieving Value for Money**

- In February this year the Council welcomed its new Chief Executive, Dr Helen Paterson.
- The new Chief Executive taking up her new post comes alongside the appointment of a new top team of Executive Directors to deliver on the Council's priorities.
- The Council's Staff and Appointments Committee have agreed a new Monitoring Officer and this recommendation will go forward to the March meeting of County Council.
- The Council remains on target to deliver on schedule, its actions and initiatives in the Improvement Action Plan. This includes work to deliver a modern, fit-for-purpose constitution, refresh of the Corporate Plan and Member Development Plans.
- The introduction of 'Policy Conferences' in the past year has helped foster wider Member involvement in Council policy development.
- In October last year, Council's Cabinet agreed a revised Charter to support working between towns, parishes and the County Council.
- In January this year, the Leader of Council led three successful Town and Parish Council conferences to listen to the views of local councillors on what works well and areas and issues most in need of improvement.
- The Council has continued to hold large "drop-in sessions for the public through our Town Forums, demonstrating a listening and engaging Council.
- The Council has supported a Member-led review of Local Area Council working. This review is nearing completion and will be reported to Full Council in the coming months.
- Phase 1 of the Council's Strategic Change Programme began in July 2022. This will deliver sustainable savings and service improvements across the Council in the coming years.
- In May last year, the Council's Cabinet agreed to replace equipment at the Council's existing winter service weather stations and at the same time create four new weather forecasting sites at a total cost of £400,000.
- The Council has continued to invest in car parking across the County, encouraging local residents to 'shop local' and sustain their local economies. Key schemes delivered include: new car parking for Amble; Morpeth and in Hexham
- A £23m Local transport Plan capital programme has been delivered focusing on maintenance of roads and bridges and improvements to the highway network. An additional £2.5m investment has been made in the Council's U and C roads using additional Council capital investment, with over 30 individual lengths of U and C roads resurfaced.

- In October last year, the Council purchased a 'JCB Pothole Pro' following a successful trial last year of the rapid road repairer. The machine will help maintain some of the county's 3,000+ miles of road.
- Earlier in the year, the Council unveiled its new fleet of cleaner and greener road cleaning machines. The four new state-of-the-art vehicles, which cost a total of £740,000, are more efficient with the latest engines, and advanced gully and drain cleaning technology.

### Next Steps

6. Achievements against the Corporate Plan priorities will be reported to Council in March each year.

### 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 contains no direct financial implications, delivery of the Council's achievements has financial implications set out in the Council's Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan and other reports to the Council's Cabinet and Full Council.
<b>Legal</b>	Whilst this report contains no immediate legal implications, delivery of the Council's achievements may have legal implications. Any legal implications arising from the delivery of specific actions are set out in past reports and / or will be brought forward in future reports.
<b>Procurement</b>	N/A
<b>Human Resources</b>	Links to the appraisal and performance frameworks.
<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:**

Corporate Plan 2021-24

**Report sign off.**

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





	Full Name of Officer
Acting Chief Executive	Audrey Kingham
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Suki Binjal
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Jan Willis
Relevant Executive Director	-
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Glen Sanderson


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## APPENDIX 1

### NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL CORPORATE PLAN KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2022-23

<p><b>Leader of Council</b></p>	
<p><b>Embedding a new ‘top team’ to take forward the Council’s ambitions</b></p>	
<p>In February this year, the Council was delighted to welcome its new Chief Executive, Dr Helen Paterson. Formerly Chief Executive at Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council, Helen brings a wealth of local government experience to the role – including as an Executive Director at Sunderland City Council and Chief Executive of Wrexham County Borough Council. The new Chief Executive taking up her new post comes alongside the appointment of a new top team of Executive Directors to deliver on the Council’s priorities. Importantly, the Council’s Staff and Appointments Committee have agreed a new Monitoring Officer and this recommendation will go forward to the March meeting of County Council.</p>	
<p><b>Improving the Council</b></p>	
<p>The Council remains on target to deliver, on schedule, all of the actions and initiatives in our Improvement Action Plan. This includes work to deliver a modern, fit-for-purpose constitution, refresh of the Corporate Plan and Member Development Plans. Also, the introduction of ‘Policy Conferences’ in the past year has helped foster wider Member involvement in Council policy-development.</p>	
<p><b>Working in partnership in the region</b></p>	
<p>In the past year the Council has continued to play its full part in the North of Tyne Combined Authority, ensuring residents, communities and businesses in Northumberland benefit from devolved funding. Most recently, in February this year, Members were informed of the Northumberland Stewardship and Rural Growth Investment Plan supported by the North of Tyne Combined Authority. The £9 million funding secured from NTCA for Northumberland will be used to provide help across Northumberland, including targeting the most difficult to reach parts of the County. The money will be used in a range of ways such as skills training for small businesses.</p> <p>In December last year, Government announced a “minded to” devolution deal with the seven councils across the North East</p>	  

<p>(Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland, South Tyneside and Sunderland Councils).</p> <p>The expanded deal which the Council has helped to secure will see a significant shift of powers, funding and responsibility which will enable the Councils to pursue their ambitions for inclusive growth. In total, it will provide £4.2 billion of additional investment to the region over 30 years, including a £1.4bn investment fund alongside significant funding for transport, education and skills, housing and regeneration.</p> <p>As this deal has been developed, the Leader of Council ensured the interests of the County have been well reflected and that the County Council will have significant responsibilities within the new Combined Authority. The Leader also played a key role in ensuring the Devolution Deal brings significant and improved funding to the region.</p>	
<p><b>Ensuring the Council helps to shape national policy and representing our communities interest nationally</b></p>	
<p>Responding to the challenges many of the County’s farming communities face, the Leader of Council commissioned an independent report into the future of farming. The aim of this is to help shape farming policy nationally and, ultimately, to sustain this vital sector for future generations. In February this year, the Council’s Cabinet received the report, written by experts from the sector. Following this, the Leader of Council has written to the Secretary of State inviting her to visit Northumberland to discuss how we respond to the findings of our future of farming report.</p> <p>Last year, the Council made representations on Government proposals which could have had a detrimental impact on fishing communities in the County. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) had been considering whether to designate Holy Island a <i>Highly Protected Marine Area</i> (HPMA), meaning a ban on fishing in the waters off the island. In March this year, the Council welcomed news that Government plans for a fishing ban off Holy Island had been dropped. The Council is pleased to have played a part to support local communities to ensure their voices were heard by DEFRA on this matter.</p> <p>Indeed, across a range of important policy areas, the Council has ensured regular and positive engagement with Government. Most recently, the Council has facilitated visits to the County by the Transport and Levelling Up Secretaries, helping secure significant Government investment for Northumberland’s communities.</p>	 <p>The right-hand column of the table contains three vertically stacked icons. The top icon is yellow and features a scale of justice, with the text 'Tackling Inequalities' and 'People' below it. The middle icon is green and features a hand holding a plant, with the text 'Driving Economic Growth' and 'Place' below it. The bottom icon is blue and features a building with columns, with the text 'Achieving Value for Money' and 'Council' below it.</p>

**Supporting the County’s residents to mark national events and celebrate heritage**

In June 2022, around 200 community groups received funding from the Council’s £70k Queen’s Platinum Jubilee fund which was launched to help communities mark the Jubilee. A spectacular Platinum Jubilee beacon lighting ceremony was held on Hadrian’s Wall and screened live on national TV. It was one of over 2,000 beacons lit across the UK and the Commonwealth. Northumberland communities celebrated the historic occasion of the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee as towns and villages became a blaze of red, white and blue, with street parties, parades, Church services, tree planting schemes and much more with schools, businesses and communities all getting involved.

Sadly, September saw the death of our Monarch, with communities across the County coming together to mark the passing of the Queen with respect and solemnity. Following consultation with communities on the most fitting ways to commemorate Queen Elizabeth II, the Council has made available additional budget for a number of park enhancements spread across the County, including: Eastwood Park in Prudhoe; Carlisle Park, Morpeth; Valley Park, Cramlington; Cleasewell Hill Park; and, Warkworth Beach.

As we look forward to the Coronation of our new King in May, Over 120 community groups have applied for King’s Coronation Community Grants to celebrate this historical event.



The Council has also worked with partners to celebrate 1900 years of Hadrian’s Wall, ensuring this World Heritage Site continues to attract and inspire current and future generations from across the region and the wider world.



In addition, the restoration of the 202-year-old Union Chain Bridge, the oldest vehicle suspension bridge in the world still open to traffic, is nearing completion. The famous structure connecting England and Scotland has been rebuilt piece by piece over the past two years involving an award-winning partnership approach between Northumberland County Council, Scottish Borders Council, Museums Northumberland and charity The Friends of Union Chain Bridge.



**Strengthening partnership working on tackling inequalities**

Following adoption of the Tackling Inequalities Plan by County Council in September last year, the Inequalities Plan has now been signed by key partners across the County and beyond, demonstrating the commitment by all partners. The Plan outlines key goals that can be delivered at scale over the coming years to level off and start to reduce the gap in healthy life expectancy.



Partner's demonstrating their commitment include:




- Children's and Adults Safeguarding Board;
- Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust;
- Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust;
- Healthwatch;
- Local Medical Council;
- Newcastle upon Tyne NHS Foundation Trust;
- NHS England;
- North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board;
- North of Tyne Local Pharmaceutical Committee;
- Northumberland County Council;
- Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service;
- Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust;
- Northumbria Police;
- Voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations.


This Tackling Inequalities Plan is so significant because it goes far beyond mere words and commits Council resources, services and projects to making a difference to communities. It is also builds on in-depth collaboration with partners and communities.













Delivering on the Council's Climate Action Plan	
<p>Since the Great Northumberland Forest was announced in 2019, over 700 hectares of woodland creation and 240,000 trees have been planted. These have been delivered through Forestry Commission Grants, Forestry England delivery, Countryside Stewardship, Green Recovery and private financed schemes. Equally, the pipeline for future woodland creation is also looking healthy with over 800ha planned for this season and approx. 3,000ha awaiting agreement via the Woodland Creation Planning Grant (WCPG) application process.</p>	 <p>Tackling Inequalities People</p> <p>Driving Economic Growth Place</p>
<p>In July 2022, the Council launched a pilot of on-street electric vehicle (EV) chargepoints as part of our ongoing commitment to make electric vehicles more accessible. On-street chargepoints were installed at seven locations across the county including in Ashington, Felton, Berwick, Alnwick, Haltwhistle, Corbridge and Bellingham. These supplement the Council's existing network of 114 EV chargers located mainly in town centre and other public car parks.</p> <p>These chargepoints represented the council's first move towards 'on-street' kerbside EV charging and a further 75 of these charging points are now being rolled out in other areas in the county, with further phases planned for the next 2 years with funding support from Government, so that those homeowners who don't have their own driveways on which to charge an EV have access to EV charging infrastructure. This is a key element of the council's Climate Change Action Plan which aims to have 30% of cars in the county electric by 2030. The Council has continued work to develop district heating networks which will utilise mine water from the former Bates Colliery as a heat source to provide low carbon heat to commercial and domestic properties around Blyth.</p> <p>The commencement of the County Hall Solar Car Port is a significant investment in renewable energy for the Council and one of the largest of its kind in the UK.</p> <p>The Council has continued its free tree scheme with 15,000 saplings up for being distributed for planting during the Winter months. This hugely popular scheme encourages residents to get directly involved in achieving Northumberland's target to become carbon neutral by 2030.</p>	 <p>Tackling Inequalities People</p> <p>Driving Economic Growth Place</p> <p>Achieving Value for Money Council</p>



<p><b>Playing our part internationally</b></p>	
<p>Working with residents and partners, the Council continues to support the refugees who have fled their homeland as a result of the war in Ukraine. Currently the County has 160 hosts providing a safe and much needed home for 460 refugees, of whom 177 are children.</p> <p>As the war continues, more Ukranian refugees could be arriving in the county over coming months. Another 97 visas have been issued - giving them permission to come to Northumberland if they wish – and an additional 41 have been confirmed.</p> <p>Earlier last year, Firefighters from Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service made a series of trips across Europe to help their colleagues in Ukraine. This included delivering fire appliances, together with an incident response unit and a 4x4 paramedic unit donated by the International Fire &amp; Rescue Association to help Ukraine's emergency services.</p>	
<p><b>Strengthening local decision-making and listening to communities</b></p>	
<p>In October last year, Council’s Cabinet agreed a revised Charter to support working between towns, parishes and the County Council. In January, the Leader of Council led three successful Town and Parish Council conferences to listen to the views of local councillors on what works well and areas and issues most in need of improvement. And, the Council has continued to hold large “drop in sessions for the public through Town Forums, underlining the Council’s commitment to listening and engaging.</p>	
<p>Alongside this, the Council has supported a Member-led review of Local Area Council working. This review is nearing completion and will be reported to County Council in the coming months.</p>	



<p><b>Deputy Leader and Corporate Services</b></p>	
<p><b>Agreeing an ambitious Budget for the County Council</b></p>	
<p>In February this year, County Council approved a budget focused on protecting frontline services, investing in the future and looking after the most vulnerable.</p> <p>Among the priorities agreed for the year ahead are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protecting and maintaining key frontline services;</li> <li>• Looking after the most vulnerable and supporting everyone with cost-of-living issues;</li> <li>• Continuing work to re-open the Northumberland Line;</li> <li>• Delivering new school builds and ongoing education improvements; and,</li> <li>• Investing in leisure centres, open spaces and town-centre regeneration.</li> </ul> <p>The Budget contains an ambitious £223 million capital programme for 2023-24, including £92 million to improve and regenerate towns and communities across the County, over £19 million for housing, £31 million for schools and £35 million for road and path repairs and flood prevention schemes.</p> <p>Reflecting what residents said was most important, the Council significantly increased the budget for Adult Social Care by 16% (from £111m to £129m (net)) as well as Children’s Services funding - net budget increasing from £67.194 million to £74.889 million (an increase of 11%).</p> <p>The average Council Tax increase residents will pay next year is 3.6%.</p> <p>It had already been agreed to keep Council Tax Support unchanged for the next year - with the Council’s scheme still one of the most generous in the region at a maximum level of 92%. Pensioners will continue to be eligible up to a maximum of 100% of their Council Tax liability. The cost of the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2022-23 is forecast to be £25.8 million</p> <p>A number of other new hardship payments are also being introduced for both Council Tax Support claimants and Council Housing tenants for the coming year.</p> <p>Savings of £17 million were agreed for the coming year, although these will not be at the expense of frontline services. These savings will be achieved by doing things differently, transforming the way the Council delivers its services and being more efficient, year-on-year.</p>	 <p>The image shows three strategic pillars stacked vertically. The top pillar is yellow and features a scales of justice icon, with the text 'Tackling Inequalities' and 'People' below it. The middle pillar is green and features a hand holding a plant icon, with the text 'Driving Economic Growth' and 'Place' below it. The bottom pillar is dark blue and features a building icon, with the text 'Achieving Value for Money' and 'Council' below it.</p>

