



Northumberland County Council

Your ref:
Our ref:
Enquiries to: Karon Hadfield
Email:
Tel direct:
Date: Date Not Specified

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, 14 JUNE 2023** at **3.00 PM**.

Yours faithfully

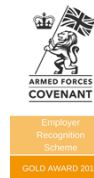
Dr Helen Paterson
Chief Executive

To County Council members as follows:-

C Ball, D Bawn, J Beynon, L Bowman, S Bridgett, D Carr, E Cartie, G Castle, T Cessford, E Chicken, T Clark, A Dale, W Daley, L Darwin, S Dickinson, R Dodd, C Dunbar, L Dunn, P Ezhilchelvan, S Fairless-Aitken, 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
County Hall, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 2EF
T: 0345 600 6400
www.northumberland.gov.uk



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
- 10)

Minutes of the annual meeting of County Council held on Wednesday 17 May 2023, as circulated, to be confirmed as a true record (see pages 11-20).

3. DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

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

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

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

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

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

e. Where Members have or a Cabinet Member has an Other Registerable Interest or Non Registerable Interest in a matter being considered in exercise of their executive function, they must notify the

Monitoring Officer and arrange for somebody else to deal with it.

NB Any member needing clarification must contact monitoringofficer@northumberland.gov.uk. 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 CHAIR, LEADER, MEMBERS OF THE CABINET, CHAIR OF AN OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE OR HEAD OF PAID SERVICE.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

To receive questions provided on notice from and to provide answers to the public in accordance with the Council's Procedure Rules.

6. MEMBER QUESTIONS

To receive questions provided on notice from and to provide answers to Members of the Council in accordance with the Council's Procedure Rules.

7. REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

(Pages
11 - 18)

Leader of Council Annual Portfolio Report

This is the Leader of Council's Annual Portfolio Report. The Report contains issues that set the context for delivery of the Leader's Portfolio. It highlights achievements over the past year and, outlines the areas of focus for the coming year (see pages 21-28).

8. REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

(Pages
19 - 38)

Challenge Board Report

To consider and respond to the Challenge Board Report (dated 14th June 2023) which is attached at Appendix 1 (see pages 29-47).

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.

Name:		Date of meeting:	
Meeting:			
Item to which your interest relates:			
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):			
Are you intending to withdraw from the meeting?		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.

Agenda Item 2

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

At the Annual Meeting of the **Northumberland County Council** held on Wednesday
17 May 2023 at County Hall, Morpeth at 4.00 pm.

PRESENT

MEMBERS

Ball, C.
Bawn, D.
Beynon, J.
Bowman, L.
Bridgett, S.C.
Carr, D.
Cartie, E.
Castle, G.
Cessford, T.
Chicken, E.
Clark, T.
Daley, W.
Darwin, L.
Dickinson, S.
Dodd, R.
Dunbar, C.
Dunn, L.
Ezhilchelvan, P.
Fairless- Aitken, S.
Flux, B.
Foster, J.
Gallacher, B.
Grimshaw, L.
Hardy, C.R.
Hill, G.
Horncastle, C.
Humphrey, C.
Hunter, I.E.
Hutchinson, J.I.

Jones, V.
Kennedy, D.
Lang, J.A.
Lee, S.
Morphet, N.
Murphy, M.
Oliver, N.
Parry, K.
Pattison, W.
Ploszaj, W.
Purvis, M.
Reid, J.
Renner-Thompson, G.
Riddle, J.R.
Robinson, M.
Sanderson, H.G.H.
Seymour, C.
Sharp, A.
Simpson, E.
Stewart, G.
Swinbank, M.
Swinburn, M.
Thorne, T.N.
Waddell, H.
Watson, A.
Watson, J.
Wearmouth, R.W.
Wilczek, R.

OFFICERS

Binjal, S.
Bradley, N.

Denyer, L.
Hadfield, K.

Hunter, P.
Kingham, A.

Masson, N.
Murfin, R.

Monitoring Officer
Executive Director – Adults, Ageing
and Wellbeing
Deputy Monitoring Officer
Democratic and Electoral Services
Manager
Interim Senior Service Director
Executive Director – Children and
Young People
Deputy Monitoring Officer
Director of Planning

Neilson, S.	Place and Regeneration Executive Director, Place and Regeneration
Paterson, Dr H. O'Neill, G.	Chief Executive Executive Director for Public Health, Inequalities and Stronger Communities
Roll, J.	Head of Democratic and Electoral Services
Soderquest, P.	Director of Housing and Public Protection
Willis, J.	Executive Director for Resources & Transformation (S151)

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

The Monitoring Officer called for nominations. Councillor Wearmouth nominated Councillor Flux which was seconded by the Leader. There were no other nominations.

RESOLVED that Councillor Flux be elected Chairman of the Council for the ensuing year.

Councillor Flux in the Chair

2. ELECTION OF DEPUTY CHAIRMAN

Councillor Flux nominated Councillor Seymour, which was seconded by Councillor Cessford. There were no other nominations.

RESOLVED that Councillor Seymour be elected Deputy Chairman of the Council for the ensuing year.

Councillor Flux advised members that his role was designated as Chairman and Councillor Seymour's as Deputy Chairman and together both these roles were the civic and ceremonial heads of the Council. By local protocol, as Chairman, he would predominantly lead on matters of Council business and Councillor Seymour would predominately lead on ceremonial matters on his behalf, and in his absence would act as the Ceremonial Head, representing the County Council at civic events.

He then called on Councillor Cessford to address Council on his work in the past year as Chair.

Councillor Cessford reported that he had carried out over 140 engagements during the course of the year of a very wide variety. It had been a great pleasure to be involved in armed forces events and to meet other civic heads from around the region. A total of £20,012.97 had been raised for his charity Tynedale Hospice at Home. He thanked Susan Taylor, Tracy Hollan and Jackie Roll for their hard work and support during the course of the year and then handed the chain of office to Councillor Seymour.

Councillor Seymour thanked members for the honour of being elected Deputy Chairman and ceremonial head of the Council. She would do her best to serve the Council and County to the best of her ability. Her charities would be The Samaritans, MND and the Stroke Association. She thanked Councillor Cessford for his service and dedication during the previous year.

Councillor Flux commented that there was a lot to be done in terms of managing the Council's formal business as well as representing the Council at Civic engagements and to help him and Councillor Seymour do that, he asked Councillor Beynon to support her in her role for the coming year.

3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Dale, Ferguson, Jackson, Mather, Nisbet, Richardson, Scott, Taylor, Towns and Wallace.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) The minutes of the meeting of County Council held on Wednesday 22 March 2023, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record.
- (b) The minutes of the extraordinary meeting of County Council held on Wednesday 22 March 2023, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record.

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

The Leader thanked the staff who had been involved in events during the Coronation weekend which had been very successful. Local heroes' awards had been presented to over 60 people from across the County.

6. CABINET MEMBERS

The list of members and portfolios had been circulated in the Chamber as follows:-

Deputy Leader and Corporate Services	Richard Wearmouth
Supporting Business and Opportunities	Wojciech Ploszaj
Inspiring Young People	Guy Renner Thompson
Caring for Adults	Wendy Pattison
Looking after our Communities	Gordon Stewart
Promoting Healthy Lives	Jeff Watson
Improving our Roads and Highways	John Riddle
Looking after our Environment	Colin Horncastle
Improving Public Health and Wellbeing	David Ferguson

The Leader highlighted that the Cabinet had been increased by two with revised portfolios. This had been discussed with Group Leaders and he

explained the reasoning behind this. The deputy Cabinet Members had not been appointed.

7. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

Establishment of Committees and Appointment of Chairs and Vice Chairs

The report made arrangements for the discharge of the non-executive functions of the County Council through the appointment of committees, asked Council to appoint members to those committees in accordance with the proportionality of the Council, to agree their terms of reference as set out in the Constitution, and to appoint Chairs and Vice Chairs. An updated Appendix A and B was circulated in the Chamber (copy attached to the sealed minutes).

