



Northumberland

County Council

Your ref:

Our ref:

Enquiries to: Karon Hadfield

Email: karon.hadfield@northumberland.gov.uk

Tel direct:

Date: 29 August 2023

Dear Sir or Madam,

Your attendance is requested at a meeting of the **COUNTY COUNCIL** to be held in **COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNTY HALL** on **WEDNESDAY, 6 SEPTEMBER 2023** at **3.00 PM**.

Yours faithfully

Dr Helen Paterson

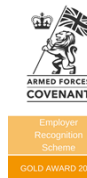
Chief Executive

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
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AGENDA

PART I

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

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. MINUTES

(Pages 1
- 12)

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held on Wednesday 14 June 2023, as circulated, to be confirmed as a true record.

3. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

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 Registrable Interest or Non Registrable 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 CABINET MEMBER FOR IMPROVING OUR ROADS AND HIGHWAYS** (Pages 13 - 20)

Annual Portfolio Report – Improving our Roads and Highways

This is the Annual Report from the Cabinet Member for Improving our Roads and Highways. The Report contains issues that set the context for delivery of the Portfolio. It highlights achievements over the past year and, outlines the areas of focus for the coming year.

8. **CORPORATE SERVICES AND ECONOMIC GROWTH OSC – INTERIM REPORT TO COUNCIL** (Pages 21 - 22)

To receive a report from the Chair of the Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC.

9. **REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LAW AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND MONITORING OFFICER** (Pages 23 - 32)

Political Proportionality

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

10. **REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LAW AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND MONITORING OFFICER** (Pages 33 - 38)

Establishment of the Rights of Way Committee and Other Governance Matters

1. To make arrangements for the discharge of the non-executive functions of the County Council through the appointment of the Rights of Way Committee, following the LAC Review undertaken earlier this year and agreed by Council in June, to appoint Members to that committee in accordance with the proportionality of the Council, including the Chair and Vice Chair, and to agree its terms of reference.
2. To receive the name of the Cabinet Member for Improving Public Health and Wellbeing.
3. To appoint a number of Chair and Vice Chair places on Committees.
4. To nominate members to the outside bodies listed in paragraph 5.3.

11. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LAW AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND MONITORING OFFICER

(Pages
39 - 52)

Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel

To consider the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel, to be presented by the Allison Thompson, who acted as Chair for this Review and decide if any or all of its recommendations should be adopted.

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.

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Agenda Item 2

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Northumberland County Council** held on Wednesday 14 June 2023 at County Hall, Morpeth at 3.00 pm.

PRESENT

Councillor B. Flux (Chairman in the Chair)

MEMBERS

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

OFFICERS

Binjal, S.	Monitoring Officer
Bradley, N.	Executive Director – Adults, Ageing and Wellbeing
Denyer, L.	Deputy Monitoring Officer
Hadfield, K.	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Hunter, P.	Interim Senior Service Director
Kingham, A.	Executive Director – Children and

Masson, N.
Neilson, S.

Paterson, Dr H.
O'Neill, G.

Willis, J.

Young People
Deputy Monitoring Officer
Executive Director, Place and
Regeneration
Chief Executive
Executive Director for Public Health,
Inequalities and Stronger
Communities
Executive Director for Resources &
Transformation (S151)

One member of the public was present.

14. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Bridgett, Carr, Dunbar, Foster, Humphrey, Nisbet, Robinson and Towns.

15. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Annual Meeting of County Council held on Wednesday 17 May 2023, be confirmed as a true record subject to Minute No. 7 (page 14) being amended to confirm that Councillor Waddell was elected as Vice Chair of Tynedale LAC, not Councillor Kennedy. This had been notified to Democratic Services.

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

The Chair reported with sadness the passing of former County Councillor Anthony Murray, who had represented the Wooler Electoral Division from 2008 until 2021. Councillors Sanderson and Dickinson both spoke in fond tribute to Anthony and members stood for a minute's silence as a mark of respect.

The Leader also reported that Cabinet had recently received the results of the consultation exercise on devolution. This had received a positive response. One of the issues which had come out was the ability of Northumberland to maintain a strong voice in the region. However, he did not feel this was a concern as all authorities worked well together. The full process should begin in May next year and Northumberland would have Cabinet responsibility for Rurality and the Environment.

The Leader then paid tribute to Chief Fire Officer Paul Hedley who was retiring from the Fire and Rescue Service. He had been an integral part of the Fire and Rescue Service for many years and a fantastic officer and friend. The Leader then also paid tribute to Suki Binjal who had acted as Interim Head of Governance and MO since 2021. She had brought a level of professionalism and integrity to the Council and had turned round a significant amount of work during her time with the Authority. He wished both officers all the very best.

Councillor Horncastle added that he had learned a lot from Paul Hedley since assuming responsibility for the portfolio. He led a very professional team and he would be sorely missed.

Councillor Bawn advised members, on behalf of the Scrutiny Chairs, that as part of the review of Scrutiny just undertaken, there would be quarterly reports to Council from September on the work of their Committees.

17. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions had been received.

18. MEMBER QUESTIONS

Question 1 from Councillor Wilczek to Councillor Riddle

Due to ongoing parking issues across Bedlington, and with the upcoming Active Travel Corridor and Northumberland Line, can the administration reassure residents that the town centre car park (next to Aldi) will remain under Northumberland County Council control?

Councillor Riddle replied that the land that comprised the new Aldi store and store car park was sold to Aldi by Advance Northumberland. The remaining car park and development land was still owned by Advance Northumberland. He anticipated this would be required to provide dedicated car parking as and when these sites were developed as part of the regeneration of Bedlington Town Centre. The County Council retained ownership of the car parks adjoining Bedlington Library and there was no intention that the situation would change.