<p><b>Investing in efficient, new systems to support customers</b></p>	
<p>The Council procured a contract with a communications provider to deliver significant improvements to school broadband connectivity. Through providing an SLA to a community of schools in the county, the Council is able to provide full fibre connectivity to over 110 schools at an affordable rate.</p> <p>Wide Area Network (WAN) - The Council procured a long term (20 year) contract that will provide 25 x faster connections across its corporate sites, 262 km of new fibre in the ground and helps address digital exclusion, by providing access to ultra-fast broadband to over 120,000 properties.</p> <p>The Council replaced its aging telephony systems with modern, digital Teams based telephony. This helped address cyber security risks and significantly reduced energy usage by an estimated 350,000 kw per year.</p> <p>The Council moved its old contact centre systems to the cloud-based, digital, Amazon Connect platform, helping it to provide a more reliable, resilient and scalable platform to manage surges in call volumes.</p> <p>The Council connected 639 rural premises to fibre to the premises (FTTP) using Rural Gigabit Voucher funding of £1.071 million (average of £1,675 subsidy per premise). 237 rural premises also benefited from Borderlands top-up voucher funding, totalling £0.476 million.</p>	 <p>Tackling Inequalities People</p> <p>Driving Economic Growth Place</p> <p>Achieving Value for Money Council</p>
<p><b>Distributing grants to support residents</b></p>	
<p>The Council issued 126,835 payments of £150 under the Government’s Energy Rebate Payment scheme to those households living in Band A to D council tax properties.</p> <p>In addition, 25,475 payments totalling £0.651 million were issued under the Council’s own Discretionary Energy Rebate scheme to assist certain households not covered by the national scheme and to top up the most vulnerable households. Payments were made as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• £20 top up to 24,861 households in Council Tax bands A to D in receipt of council tax support</li> <li>• £170 to 360 households in Council Tax bands E to H</li> <li>• £400 to 219 households classified as off the main electricity grid</li> </ul>	 <p>Tackling Inequalities People</p>




<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>£150 to households in receipt of a Class U Council Tax exemption where the recipients are classed as having a severe mental impairment</li> </ul> <p>The Council has processed 18,387 Government Hardship Scheme payments of up to £25 (£0.458 million in total) to the Council Tax accounts of eligible claimants to reduce their liability for 2023-24.</p> <p>The Council has processed and funded 18,242 Hardship payments of up to £175 (£2.063 million in total) to eligible Council Tax support claimants.</p> <p>The Council has processed and funded 124,635 payments of £17.21 (£2.145 million in total) to households, not in receipt of Council Tax support, and not an empty property or a second home to reduce their Council Tax liability for 2023-24.</p>	
<p><b>Supporting small, local businesses</b></p>	
<p>The Council designed and supported a new e-procurement platform (OPEN) that will transform how businesses find and bid for contract opportunities. The Council has engaged suppliers in the development and supported them to register free of charge.</p> <p>The Council has introduced a supplier incentive programme and embedded early payment facilities into its contracts to strengthen prompt payment to small and local suppliers and unlock additional efficiencies.</p>	 
<p><b>Delivering modern, efficient and fit-for-purpose services</b></p>	
<p>The Council's Strategic Change Programme has set out to redesign the way the Council delivers local public services within the context of the ongoing challenges. Phase 1 of the Council's Strategic Change Programme began in July 2022. This included key discovery and opportunity assessment activities, including data and information collection and analysis, multiple engagement workshops with key stakeholders and service experts.</p> <p>A draft Business Case was developed and reviewed by key internal stakeholders through multiple sessions and agreed by the Council's Cabinet in January this year. This sets out a proposed programme of improvement projects. These will deliver sustainable savings and service improvements across the Council in the coming years.</p>	

<b>Local Services</b>	
<b>Helping to tackle food waste</b>	
<p>Last year, the Council commenced a new food waste recycling trial, with thousands of homes taking part. As the Council continues its drive to becoming carbon neutral by 2030, the new pilot scheme involves collecting the weekly food waste from around 4,500 households across four areas within the County.</p> <p>The trial will help the Council assess the financial, environmental and operational impacts of providing a recycling collection service for food waste, to help inform plans for the expansion of the service across the rest of the county. The first collections have now taken place and have got off to a good start with staff reporting over 4,500 kilograms of food waste being collected in the first week. Once collected, food waste is recycled at an anaerobic digestion plant. The contents are processed to generate renewable energy and make a natural fertiliser for growing crops.</p>	 
<b>Investing in cycling and walking</b>	
<p>In October last year, the Council's Cabinet agreed plans for new cycling and walking routes for three areas in Northumberland. The development of high-quality Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure routes for Ponteland-Callerton and in Ashington and Blyth will create stronger and greener links for commuting and within towns for work, education and leisure purposes. The work in Blyth will tie in with the pedestrian and cyclist improvements made to the Waterloo Road / Renwick Road junction which was completed in June 2022.</p> <p>There are currently 11 LCWIP projects active in Northumberland, including Blyth, Ponteland, Ashington, Hexham, Bedlington, Haltwhistle. Some projects will start their construction phase during 2023 while others are under early preliminary design stages.</p> <p>The new improved cycling and walking routes link in with the Big Northumberland Gear Change campaign, which encourages people to adopt more sustainable ways of moving around the county by walking, cycling and using public transport more often.</p> <p>At the same time, Cabinet approved a £150k grant to the Kielder Water and Forest Park Trust to deliver the first phase of The Reivers Trail initiative.</p> <p>Following this, In January, Jan 2023 – the Council secured almost £15m funding towards new cycling and walking routes</p>	

<p>for Tynedale and Bedlington. In Bedlington, the scheme will provide new and upgraded active travel infrastructure to improve the east to west link across the town, connecting key residential and employment areas with the planned Northumberland Line station. Additional benefits include connections to schools across the Town. The Council also has funding for cycling in the Blyth Town Deal which will help to create a properly integrated transport network linking to the Northumberland Line.</p> <p>In Tynedale there'll be an active travel link between Hexham train station and Corbridge, improving both local connections within Hexham and facilitating active travel trips between Hexham and Corbridge.</p>	
<p><b>Maintaining high-quality parks and open spaces</b></p>	
<p>Last year, some eleven Northumberland parks were awarded prestigious Green Flag Awards by environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy, which recognises them as some of the very best in the country.</p> <p>Northumberland's winning green spaces are: Alexandra Park, Cramlington; Astley Park, Seaton Delaval; Bolam Lake Country Park, Carlisle Park, Morpeth; Castle Vale Park and Coronation Park, Berwick; Doctor Pit Park, Bedlington; Eastwoods Park, Prudhoe; Hexham Parks; Hirst Park, Ashington, Plessey Woods Country Park and Ridley Park, Blyth.</p> <p>The Green Flag Award is a prestigious benchmark of quality for a park or green space. This international award, now celebrating its 26th year, is a sign to the public that the space boasts the highest possible environmental standards, is beautifully maintained and has excellent visitor facilities.</p> <p>The Council has committed to an on-going capital programme to improve its parks and country parks.</p>	 <p>The icons are arranged vertically. The top one is yellow with a scale icon and text 'Tackling Inequalities People'. The middle one is green with a plant icon and text 'Driving Economic Growth Place'. The bottom one is blue with a building icon and text 'Achieving Value for Money Council'.</p>
<p><b>Ensuring winter readiness across the County</b></p>	
<p>In May last year, the Council's Cabinet agreed to replace equipment at the Council's existing winter service weather stations as well as creating four new weather forecasting sites at a total cost of £400,000. The Council uses live and historical data gathered from the weather stations in conjunction with specialist weather forecasting to make decisions on winter services actions on the treatment of the road network each day. This also secures environmental benefits by ensuring we more efficiently target salt-spreading.</p> <p>A further £1.261m was also invested as part of our fleet replacement programme to replace nine of our gritter fleet that</p>	 <p>The icon is a blue rectangle with a white building icon and text 'Achieving Value for Money Council'.</p>

<p>were at the end of their economic life with new state-of-the-art gritters, ensuring that our staff have modern, fit-for-purpose and reliable vehicles to support the delivery of the winter maintenance service.</p>	
<p><b>Investing in infrastructure to support local communities and economies</b></p>	
<p>The Council has continued to invest in car parking across the County, encouraging local residents to ‘shop local’ and sustain their local economies. Key schemes delivered include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A new car park for Amble opened in August 2022, increasing the number of spaces available from 47 to 134. The new car park provides seven disabled parking bays and six electric vehicle bays. Spaces for motorcycles and bikes are also provided. Around 2,500 tonnes of recycled road making material were used saving the Council over £125,000 in tipping fees and over £100,000 in the purchase of quarried stone - as well as saving around 17 tonnes of carbon. The newly-expanded carpark is free for the first hour and also has some larger bays suitable for parking motorhomes.</li> <li>• In November last year, Morpeth Town Centre’s newest free carpark opened for business – providing hundreds of new spaces for residents and visitors. The Goosehill carpark, on the site of the former first school, contains 128 standard parking bays, eight disabled bays and six electric vehicle charging spaces. The carpark is free with a maximum stay of 24 hours.</li> <li>• And, in December, Hexham’s newest carpark officially opened, with 250 spaces, including electric vehicle charging provision. This will operate as a long-stay facility, helping alleviate the pressure on Wentworth car park. Following public feedback earlier this year the council will also be keeping around 100 long-stay spaces in Wentworth carpark in the Town Centre.</li> </ul>	 <p>Tackling Inequalities People</p> <p>Driving Economic Growth Place</p> <p>Achieving Value for Money Council</p>
<p>Last year also marked the completion of the Bates Clean Energy Terminal, where the Council was accountable body working in partnership with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and Port of Blyth.</p> <p>We also saw in the past year the completion by Advance of the new dock at Cambois which facilitated the arrival of JDR Cables. The Council and the LEP joined to invest in the development which otherwise would have seen the site left empty and unused.</p>	 <p>Driving Economic Growth Place</p>



<p>In June last year, a new pilot boat for the Port of Berwick which will help safeguard its commercial operations for years to come was officially unveiled. This was delivered after the Council's Cabinet approved a £60,000 grant from its Strategic Regeneration Budget to the Berwick Harbour Commission for a replacement boat. Thanks to the Council funding, the Harbour Commission was able to buy a purpose-built pilot boat from the Port of Sunderland. The new pilot boat will support the Port in its two distinct areas of operation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commercial – handling and storing dry bulk cargoes with the stevedoring/piloting expertise it has within the operational capability of the harbour; and,</li> <li>• Local amenity and leisure – developing an area separate to the commercial activity for visiting yachts, and cruise passenger visits.</li> </ul>	
<p>At a time when, many councils have cut back on public toilet facilities, the Council has in the past year continued to invest in a network of public conveniences across the County. In November last year, refurbished public toilets opened at Alnwick to improve the services in one of the County's main towns.</p> <p>And, in July – work was completed in toilet facilities at Low Newton, including a beach wheelchair storage area funded by local donations.</p> <p>These improvements form part of a wider £1.35m three-year programme of works to improve the standard of all of the 54 public toilets in the County for which the Council has responsibility. These will improve the standards of public toilets for residents and visitors, with facilities in the larger main towns and key tourism destinations getting a programme of full refurbishment and modernisation. All remaining County Council toilets will undergo essential refurbishment, so facilities are brought up to a decent standard of repair and are easier to keep clean and maintain.</p>	 

**Investing in the County's roads**

During the past year, the Council has continued to invest in roads across the County. This includes investing in state-of-the-art technology to help keep Northumberland's roads running smoothly.

A £23m Local transport Plan capital programme has been delivered focusing on maintenance of roads and bridges and improvements to the highway network including road safety schemes, improvements for pedestrians and cyclists and reduced speed limits, including introduction of 20mph at school schemes which are nearing completion.




An additional £2.5m investment has been made in the Council's U and C roads using additional Council capital investment, with over 30 individual lengths of U and C roads resurfaced.


Design works have been completed and a contract let to carry out the complex repairs needed to resolve the long-term landslip affecting the B6344 at Rothbury with works expected to commence in spring 2023. After the Council's successful bid to the DfT Highway Maintenance Challenge Fund, work is now nearing completion on the £4.8m Steel Bridge Refurbishment Project to paint and refurbish eight of the Council's major steel bridges.



In October last year, the Council purchased a *JCB Pothole Pro* following a successful trial last year of the rapid road repairer. The machine, which has numerous tools and attachments to completely repair a pothole or stretch of road surface, was put through its paces by the Council last summer and will now help maintain some of the county's 3,000+ miles of road.


Earlier in the year, the Council unveiled its new fleet of cleaner and greener road cleaning machines. The four new state-of-the-art vehicles, costing a total of £740,000, are more efficient with the latest engines, and advanced gully and drain cleaning technology. The gully tankers are slightly larger than the previous vehicles, with greater capacity to allow more gullies to be cleaned and fewer trips needed to the gully waste disposal facility. This will make the routine cleaning operation more efficient and this will reduce the reliance on external support to help unblock drainage pipes.