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

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Council establishes the committees, agrees the size and numbers of members of the committees and appoints the chairs of committees set out in Appendix A;
- (b) Council appoints the working groups currently established by Council, numbers of members and chairs and approves the terms of reference as set out in Appendix B;
- (c) Council appoints ungrouped members to committees of the Council; and
- (d) authority be delegated to the Monitoring Officer to appoint members of committees on the nomination of their respective Group Leader.

8. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

Appointments to Outside Bodies 2023-24

Council was asked to agree its nominations to outside bodies.

This was proposed by the Leader and seconded by Councillor Hill.

Councillor Dickinson asked if there had been any change to the nominations following the recent local council election results. The Leader advised that this would be checked, and welcomed representation from opposition groups where this was available.

Councillor Morphet highlighted that there were no names to the nominations and asked if a list could be provided. Members were advised that there had

been very few changes to the existing representation, but a list would be sent to members for information.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Council agree its nominations to the bodies detailed in the appendix at the end of the report; and
- (b) Council note the positions on the North of Tyne Combined Authority Committees, and the North East Combined Authority and North of Tyne Combined Authority Joint Transport Committees, and authorise the Head of Democratic and Electoral Services, in consultation with the appropriate Group Leaders, to make any changes to the determination of allocation to political groupings which may be necessary following the May elections in the region, and as advised to the Council by the NOT and NECA secretariat.

9. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC AND ELECTORAL SERVICES

Timetable of Meetings for 2023-24

The report sought Council's approval of the annual timetable of meetings for 2023-24.

This was moved by Councillor Watson and seconded by Councillor Wearmouth.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) that the annual timetable of meetings for 2023-24 attached to the report be agreed; and
- (b) Working Groups consider and agree their own timetable of meetings for 2023-24 (detailed in the appendix A) at their first meetings after the annual Council meeting.

10. REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Corporate Plan 2023-26

The report presented the Council's Corporate Plan for 2023-2026. The Plan built on the progress from the previous Corporate Plan and presented a refreshed vision, and three Council priorities. The refresh took account of the changing operating context and the recommendations of the Independent Review of Governance ('Caller Review') which reported to Full Council in June 2022. Moving forward, the three Priorities in the Plan would set the context for the Council's Budget and Medium-Term Financial planning process. Service planning, the performance framework, and staff appraisal process would all contribute to achieving the priorities.

The Leader introduced the Plan which had had significant input from all members and partners. It set out what the Council wanted to achieve in the next three years and the headline was meeting the Council's three key priorities. He stressed this was not the Administration's Corporate Plan but instead belonged to the Council as a whole. He proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Wearmouth.

A number of comments were made by members including:-

- Councillor Dickinson supported the comments made about the ambition in the Plan and the fundamental principles, adding that all members had participated in engagement sessions. He would like to see some information on progress with Key Performance Indicators included so this could be actively monitored. The Leader agreed with this.
- Councillor Morphet did not feel that VFM should be a key priority as this should be fundamental to what Councils provided. It had only become a key priority because council funding had been cut to the bone by the government and his Group felt the third priority should be the climate and ecological emergency.
- Councillor Hill commented that there were many things to support in the Corporate Plan and she agreed with the three key overarching aims. There were some elements in it which she felt were possibly unrealistic, and some understatements. Her specific concern was around the implication that the North of Tyne Combined Authority was automatically a good thing and widely supported by all members. She reminded members that this arrangement was not put to referendum or to a vote at full Council. Consultation was not the same as democracy. She was concerned that working towards a "stronger NoT Combined Authority" meant expansion without the involvement of any democratic process such as a vote in Council or a referendum.

The Leader agreed some of the ambitions were lofty, but he would not want to do anything else. Regarding consultation, there had been much more face to face consultation in the last year and this would continue. However, the Council had not been given the task of doing a referendum but of doing consultation, and this would show that Northumberland had done more consultation than any of the other Councils. Finally, he thanked everyone for their contributions to the Plan.

On being put to the vote by a show of hands, there voted FOR: a substantial majority; AGAINST: 2; ABSTENIONS:0. It was therefore

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the Corporate Plan 2023-26 be adopted;
- (b) Council receive and consider an annual Corporate Plan Achievements report at Full Council in March each year; and
- (c) Council receive and consider an annual Corporate Plan Performance Report at Full Council at the conclusion of Quarter four of the performance cycle.

11. REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Review of the Effectiveness and Function of Local Area Councils (Committees)

A review and detailed analysis had been undertaken by the Local Area Councils (Committees) Chairs and Vice Chairs. This had examined the role, context and operational issues arising in discussions about how to enhance the effectiveness and function of the Local Area Councils (Committees), with an overarching goal of stimulating greater public engagement. The report summarised the recommendations of the review and set out a suggested series of changes that covered both “business as usual” refinements, as well as some more substantive changes.

The report was introduced by the Leader and he drew members’ attention to the key points; these would be called “Committees” and there was a need for greater public engagement which would be down to the Chairs on how this was achieved. The main aim was delegated budgets for the LACS but for now the community chest was being rejigged to allow it to become more of a focal point of the LAC meeting, which would encourage better dialogue with local residents. He also highlighted the return of the county wide Rights of Way Committee and moved the report’s recommendations, which was seconded by Councillor Swinburn.

A number of points were raised including:-

- Councillor Dickinson asked if the delegated budgets would be at the same level as currently and hoped no funding would be taken away. The Leader replied that the community chest funding would remain at the same level for this year. As budget deliberations began for next year, budgets along with delegated budgets would be considered.
- Councillor Reid acknowledged that community engagement was very difficult because most residents would rather leave the decision making to councillors than attend meetings themselves, apart from on planning applications. He would support the report but it was much the same as what other Administrations had tried previously. He suggested that there should be a comprehensive consultation with residents to find out how they wanted to be engaged with the Council in a sustainable way, instead of telling them how they could do it.
- Councillor Swinburn commented that the Council was not engaging properly with its residents through the LACS because reports were going to them which were of interest to members not the public. He had suggested to the Leader and Councillor Castle recently that the Council needed to ask its residents what information they wanted brought to the LACS and what they needed help with. Then they would be engaged.
- Councillor Kennedy commented that valid points were being made. Hexham Town Council had in the past hired a market stall at Hexham Market which allowed the public to drop in when it suited them and it had worked very well.
- Councillor Dodd remarked that it was up to members to make the LACS work. They enabled local backbench members to discuss problems in their division with officers direct, which wasn’t always acknowledged.

- Councillor Dickinson firstly thanked the Leader for incorporating comments he had made into the report. He commented on the need to be more modern and accessible and felt that the pandemic had taught members a lot about hybrid meetings and the contribution to the Council's carbon footprint this could make. He felt that there were better ways of managing public access to and involvement in these meetings, which could be easily implemented and also open the Council up to working in a more modern way, which could result in getting the interaction which was needed. Currently, it did not feel easy for a member of the public to ask a question at a LAC.
- Councillor Castle commented that the review was trying to change the direction of travel a little and the major factor was to split planning completely from the LAC agenda because in some cases, planning applications simply overwhelmed the agendas. He agreed engaging with the public was difficult and all members did it differently. Innovative thinking was needed because the LACS had an important role to play in engaging with people locally.
- Councillor Murphy agreed that the Council needed to be more imaginative in considering what community engagement was. People engaged with the Council every day in many different ways and the Council got feedback every day on how they felt about services. Her view was that people should be left in peace because they were already being engaged with.
- Councillor Gallacher welcomed the review but expressed frustration that members had not received the planning training they needed to keep abreast of new legislation. He suggested that a review of planning training be done in six months and a deep dive in twelve months.

The Leader commented that all members seemed to be in agreement on what they wanted from the LACS and it was down to the Chairs and Vice Chairs to make them work. He encouraged members to think about what matters they might want to consider at their LAC and the resource would be there to make them work.

RESOLVED that recommendations 1-21.3 as detailed in the report, be approved.

12. REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Review and Redraft of the Constitution 2023

Council was asked to adopt the Council's redrafted Constitution, to note the 2022/23 Constitution and Scrutiny review work programme and the Member and officer engagement sessions which had taken place, to note the recommendations from the Constitution Working Group (CWG) and Scrutiny Leads/Chairs that took place during the review and redraft, to note the continued remit of the Constitution Working Group of on-going oversight over the Constitution in conjunction with the Council's Monitoring Officer and, following the approval and adoption of the redrafted constitution, Members were requested to note the implementation work programme, the proposed sequence of change, and embedding, of the redrafted constitution as set out in paragraph 11 of the report.

The report was presented by the Leader and he moved the recommendations which was seconded by Councillor Hill. He thanked all those who had been involved in its development.

Councillor Dickinson commended the work of colleagues on the Constitution Working Group. It was important that all councillors and officers understood the document. Regarding the need for improvement to cultures and behaviours, this document would help with that. The engagement and contributions had been very positive and the resulting document made things a lot clearer for everyone.

Councillor Morphet welcomed the work which had gone into this but added that it had clearly been rushed and needed a good proof read and tidy up, which he had been assured would happen.

Councillor Hill felt this had been an excellent exercise resulting in a document which everyone involved should be proud of. She felt it would be useful if each member had a printed copy and hoped that it would be continuously monitored and improved upon.

The Chair agreed that the Constitution Working Group had done a lot of work on this, and he thanked all of those who had helped on the extensive consultation exercise which had been carried out. There had been a lot of collaborative working.

The Leader drew members' attention to the recommendations and thanked everyone for playing their part in the Constitution's development.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Council agree to adopt the redrafted Constitution for implementation with effect from 17th May 2023; and
- (b) authority be delegated to the Monitoring Officer to make such changes to the Council's Constitution as they deem to be necessary and in the Council's interests to do so, which shall be in consultation with the Chair of the Constitution Working Group where the monitoring officer considers appropriate, and which do not materially change any principles previously approved by the Council including, but not limited to, changes:
 - i) amounting to routine revisions
 - ii) to provide appropriate clarity
 - iii) to correct typographical and other drafting errors
 - iv) to reflect new legislation
 - v) to correct inconsistencies in drafting
 - vi) to reflect new officer structures and job titles, properly approved through Council processes.

13. ANNUAL REPORTS

(1) Overview and Scrutiny Committees

Each of the Scrutiny Chairs presented their individual reports highlighting the key issues which had emerged during the course of the previous year.

(2) Standards Committee

This was presented by Councillor Flux. This had been a significant year in terms of workload and developments for the Standards Committee and he thanked the Chair, Mr Joe Jackson for his work.

(3) Armed Forces Forum

Councillors J. Watson and Castle presented the report highlighting the key issues in this very important service.

RESOLVED that the annual reports be received.

.....
Chair of the County Council

.....
Duly Authorised Officer



Northumberland County Council

COMMITTEE: COUNCIL

DATE: 14TH JUNE 2023

Leader of Council Annual Portfolio Report

Report of: Councillor Glen Sanderson, Leader of Council

Responsible Officer: Dr Helen Paterson, Chief Executive

1. Purpose of report

1.1 This is the Leader of Council's Annual Portfolio Report. The Report contains issues that set the context for delivery of the Leader's Portfolio. It highlights achievements over the past year and, outlines the areas of focus for the coming year.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Council is recommended to:

- (i) Note the Leader of Council's Portfolio Report.

Link to Corporate Plan

- **Achieving Value for Money** – The Leader's Portfolio contributes to Value for Money by ensuring the Council makes the best decisions within a robust governance framework and, that the Council works with Government as well as regional and local partners to secure the best for Northumberland's residents.
- **Tackling Inequalities** – The Leader's Portfolio plays an important role in driving delivery of the Council's Inequalities Plan, as a core part of the Council's corporate strategy.
- **Driving Economic Growth** - The Leader's Portfolio works closely with the Supporting Business & Opportunities Portfolio, in particular to deliver substantial investment in the County's strategic transport and infrastructure as well as delivery of flagship growth and employment initiatives.

3. Key issues

3.1 The Annual Portfolio reports from each of the Council's Cabinet Members provide an opportunity for Council to consider and comment on the work of each Portfolio. This strengthens the important link and accountability between key decisions taken by the Cabinet and achievement of the three priorities of the Council as set out in the Corporate Plan.

4. Background

4.1 County Council adopted the Corporate Plan at its AGM on 17th May 2023. The Plan establishes three priorities for the Council, underpinned by our approach to tackling Climate Change. The Annual Council Achievements Report (reported to Council in March 2023) sets out overall progress against the three priorities whilst this report and

the other forthcoming Portfolio reports provide an opportunity for Members to drill down further into the work of individual Portfolios.

5. Leader of Council Portfolio - Context

- 5.1 This past year has been one of momentous change and challenge nationally and globally. In June of last year, the whole County joined in a wonderful weekend of celebration for Her Majesty, The Queen's Platinum Jubilee. I was proud that the County's stunning landscape provided a spectacular backdrop to the opening of the celebrations with the lighting of the beacon at the Hadrian's Wall, World Heritage Site.
- 5.2 Of course, sadly, The Queen passed away in September. Again, the County's people came together to mark this sad occasion with dignity and respect. And, in a spirit of renewal, resilience and continuity we celebrated the Coronation of our new King in May.
- 5.3 Globally, the War in Ukraine has resulted in a new and horrifying humanitarian disaster. The Council and communities across the County have played their part in responding to this crisis. Together, we have raised much-needed funds to alleviate the suffering of families. We have provided essential equipment and provisions, including firefighting kit. Supported by the Council's Housing Team, we have also helped some 460 refugees, of whom 177 are children, to find sanctuary in Northumberland. People across our County have opened their doors to refugees and welcomed them into their homes. I am deeply proud but not at all surprised by this collective response and thank all our communities and Members for this.
- 5.4 The Ukraine War, coupled with other conditions – let us not forget, we continue to recover from the Covid Pandemic - have impacted households and businesses through spiralling cost increases. Again, the Council has acted to support those most in need and we will continue to do that within the confines of our powers and resources.
- 5.5 Despite the national and global challenges which have impacted locally on all of us, the Council has maintained focus on delivering high-quality, day-to-day services in communities as well as investing in Northumberland's future.

6. Achievements

- 6.1 I and my Cabinet colleagues are proud of our refreshed Corporate Plan. This key policy document clearly sets the direction for how we will deliver on the Council's three priorities of: Achieving Value for Money; Tackling Inequalities; and Driving Economic Growth. I thank Council for adopting its Corporate Plan at the Council's AGM in May. I believe the Plan's priorities will resonate with all Members and that we can work together across the Council Chamber to deliver these for the benefit of all our residents, communities and businesses.
- 6.2 I am also delighted that during the past year we have made substantial progress in delivering a wide range of initiatives, as well as high-quality, day-to-day services which have made a positive impact on our three priorities. Some of these key achievements are highlighted below. I believe these are a testament to the focus of the Council's Portfolio Holders and the dedication and professionalism of our staff across the organisation. These achievements also represent the hard work and ingenuity of all Members across the Council contributing through, for example: Scrutiny and other committees; Policy Conferences; and working directly in their communities. I extend a warm thank you to all Members for their excellent endeavours.

7. Achieving Value for Money

7.1 In February this year, I was pleased that County Council approved a budget focused on protecting frontline services, investing in the future and looking after the most vulnerable. Among the priorities agreed for the year ahead were:

- Protecting and maintaining key frontline services;
- Looking after the most vulnerable and supporting everyone with cost-of-living issues;
- Continuing work to re-open the Northumberland Line;
- Delivering new school builds and ongoing education improvements; and,
- Investing in leisure centres, open spaces and town-centre regeneration.

7.2 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.

7.3 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%).

7.4 I am pleased the Council has delivered its actions and initiatives in our Improvement Action Plan. This included a redrafted constitution, a new 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. The establishment of our 'BEST ways for working' will further strengthen and refine the Councils' continuous improvement.