<p><b>Repairing local environments</b></p>	
<p>In February this year, major works to tackle historical pollution on the coast at Lynemouth received all the necessary planning and regulatory consents, meaning the scheme can get underway later this year. The Council has allocated £5m to clean up this stretch of coastline and stop historic waste deposits from washing into the sea. All the necessary regulatory consents for the scheme have now been secured, along with the final waste recovery permit from the <i>Environment Agency</i>. In the meantime, Council teams continue to visit weekly to monitor and remove material from the beach, where safe to do so.</p>	
<p><b>Children and Young People</b></p>	
<p><b>Maintaining our high standards in Children’s Services</b></p>	
<p>In September last year, Ofsted Inspectors praised Northumberland’s Children’s Services for their work to provide young people with safe and secure long-term care. This followed the last full inspection in 2020, when Ofsted rated Children’s Services as “good” across the board.</p> <p>Inspectors returned to carry out a focused visit in July 2022, as part of the overall inspection framework, to shine a spotlight on the local authority’s arrangements for planning and achieving permanence for children who are ‘looked after’, including adoption.</p> <p>Inspectors found that in Northumberland, parents are appropriately supported to provide the best opportunity for children to remain living at home with them. This included safe and timely discharge of care orders for children who are placed at home with their parents. Where it is not possible to maintain a child with or return them to their parents, prompt action is taken to ensure the child is placed with permanent carers at the earliest opportunity. This includes timely and effective legal work.</p> <p>The report said that children’s permanence plans meet their individual needs. Family members are considered as alternatives to foster care and where long-term foster care is right for children, they are carefully matched to long-term foster carers.</p> <p>Where children are adopted or move to carers under a special guardianship order, those parents and carers receive enhanced support to help the children develop early attachments.</p> <p>Sensitive and child-centred social work helps children to engage with plans and understand their journey.</p>	 

<p>Young people who are supported in Northumberland Adolescent Service benefit from access to a range of professionals, including emotional well-being and youth justice practitioners, where appropriate, who provide wrap-around care.</p> <p>Managers offer positive supervision and support to workers. All workers spoken to by inspectors were positive about working for Northumberland.</p>	
<p><b>Investing in state-of the-art school facilities</b></p>	
<p>The Council continues to work in partnership with schools across the County to ensure young people have access to the best educational facilities. To deliver this, Council investment is, of course, important but so too is consultation with schools, communities, parents and pupils.</p> <p>Work is underway on the Gilbert Ward Academy in Blyth, a new special free school for Northumberland. The state-of-the-art school will provide education for up to 80 students aged 11-16 with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) and autism spectrum disorder (ASD) needs. Gilbert Ward Academy is part of Northumberland County Council’s wider strategy to increase special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) support across the County. A bid for an 80-place secondary SEMH special school was made by the Council in 2018 as part of the Government’s Free Schools programme.</p> <p>Detailed designs for new school proposals in Amble will go on display for the first time. The Council has already approved a multi-million investment in the Coquet Partnership of schools, including a new building for James Calvert Spence College (JCSC). Further investment will also be made to refurbish the South Avenue site of JCSC to create new facilities for Amble First School and a satellite provision for Barndale House School to provide 50 new places for young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The new school will use innovative technologies to create a “net zero carbon in operation school, supporting the Council’s ambition to become carbon neutral by 2030. The enhanced facilities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An all-weather running track;</li> <li>• A floodlit 3G full-size football pitch;</li> <li>• A Multi Use Games Areas (MUGA); and,</li> <li>• A series of football and rugby pitches.</li> </ul> <p>And, in December last year, planning permission was granted for a new school that is set to transform education for young people in Seaton Valley for generations to come.</p>	 <p>The right-hand column of the table contains two logos. The top logo is a yellow rectangle with a circular icon of a scale of justice and the text 'Tackling Inequalities' and 'People' below it. The bottom logo is a dark blue rectangle with a circular icon of a building and the text 'Achieving Value for Money' and 'Council' below it.</p>






<p>Following extensive consultation, the £40m project will see Astley Community High School and Whytrig Middle School rebuilt on a new, shared campus to create a state-of-the-art learning environment for over 1,000 students. Sports facilities including indoor and outdoor sports pitches and a swimming pool will also be available for use by the wider community.</p> <p>All of this follows the redevelopment of Queen Elizabeth High School and Hexham Middle School which recently won a national award. The Council has also pledged investment for schools in Berwick.</p>	
<p><b>Supporting educational excellence and choice for parents and young people</b></p>	
<p>In March this year, the vast majority of Northumberland pupils moving up to middle and secondary schools in September received offers for their first-choice school. A total of 4,114 pupils applied for places, a rise from the 4,037 applications last year, with 95.45% (3,927) receiving their first choice, 4.04% (166) their second choice, 0.44% (18) their third choice and 0.07% (3) their fourth.</p> <p>In addition, a record 89.6% of schools are rated good or outstanding, with the Council’s School Improvement Team working in close partnership with our schools and academies to make sure all remaining schools are on track to improve. This is above the national average for school performance and represents the best performance ever for the County.</p>	
<p><b>Giving children the best start in life</b></p>	
<p>The Council secured additional Government funding to help give children in Northumberland the best start in life after the Council was recognised as a “trailblazer” in the development of Family Hubs.</p> <p>The County’s network of Children’s Centres relaunched as Family Hubs in September 2022 after the Council successfully bid to join the Government’s programme.</p> <p>Midwives, health visitors, early years and mental health professionals, youth staff, and a host of other services - including relationship and parenting programmes, and financial advice – are brought together into a vibrant ‘one-stop-shop’ that meets the needs of families with children and young people of all ages.</p> <p>Now, the Council has been recognised as one of 14 “trailblazers” and awarded additional funding to help lead the way in the national rollout of the programme particularly around perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationships, infant feeding, and parenting support.</p>	



<p>The Family Hubs network is made up of 19 hubs, including outreach posts in more rural areas, mobile play vans, digital and virtual support. Every day, the timetables are packed with activities – and there are also digital and virtual services too to make sure the support is accessible for all.</p>	
<p><b>Healthy Lives</b></p>	
<p><b>Investing in excellent sport &amp; leisure facilities</b></p>	
<p>At a time when many councils are closing sports &amp; leisure facilities, the Council has in the past year continued to invest in modern facilities and leisure services that meet the changing demands of residents and visitors to the County.</p> <p>Last year, Berwick’s new sports and leisure centre opened to the public with residents enjoying the new swimming pools, spa and fitness suite, a café, an indoor bowling area and much more.</p> <p>Berwick’s new facility boasts a 20 x 24 metre, four-court hall and can be used for a wide range of uses and activities including 5-a-side football, netball, badminton, martial arts and volleyball.</p> <p>In September, the new look Newbiggin sports and community hub opened to the public following a major refurbishment project. The £1.9m County Council-funded scheme has seen the centre refurbished and remodelled to provide a new and improved sporting offer and a community hub.</p> <p>A new, modern and welcoming reception area, a library area with public access PCs, and the creation of a community café and hub has provided a welcoming social space for local people. Here they can access a range of services, support and events, with opportunities to learn new skills, seek help finding employment and receive health checks and advice.</p> <p>On the sporting side, the ground floor gym area has been reconfigured to provide a dedicated cycling/spinning studio while the first floor has been converted into a new gym area with weights and state-of-the-art cardio equipment. There are new and improved changing facilities for sport and community use, including changing places that are designed to be fully accessible for those with additional needs. Outside there will be a community garden and a new football pitch is being laid.</p> <p>Alongside this, the £21m construction of the new Morpeth Leisure Centre is nearing completion and on track to open to the public in early 2023. The main swimming pool has now been filled with water – a total of 450,000 litres – which took five days to fill. The new leisure centre will incorporate a six-lane swimming pool with spectator gallery, a learner pool, spa</p>	 <p>The right-hand column of the table contains two logos. The top logo is a yellow rectangle with a circular icon of a scale of justice and the text 'Tackling Inequalities' above 'People'. The bottom logo is a blue rectangle with a circular icon of a building and the text 'Achieving Value for Money' above 'Council'.</p>




<p>facilities, a four-court sports hall, a new 100 station gym, a dedicated spinning studio, two fitness studios, a cafe area and soft play. It will also incorporate a new community services hub which will see the Town's Library move back to its former home on Gas House Lane, a customer service centre and a new adult learning facility with classrooms for STEM learning and catering.</p>	
<p><b>Delivering innovation in our Libraries</b></p>	
<p>Libraries continue to be at the heart of local communities and National Libraries week in October last year proved the ideal platform to relaunch the County Council's service. The Council celebrated its 21st century offering by "Turning the Page on a New Chapter". Improvements in Libraries across the County have started with new looks at Bedlington, Ashington and Newbiggin which will be rolled out across Northumberland.</p> <p>This follows the Service playing a vital role in the Covid pandemic when thousands more people signed up to fill the empty lockdown hours and borrow books remotely via the eLibrary service. Library staff also made hundreds of doorstep deliveries and Reading Friend phone calls.</p>	
<p><b>Supporting events that promote healthy lives</b></p>	
<p>As part of the Big Northumberland Gear Change over 8,200 people visited our Bike Festival in Blyth. Partnering with <i>Dr Bike</i> and <i>3Sixty, Fat Creations, Cycle with Jan</i>, and <i>Cycling for Everyone</i> it was a day residents left their cars at home, got on their bikes and joined in the fun.</p> <p>And, over 500 young people from schools around the county took part in a School Games Live event at The Alnwick Gardens to celebrate the 2022 Commonwealth Games.</p>	
<p>Last year, the Council signed the Healthy Weight Declaration and, we are working towards the 16 commitments alongside the Hospitals Trust and North Tyneside Council.</p>	


<p><b>Community Services</b></p>	
<p><b>Delivering affordable housing</b></p>	
<p>The Council has used a range of approaches to help create more affordable housing in areas of identified housing need. The Council has allocated £45m which will be used over the next five years to create some 400 affordable homes.</p> <p>Over the last five years, around 1,300 affordable homes have been secured through the planning process. Of these, around 800 were affordable homes for rent, delivered by the Council and partner housing associations. Around 180 were for shared ownership, and around 320 were available for purchase at a discount. In addition, there are about 190 affordable homes planned that the Council will manage including sites in rural locations. The Council is also working on a number of schemes with housing associations to deliver around 1,200 affordable homes for rent, shared ownership and ‘rent to buy’.</p> <p>As part of this approach, the Council is to build four new bungalows in Felton which it will rent out at an affordable rate. The Council’s North Area planning committee has approved the scheme which will see the two- bedroomed bungalows built on a County Council garage site Felton. Zero carbon technologies will be used to power the new homes. The eco-friendly bungalows will have an insulated timber frame and roof, air source heat pumps and solar panels to help reduce bills for new tenants.</p> <p>After consulting local residents and receiving some valuable feedback, some modifications were made to the original scheme including reducing the number of bungalows from five to four.</p> <p>Planning permission has also been granted for a Council and Advance led scheme to build nine affordable bungalows at New Hartley near Seaton Delaval, providing housing for residents in need. The two-bedroomed bungalows will be available for affordable rent. These properties will be made available to a range of residents who require accessible ground floor accommodation, regardless of age. The properties have been specifically designed to allow residents to remain in their homes for as long as possible should their physical or mental health needs change.</p> <p>In February this year, to mark National Empty Homes Week, the Council highlighted the work taking place to address the problem of empty properties in the County and is appealing to anyone who owns or knows of a long-term empty property to get in touch. With affordable housing in short supply, the Council has been taking action in a number of ways to help bring unused properties back into residential use. The</p>	 <p>The right-hand column of the table contains two logos. The top logo is a yellow rectangle with a circular icon of scales of justice and the text 'Tackling Inequalities' and 'People' below it. The bottom logo is a dark blue rectangle with a circular icon of a building and the text 'Achieving Value for Money' and 'Council' below it.</p>





<p>Housing Services, Private Sector housing team has assisted in returning over 540 empty properties back into use over the last 5 years.</p>	
<p><b>Securing improvement in the Fire &amp; Rescue Service</b></p>	
<p>In April last year, the Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) was recognised by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) as fully discharging all recommendations made in its report published in 2021.</p> <p>The recommendations centred on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving the management and recording of the working time of dual contract personnel;</li> <li>• Ensuring the meeting of statutory requirements could be evidenced; and,</li> <li>• Maintaining appropriate rest breaks for operational staff welfare.</li> </ul> <p>In publishing the revisit outcomes, Her Majesty's Inspector of Fire &amp; Rescue Services, recognised the robust plans the Service now has in place and commitment to make the improvements that are needed.</p>	 
<p><b>Planning for the future of the County</b></p>	
<p>On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 - the first ever comprehensive Local Plan covering the entire county was formally adopted by the Council. This signalled a final break from the plans of the former district and County Councils and will guide all future planning applications for the period up to 2036.</p> <p>The Northumberland Local Plan, which includes new planning policies, will guide and detail the scale and distribution of development. It sets out a range of development proposals as well as planning policies, which will be used to assess applications and guide the location of future development in the county up to 2036.</p> <p>At a local level, the Council's Planning Team continues to support neighbourhoods to develop Neighbourhood Plans. In September, the Haydon Parish Neighbourhood Plan was formally 'made' at the Council's Cabinet Meeting. This took the total of Neighbourhood Plans in the County to 19.</p>	  

<b>Adults' Wellbeing</b>	
<b>Supporting residents deal with rising costs of living</b>	
<p>Throughout the Winter, residents have received a 'warm welcome' thanks to Northumberland's network of warm spaces. With partners, the Council has grown a network of over 150 warm, safe spaces where residents can enjoy a hot drink, have conversations with others or join in activities. Libraries, community hubs, village halls, churches and cafes are among the venues taking part.</p> <p>The Warm Spaces network is just a part of the support available to residents - in addition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Northumberland Communities Together continued to deliver a seven-day-a-week helpline, advising on the support available to residents;</li> <li>• The Council distributed The Government's Household Support Fund (HSF) to those most in need, both directly to residents and through the community and voluntary sector to provide support with food, energy and water and other essential household costs;</li> <li>• Families continued to receive vouchers during the school holidays towards food, energy and other essential costs. There was also support for young people in education settings throughout the year, such as hygiene products, learning equipment, and school uniform support;</li> <li>• Children and young people made memories and enjoyed nutritious food through the Holiday Activity and Food programme; and,</li> <li>• Community-led food partnership Nourish Northumberland worked together to make sure everyone in Northumberland could access safe, healthy and affordable food.</li> </ul> <p>Additionally, there has been Public Health Grant investment in building community resilience, warm homes schemes, support for children and 'community fridges'.</p>	
<b>Valuing Care Workers</b>	
<p>Since April 2022, the Council has been offering all the organisations it commissions for Adult Social Care services additional funding in return for a commitment to pay care workers the Real Living Wage.</p> <p>In the past, care workers in many services have been paid little more than the statutory minimum wage. As well as recognising the importance of the work which they do, the</p>	