7.5 I know all Members have been pleased to welcome our new Chief Executive Officer, Dr Helen Paterson. The new Chief Executive taking up her new post came alongside the appointment of a new top team of Executive Directors to deliver on the Council's priorities. This now gives the Council the stability needed to take the organisation forward.

7.6 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 locations across the county. These supplement the Council's existing network of EV chargers located mainly in town centre and other car parks.

7.7 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 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 an important part of the Council's Climate Change Action Plan which aims to have 30% of cars in the County electric by 2030. The Council has also continued 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.

7.8 The development 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.

8. Tackling Inequalities

8.1 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. Our 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. I am pleased we have developed this plan and are delivering in partnership.

8.2 Our Tackling Inequalities Plan is so significant because it goes beyond mere words and commits Council resources, services and projects to making a difference to communities. I am committed to ensuring this continues to be the case.

8.3 Having high-quality local environments for people of all ages is an important part of promoting wellbeing. That's why I was delighted that last year, when eleven Northumberland parks were awarded the prestigious Green Flag Awards. This award recognises them as some of the very best in the country.

8.4 Equally, ensuring young people have access to the best educational facilities is fundamental to reducing inequalities and as Leader of Council, I continue to support substantial investment in our schools across the County.

8.5 For example, work is now underway on the Gilbert Ward Academy in Blyth, a new special free school for Northumberland. In addition, the Council has approved a multi-million investment in the Coquet Partnership of schools and, 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. 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.

8.6 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. The pipeline for future woodland creation is also looking healthy, with over 800 hectares planned for this season and approximately 3,000 hectares awaiting agreement.

8.7 The Council has continued its free tree scheme with 15,000 saplings 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.

8.8 Finally, and, on a personal note, I am thrilled with the restoration and re-opening of the 202-year-old Union Chain Bridge, the oldest vehicle suspension bridge in the world. The famous structure connecting England and Scotland has been rebuilt piece by piece over the past two years.

9. Driving Economic Growth

- 9.1 I am delighted that construction has now started on the Northumberland Line, with six new stations granted planning approval. When fully operational, it will see journeys between Ashington and Newcastle with no need to change trains. Passengers in the North-East will be able to connect with friends and family and enjoy greater access to business, education and leisure opportunities when the historic line re-opens.
- 9.2 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. 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. Following this, we welcomed Government's announcement, in the Spring Budget, of £16m investment for Ashington Town Centre.
- 9.3 In a significant milestone for the Borderlands Growth Deal, the fantastic Ad Gefrin Distillery in Wooler opened 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.
- 9.4 Last year also marked the completion of the Bates Clean Energy Terminal, delivered in partnership with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and Port of Blyth. We also saw in the past year the completion by Advance Northumberland of the new dock at Cambois which facilitated the arrival of 'JDR Cables'. The Council and the LEP invested in the development which otherwise would have seen the site left empty and unused. Both these milestones underline the link between growth and Climate Change.

10. Key Areas of Focus for the Coming Year

- 10.1 I am pleased with our achievements over the past year. As you would expect though, I am determined to achieve even more for our residents, communities and businesses. As Leader of Council, I have clearly defined Portfolio responsibilities and, in the subsequent paragraphs, I share my headline ambitions on these for the coming year. At the same time, the Leader's Portfolio is somewhat unique in that it involves working closely with all Portfolio Holders to ensure we are delivering the very best for our residents. That is a real privilege and, I very much look forward to working with my Cabinet colleagues in the coming year, supporting and celebrating their achievements in their Portfolios.
- 10.2 **Corporate Strategy** – I look forward to working with partners to develop a County Plan which will embed a shared vision and aims for Northumberland. We will start this with a partner roundtable event on inequalities on July 13th, and we will continue those conversations, in the coming months, including with Members.
- 10.3 **Partnerships** – As well as strengthening local partnerships, I will ensure Northumberland plays its part in the development of the new, expanded Devolution Deal for the LA7 area. The Deal will bring £4.2 billion additional investment to the region over 30 years and I will ensure our County secures its fair share of this investment in transport, education & skills, housing and regeneration.

- 10.4 **Communications** – In the coming year, we will build on previous campaigns to promote all that is great about Northumberland. I invite all Members to join me in ‘talking up’ the achievements of our Council and promoting the County as a ‘Land of Great Opportunities’.
- 10.5 **Consultation & Engagement** – This summer will see the start of greater engagement with our residents and communities, and I will ensure we listen to what they tell us. Moving into the Autumn and Winter, we will also build on previous engagement to deliver another successful Budget Consultation, including a survey as well as engagement with LACs, towns and parishes. I also look forward to even stronger engagement with all Members through, for example, our ‘Policy Conferences’.
- 10.6 **Governance** – Good governance is at the heart of any well-functioning council. In the period since I called for an independent review of governance and the subsequent report from that review, I believe we have reached an important milestone. Our redrafted Constitution was adopted by Council in May this year. Our Codes of Conduct have been updated to reflect best practice. We have undertaken reviews of the Council’s Scrutiny Function as well as the LACs to strengthen engagement and enhance decision-making. I also established Policy Conferences to give all Members the chance to participate in policy development in a more informal setting. In the coming year, I am determined to build on the progress we have made to strengthen governance and I am committed to further, deeper engagement with all Members in Policy Conferences. I look forward to working with all Group Leaders and indeed all Members in this.
- 10.7 **Rural Growth & Sustainability** – As Leader of Council and Portfolio Lead for Rural Affairs within the North of Tyne Combined Authority, I am committed to the County and wider Combined Authority Area becoming a national exemplar for rural stewardship and growth. This pledge is at the heart of the recently announced “minded to” devolution deal for the wider North East region.
- 10.8 Working with the Combined Authority and the Borderlands Partnership, I will champion delivery of the Northumberland Stewardship and Rural Growth Investment Plan. The aim of the Plan is to enhance our environment, grow our rural economy, and improve opportunity and prosperity in our communities. The plan has been shaped by our recent ‘Future of Farming in Northumberland Inquiry’ that I commissioned early last year. From a combination of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Rural Economic Prosperity Fund, and North of Tyne Investment Fund, an initial tranche of £9 million has been secured to drive delivery of the Plan. The first wave of projects is to create a new Northumberland Small Business Service (NSBS), establish innovative Rural Asset Multiplier Pilots (RAMPs) targeted at the Coast AONB area and part of the National Park Authority area, and to prepare a Northumberland Food Strategy and Action Plan.
- 10.9 **Strategic Transport & Infrastructure** – I am pleased with progress on the ground to deliver the Northumberland Line for our residents and businesses. In the coming year, I will ensure we ‘stay on track’ with this truly game-changing project. At the same time, I will continue to make the strongest possible case to Government for further investment in our strategic road network, in particular the A1 dualling proposals. I also welcome the recent, substantial Government investment to fix potholes and look forward to working with the Portfolio Holder for ‘Improving Our Roads and Highways’ to ensure every penny of this new investment is put to good use.

10.10 **Climate Change** – In the coming year, I will continue to champion and drive forward a wide range of exciting projects to protect and enhance our environment. For example, I look forward to the completion of the County Hall solar car-charging project which will showcase what major employers can do to lead by example on carbon reduction. I also want to use the coming year to work with partners and all Members on how we reach people who are interested but, not yet actively engaged in the Climate Change agenda. Reaching those people as well as continuing to work with those already engaged will be key to achieving our Climate Action Plan ambitions.

Implications

Policy	This report supports delivery of all three priorities of the Corporate Plan.
Finance and value for money	Value for money is a priority for the Council. This Report contains no direct financial implications. The ongoing delivery of the individual actions within the Leader of Council's portfolio may have financial implications which would form separate reports as these arise.
Legal	Whilst this report contains no immediate legal implications, the delivery of the individual actions within the Leader of Council's portfolio may have legal implications, which would form separate reports as these arise.
Procurement	N/A
Human Resources	N/A
Property	N/A
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	N/A
Risk Assessment	None at this stage.
Crime Disorder &	N/A

Customer Consideration	N/A
Carbon reduction	Each of our three Priorities have an important a part to play in responding to the Climate Change Emergency.
Health and Wellbeing	N/A
Wards	All

Enclosure

Background papers:

N/a

Linked documents

- Corporate Plan 2023-26
- Corporate Plan Achievements Report March 2023

Report sign off.