<p>Council's support aims to address current pressures on care services at a time when workforce shortages are affecting many sectors of the economy.</p> <p>From December 2022, the Council has been operating a further scheme specifically targeted at the home care services which visit people in their own homes to provide care and support. Home care workers in rural Northumberland often need to drive between visits, and increasing fuel costs meant existing rates paid to cover mileage expenses were falling behind the real cost. The Council now funds home care providers to pay the maximum mileage rate approved by HMRC – in many cases an increase of as much as 80% on what they were previously receiving.</p>	
<p><b>National recognition for our Social Workers</b></p>	
<p>Two social workers from Northumberland were shortlisted for the Social Worker of the Year Awards 2022.</p> <p>A Team Manager for the North Mental Health Team, was selected as a finalist for Team Leader of the Year, Adult Services award, and a Team Manager, in Northumberland's Adult Social Care Social Work Academy was selected as a finalist for the Practice Educator of the Year award.</p>	
<p><b>Investing in equipment for disabled people</b></p>	
<p>Northumberland County Council's Joint Equipment Loans Service has installed a state-of-the-art industrial cleaning machine which will enable independent living equipment to be recycled and reused, and will also contribute to the Council's climate ambitions.</p> <p>The service provides more than 58,000 pieces of community equipment to people in Northumberland each year to help them to live safely at home. Equipment is loaned free of charge following an assessment by a health or social care professional.</p> <p>The service recycles 75% of used equipment to help reduce its carbon footprint. Last year the service recycled almost 30,000 returned items which would otherwise have been scrapped.</p> <p>The new machine, which is expected to last for at least 20 years, will provide increased capacity to allow the service to recycle even more efficiently.</p>	 

<p><b>Supporting independent living</b></p>	
<p>Planning permission has been granted for 13 Dementia friendly affordable bungalows which will be built at Lyndon Walk in Blyth as part of the Council's overall commitment to increase the availability of housing to meet the needs of all residents.</p> <p>The bungalows have been designed to support residents who are living with Dementia and Alzheimer's enabling them to live independently in their own home, with support from their spouse, family or carers.</p> <p>They will be available for affordable rent and allocated via a special allocations process led by the Council's Adult Social Care service. Extra care and respite care will be provided by a new team. The development has been designed throughout to suit Dementia clients, with features including level access wet rooms and a technology system in each bungalow that will allow carers to be seen by the resident on a two-way screen. Outside, there will be an inner sensory garden that is safe and secure for residents to experience.</p> <p>This follows the opening of a new supported housing scheme in Berwick in October last year, giving young adults with learning disabilities the chance to live independently with support in their local community. The scheme forms part of the Council's Extra Care and Supported Housing Strategy. Henderson Court consists of ten flats with 24-hour support to help the residents build their life skills, manage their tenancy and be part of the local community.</p>	 
<p><b>Business</b></p>	
<p><b>Connecting Northumberland's residents and businesses</b></p>	
<p>Main construction work has now started on the Northumberland Line rail scheme, with six new stations granted planning approval. This follows the closure of passenger services some sixty years ago. When fully operational, it will see journeys between Newcastle and Ashington with no need to change trains.</p> <p>Passengers in the North-East will be able to connect with friends and family and enjoy greater access to business and education opportunities when the historic Northumberland Line reopens.</p> <p>Not only will the restoration of passenger services connect communities, but it will also boost the region's economy through improving access to jobs. Once complete, the journey time between Newcastle and Ashington will be reduced from 70 minutes to just 35, with services operating regularly seven</p>	  

<p>days a week, providing easy access to jobs, education and tourism opportunities in the City Centre.</p> <p>The Line's construction work alone has created almost 100 high-skilled jobs and apprenticeships.</p> <p>Congestion is expected to reduce, improving air quality as people will be encouraged away from their cars and onto trains.</p>	
<p>In March this year the Council awarded Commsworld, the UK's largest independent network provider, a 20-year contract worth £22m. The contract is forecast to attract £114m of private investment into the region to transform and support the County's digital infrastructure.</p> <p>All 146 council sites are due to be connected by July 2024 and by late 2026, Commsworld plans to have 262km of new fibre installed across the County, enabling Fibre To The Premises (FTTP) access to more than 120,000 residential and business properties, many of which have never enjoyed access to gigabit-capable fibre networks before.</p> <p>Commsworld will be implementing and supporting the service over a 20-year period. The contract represents a step change by the Council, to embrace a progressive, long-term approach to infrastructure and connectivity in line with its digital strategy. It involves replacing its ageing Wide Area Network (WAN) with world-class full-fibre infrastructure which will also provide businesses and communities across the county – including its most rural areas – with access to faster, high-quality, reliable connectivity.</p> <p>It will future-proof Northumberland's digital backbone, by building and migrating services on to the new world-class dark fibre digital infrastructure. For instance, Commsworld will utilise the infrastructure established by the recent Local Full Fibre Network (LFFN) project funded by Government through its Project Gigabit, which will result in a significant uplift in internet connectivity for 110 Northumberland schools, delivering a further boost to digital learning.</p> <p>The contract will also see Commsworld work in partnership with iNorthumberland, Community Action Northumberland and the National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise (NICRE) to tackle digital poverty, alongside digital skills and confidence within the communities of Northumberland.</p>	
<p><b>Attracting and supporting investment</b></p>	
<p>The Council has continued to work with businesses and partners to facilitate the building of a gigafactory at Blyth which will secure thousands of high-quality jobs for Northumberland.</p>	

<p>The recent acquisition of <i>British Volt</i> by <i>Recharge</i> Industries has now been concluded.</p>	
<p>In a significant milestone for the Borderlands Growth Deal, the Ad Gefrin Distillery in Wooler is on track to open to the public on 25<sup>th</sup> March. Attracting thousands of visitors and providing good-quality local jobs, Ad Gefrin will bring a boost to the local economy.</p>	
<p><b>Regenerating and revitalising our towns</b></p>	
<p>In October last year, the Council’s Cabinet approved a new programme to help reinvigorate Ashington town centre. The Ashington High Street Innovation Programme will see a range of projects delivered in the Town over the coming months, worth over £2.3m.</p> <p>Around £1.9m of the funding was secured in a successful bid to the North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA) Towns and High Streets Programme, which identified Ashington as one of three centres that would benefit from targeted funding to support innovative projects aimed at revitalising the Town Centre and High Street.</p> <p>The three key projects are:</p> <p><b>Public Realm Improvements and Connectivity</b> – to make it easier for pedestrians to navigate around the town and create attractive and greener routes to key destinations.</p> <p>This will include creating a more visible access to bring visitors through to Portland Park and connecting this area with the high street. The area will be remodelled to create an attractive and welcoming gateway to leisure and retail.</p> <p>There’ll also be improvements to signage and the look and feel of Station Road West and the Town Centre with new planting and street furniture.</p> <p><b>Animating Ashington</b> – this project will deliver a programme of cultural and heritage inspired events based on colour and animation. This will improve the Town’s current cultural offer including a programme of events throughout the year and activities could include festivals, makers, craft and lifestyle markets.</p> <p>A creative team will be commissioned to work with residents, schools and local businesses and develop and deliver the cultural programme.</p> <p><b>The Accelerate Ashington Business Support Programme</b> - this will be delivered by Advance Northumberland, providing a support service to a range of</p>	 <p>The right-hand column of the table contains three vertically stacked icons. The top icon is yellow and features a scale of justice, with the text 'Tackling Inequalities' and 'People' below it. The middle icon is green and features a hand holding a plant, with the text 'Driving Economic Growth' and 'Place' below it. The bottom icon is blue and features a classical building facade, with the text 'Achieving Value for Money' and 'Council' below it.</p>

businesses and individuals looking to grow or create new businesses within the town and in particular the centre.

The aim is to develop an increased sense of pride and community across the Town, demonstrating to local business owners how they can, and do, positively contribute to the overall success of Ashington and can continue to do so in the future.


In February this year, the Council welcomed Government's announcement on investment to level up Blyth by upgrading housing, tackling health inequalities, improving access to local jobs and cutting crime. The measures announced include:

- Housing: An £18 million boost will repurpose run-down and empty homes into high-quality affordable housing to rent and convert under-occupied offices into new apartments. Some of the funding will also go towards making social housing more energy-efficient.
- Employment support: Almost £1.5 million will fund new high-tech training equipment at the Town's Energy Central Campus, providing local young people with a route to high-quality jobs on their doorstep.
- Anti-social behaviour: A £200,000 initiative to reduce crime in Blyth including by extending CCTV provision in the Town Centre and establishing a new partnership between local businesses and the Police. These interventions will target anti-social behaviour, substance misuse and theft.
- Health: Government will strengthen local partnerships between Jobcentre Plus and NHS services in Blyth so more disabled people and those with health conditions are supported to start, stay and succeed in work. DHSC is also working with the Council to support more smokers to quit, complementing the £35 million recently allocated to address health inequalities across the whole of the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care System over the next 3 years.

This additional investment will support the Town's transition to a leading clean energy port. Since 2019, the Council has secured Government investment in Blyth of over £56 million.

The Government announcement for Blyth follows the Council's Cabinet approving, in December, over £1million extra funding to support a scheme to restore and revitalise Hexham's historic Town Centre.

The Hexham High Streets Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ scheme) was established as a £2.4m scheme in October 2020 as part of a national programme and funded by Historic

<p>England, with the Council and private sector match-funding contributions.</p> <p>It will revitalise the Town's historic centre making it an even more attractive, engaging and vibrant place for people to live, work, invest and visit.</p> <p>As part of this, some £300k will be allocated to the refurbishment of The Shambles, a prominent grade II* listed structure. The funding will support much needed repairs, improvement work to the timber beams, timber and stone columns, roof and flooring to restore this historic asset in the heart of the Town Centre.</p>	
<p><b>Investing in learning and supporting apprenticeships</b></p>	
<p>Work started in February to make way for a new state-of-the-art-learning facility, the Energy Central Learning Hub at the Port of Blyth.</p> <p>The new 2,396 sqm hub is phase one of Energy Central Campus and will build upon the success of the existing industrial training cluster in Blyth. This adds to the current offer of Port Training Services and STEM Hub, Newcastle University, Northumberland Skills Welding &amp; Fabrication Centre, Blyth Tall Ship and Northumberland College.</p> <p>Once built, Energy Central Learning Hub will deliver STEM education and sector-related vocational and work-based learning in high-quality specialist training facilities.</p> <p>It will also house major conferencing capabilities as well as a visitor centre to encourage collaboration between employers, education institutions and Northumberland residents.</p> <p>Energy Central Learning Hub is a flagship project for Energy Central which is a strategic partnership between Northumberland County Council, Port of Blyth, Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult and Advance Northumberland.</p>	
<p>As part of the ongoing commitment to the NCC apprenticeship programme the council has recruited 66 apprentices in the last 12 months. And, the Council has attracted over 200 attendees to apprenticeships events. Engagement in NCC campaigns has reached 300,000+ impressions with over 10,000 engagements.</p>	





## Northumberland County Council

COMMITTEE: COUNCIL

DATE: 22 MARCH 2023

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Challenge Board Interim Report 2 for the Member Oversight Group

**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 consider and respond to the second interim report of the Challenge Board, provided to the Member Oversight Group on the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2023.

### **Recommendations**

**It is recommended that Council:**

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

### **Link to Corporate Plan**

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

### **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**

2. In 2021, the Leader of Council commissioned 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.
3. Again, following the Caller recommendations, the Leader of 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.

4. Following its latest round of meetings, the Challenge Board drafted its second, interim report and presented its findings to the MOG on the 3<sup>rd</sup> March. This is attached as Appendix 1. These are the Board’s findings, based on the documents and discussions they have held so far.
5. In its Report, the Challenge Board states it has heard from people inside and outside the organisation, that the Council feels ‘better’ and ‘calmer’. The Report points out the appointment of the new Chief Executive and her top team have brought certainty and stability, creating a ‘different feel about the place’ and that “[The] mood has changed.”
6. In addition to the Challenge Board’s Report, Council Officers, working with Members have continued to make significant and positive progress on delivering on the Council’s Improvement Action Plan. These actions address all recommendations set out in the ‘Caller Report’ last year.
7. The Report makes recommendations on areas where the Council can continue to make progress including:
  - a. Creating an improvement narrative – linking all the key areas of improvement and change being taken forward across the organisation (including Strategic Change as well as the Improvement Action Plan).
  - b. Ensuring the work on updating and implementing the new Constitution and Code of Conduct is inclusive.
  - c. Using the refresh of the Corporate Plan to engage and involve Members and partners in the priorities.
  - d. Allowing time for reflection on the corporate governance of Advance.
  - e. Making progress on an agreed protocol on appropriate access to information, whilst also defining the personal responsibility of Members to respect confidentiality, in order to rebuild trust.
8. The Leader of Council and Chief Executive thank the Challenge Board for their continued advice and support to the Council. As with the previous Report to Council (January 2023), Officers and Members will give detailed consideration to the Board’s advice and ideas. Since the Report was produced, there have been productive conversations between the Board, Leader of Council, Chief Executive (and Officers) and the other Group Leaders. Members will also note the report on the appointment of a new Monitoring Officer at March Council.
9. Officers and Members continue the very positive work on the Corporate Plan refresh. There has been very constructive engagement with Members on this (e.g. Policy Conference held in January) as well as wider engagement with Towns and Parishes through a series of conferences also held in January this year. Officers have, of course, taken account of the suggestions made by the Challenge Board. Where the Board feels there are opportunities for Officers and Members to engage more with Board, we will maximise these over the next few months.