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

	Full Name of Officer
Chief Executive	Dr Helen Paterson
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, Director of Corporate Strategy and Communications

philip.hunter@northumberland.gov.uk



Northumberland County Council

COMMITTEE: COUNCIL

DATE: 14TH JUNE 2023

Challenge Board Report

Report of: Cllr. Glen Sanderson, Leader of Council

Responsible Officer: Dr Helen Paterson, Chief Executive

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to consider and respond to the Challenge Board Report (dated 14th June 2023) which is attached at Appendix 1. The Council's response and recommendations are set out below.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Council is recommended to:

- (i) Note and receive the Challenge Board report as attached at Appendix 1.
- (ii) Receive and note the Challenge Board Recommendations.
- (iii) Approve the Council's responses to each of the Recommendations as set out in paragraph 5.10 of this report.
- (iv) Agree the work of the Challenge Board is now complete and that their work with the Council will conclude.
- (v) Thank the Chair and all Challenge Board members for their support, advice and guidance during the past year.

Link to Corporate Plan

This report links to all priorities of the Corporate Plan.

3. Key issues

3.1 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 have helped to improve the ways in which we work. Together, over the past year, Members and Officers have taken this opportunity to: revise and clarify structures; strengthen and refine governance; refresh the values & behaviours framework; and, reset working relationships, leading to a more positive working environment and more opportunities for Member input.

4. Background

4.1 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 on 8th June 2022.

4.2 At its meeting of 8th June 2022, Council considered a report by the Leader and Deputy Leader on the Independent Governance Review (The 'Caller Review'). Following this, Council agreed to form a Steering Group on a task and finish basis, to consider the Council's response to the 'Caller Review' and its recommendations. It was further agreed that the Steering Group would meet within seven days of 8th June and report back to the County Council on 21 June 2022.

4.3 At its meeting on 21st June 2022, Council resolved that:

- The Report of the Independent Governance Review (The 'Caller Review') be formally received.
- The findings of the Caller Review Report be accepted.
- The Task and Finish Steering Group's initial proposed Plan of Action in response to the Caller Review and its recommendations be agreed.
- A further report be received from the Task and Finish Steering Group on 6 July 2022, the next ordinary meeting of the Council, setting out a more detailed timetable and assessment of resources required to implement the Caller Review recommendations.

4.4 Council duly received a further report from the Task and Finish Steering Group on the 6th of July. At that meeting, Council resolved that:

- Council note and agree the Task and Finish Steering Group's Plan of Action in response to the Caller Review and its recommendations;
- Council submit to the Task and Finish Steering Group for its consideration, any suggested additional actions or changes to the proposed actions in the Plan of Action; and,
- Council approve the establishment of an Advisory Challenge Board, and its terms of reference [shared with Members at the Council meeting], and authority be delegated to the Interim Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the cross party task and finish steering group, to confirm the nominations to the Advisory Challenge Board.

4.5 A cross-party, Member Oversight Group, ("the MOG"), was established to oversee the development and delivery of an Improvement Plan.

4.6 The Local Government Association (LGA) worked with the Council 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.

4.7 Since October 2022, the Challenge Board has met regularly at County Hall. Outside of those meetings, individual Board members engaged as needed with Officers, Members and other stakeholders.

4.8 The Challenge Board drafted this third report (attached as Appendix 1) and the report was shared with the MOG on 31st May. Following this, the Chair of the Board discussed its findings with the MOG on 6th June.

5. Key messages from the Challenge Board Report

“Officers and members have worked really hard to make progress, in a short space of time, on the 9 Caller recommendations.” [Challenge Board Report 14th June 2023]

5.1 This Challenge Board report contains much to be positive about. It is clear the Council – Officers and Members working together – have made progress in a relatively short space of time on the actions to respond to the Caller Recommendations. This builds on earlier, positive progress the Board commented on in its first two reports to Council.

5.2 In its first, interim report to Council in January this year, the Board highlighted the Leader of Council’s decision to invite in Mr Caller’s team as a “brave and correct one”. That report also underlined the Leader’s “...energetic and determined response to the report’s findings... [his] personal commitment to driving the improvement agenda forward is self-evident.”

5.3 Despite an uncertain economic and social context, the Board also found in its first interim report that the Council had “quickly put in place many actions to respond to the [Caller] report and it had done this “alongside a continued focus on, and energy spent, on big projects that will bring significant benefit to the County such as The Northumberland Line.” In the same report, the Board heard a widespread view that the recent changes at the most senior officer level had had a positive impact on the atmosphere in County Hall and the Board were also told that the “behaviours across all Groups were feeling better, with less antagonism.”

5.4 In its second, interim report to Council in March this year, the Challenge Board stated it had heard from people inside and outside the organisation, that the Council feels ‘better’ and ‘calmer’. The report pointed out the appointment of the new Chief Executive and her top team had brought certainty and stability, creating a “different feel about the place” and that “[the] mood has changed.”

5.5 Alongside these messages of positive progress, the Board has in all its reports, including this one, shared numerous, constructive challenges on how the Council is delivering on its improvement actions. This is only right – this is after-all a ‘Challenge Board’. Crucially the Council has listened to the Board’s advice and challenge. For example, we listened to their advice and took more time on the tier 3-4 restructure to enable the incoming Chief Executive to take ownership of this process. We listened to the Board’s advice on taking longer to redraft the Corporate Plan to enable more engagement. The Corporate Plan is a better document due to that additional engagement and, there will be further engagement on Corporate Plan target-setting during the Summer as well as engagement with partners towards a County Plan. The Board provided detailed, valuable advice and support on the redraft of the Council’s

Constitution and we took that on board too, producing a much-strengthened Constitution which the Council adopted at its recent AGM.

5.6 So, the past year has seen an intensive period of improvement activity, almost from the first day of Mr Caller sharing his Review Team's findings with Full Council on the 8th June 2022. This activity and resultant progress is reflected in all three of the Challenge Board's reports.

5.7 The Board are equally clear in their report to this meeting that the actions we have delivered will take time and ongoing focus to be embedded in the organisation and to make long-term, positive change in culture and ways of working. We agree with the Challenge Board on this critical point. Indeed, as the Board points out, this would be the case in any local authority undergoing such change. Again, like most Councils, there will be a period of fine-tuning actions already delivered, further developing targets and, of course, reviewing progress.

5.8 In many respects these activities will be ongoing and, it is useful to remember what Mr Caller said in response to a question when he attended Council last year: "...[He] would not rate councils as he had never known one to be either all good or all bad."

5.9 So, the Challenge Board's report (and indeed it's two earlier interim reports) is clear on two themes: firstly, the Council has made progress in taking forward its improvement actions – and this has made a positive difference in the short-term; and, secondly, it will take time and ongoing development to ensure these actions deliver the long-term change and improvement we all want to see.

5.10 What's also clear from the Board's report, is there is no longer a compelling case to retain the services of a Challenge Board. The Board has been a valued, 'critical friend', particularly during the period of transition to a new senior leadership team. That team is now established, with a 'seasoned' Chief Executive and permanent, Executive Director structure in place. Together with Members, the Chief Executive and Executive Team are now taking forward the Council's 'BEST ways of working' which will build on, refine and strengthen the actions already undertaken to respond to the 'Caller Recommendations'. The Challenge Board's report makes eight welcome recommendations, which are largely about embedding, reviewing and developing actions further. These are listed below with the Council's proposed responses to these:

"...we will leave you with our recommendations..." [Challenge Board Report 14th June]

Challenge Board Recommendation:

- 1. Develop a clearly articulated transformation/improvement plan to drive and support the council's improvement journey. This should have clear accountabilities and receive both cross-party and independent oversight.**

Proposed Response:

- This will be taken forward through our BEST way of working which was formally launched in April this year and will include, amongst other initiatives, a Best Value baseline assessment for the Council. Economic Growth and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee will provide cross-party oversight of improvement actions and Audit Committee of governance matters as part of their review and

approval of the Annual Governance Statement (AGS). The AGS will also be subject to independent review as part of the external audit process.

Challenge Board Recommendation:

- 2. Ensure that all Corporate Plan actions have clear success measures/targets to enable accountability to be monitored [and] that the Corporate Plan drives the Council and develops into a linked plan for the whole county.**

Proposed Response:

- This work is planned for Summer 2023 and will build on the engagement in the Corporate Plan by Members and Officers.

Challenge Board Recommendation:

- 3. Keep the post of interim MO under regular review with the aim of a permanent appointment at the earliest opportunity.**

Proposed Response:

- We will, of course, do this as a matter of good practice and sensible succession planning.

Challenge Board Recommendation:

- 4. Develop a leadership development programme for the senior team to enable the team to be fit for purpose to meet the challenges ahead, including the need to speak truth to power and to support the whole Council with good member and officer engagement.**

Proposed Response:

- Development and coaching activity started in May 2023 and will continue to develop in the coming months.

Challenge Board Recommendation:

- 5. Ensure that the whole Council are supported to be a part of the improvement journey.**

Proposed Response:

- This is happening already and will continue. All Groups have access to the Chief Executive and Senior Team. Members have also embraced the new 'Policy Conferences' which have been established as a further way for all Members to put their ideas into policy development through open, informal and cross-party discussion.

Challenge Board Recommendation:

- 6. Maintain focus on a clearly articulated member development programme to address the required improvements in member behaviour, as well as enabling members to be more effective in their roles, including through stronger and influential scrutiny.**

Proposed Response:

- This work has been underway since March. Prior to that, Member development took place through extensive engagement in the Council's improvement actions (Corporate Plan, Constitution, Code of Conduct). The whole organisation, including

Members and Officers, will continue to build on and strengthen our approaches to Member development. Of course, we recognise this will take time to embed, though there is demonstrable evidence that the building blocks are now in place for us to do that.

Challenge Board Recommendation:

7. **Ask Local Partnerships to continue to provide you with advice on the robustness of the governance changes around Advance and to undertake a regular review to protect the council’s interests.**

Proposed Response:

- We have taken advice from Local Partnerships and, in future, will continue to seek expertise from a range of advisors as appropriate. We will consider inviting Local Partnerships (or another provider) to review of how the new company governance arrangements are working in a year's time.

Challenge Board Recommendation:

8. **Receive an LGA-managed, focussed, Corporate Peer Challenge before the end of the municipal year and ensure that the recommendations of this report are considered as part of that.**

Proposed Response:

- We are committed to this and will start to plan for this in the coming months.

5.11 Responding to the above recommendations will not, by itself, require a Challenge Board to be in place and the Challenge Board Report does not make that case. Nor does it set out any actions or lack of actions which would call for ongoing support from a Challenge Board.

5.12 However, the Council will continue to seek advice and challenge as it moves forward. Indeed, we embrace the Board’s final recommendation to undertake a focused peer review before the end of the Municipal Year. This, we believe, will provide us with a timely and appropriate level of ‘check’ and feedback on our ongoing improvement journey.

5.13 The Leader of Council and Chief Executive thank the Challenge Board for the advice, support and time they have given to the Council. We are also grateful for the role and resource commitment to the work of the Challenge Board provided by the Local Government Association.

Implications

Policy	This report links to all aims and priorities of the Corporate Plan.
Finance and value for money	Value for money is a priority of the Council. The completion of the Challenge Board’s work will reduce expenditure associated with the Board’s activities. Otherwise, this Report contains no direct financial implications. The ongoing delivery of the

	individual actions may have financial implications, which would form separate reports as these arise.
Legal	Whilst this report contains no immediate legal implications, the delivery of the Council's 'BEST ways of working' may have legal implications. Any legal implications arising from the delivery of specific BEST initiatives will be brought forward in future reports.
Procurement	N/A
Human Resources	Links to the appraisal and performance frameworks.
Property	N/A
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	N/A
Risk Assessment	Failure to implement specific actions from the Improvement Plan in response to the Caller Review recommendations could have impacted negatively on the Council's Strategic Risks
Crime & Disorder	N/A
Customer Consideration	N/A
Carbon reduction	N/A
Health and Wellbeing	N/A
Wards	All Wards

Appendix

Appendix 1 - LGA – Challenge Board Report - 14th June 2023.

Background papers:

N/A

Linked Reports and mins

Solace [Independence Governance Review](#) (known as the Max Caller Report)– Full Council 8th June 2022

[Report of Governance Review Task and Finish Cross Party Steering Group](#) – Full Council 21st June 2022

[Challenge Board Interim Report 1](#) – Full Council 18th January 2023

[Response to the Challenge Board Interim Report 1](#) – Full Council 18th January 2023

[Challenge Board Interim Report 2](#) – Full Council 22nd March 2023

[Challenge Board Interim Report 2](#) (response) - Full Council 22nd March 2023

Report sign off.

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

	Full Name of Officer
Chief Executive	Dr Helen Paterson
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, Director of Corporate Strategy and Communications
Philip.hunter@northumberland.gov.uk

Northumberland County Council

Challenge Board Report

14 June 2023

1. Background

1.1 In 2022 The Leader took the difficult but necessary decision to commission an independent review of governance. Widely known as the “Max Caller Review,” this reported in June 2022. As a result of that report (and as a recommendation within it) the Leader of the County Council asked the LGA to help it set up a Challenge Board.

1.2 The Challenge Board is independent of the Council and has membership with significant and appropriate experience at both top officer and councillor level. The Board is chaired by Pat Ritchie CBE and has a further experienced council CEO, Wallace Sampson OBE. It has a Conservative Council Leader, Councillor Abi Brown and a Labour Council Leader, Sir Stephen Houghton CBE. It also includes an experienced Monitoring Officer: Gillian Marshall; a previous S151 Officer who also has commercial and governance experience, Neil Thornton and the regional lead for the LGA, Mark Edgell.

1.3 All members of the Board are used to operating in challenging local places, with issues around member and officer relationships, scarcity of resources and a changing world. We have used our collective knowledge and experience to provide robust challenge and to advise on, and help shape, the Council’s improvement actions.

1.4 In August 2023 the Leader welcomed our agreement to come in as your ‘critical friend’ and was also clear that “no one organisation or individual should ever shy away from challenge.” With that principle in mind, we have written this report in a way which gives our honest view as to what we have found and where we feel the Council needs to go from here.

1.5 We would like to record our appreciation for the support for the Board from colleagues at the Council, notably Morgan Brown and Philip Hunter.

2. Our Focus

2.1 Everyone at Northumberland County Council (NCC) shares a passion for delivering on the most important things for residents and businesses. Now more than ever, in a post-pandemic environment and as families and businesses struggle with rapidly increasing costs, they need their council to be on their side, with a strong focus

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on the community, attracting well-paid jobs to the County, delivering effective support services, and investing in the future.

2.2 However a council can only sustain the best outcomes for residents when the organisation is fit-for-purpose. That is when members, senior officers and their teams are all pulling in the same, and right, direction. To Max Caller and his team, it was clear that NCC faced significant challenges to strengthen the governance of 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, Max Caller gave the Council 9 recommendations:

- 1) Redrafting its Corporate Plan in terms of the Administration's Goals and Objectives, moderated by the capacity of the organisation and the legislative framework,
- 2) Ensuring the values by which the Council seeks to operate are lived within the organisation
- 3) Using the data it holds, collects, or needs to collect to define priorities and monitor and improve performance in a systematic way and publish the outcomes.
- 4) Reviewing and agreeing a redraft of the Constitution to ensure that decisions that should be taken at Member level, by Cabinet, Committee, Individual Member or Full Council are clearly identified and that the recording and scrutiny of officer decisions, both individually and in aggregate, is unambiguous.
- 5) Reviewing and redrafting the codes of conduct which regulate member and officer behaviours and working relationships with each other, to make it clear what the expectations of each party should be and how robust challenge can be handled, to ensure proper accountability can be achieved. This needs to recognise the legitimate rights of Councillors for information to enable them to do their role and for Councillors to recognise that policy is the preserve of the Council unless delegated and saying no is a legitimate outcome.
- 6) Establishing a rationale for the establishment or continuation of any company established under the provisions of the Localism Act 2011.
- 7) Establishing a specific governance framework by which, for those companies wholly or partly owned by NCC, their directors are appointed, reports on performance

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are presented to a Cabinet Sub-Committee, conflicts of interest and risk are dealt with and how shareholder agreements are ratified, by both the company and NCC.