## Implications

<b>Policy</b>	This report links to all aims and priorities of the Corporate Plan.
<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 may 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>	N/A
<b>Human Resources</b>	Links to the appraisal and performance frameworks.
<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>	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>	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:**

Independent Governance Review Report

Challenge Board Interim Report 1 for Member Oversight Group

**Report sign off.**

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

	Full Name of Officer
Acting Chief Executive	Audrey Kingham
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

# Northumberland County Council

## Challenge Board Interim Report 2 for Member Oversight Group

24 February 2023

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### 1. Background, scope and focus

1.1 The Challenge Board is independent of the Council and has membership with significant and appropriate experience. 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

1.2 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.

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

1. Is the Council's action plan appropriate and sufficient to cover the issues raised in the Max Caller report?
2. Have the actions responding to the Max Caller report 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 these 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?"

1.4 We are particularly focussed on the 9 specific recommendations in the Max Caller report. However, the reference to "Best Value" refers to the Council's general Duty of Best Value to "make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness." The Board, therefore, will look beyond the 9

# Northumberland County Council



## Challenge Board Interim Report 2 for Member Oversight Group

24 February 2023

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recommendations if there are underlying issues affecting the re-creation of that well-functioning and effective Council. This is fundamentally about governance and culture.

1.5 This is the Challenge Board's second report. We have agreed with the Council to provide reports to the MOG every 2 months, with a stocktake of the approach in April 2023.

## 2. Views from the Board

### Response to the last report

2.1 The Board has continued to engage with a wide range of people and continues to appreciate their openness.

2.2 The Council responded formally to our first report through a report from The Leader to Council dated 18/1/23. We felt the response was fair and positive, although perhaps a little defensive in places. The Council clearly took some of the advice of the Board, such as pausing the work on the shape of the Council until the arrival of the new CEO.

2.3 As encouraged in our first report, there has, in some cases, been more effective engagement with the expertise and experience of the Board over the past 2 months, such as on the Corporate Plan refresh. However, for us to be able to be that critical friend providing robust challenge, there needs to be still greater engagement with us. We are all learning; the council is not making life deliberately awkward for the Board but it could certainly make more of the resources and opportunity the Board presents.

### Progress since the last report

2.4 We have heard from people inside and outside that the Council feels better, calmer. The CEO appointment is seen as good and as having brought certainty, stability and the prospect of proper governance. But there is a need to capitalise on

# Northumberland County Council



## Challenge Board Interim Report 2 for Member Oversight Group

24 February 2023

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that opportunity to go deep and make sure governance is strong and ensures that people are, and the organisation is, kept safe and on the right track. There is a need to see the importance of political management and development. Stakeholders feel they can get behind the 3 priorities, particularly the one around reducing inequalities. But they do want to be effectively involved in shaping what it means.

### *Top team*

2.5 We reported last time that previous changes at the most senior officer level had had a positive impact on the atmosphere in County Hall. Since that report there has been good progress on clarifying the new top team, with some people now in post, including of course the new CEO. There is a sense of things beginning to come together, a different feel about the place. The mood has changed.

2.6 Helen's appointment is seen as a good one and should allow a rapid change in the leadership of the Council, clear direction and the putting in place of key building blocks of the future Council. Helen has rightly focussed on getting out and about; meeting front line staff and being focussed on building relationships both inside and outside the council. There is indeed a need to re-establish the partnership framework and how best to work with partners, as well as a proper relationship with partners.

2.7 Many of the, previously, interim senior officers have been appointed to permanent posts. This brings stability and retains knowledge. We have seen a much more positive and energetic team developing. However, the Council needs to ensure that the new top management team can look different and feel different in terms of the way it can help take the council forward in the eyes of the overall staff cadre.

2.8 Yes, the introduction of the new CEO will be a positive contribution to this leadership, but the Council requires long term cultural change and Helen, on her own, won't be able to do everything, nor everything at once. Her leadership will help galvanise the team, but it is important that the team, as a whole, is visible, shares the load and works as a corporate leadership team.

2.9 The CEO has rightly recognised that there is a need for formal development of the senior team. The Challenge Board supports this view and believes that this should be an early priority to help support the pace of cultural change. Plans for "living leader" in June and beyond will help.

# Northumberland County Council

## Challenge Board Interim Report 2 for Member Oversight Group

24 February 2023

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2.10 Clarity around the new executive team also brings with it the chance to start afresh on relationships between members and officers. The Leader is trying to engage the opposition and there is definite need for politicians to work together, but there is also a clear role for officers to support and work with ALL members.

2.11 Your fresh start brings an opportunity to create a stronger combined top team of members and officers, fulfilling their respective roles, with members leading and with officers clearly able to speak truth to power. We would recommend the need for some joint leadership development to support the culture change.

2.12 The key failure in the recruitment process has been the inability to appoint a permanent Monitoring Officer (MO). Are there lessons to be learned about the process and the way that the role was pitched which put candidates off last time and will allow adjustments for the future?

2.13 As we said in our previous report, this is a key role and a real worry for us. We understand that, due to the recruitment difficulties, there is consideration of a new long term interim appointment. Now the Council has made progress away from interim roles across the rest of the senior team, there should be serious consideration over whether such an approach fits well with such an important role. We do however understand the need to fill this post and should an interim be appointed we would recommend this is kept under regular review.

2.14 We noted the disappointing lack of trust and respect for this role from some members. There is obviously a clear need to find a good MO as soon as possible and, in the meantime, for everyone to trust and respect the role and its importance and independence. The Chief Executive has already set clear expectations on the role of the MO and its importance in ensuring good governance in the council

### *Complaints*

2.15 There is still an urgent need to finalise those complaints still outstanding. We would expect to see progress on resolving these by our next report in April. The delay over progressing some complaints is understandable in that the outcomes need to be robust and understandable but the continuation of the processes on complaints, that have been on the books for many months, has added to suspicion. The sooner they reach the right conclusion (whatever that is) the better.



# Northumberland County Council

## Challenge Board Interim Report 2 for Member Oversight Group

24 February 2023

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2.16 It is sensible that the Council intends, with support from the Board, to seek independent review of the processes it has followed on these matters and to identify any lessons to be learned or required process changes. The standards process, where it must be used, needs to be fair, swift, and as transparent as it can be to help build trust. It is recognised that any council has very little flexibility on the range of sanctions available to it.

### *Overall Improvement Activity*

2.17 The Council is only at the start of an improvement journey, and this is a longer-term project than perhaps the council leadership has previously acknowledged. We repeat, also, that we have yet to see how the various streams of improvement are being coordinated and linked in an overall “plan.” We understand the CEO has started, with the Executive Directors, to map the various improvement streams.

2.18 The “Strategic Change Programme” has now been retitled “Best.” It originally appeared to us to be focussed on financial control and reductions. There is nothing wrong with that, but we were unclear how it would also act around behaviours and hearts and minds. The Council has now clarified that this work has 3 main purposes: improving customer service; improving the experience of staff and better value for money. Despite this, the Board still feels there needs to be more-focussed work in the Council on values, behaviour, culture and ethos. There is a need to create greater alignment over the need for savings and the need for cultural change as defined by the Caller Report.

2.19 The Leader and CEO have agreed how the “Best” programme will be directed moving forward. It is right that this is an officer board and will, in future, be chaired by the CEO. It is also good to see members of the Executive Team taking the SRO lead on different elements and building links on these with member portfolio holders. Members should hold officers to account for delivering against the “Best” outcomes. In this respect, regular engagement on the improvement plan with all members, including via scrutiny, should be built into the programme management arrangements.

2.20 The oversight and direction of the “Best” initiative seems clear. We have previously also seen the Caller improvement plan and the work packages around

# Northumberland County Council

## Challenge Board Interim Report 2 for Member Oversight Group

24 February 2023

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that. What we have yet to be convinced about is that there is an overall improvement framework that defines the success measures from that and other work, against a benchmark of a Best Value council. The Council needs this to enable it track the outcomes from the Caller work, but also to ensure that those ambitions are fully integrated into an overall improvement plan or, alternatively, that Caller ambitions are properly integrated into “best.”

2.21 The Board has started a conversation with the CEO on an overarching, compelling, improvement narrative. We need to see this as it is still not clear how all the activity is knitted together into an integrated plan to arrive at the Council you seek to be. This is also needed to avoid a silo approach within each element. It is unclear how the improvement activity flows from the Council’s 3 priorities and also how those 3 priorities are driving the new structure, budget decisions and other improvement plans. Those improvement activities need to have clarity on the outcomes being sought from them. Also, they will not all have equal importance, so your overall plan should be clear on prioritisation.

2.22 The Board has been asking for this overarching narrative and plan for some time. We would be happy to help you develop this. We do need to see and understand this before we review our future role. You will also need to invest time presenting and explaining it to the wider Council and partners.

### *Strategic Delivery Partner*

2.23 We note that the principle of a Strategic Delivery Partner as part of your “Best” work has been approved by Cabinet. There needs to be absolute clarity over the purpose of the Improvement Partner and how they will work with you and build capacity within the Council over time. In the short term the Improvement Partner will bring much needed expertise and capacity, but it also needs to quickly build the same within the council. Skills transfer and capacity building should therefore be seen as an important element of the contractual relationship with the Improvement Partner.

2.24 The type of partner chosen will be key. They will need the right skills and value set and the council will need to ensure they are contracted in an effective way. You

# Northumberland County Council

## Challenge Board Interim Report 2 for Member Oversight Group

24 February 2023

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need to consider how bringing in an improvement partner will land with staff and indeed politically across the Groups.

### *Corporate Plan*

2.25 Having a widely owned Corporate Plan based on clearly identified needs and priorities is a fundamental element of a Best Value authority. The Board had a good session with the Council talking through plans for the Corporate Plan refresh. We offered advice around the timing and speed of this. We understand the intention is to take the new Plan to Council in May. We still feel that this is too soon and that by that stage, it may not have been possible to have engaged with a sufficiently wide range of people. This will mean that some of the potential benefits of the process as well as the strength of the Plan itself will have been lost.

2.26 The Corporate Plan should start from a widely understood picture of needs across the County, as indicated by the data. We feel the journey of arriving at a new Corporate Plan can be just as important as the destination. We do however acknowledge that there has been some engagement on the Corporate Plan with members, through a Policy Conference approach, and with staff groups.

2.27 Arriving at a new Plan is another area where we are not saying slow down for sake of it, 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. The lesson of your own example of the (drawn out) process followed to arrive at the Local Plan should be considered as many feel this was an excellent example of cross party working. We are clearly not saying take as long as that, but the process built in widespread and collective ownership and agreement of the Plan.

2.28 If the current intention to have 2 stages to this exercise, of providing a plan (in May) and then socialising it, is confirmed, you will need to spend time building awareness and embedding it in the Council. This will then need to be used as a basis of building a broader County Plan with partners. That will also need to be done in an inclusive and collaborative way.

### *Constitution and Code of Conduct*

# Northumberland County Council

## Challenge Board Interim Report 2 for Member Oversight Group

24 February 2023

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2.29 We understand that the work to look at the Constitution and Codes of Conduct is progressing, but we wonder to what extent there is there real buy in from members in these processes. The starting point should really be a definition of the sort of culture you want to create through your Constitution and indeed Codes.

2.30 The key to success of the new documents will be ownership arising from how you involve people from across the Council in arriving at them. If you do that, they can fully articulate hopes and fears but most importantly can improve overall governance, efficiency, and culture by addressing what can and cannot be done so parties understand the final outcomes. For example, elsewhere we refer to the ambition from many for there to be stronger overview and scrutiny arrangements. How is this aspiration being reflected in the current review of the Constitution?

2.31 How will you embed the hoped-for behaviour change? You will need effective training and development around the new documents for both officers and members. We have yet to see the plan around this. Likewise, although we have had conversations with NCC over work to looking at the Constitution, we have not seen a plan around evaluation of adjustments to it.

*“Advance” (and other arm’s length companies)*

2.32 We welcome the Council reviewing the rationale for arm’s length companies and also reviewing the approach to their governance, as recommended by the Caller report. We assume the Council is satisfied with the rigour of the approach it followed in November 2022 on assessing the continuation of the Advance model?

2.33 We additionally welcome Advance moving to having independent NEDs on the Board. We hope that some strong appointments can be made. We would recommend that the Council uses an external partner, such as Local Partnerships, to review the progress made so far and to consider the way the Council looks to discharge its shareholder responsibilities. It would be sensible to carefully consider your proposals for the shareholder committee and indeed to be very clear on the different roles and scheme of delegations to the various fora and individuals within the governance of Advance. If you take advice from Local Partnerships, part of this could usefully consider the pros and cons of a transition to an independent Chair of Advance.

# Northumberland County Council



## Challenge Board Interim Report 2 for Member Oversight Group

24 February 2023

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2.34 Our understanding is that a report on the governance is due at Cabinet in March. Given the sensitivity around Advance, our advice is don't rush this and consider some of the points made in the preceding paragraph and take the advice of Local Partnerships on best practice elsewhere.

### *Budget process*

2.35 The leadership of the Council made great effort to get across Northumberland, notably through the area committees, to take questions on the budget. However, we were disappointed to hear views that the budget progressed to approval through Council without early or full involvement of opposition Groups and indeed that consultation with partners was seen to fall short of that done by other Councils. We heard that opposition members were not given a clear or timely opportunity to look at the overall shape of, or the proposals for, the budget, nor did they feel properly consulted

2.36 Opposition groups were told in November that the 2023/24 budget would be different, given the higher degree of uncertainty and size of the gap that needed closing. Members had been given a promise that the budget outline would be shared in January, this didn't happen in the way, nor on the timeline, it had in previous years.

2.37 It appears to be acknowledged by the Council that there is a lot of scope for a more inclusive budget process. One which is more open and transparent for all members and partners and the public. Part of this would be ensuring the wider membership is engaged in a conversation on the broad shape of the budget, perhaps through a Policy Conference type approach. We understand that there are plans, in June, to agree a better process for the next budget round. We welcome that and would suggest the planning includes asking opposition Groups, beforehand, what better would look like.