8) Establishing an officer structure which is designed to deliver against earlier recommendations and seek to appoint permanent employees to fulfil those objectives.

9) Establishing a scheme of performance appraisal, starting with the Chief Executive at member level, in line with the JNC provisions, which cascades throughout the organisation so that every employee is clear about their targets and how they fit into plan delivery. As the Chief Executive is accountable to the Council as a whole for their performance, publish the targets and how they have been achieved as an annual statement to Council.

2.3 We have focussed our attention on these 9 recommendations, seeing our 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 been implemented or carried out in the way intended?
3. The "so what?" question. Are the Council clear on the outcomes they are seeking to achieve by their improvement actions? When completed, will they have, or be likely to have in due course, the desired impact in terms of the changes in the systems, processes, behaviours and culture.

2.4 The Board have looked beyond the (narrow) 9 recommendations listed above if there were legitimate areas that we felt are important in identifying underlying causes of issues, or the enabling of effective solutions for the re-creation of that well-functioning and effective Council; what the Max Caller Report implied were needed for a "Best Value.....Authority."

2.5 The Board has engaged with a wide range of people and has been struck by their openness and constructiveness. We have been particularly heartened by the desire of Councillors from across the political spectrum to share their views with us. One thing is clear from all this: that Northumberland County Council has been through a challenging, distracting period. It is coming out the other side. But it is not there yet. There is passion for Northumberland and a clear determination from almost just about everyone to improve governance and behaviour and to get back to being focussed on doing the very best for Northumberland's residents, businesses, and visitors.

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3. Our Findings

3.1 You have only just begun your improvement journey. Likewise, the Challenge Board is clear that implementing the Caller recommendations is not simply a tick box process or a binary yes/no? Officers understand this point too. The process needs to commence by describing what success looks like in terms of culture, governance, and other outcomes. We believe that there is still some work to do around this.

3.2 Officers have started to define success and outcomes, but it needs to be more explicitly developed so members can see it too and agree the goals. You could still consider some reference to a priority within your Corporate Plan around a 'fit for purpose council' to better reflect Caller and which could have encompassed your value for money priority. Whilst there is some reference to improvement in the Corporate Plan, under the Value for Money section, it could be more explicitly drawn out.

3.3 The Board has been given significant evidence of the efforts the Council has been putting in, under the direction of the Leader and CEO to meet each of the 9 Caller recommendations. A lot of action has been undertaken and this has resulted in some new things being put in place to meet the thrust of a recommendation. In every case the action of the Council needs to be undertaken with a clear view of the intended result.

3.4 On some of the Caller recommendations the Council has made good progress. However, at present whilst certain policies, procedures and systems have been adjusted, corrected, or put in place, we feel that there is only limited evidence, so far, that it is working in terms of adjusting culture, behaviours and ensuring those changes are embedded. The Council shows awareness around this point. To a large extent this would be the case in any authority where change is needed, but the interventions undertaken will take time to have an impact. Your improvement journey is an ongoing and longer-term piece of work.

3.5 On Caller recommendation 1, we acknowledge that there has been an extension to the timescale to produce the Corporate Plan, reflecting our previous 'don't rush' message. You acknowledge that further work is required to evolve it into a linked County Plan but appears to have been arrived at through a reasonably inclusive process and has 3 clear priorities.

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3.6 We note that some performance measures have metrics but there are many that do not. Those key outcomes should be the basis for performance management by members. We understand you plan that Full Council will receive an annual Corporate Plan achievements report in March each year, followed by an annual performance report (at the conclusion of Q4 performance). Both reports will present progress on achievement of the Council's three priorities. Recognising that it is for the Scrutiny Commissions to decide their respective work programmes, we feel you should look to report performance formally to a forum, such as Scrutiny, more frequently; perhaps quarterly.

3.7 You do make clear that the Corporate Plan priorities now need to be embedded in service planning, corporate performance reporting and linked to appraisals (all messages we have previously given to you). There is some progress on this “golden threading.” But it is what you do with the Corporate Plan now that matters. For that reason, we feel it is too early to evaluate the impact of the new Plan. It needs to become the driving force behind the council’s actions and the basis of the County’s ambitions, the shape and priorities within the budget and how the council carries out its business.

3.8 In terms of Caller recommendation 2, you have remained with your existing values. There has been engagement with approximately 600 people to begin to bring these to life with workshops and focus groups. But, we feel it is much too early to say what impact this work and these values will have. A Corporate Peer Challenge in a few months’ time would be the best time to look at this again.

3.9 On Caller’s third recommendation, we felt you had good plans to bring together and use data. The system you are trying to establish looks promising, but it should be clearly driven by the priorities within the Corporate Plan. We consider it too early to evidence that it is drive actions and monitor outcomes.

3.10 The work to review and agree a redraft of the Constitution (Caller recommendation 4) appears to have been inclusive and a good example of cross party and joint officer, member working. You have reached a thought through outcome (including responding to our suggestions around looking at the Business Chair role). It is obviously not yet possible to judge the impact of the new Constitution. It would benefit from being regularly reviewed but we hope it will facilitate more inclusive working across all members, leading to clear and effective decision making.

3.11 Caller Recommendation 5 was about Code of Conduct, including information. The Code of Conduct has been re-emphasised and there has been some training

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around it, which reached 96% of members in some form. But this is a long term, relentless, task. We are unclear, yet, how effective these changes and training will have been. A key assessment of impact, which can only be made in time, will revolve around whether robust challenge is made and accepted in an appropriate way, leading to proper accountability.

3.12 On information the Constitution has been strengthened, making clearer the Member rights in relation to access to information. Your changes to the Code of Conduct and the Constitution are being made to deliver the outcome of better governance and behaviour. Whilst “fewer complaints” is an important measure of success, we are less sure the other stated success measures are the right ones.

3.13 In response to recommendation 6, you quickly arrived at a rationale and have used it since. We feel you should keep this approach under regular review, but also test the rationale for the continuation of companies on a frequent basis.

3.14 On recommendation 7 you responded positively to our suggestion of seeking advice from Local Partnerships and your MO and S151 have met with them. Additionally, Advance has gone through a process to appoint 4 new Non-Executive Directors to their board. However, we feel there is more to do on this. Unless the council gets the governance of this body, and the Council’s role as shareholder, right, there may still be some significant risks for you. We would recommend that you continue to engage with Local Partnerships to provide you with advice on the robustness of the governance changes and also to undertake regular review to protect the council’s interests.

3.15 In terms of recommendation 8, appointing a new permanent (senior) officer structure. The incoming CEO helped steer this before her official arrival. You have succeeded in all senior appointments except for the MO, where there is an experienced MO as a long-term interim. Despite this, we welcome the stability that will be brought by permanent appointments, after what was a lengthy period of interim appointment across the senior team. The Council is now in the process of establishing a revised structure further down the organisation.

3.16 The appointment of a new CEO has been very welcome. The CEO has brought order to the role of the Executive and the effective management of the Council. However, she cannot do everything herself. There are good signs of the Management Team beginning to gel and take appropriate change further down into the Council but there is further to go. Whilst the management team is relatively new, many of the individuals were at the council before their recent confirmation. The team has needed

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the leadership now being provided by the new CEO. But all senior managers now need to step up to meet the challenges ahead and this should be a focus of the planned leadership development programme.

3.17 On Caller recommendation 9, the Council sought further advice to clearly define a robust appraisal process that satisfies the recommendations of the Independent Governance Review and that is rigorous, fair, legally-sound and pragmatic. The process you now have appears to fully comply with JNC guidance. The targets were agreed between the CEO, Leader and Deputy Leader and the approach was agreed at the cross-party StAC.

3.18 Overall, we share the view of many; that your improvement journey will need 3 years or more to get to the level of a good Best Value Council. This is not the same as us saying there are many things you are not doing that you should be doing now. Rather some actions will take time to work through and to get to the outcomes. In some cases, you will need to try other and further actions to take the Council to a higher level. The Council feels it is beginning to develop these plans through BEST.

3.19 Whilst we do see this as a plan for a way of working, the Board feels that an explicit, properly articulated, longer-term transformation and improvement plan is needed to drive and focus all your improvement actions. This requires even clearer measures of success which could be owned and monitored on a cross party basis. The monitoring/driving could be by the Member Oversight Group (or replacement). But we would also expect that the independently chaired Audit Committee, will seek some oversight so that it can be assured of the effective governance of the Council

3.20 In terms of now: the joint leadership being provided by The Leader and the new CEO has created focus and momentum to both the Council generally and your improvement journey in particular. The CEO has also launched straight into the things that needed doing urgently. Some of these were reflected in the Caller recommendations. Some others were just essential to get the Council back on track.

3.21 The relationship between the new CEO and The Leader is strong and positive. This was something missing when Max Caller undertook his work. The CEO has begun to build engagement with all political groups. It will take time for the senior team to have equally strong relationships with all groups and members.

3.22 Officers need to be enabled to speak truth to power. There have been steps towards that but it needs to go further. Some perceive that the primary officer role is pleasing the Leader and Cabinet. In an effectively functioning Council, officers need to

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ensure they support, and are seen to support, the membership and organisation as a whole.

3.23 In Northumberland, that need is even greater, as the improvement journey is a vital process and one that will only be achieved if the **whole** Council and **all** officers, members and Groups are involved, supported, and wholeheartedly buy in to it.

3.24 Another feature of NCC is that it is a hung council. This makes it even more important that opposition members are engaged, informed, supported, and involved more effectively than they are currently, particularly by senior officers. Members themselves have a role in this too of course.

3.25 We have observed that the Council has found it easier to make progress on behaviours on the officer side. But you still have some way to go on the member side to ensure the council is properly and effectively member led (and officer managed). However, it is good to have seen that there has been a significant reduction in councillor-to-councillor complaints. Indeed, there have been none for many months. This has undoubtedly been helped by the introduction of a new code of conduct (based on the LGA model one), as well as some training on what it means and around declarations of interest.

3.26 We are also pleased to see that the historical Standards cases are now resolved. The Council should also be congratulated for having an independent review of the process so lessons can be learnt for the future.

3.27 We are also supportive of the new social media protocol. This will ensure that members will need to declare their involvement which should help reduce suspicion and antagonism. This has been an issue in other Councils and has led, elsewhere, to some councillors resigning or being sanctioned for similar issues.

3.28 More generally, however, the Council is the best part of 12 months past the Caller Report. We are disappointed that some of the behavioural changes we would have hoped and expected to have seen by now have only shifted very slightly.

3.29 This is partly about (some) individual members not yet taking proper responsibility for their actions or adjusting their behaviour. But it is also about what the Council should be doing to support the development of better member relationships more generally. Allied to this, the collective Council needs to ensure that all members are given the opportunity, support, and skills to carry out their roles effectively.

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3.30 The Full Council meeting needs to consistently fulfil its potential as a forum for effective debate, with the opportunity for all members to have their say.

3.31 We could summarise your need for change as the better inclusion of ALL members in the governance of the Council, through:

- more effective Scrutiny. The Council have undertaken a scrutiny review which will hopefully lead to improvements, but scrutiny needs to be much better planned, forward looking, stronger and to have impact. It is currently significantly behind the pace of the best councils ..

- an effective, complete, timely programme of member development to ensure members fully understand their varying roles, their potential and the importance of culture and behaviours in facilitating more effective member to member and member to officer interactions

- understanding and following the new clarity over access to information

- reviewing the time-of-day of meetings

3.32 We were going to add “the role Business Chair in Full Council” to this list. We do feel the way that the Council has already considered and addressed this issue and has decided to remove that role has shown maturity of approach and effective cross party working.

3.33 At the end of the day, all members must be able to challenge Council performance and indeed policy. They should also be able to challenge poor behaviours and be supported in so doing. But this should be possible without having to resort to the formal standards process.

3.34 Group Leaders and others in leading positions, have a key role in modelling and reinforcing good behaviour. However, officers also need to show members what good looks like and to call out, at an early stage, poor behaviour equally and impartially across all members. This will help ensure that the Standards process goes back to being very much a last resort, rather than being over-used by members, as in the recent past.

3.35 It should also be noted that we received views from across the political spectrum that female members struggle to be heard.

3.36 The Council should be undertaking this work to ensure the (further) building and bolstering of trust across the Council. Trust that all members’ voices are being heard.

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Trust they can carry out their role effectively. Trust that people are doing their job to the best of their ability.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 During the time the Board has operated, there have remained and emerged some unresolved residual legacy issues around the previous regime, including the international work. These, and other matters are still being worked through. To some extent the past is still there. But the Council is, rightly, trying hard to look and move forward.

4.2 Officers and members have worked really hard to make progress, in a short space of time, on the 9 Caller recommendations. But the Council needs to continue to see this as more than a box ticking exercise. It will take some time for the actions already undertaken by the Council, and those upcoming, to work through the organisation and to achieve results. Indeed, the Board consider it to be too early to answer most of the “so what” questions. In other words, it is not possible for us to say that your actions have yet led to a consistently better culture, embedded for the future.

4.3 We believe the key issue for the Council to (continue) to address is to clarify what it would look like if it were a Best Value authority. You have gone some way towards this, but there is further you can go. Key to achieving that is the need for an overall Improvement/Transformation Plan, with clear accountabilities and with cross party oversight.

4.4 Your actions will take time to impact on the fundamental issues here, which are: governance, systems, behaviours, trust, and culture. Those necessary changes will take time to develop and embed. The biggest question is how long will it take and how well the council can embed its (new) values and ensure the necessary behaviour change is permanent?

4.5 The Challenge Board has been in place for around 9 months. However, we see the Council’s improvement journey as being a longer-term journey, perhaps around 3 years to get to fully being a Best Value Authority. That is not the same as saying the Challenge Board needs to be around for that length of time. The Council invited us in and asked us to do this work. We agreed to produce a report at this point. Now is the time for the Council to consider whether it needs the Board to remain active or to step back.

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4.6 This Challenge Board process has been a learning one for both the Board and the Council. You should consider how it builds on the start of your journey of improvement but also ensure you continue to invite and welcome challenge to help you get there more quickly.

4.7 In the meantime we will leave you with our recommendations:

1. Develop a clearly articulated transformation/improvement plan to drive and support the council's improvement journey. This should have clear accountabilities and receive both cross-party and independent oversight.
2. Ensure that all Corporate Plan actions have clear success measures/targets to enable accountability to be monitored and cross that the Corporate Plan drives the Council and develops into a linked plan for the whole county
3. Keep the post of interim MO under regular review with the aim of a permanent appointment at the earliest opportunity.
4. Develop a leadership development programme for the senior team to enable the team to be fit for purpose to meet the challenges ahead, including the need to speak truth to power and to support the whole Council with good member and officer engagement
5. Ensure that the whole council are supported to be a part of the improvement journey.
6. Maintain focus on a clearly articulated member development programme to address the required improvements in member behaviour, as well as enabling members to be more effective in their roles, including through stronger and influential scrutiny.
7. Ask Local Partnerships to continue to provide you with advice on the robustness of the governance changes around Advance and to undertake a regular review to protect the council's interests
8. Receive an LGA-managed, focussed, Corporate Peer Challenge before the end of the municipal year and ensure that the recommendations of this report are considered as part of that.

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