### *Scrutiny*

2.38 Effective scrutiny is an essential element of a Best Value authority. We have heard widely that scrutiny needs to be significantly improved and given more

# Northumberland County Council



## Challenge Board Interim Report 2 for Member Oversight Group

24 February 2023

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potential influence. We are unclear what the plans for this strengthening are, in terms of the structural arrangements for scrutiny, how to develop the confidence and skills of members as well as to ensure effective officer support and resource.

### *Leadership development*

2.39 We have seen evidence of proposals for development across the officer cadre. But what we have not yet seen is a clear development plan for members. One which can support the ambitions of the Council and expectations of the overall improvement plan as well as “Best.” Members need to have the capacity to show clear leadership and they need to be given the support and development to do this.

2.40 We would welcome hearing further about 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. Is this now progressing and being led on a cross-party basis? There is a need to undertake significant member development, particularly looking at member and officer roles, relationships, behaviours. This will include understanding the role of statutory officers.

2.41 We also feel it is appropriate for officers to be developed and trained to ensure they understand, and are equipped to work in, a political environment and particularly the realities of a “No Overall Control” environment.

2.42 Building on separate officer and member development the council should also look to joint top team development for the collective cabinet and management team.

### *Caller's 9 Recommendations*

2.43 To summarise progress against the 9 Caller recommendations, it would be fair to say that the Council has made some good progress on our first and second tests (para 1.3) against some of them. There are further plans to take several other pieces of work related to other Caller recommendations to the Council meeting in May. These will technically tick off against most of the recommendations on at least the first test (para 1.3). However, our comments above raise questions about the second test on some of these.

# Northumberland County Council

## Challenge Board Interim Report 2 for Member Oversight Group

24 February 2023

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2.44 Alongside these concerns the Council has yet to demonstrate to us how many of these pieces of work will impact on our test 3 (para 1.3), specifically on the overall culture and governance of the Council and how it matches up to the Best Value ideal.

2.45 We are still gathering views about your progress against the Caller recommendations, as well as wider progress against the Best Value Authority benchmark. We intend to provide a stocktake on this and the role of the Board to MOG in April.

### 3. Recommendations

3.1 We continue to hear many voices saying that the challenge is bigger than some think and that this will be a longer improvement journey than was originally hoped, or planned, for. Some voices are also asking whether the council is focussed enough on the longer-term values, culture and behaviour change required to be an effective, Best Value, Council.

3.2 The key is to rebuild trust. This can't be done overnight and is a longer-term project. It will be slower and harder to achieve if some are, or perceive they are, not being effectively involved in the process of rebuilding, or in the activities currently being undertaken on things like the Corporate Plan, Constitution and Codes.

3.3 There are the issues we feel the Council needs to quickly address:

a. It is essential for the Council to arrive at a compelling overall improvement narrative/ambition, which is clear about outcomes and the Council you seek to be. You should then ensure you have a clear holistic improvement plan through which to achieve this. This needs to build on the framework which the Caller recommendations use to ensure the governance, culture, and behaviours outcomes from the action around Caller are either explicitly integrated within the "best" programme or it is shown how the overall improvement plan will ensure they will be embedded through other routes. Stakeholders, as well as ourselves, will need this for assurance. Plans are not a proxy for having done it. Having done it is not a guarantee of having any, or the expected, impact.

# Northumberland County Council



## Challenge Board Interim Report 2 for Member Oversight Group

24 February 2023

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b. Assure yourselves that the work on adjusting the Constitution and Codes of Conduct and to socialise/implement them are inclusive and focussed on the outcome you are seeking to generate.

c. Capitalise on the opportunity given by a refresh of the Corporate Plan to create common purpose around the Leader's key ambition on inequalities. Start by sharing data defining the nature of inequality around the County, to ensure an informed debate on the ambitions and interventions in a Corporate Plan to tackle this and achieve other key priorities. Your current approach to renewing the Corporate Plan appears to be a missed opportunity

d. Allow yourself time for further reflection on the corporate governance of Advance, using advice from an expert such as Local Partnerships.

e. We would still urge you to make progress, ahead of the refresh of the Constitution, on 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.





## Northumberland County Council

COUNTY COUNCIL

MARCH 2023

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Pay Policy Statement of Northumberland County Council 2023/2024

**Report of Sarah Farrell, Director of Workforce and OD**

**Cabinet Member:** Richard Wearmouth, Deputy Leader

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### **Purpose of report**

The Localism Act 2011 requires the County Council to prepare and publish a Pay Policy Statement. The purpose of such a statement is to articulate the Council's policies towards a range of issues relating to the pay of its workforce, particularly its senior staff and its lowest paid employees.

The Council wishes to ensure that it operates on the principles of equal pay for work of equal value, and also within the various other legislative requirements, including the Equality Act 2010.

The policy statement applies to the 2023-24 financial year. The policy will be reviewed annually and takes into account the statutory guidance on openness and transparency issued by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. (DLUHC)

### **Recommendations**

Council is requested to approve:

1. The amended Pay Policy Statement 2023-24 set out at Appendix 1.

### **Link to Corporate Plan**

The report is relevant to both the Living & Learning and Thriving priorities included in the NCC Corporate Plan 2021-2024 as it is linked to the pay of the workforce.

### **Key issues**

This report is required to be submitted annually for consideration for approval by Full Council.

## **Background**

1. Please find attached at Appendix 1 the proposed amended Pay Policy statement for 2023/24 based on external legal advice. All amendments to the policy statement approved by Council on 30 March 2022 are underlined in the document.
2. The proposed revisions to the 2023/2024 Pay Policy and the reasons have been highlighted in Appendix 2. Where a revision has been made to the 2023/24 Policy the paragraphs have been underlined in the document. A copy of the original published 22/23 Pay Policy statement has been included and attached at Appendix 3 for reference.
3. Under section 39 of the Localism Act the Pay Policy has to be agreed by 31 March. The proposal is the revised document will replace the current published Pay Policy 2022/23.

## **Implications**

<b>Policy</b>	The purpose of such a statement is to articulate the Council's policies towards a range of issues relating to the pay of its workforce, particularly its senior staff and its lowest paid employees. The Council wishes to ensure that it operates on the principles of equal pay for work of equal value, and also within the various other legislative requirements, including the Equality Act 2010.
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	As above
<b>Legal</b>	As above and also the legal implications are covered within the body of this report.
<b>Procurement</b>	Not applicable
<b>Human Resources</b>	Statement relates to pay within the organisation and its workforce in particular the highest salaries and its lowest paid employees.
<b>Property</b>	Not applicable
<b>Equalities</b> (Impact Assessment attached)	EIA attached Appendix 4

Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	Not applicable
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	Not applicable
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	Customers will have access to the statement via the website
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	Not applicable
<b>Health and Wellbeing</b>	As policy is linked to Human Resources and the workforce of NCC our policy can have an effect on wellbeing and mental health of workforce.
<b>Wards</b>	Not applicable

**Background papers:**

**Report signs off.**

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

	Full Name of Officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Suki Binjal
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Jan Willis
Relevant Executive Director	Sarah Farrell Director of Workforce and OD
Chief Executive	Helen Paterson (Audrey Kingham on behalf of Helen Paterson)
Portfolio Holder(s)	Richard Wearmouth

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# Northumberland County Council

## Pay Policy Statement April 2023 to March 2024

### Purpose

1. The Localism Act 2011 requires the County Council to prepare and publish a Pay Policy Statement. The purpose of such a statement is to articulate the Council's policies towards a range of issues relating to the pay of its workforce, particularly its senior staff and its lowest paid employees. The Council wishes to ensure that it operates on the principles of equal pay for work of equal value, and also within the various other legislative requirements, including the Equality Act 2010.
2. This policy statement applies to the 2023-24 financial year and will be approved at a meeting of the Council which is open to the public and observers. It will be reviewed annually and takes into account the guidance on openness and transparency issued by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. (DLUHC)

### Scope

3. The policy applies to all Council employees although it does not normally refer to particular individuals (except where required or specifically agreed) to ensure the General Data Protection Regulations are adhered to. This policy does not apply to school staff as it is the responsibility of each school to determine their own pay policies.
4. The Council's policies and schemes relating to data transparency, and the guidance on transparency issued by the Secretary of State for DLUHC should be read in conjunction with this pay policy statement.

### Publication

5. This policy will be published on the Council's website and will be made available to the community. This will enable local people to have an informed view of whether local decisions on all aspects of remuneration are reasonable and make the best of public funds.

### Salaries of Chief Officers and Senior Posts

6. The Council's management structure, along with the salaries of the Council's Chief Officers and its most senior staff will be published on the Council's internet site. All these posts are evaluated using the Local Government Employers job evaluation scheme. When determining salary bands, there are a number of factors taken into account, including:

- The current labour market
- The Council's senior structure, financial situation and foreseeable future changes to these
- The total remuneration package
- How pay is linked to remuneration of the wider workforce and national negotiating frameworks
- The costs over the short, medium and long term.

The Staff & Appointments Committee has access to appropriate independent expert advice where necessary. Senior management pay bands will increase in line with the nationally negotiated pay increase for the NJC for Local Government Services employees. The Committee also has the discretion to agree additional pay points if required.

7. For the purpose of this policy statement, the Council defines its senior posts as those at Head of Service level and above.

8. The data publicised for senior posts will detail the post title, the banding range (as recommended by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in its guidance on Data Transparency), and the name of the current post holder. The conditions of service for senior staff require them to agree to the publication of such information.

9. All senior staff are appointed to a spot point within their salary range and there is no automatic incremental progression within the range. The default position is that there is no increment awarded, however, in exceptional circumstances the Head of Paid Service may consider awarding an increment following objective assessment of performance. in accordance with the Senior Manager Terms and Conditions of Employment. Any recommendations made by the Head of Paid Service should then be subject to the approval of the Staff and Appointments Committee. There is no "earn back" scheme in operation.

10. In addition to the above, for Chief Officer posts, salary and any other fees, allowances, bonuses, performance related pay, and benefits in kind that the post holder would routinely be entitled to will also be published in the Council's Statement of Accounts. Chief Officer is defined in s43 of the Localism Act 2011 as follows:

- € The head of the authority's paid service
- € The monitoring officer
- € Any statutory chief officer:
  - The person having responsibility, for all statutory purposes (inc. s151 of the

Local Government Act 1972), for the administration of the authority's financial affairs.

- The Director of Children's Services appointed under s18 of the Children Act 2004.
- The Director of Adult Social Services appointed under section 6 (A1) of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 (as amended by the Children Act 2004).
- The Director of Public Health appointed under s73A (1) of the National Health Service Act 2006.
- The Director of Education appointed under s532 of the Education Act.
- The Chief Fire Officer of a fire brigade maintained under the Fire Services Act 1947 and appointed under regulations made under section 18(1)(a) of that Act.

€ Any non-statutory officer:

- A person for whom the head of the authority's paid service is directly responsible.
- A person who in relation to most of their duties is required to report direct or is directly accountable to the head of paid service and any person who similarly is required to report direct or is directly accountable to the authority or its committees.

11. All County Council employees covered by this pay policy statement who have a contract of employment for at least 3 months, and, all Fire Authority employees, are automatically enrolled into the appropriate pension scheme i.e., the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) or the Firefighters Pension Scheme. The employer will make pension contributions to those schemes. In respect of the LGPS, the current employer's contribution rate is 21% of pensionable pay in respect of future service accruals and, in addition, lump sum payments are made in respect of the past service deficit. There are 4 Firefighters Pension Schemes currently in operation. In respect of the old Firefighters Pension Scheme (the scheme in existence prior to 6 April 2006) the employer pays a pension contribution of 21.7% of pensionable pay. In respect of the Firefighters Pension Scheme (which commenced on 6 April 2006), the employer pays 11.9% of pensionable pay. In respect of the latest Firefighters Pension Scheme (which commenced on 1 April 2015), the employer pays 14.3% of pensionable pay. Employees can opt out of their pension scheme if they wish. The fourth one is the Retained Modified Scheme, introduced 1 April 2015 and the employer's percentage is 21.7%.

12. Notwithstanding any other requirement of the Constitution, any appointment within the Council that attracts a salary package of £100,000 or more will be considered and approved by the Staff & Appointments Committee. Salary package in this respect includes salary and any other fees, allowances, bonuses and benefits in kind that the post holder would routinely be entitled to. This does not include the employer's pension contributions should the post holder choose to join a pension scheme.

## **Salaries of Posts below Head of Service**

13. The band applicable to a post in bands 1-10 (spinal column point 1–43 inclusive) is determined using the job evaluation scheme recommended by the NJC for Local Government Services. A panel of experienced trade union representatives and HR officers evaluate each post using agreed job descriptions. Posts in bands 11-13 (spinal column point 44- 55 inclusive) are evaluated using the Local Government Employers job evaluation scheme. There is a right of appeal against the grade determined for the job in accordance with a locally agreed procedure. There is also an agreed procedure for consideration of individual re-grading requests.

14. There are thirteen bands covering posts below Head of Service. Each band has a number of spinal pay points with a differential falling within agreed parameters. It is the Council's policy to appoint at the bottom of the relevant pay band with agreed rules around appointment, promotion or re-grading to a post with a higher maximum salary. In exceptional circumstances where this is not the case, appointing officers are required to provide clear evidence so that the principles of equal pay for work of equal value are not undermined.

15. Pay bands will be updated annually in line with guidance from the National Employers. Incremental progression within each pay band is normally applicable from 1 April each year up to the maximum of the band, subject to six months' service within the band. Where the service requirement is not met on 1 April, the increment will be paid on the six-month anniversary of the employee's start date on that band.

16. The Council's arrangements for remuneration in respect of additional payments and allowances are outlined in Northumberland County Council's Terms and Conditions of Employment, as are the methods of calculating pay for part time and term time only workers.

## **Salaries of Other Posts**

17. There are a small number of other staff groups employed by the Council who are not covered by Northumberland County Council's Terms and Conditions of Employment. The pay levels for Youth and Community Workers, Tutors, 'Soulbury' employees, centrally employed Teachers, Coroners and Uniformed Firefighters are determined by applying the relevant rules applicable within their own nationally agreed terms and conditions.

## **Relationship between Senior Posts and Lowest Paid Posts**

18. As of November 2022, the Council's pay multiple is 6.55 i.e., the ratio of the median employee remuneration to that of the highest paid employee. This pay multiple is considered to be appropriate and does not represent an excessive pay gap. The multiple is significantly reduced from the previous year due to a substantial reduction in the maximum salary paid within the



Council.

## **Severance and Redundancy Payments**

19. The County Council's policy on redundancy, severance and pension is reviewed regularly (in accordance with *The Local Government (Early Termination of Employment) (Discretionary Compensation) (England and Wales) Regulations*). The Redundancy Policy is published on the Council's website. Any changes to this scheme are consulted upon with the relevant trade unions recognised by the Council for collective bargaining purposes. Any significant changes to the scheme must be considered by the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC). This scheme is not contractual, and the County Council may vary the discretionary terms of the scheme. Payments must always be in the financial and managerial interests of the County Council and all cases must be approved in accordance with the scheme of delegation.

20. Severance or redundancy payments made to any Chief Officers and Senior Officers will be published in the Council's Statement of Accounts as required.

21. The Staff and Appointments Committee has delegated authority from the Full Council to approve severance and redundancy payments for Chief and Deputy Chief Officers. For clarity, this requirement applies to all those posts that fall into the scope of s43 of the Localism Act and all Heads of Service. All exit packages over £100k will be approved by Full Council.

## **Additional Special Payments**

22. To ensure the Council has sufficient flexibility to cope with a variety of circumstances, foreseeable or not, the Head of Paid Service, or an individual nominated by the Head of Paid Service, may agree the use of market supplements or other such mechanisms for individual categories of posts, individual posts, or individual employees. The Staff and Appointments Committee will approve additional special payments for Chief Officers and Senior Officers.

23. The statutory role of Returning Officer carries a set fee at centrally funded polls such as Parliamentary, PCC elections and national referenda. At such polls this fee is set by order based on local authority size and previous authorised spend. At County Council, Combined Authority and Town & Parish elections (local elections), the Returning Officer's fee is not set by order and is subject to local discretion. It is proposed that the NCC Returning Officer fee for local elections and the calculation of payments made to the election core team and all other staff employed at these polls is based on the most current nationally funded election or a % of it, leading up to that local election. Moving forward all election roles supporting Elections will be aligned to NCC Paybands depending upon the key tasks and responsibilities required for the role. A suite of role profiles has been developed and aligned with NCC Paybands and using NJC terms and conditions for calculation of payments for hours worked during elections.

24. The Returning Officer's fee at local elections, together with the schedule of payments made

to the election core team and for each job type employed at the election, will be published not later than the publication of the statutory election timetable, notice of election. Any job type that qualifies for a mileage payment that is not inclusive of a fee, mileage will be set at the standard rate for public sector workers.

25. The Returning Officer reserves the right to make reasonable payments as are necessary for the conduct and delivery of casual vacancies and planning referenda that fall outside of the main election cycle.

### **Re-Employment of Former Employees**

26. Where employees have been made compulsory redundant there is no general restriction on any future re-employment, where such re-employment occurs at a later date and as a discrete event unconnected with the redundancy, although in certain circumstances the return of pension and redundancy payments is a legal requirement. Where staff have requested voluntary redundancy, and this has been approved, then re-employment with the Council to a permanent, fixed term or temporary post within a period of 2 calendar years will only be with the express approval of the Director of Workforce and OD. If there are any exceptional circumstances regarding the re-employment of employees, who have been made compulsory redundant, either employed directly by the Council or via an agency/consultancy basis, these must be discussed and agreed in advance with the relevant Executive Director and together with the Director of Workforce and OD.

### **Pay Protection**

27. The Council's Pay Protection and Detriment Scheme outlines the circumstances where it is appropriate to provide pay protection, including the terms and duration.

### **Secondary Employment**

28. Chief Officers may undertake secondary employment if a declaration is made, formal approval is sought and subsequently approved by Staff and Appointments Committee.

29. Other senior officers may undertake secondary employment if a declaration is made, formal approval is sought and subsequently approved by the Head of Paid Service.

### **Contracts for services and appointment of consultants**

30. By law, the County Council must determine whether an arrangement with a consultant or contractor constitutes a contract of employment or is on a self-employed basis. It must determine this for every proposed agreement. The decision on status relates to the contract, not the individual. The decision must be undertaken before the Council agrees to any engagement or signs any contract. Where an engagement constitutes a contract of

employment, the Council's standard terms and conditions will apply. The County Council will pay the contract at the evaluated rate for the job. It may be appropriate to re-engage a former employee as a consultant with a contract for service in certain circumstances, such as:

- € for discrete pieces of work where the former employee has the appropriate skill and experience, which is not available elsewhere in the Council
- € where it is more cost-effective
- € where it is difficult to recruit due to market conditions
- € where work of an urgent nature arises at short notice

The County Council will make such arrangements time-limited and subject to appropriate written agreements covering the nature, duration and quality standards. The County Council will include the basis on which the agreement terminates. The contractor must sign the written agreement before the arrangement starts. The initial consideration for providing cover for urgent work will be through the use of temporary employment contracts. This will be advertised in the usual manner. The County Council may make acting-up or secondment arrangements available to existing staff, particularly where work relates to the regular business of the service area.

31. Under the Pensions Act 2008, the County Council must comply with auto-enrolment regulations. It will assess whether a contractor is an employee rather than self-employed and therefore pensionable under the Act. To determine whether a consultant is self-employed, consideration is given to:

- € the contractual terms we agree
- € the realities of the employment relationship

The County Council will review whether there is provision for substitution and whether resources are provided by the consultant or by the County Council. These examples are not exhaustive and are illustrative of the type of factors that will be taken into account.

### **Personal service contracts**

32. In the contracting sector, the generally accepted definition of a personal service company is:

- € a limited company that typically has a sole director, the contractor, who owns most or all of the shares

Contractors choose to work for clients using their own limited companies for many reasons. Limited companies can be a tax-efficient way for contractors to work. They may split their

income between salary and dividends. This means they do not pay employers' or employees' Class 1 National Insurance Contributions on a large part of their income. Personal service contracts prevent the risk of there being a contract of service or an employment relationship with us. This eliminates any income tax liability on the County Council. Using a limited liability company also insulates contractors from business risk to a certain extent. Due to Government changes in the rules for off-payroll working in the public sector for intermediaries, off payroll work is supported by the County Council Procurement service to ensure good practice is followed.

### **Policy Review**

33. This policy statement will be reviewed annually and any disputes relating to interpretation will be considered by the Head of Paid Service or a person nominated by the Head of Paid Service who will be the final arbiter. Where unforeseen circumstances require flexibility of this policy, the Head of Paid Service, or the Staff & Appointments Committee if the matter concerns a Chief or Deputy Chief Officer, will have the power to approve changes. Any deviation from the policy in-year will be reported to the full Council at the next review date.



# Northumberland County Council

## **Pay Policy Statement April 2022 to March 2023**

### **Purpose**

1. The Localism Act 2011 requires the County Council to prepare and publish a Pay Policy Statement. The purpose of such a statement is to articulate the Council's policies towards a range of issues relating to the pay of its workforce, particularly its senior staff and its lowest paid employees. The Council wishes to ensure that it operates on the principles of equal pay for work of equal value, and also within the various other legislative requirements, including the Equality Act 2010.
2. This policy statement applies to the 2022-23 financial year and has been approved at a meeting of the Council which was open to the public and observers. It will be reviewed annually and takes into account the guidance on openness issued by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. (DLUHC)

### **Scope**

3. The policy applies to all Council employees although it does not normally refer to particular individuals (except where specifically agreed) to ensure the General Data Protection Regulations are adhered to. This policy does not apply to school staff as it is the responsibility of each school to determine their own pay policies.
4. The Council's policies and schemes relating to data transparency, and the guidance on transparency issued by the Secretary of State for DLUHC should be read in conjunction with this pay policy statement.

### **Publication**

5. This policy will be published on the Council's website and will be made available to the community. This will enable local people to have an informed view of whether local decisions on all aspects of remuneration are reasonable and make the best of public funds.

### **Salaries of Chief Officers and Senior Posts**

6. The Council's management structure, along with the salaries of the Council's Chief Officers and its most senior staff will be published on the Council's internet site. All these posts are evaluated using the Local Government Employers job evaluation scheme. When determining salary bands, there are a number of factors taken into account, including:

- The current labour market
- The Council's senior structure, financial situation and foreseeable future changes to these
- The total remuneration package
- How pay is linked to remuneration of the wider workforce and national negotiating frameworks
- The costs over the short, medium and long term.

The Staff & Appointments Committee (Paragraph 14) has access to appropriate independent expert advice where necessary. Senior management pay bands will increase in line with the nationally negotiated pay increase for the NJC for Local Government Services employees. The Committee also has the discretion to agree additional pay points if required.

7. For the purpose of this policy statement, the Council defines its senior posts as those at Head of Service level and above.

8. Chief Executive works within the national conditions of service covered by the JNC for Chief Executives.

9. All Senior Officers are employed on Northumberland County Council Terms & Conditions for Senior Management, which are locally determined and are supplemented by policies of the Council. Chief Officers (as defined in paragraph 12) also work within the national conditions of service covered by the JNC for Chief Officers.

10. The data publicised for senior posts will detail the post title, the banding range (as recommended by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in its guidance on Data Transparency), and the name of the current post holder. The conditions of service for senior staff require them to agree to the publication of such information.

11. All senior staff are appointed to a spot point within their salary range and there is no automatic incremental progression within the range. The default position is that there is no increment awarded, however, the Head of Paid Service will review the performance of each post holder and may award an increment in accordance with the Senior Manager Terms and Conditions of Employment. There is no "earn back" scheme in operation.

12. In addition to the above, for Chief Officer posts, salary and any other fees, allowances, bonuses, performance related pay, and benefits in kind that the post holder would routinely be entitled to will also be published in the Council's Statement of Accounts. Chief Officer is defined in s43 of the Localism Act 2011 as follows:

- € The head of the authority's paid service
- € The monitoring officer
- € Any statutory chief officer:
  - The person having responsibility, for all statutory purposes (inc. s151 of the Local Government Act 1972), for the administration of the authority's financial affairs.
  - The Director of Children's Services appointed under s18 of the Children Act 2004.
  - The Director of Adult Social Services appointed under section 6 (A1) of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 (as amended by the Children Act 2004).
  - The Director of Public Health appointed under s73A (1) of the National Health Service Act 2006.
  - The Director of Education appointed under s532 of the Education Act.
  - The Chief Fire Officer of a fire brigade maintained under the Fire Services Act 1947 and appointed under regulations made under section 18(1)(a) of that Act.
- € Any non-statutory officer:
  - A person for whom the head of the authority's paid service is directly responsible.
  - A person who in relation to most of their duties is required to report direct or is directly accountable to the head of paid service and any person who similarly is required to report direct or is directly accountable to the authority or its committees.

13. All County Council employees covered by this pay policy statement who have a contract of employment for at least 3 months, and, all Fire Authority employees, are automatically enrolled into the appropriate pension scheme i.e., the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) or the Firefighters Pension Scheme. The employer will make pension contributions to those schemes. In respect of the LGPS, the current employers' contribution rate is 21% of pensionable pay in respect of future service accruals and, in addition, lump sum payments are made in respect of the past service deficit. There are 4 Firefighters Pensions Scheme currently in operation. In respect of the old Firefighters Pension Scheme (the scheme in existence prior to 6 April 2006) the employer pays a pension contribution of 21.7% of pensionable pay. In respect of the Firefighters Pension Scheme (which commenced on 6 April 2006), the employer pays 11.9% of pensionable pay. In respect of the latest Firefighters Pension Scheme (which commenced on 1 April 2015), the employer pays 14.3% of pensionable pay. Employees can opt out of their pension scheme if they wish. The fourth one is the Retained Modified Scheme, introduced 1 April 2015 and the employer's percentage is 21.7%.

14. Any appointment within the Council that attracts a salary package of £100,000 or more will be considered and approved by the Staff & Appointments Committee. Salary package in this respect includes salary and any other fees, allowances, bonuses and benefits in kind that the post holder would routinely be entitled to. This does not include the employer's pension contributions should the post holder choose to join a pension scheme.

### **Salaries of Posts below Head of Service**

15. The band applicable to a post in bands 1-10 (spinal column point 1–43 inclusive) is determined using the job evaluation scheme recommended by the NJC for Local Government Services. A panel of experienced trade union representatives and HR officers evaluate each post using agreed job descriptions. Posts in bands 11-13 (spinal column point 44- 55 inclusive) are evaluated using the Local Government Employers job evaluation scheme. There is a right of appeal against the grade determined for the job in accordance with a locally agreed procedure. There is also an agreed procedure for consideration of individual re-grading requests.

16. There are thirteen bands covering posts below Head of Service. Each band has a number of spinal pay points with a differential falling within agreed parameters. It is the Council's policy to appoint at the bottom of the relevant pay band with agreed rules around appointment, promotion or re-grading to a post with a higher maximum salary. In exceptional circumstances where this is not the case, appointing officers are required to provide clear evidence so that the principles of equal pay for work of equal value are not undermined.

17. Pay bands will be updated annually in line with guidance from the National Employers. Incremental progression within each pay band is normally applicable from 1 April each year up to the maximum of the band, subject to six months' service within the band. Where the service requirement is not met on 1 April, the increment will be paid on the six-month anniversary of the employee's start date on that band.

18. The Council's arrangements for remuneration in respect of additional payments and allowances are outlined in Northumberland County Council's Terms and Conditions of Employment, as are the methods of calculating pay for part time and term time only workers.

### **Salaries of Other Posts**

19. There are a small number of other staff groups employed by the Council who are not covered by Northumberland County Council's Terms and Conditions of Employment. The pay levels for Youth and Community Workers, Tutors, Soulbury employees, centrally employed Teachers, Coroners, Uniformed Firefighters are determined by applying the relevant rules applicable within their own nationally agreed terms and conditions.



## **Relationship between Senior Posts and Lowest Paid Posts**

20. As of December 2022, the Council's pay multiple is 8.73 i.e., the ratio of the median employee remuneration to that of the highest paid employee. This pay multiple is considered to be appropriate and not represent an excessive pay gap.

## **Severance and Redundancy Payments**

21. The County Council's policy on redundancy, severance and pension is reviewed regularly (in accordance with *The Local Government (Early Termination of Employment) (Discretionary Compensation) (England and Wales) Regulations*). The Redundancy Policy is published on the Council's website. Any changes to this scheme are consulted upon with the relevant trade unions recognised by the Council for collective bargaining purposes. Any significant changes to the scheme must be approved by the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC). This scheme is not contractual, and the County Council may vary the discretionary terms of the scheme. Payments must always be in the financial and managerial interests of the County Council and all cases must be approved by the relevant Executive Director and the Head of Paid Service or their nominated representative.

22. Severance or redundancy payments made to any Chief Officers and Senior Officers will be published in the Council's Statement of Accounts as required.

23. The Staff and Appointments Committee has delegated authority from the Full Council to approve severance and redundancy payments for Chief Officers. For clarity, this requirement applies to all those posts that fall into the scope of s43 of the Localism Act and all Heads of Service. All exit packages over 100k must be approved by Full Council.

The SAC will approve additional special payments for Chief Officers and senior officers and in the interests of transparency all special payments should be reported to the SAC.

## **Additional Special Payments**

24. To ensure the Council has sufficient flexibility to cope with a variety of circumstances, foreseeable or not, the Head of Paid Service, or an individual nominated by the Head of Paid Service, may agree the use of market supplements or other such mechanisms for individual categories of posts, individual posts, or individual employees. As stated in paragraph 23 and, in the interests of transparency all special payments should be reported to the Staff and Appointments Committee.

25. The statutory role of Returning Officer carries a set fee at centrally funded polls such as Parliamentary\_PCC elections and national referenda. At such polls this fee is set by order based

on local authority size and previous authorised spend. At County Council, Combined Authority and Town & Parish elections (local elections), the Returning Officer's fee is not set by order and is subject to local discretion. It is proposed that the NCC Returning Officer fee for local elections and the calculation of payments made to the election core team and all other staff employed at these polls is based on the most current nationally funded election or a % of it, leading up to that local election. Moving forward all election roles supporting Elections will be aligned to NCC Paybands depending upon the key tasks and responsibilities required for the role. A suite of role profiles has been developed aligned with NCC Paybands and using NJC terms and conditions for calculation of payments for hours worked during elections.

26. The Returning Officer's fee at local elections, together with the schedule of payments made to the election core team and for each job type employed at the election, will be published not later than the publication of the statutory election timetable, notice of election. Any job type that qualifies for a mileage payment that is not inclusive of a fee, mileage will be set at the standard rate for public sector workers.

27. The Returning Officer reserves the right to make reasonable payments as are necessary for the conduct and delivery of casual vacancies and planning referenda that fall outside of the main election cycle.

### **Re-Employment of Former Employees**

28. The Council's policy is that there is no general restriction on any future re-employment of an employee who has been made redundant or who is in receipt of a Local Government or other public sector pension. However, where staff have requested voluntary redundancy, and this has been approved, then re-employment with the County Council to a permanent, fixed term or temporary post within a period of 2 calendar years will only be with the express approval of the Service Director Human Resources. Such approval will only be given on the basis of service need and will take account of current legislation at the date of the request. Posts which are, by their nature, casual and place no obligation on the Council to provide work (and no obligation on an individual to accept work offered) are exempt from this requirement; such posts will include casual registration, electoral and invigilating staff. The County Council does not however approve of "deals" involving the redundancy / early retirement and immediate re-employment of employees either on the payroll or via an agency/consultancy basis. If there are any exceptional circumstances, which might appear to justify such arrangements, these must be discussed and agreed in advance with the relevant Executive Director and Human Resources/Organisational Development.

### **Pay Protection**

29. The Council's Pay Protection and Detriment Scheme outlines the circumstances where it is appropriate to provide pay protection, including the terms and duration.

## Secondary Employment

30. Chief Officers may undertake secondary employment if a declaration is made, formal approval is sought and subsequently approved by the Leader of the Council.

31. Senior Officers may undertake secondary employment if a declaration is made, formal approval is sought and subsequently approved by the Head of Paid Service.

## Contracts for services and appointment of consultants

32. By law, the county council must determine whether an arrangement with a consultant or contractor constitutes a contract of employment or is on a self-employed basis. We must determine this for every proposed agreement. The decision on status relates to the contract, not the individual. The decision must be undertaken before we agree to any engagement or sign any contract. Where an engagement constitutes a contract of employment, our standard terms and conditions will apply. The county council will pay the contract at the evaluated rate for the job. It may be appropriate to re-engage a former employee as a consultant with a contract for service in certain circumstances, such as:

- € for discrete pieces of work where the former employee has the appropriate skill and experience, which is not available elsewhere in the council
- € where it is more cost-effective
- € where it is difficult to recruit due to market conditions
- € where work of an urgent nature arises at short notice

The county council will make such arrangements time-limited and subject to appropriate written agreements covering the nature, duration and quality standards. We will include the basis on which the agreement terminates. The contractor must sign the written agreement before the arrangement starts. The initial consideration for providing cover for urgent work will be through the use of temporary employment contracts. We will advertise these in the usual manner. The county council may make acting-up or secondment arrangements available to existing staff, particularly where work relates to the regular business of the service area.

33. Under the Pensions Act 2008, the county council must comply with auto-enrolment regulations. We will assess whether a contractor is an employee rather than self-employed and therefore, pensionable under the Act. To determine whether a consultant is self-employed, consideration is given to:

- € the contractual terms we agree
- € the realities of the employment relationship

The county council will review whether there is provision for substitution and whether resources are provided by the consultant or by us. These examples are not exhaustive and are illustrative of the type of factors that will be taken into account.

### **Personal service contracts**

34. In the contracting sector, the generally-accepted definition of a personal service company is:

- € a limited company that typically has a sole director, the contractor, who owns most or all of the shares

Contractors choose to work for clients using their own limited companies for many reasons. Limited companies can be a tax-efficient way for contractors to work. They may split their income between salary and dividends. This means they do not pay employers' or employees' Class 1 National Insurance Contributions on a large part of their income. Personal service contracts prevent the risk of there being a contract of service or an employment relationship with us. This eliminates any income tax liability on the county council. Using a limited liability company also insulates contractors from business risk to a certain extent. Due to Government changes in the rules for off-payroll working in the public sector for intermediaries, off payroll work is supported by the County Council Procurement service to ensure good practice is followed.

### **Policy Review**

35. This policy statement will be reviewed annually and any disputes relating to interpretation will be considered by the Head of Paid Service or a person nominated by the Head of Paid Service who will be the final arbiter. Where unforeseen circumstances require flexibility of this policy, the Head of Paid Service, or the Staff & Appointments Committee if the matter concerns a Senior Officer, will have the power to implement changes. Any deviation from the policy in-year will be reported to the full Council at the next review date.



# Northumberland

## County Council

### Equality Impact Assessment - HR Policies

Carrying out an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) will help the County Council to meet its Public Sector Equality Duties (Equality Act 2010).

The duties which need to be considered when making decisions are to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

Failure to assess the equality impact may increase the risk of making an unfair decision which could potentially be discriminatory. It also prevents us from identifying opportunities to promote equality and therefore leaves the County Council open to potential legal challenge.

Using this EIA template will help to ensure that a decision is made in a fair way, based on evidence. It provides a clear and structured method to assess the potential impact on protected groups.

<b>Title of policy:</b>	Pay Policy Statement 2023/24
<b>Briefly describe the aims of the policy change, decision or proposal</b>	The Localism Act 2011 requires the County Council to prepare a pay policy statement. The purpose of such a statement is to articulate the Council's policies towards a range of issues relating to the pay of its workforce, particularly its senior staff and its lowest paid employees. The Council also wishes to ensure that it operates on the principles of equal for work of equal value, and also within the various other legislative requirements, including the Equality Act 2010.

Consider the potential impact on any member of staff or member of the public with the following protected characteristics:

Age, Disability, Gender identity/Gender reassignment, Race, Religion or belief, Sex, Sexual orientation, Women who are pregnant or have recently had a baby.

Also, for issues affecting staff, consider employees who are married or in a civil partnership.

<p><b>What information is already held, or have you obtained through consultation or engagement activity?</b> (For each protected characteristic: What do you know about who is employed or uses a service or potentially could be affected by the proposal? Who has been consulted? If you have gaps in your evidence or data, you may need to carry out targeted engagement activity and/or consider information from local or national research.)</p>	<p>The pay policy statement relates to how pay and reward is set and maintained within the Council. Once released, should any individual issues arise, these will be considered on a case-by-case basis and any E&amp;D implications will be recorded by the HR/OD Team.</p>
<p><b>After considering the information, which protected groups may potentially be affected?</b> (Delete those not likely to be affected)</p>	<p>Disability Race LGBT+ Sex Age Women who are pregnant or have babies</p>
<p><b>Using the information you have, give details of any potential positive and negative impacts on protected groups likely to be affected by the policy change, decision or proposal</b></p>	<p><u>Disability</u> The Council's employee records detail those employees who consider themselves to have a disability for staff that have provided data. When determining the general principles of the pay policy statement, individual circumstances are not considered and there are no barriers for disabled employees as the policy applies across the board. Disabled staff can only be advantaged in that the decision to adopt a pay policy will ensure that there is transparency in how the Council pays and rewards its staff. These are safeguards in other HR/OD Policies</p>

	<p>such as making reasonable adjustments to support disabled people in their employment. It is generally the case that employees with disabilities are employed within the lower pay groups and the specific reference to the Council's pay multiple (and monitoring of the multiple) should highlight any drift between the highest paid employee and the lowest.</p> <p><u>Race</u> The Council's employee records detail race information for staff that have provided data. When determining the general principles of the pay policy statement, individual circumstances are not considered and there are no barriers for employees of differing racial backgrounds as the policy applies across the board. BAME staff can only be advantaged in that the decision to adopt a pay policy will ensure that there is transparency in how the Council pays and rewards its staff. There are safeguards in other HR/OD Policies such as recruitment and dignity at work to support BAME people in their employment.</p> <p><u>LGBT+</u> The Council's employee records detail sexuality information for staff that have provided data. When determining the general principles of the pay policy statement, individual circumstances are not considered and there are no barriers for employees of differing sexuality as the policy applies across the board. LGBT+ staff can only be advantaged in that the decision to adopt a pay policy will ensure that there is transparency in how the Council pays and rewards its staff. There are safeguards in other HR/OD Policies such as recruitment and dignity at work to support LGBT+ people in their employment.</p> <p><u>Sex</u> The Council's employee records detail the split between gender. Although the pay policy statement does not cover gender issues, it does cross reference to other documents and policies which address gender issues. The mandatory Gender Pay Gap must be reported on by 31 March annually and this will provide further transparency in relation to gender and pay. It is generally the case that women are the lowest paid group and the specific reference to the Council's</p>
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	<p>pay multiple (and monitoring of the multiple) should highlight any drift between the highest paid employee and the lowest.</p> <p><u>Age</u> The Council's employee records detail the age of employees. Although this pay policy statement itself does not cover age issues, it does cross reference to other documents which address age issues. There are also other policies in place to ensure that age is only taken into account when considering pay and reward where there is reasonable justification e.g., statutory redundancy pay based on age and length of service.</p> <p><u>Women are pregnant or who have recently had a baby</u> The NJC terms of service, supplemented by local terms, cover the pay and reward policy in respect of pregnancy and maternity leave. The Pay Policy statement does not impact on the established arrangements which will be themselves subject to an EIA. There are other policies in place to ensure that service whilst pregnant or on maternity leave is counted when considering pay and reward.</p>
<p><b>Give details of any Human Rights implications and actions that may be needed to safeguard Human Rights</b></p>	<p>None</p>
<p><b>Give details of any actions that can be taken to promote equality or to lessen any potential adverse impact on protected groups</b></p>	<p>All cases which are raised will be considered on an individual basis. Where there is a possible negative impact on an individual with a protected characteristic, measures will be taken where possible to resolve this whilst still considering health and safety as the primary consideration.</p>
<p><b>What plans are there to monitor and review the actual impact of the policy change, decision or proposal on equality of opportunity?</b></p>	<p>The Pay Policy is reviewed annually and considered by the full Council. Appropriate action will be taken as necessary.</p>
<p><b>When will follow up</b></p>	<p>Annual Review of the Pay Policy, and this EIA.</p>



review be done?	
<b>Based on a consideration of all the potential impacts, mark one of the following ( ✓ ) as an overall summary of the outcome of this assessment:</b>	
	The equality analysis has not identified any potential for discrimination or adverse impact and all opportunities to promote equality have been taken.
	The equality analysis has identified risks or opportunities to promote better equality; the change, decision or proposal will be adjusted to avoid risks and ensure that opportunities are taken.
✓	The equality analysis has identified risks to equality which will not be eliminated, and/or opportunities to promote better equality which will not be taken. Acceptance of these is reasonable and proportionate, given the objectives of the change, decision or proposal, and its overall financial and policy context.
	The equality analysis shows that the change, decision or proposal would lead to actual or potential unlawful discrimination or would conflict with the Council's positive duties to an extent which is disproportionate to its objectives. It should not be adopted in its current form.
<b>Explain how the judgement above was reached and summarise steps which will be taken to reduce any negative or to enhance any positive impacts on equality</b>	
<b>Name(s) and job title(s) of person (people involved in) carrying out this assessment</b>	Estelle White Senior HR OD Manager
<b>Authorising Director or Head of Service</b>	Sarah Farrell, Service Director
<b>Date authorised</b>	7.3.22
<b><i>The completed equality impact assessment must be attached to the policy that will be considered by the decision maker or decision makers to enable them to give due regard to the impact of the policy, decision or proposal on protected groups</i></b>	

Please send a copy to  
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[irene.fisher@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:irene.fisher@northumberland.gov.uk)

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

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