Question 2 from Councillor Hill to Councillor Horncastle

In the last 15 years, how many bodies have been buried in the wrong graves in Northumberland due to errors by this authority? How many bodies have been exhumed as a result?

Councillor Horncastle replied that the new Unitary Northumberland County Council came into effect in 2009 at which point it took over responsibility for 23 active cemeteries across the County from its predecessor District Councils. During the period from 2009 to date, there had been one instance of a body being buried in the incorrect plot, in this instance the plot was empty but had already been purchased by a family for future use. The error was quickly identified and following dialogue with both of the affected families and with the consent of the Church of England, the Council arranged for the exhumation of the grave and reburial in the adjoining correct plot. The Council accepted that even one error of this nature was not acceptable and had taken further measures to mitigate the risk of any reoccurrence and had apologised unreservedly to both of the families affected by this unfortunate error. He added that these unfortunate errors were certainly not unique to Northumberland. Similar instances in other places were widely reported across the country. For example, in October the Northern Echo had reported on seven burial errors in other authorities in the South of the region and these appeared to be largely down to human error. He pointed this out, not to excuse the one mistake made in the County. This was, of course, deeply

regrettable and was taken very seriously. However, he reassured colleagues and residents that these errors were not unique to Northumberland, and the Authority was not an outlier in this.

Councillor Hill replied that she was aware of several instances in Berwick where such things had happened. In light of this information, the failure to apologise to families and the impact on them, she asked whether the Cabinet Member would call for a full review to ensure that these errors weren't repeated.

Councillor Horncastle responded that officer research had only identified one instance and he could therefore not comment any further than that.

19. REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Leader of Council Annual Portfolio Report

The Leader of Council's Annual Portfolio Report contained issues that set the context for delivery of the Leader's Portfolio. It highlighted achievements over the past year and, outlined the areas of focus for the coming year.

The report was presented by the Leader. The report detailed achievements against the Council's three key priorities. A second Equalities conference was scheduled to take place in July which would discuss the Action Plan and action points. He detailed the support which had been provided through Northumberland Communities Together and the major investment programmes with the help of North of Tyne and Government funding throughout the County.

Support for business included free car parking and new car parks, support for better public transport and larger projects such as JDR Cables in Blyth, as well as support for skills training.

On value for money, the budget had protected front line services. The elderly had been looked after and education results were very good. Investment was being made to amenities such as public toilets and parks and open spaces and there would be more investment in the environment going forward. There had been significant investment in leisure centres and new schools and while these were not cheap, they were essential to show that the Council was providing value for money.

He was also very pleased to see the way the new Executive Management Team, led by the Chief Executive, had transformed things and were working well as a team and with members.

Councillor Dickinson referred to comments he had made at the last meeting on the Corporate Plan about the need for KPIs to be included. There was nothing in the Leader's Report to indicate that anything was being measured and he asked when this evidence would be available, and when would the Authority be working on this type of plan.

Councillor Kennedy looked forward to seeing the new public facilities in Hexham which had been long awaited and reiterated the points made by Councillor Dickinson regarding KPIs which would be helpful to assess performance.

Councillor Hill agreed on the need for more detail, particularly on tackling inequalities with respect to social housing.

Councillor Ball asked for more support for Ashington. Whilst people were using foodbanks and could not afford the rent or council tax, she would continue to lobby for this support.

Councillor Scott asked about the investment planned for Waterworld in Prudhoe.

Councillor Dale commented that the draft Statement of Accounts showed that 62% of KPIs were showing red. She felt it was important that this information be included in the Corporate Plan, although it was available on line.

The Leader responded that Cabinet members would each be giving an annual report to Council. He agreed with Councillor Kennedy's points regarding Hexham and the work which had gone on there, adding that partnership working was very important. He assured members that there would be progress in Ashington and members would be kept involved. Social housing would be discussed at the Equalities conference coming up. KPIs would be published and he hoped to be able to give an update on these at one of the Group Leader meetings. Finally, Cabinet had agreed £1.5m of investment in Waterworld.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

20. REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Challenge Board Report

Council was asked to consider and respond to the Challenge Board Report (dated 14th June 2023) which was attached at Appendix 1. The following members of the Challenge Board were present at the meeting: Pat Ritchie (Chair), Mark Edgell, Wallace Sampson, Stephen Houghton and Gillian Marshall.

The Leader introduced the report, highlighting that one of the recommendations from the Caller Report had been to invite in a challenge board to help the Authority deal with the matters which had been raised in the recommendations. Lee Rowley MP, the Minister at DLUHC had recently commended the Authority for the work they had done so far and the Leader's intention was that a peer review should take place.

Regarding the point in the Challenge Board report about female voices struggling to be heard, he found this disappointing. No member should struggle to be heard whether male or female so some work would be done

anonymously to identify where the problem was and how it could be alleviated. The results would be reported to the next Group Leaders meeting and the Group Leaders could then take this forward. He then proposed the report's recommendations, which was seconded by Councillor Reid.

Pat Ritchie thanked the Council for inviting the Challenge Board in and all of those who had engaged so well with the process. Two interim reports had been presented so far and this third report was a stock take report. It was important to focus on the report as a whole, as it contained a lot of detail, and not just on the recommendations. It was the Board's assessment of where the Council was following Caller. A huge amount of progress had been made in a short period of time but there was still a long way to go on an improvement journey that could take quite a while. The most important thing was to consider the work which had been done, and how it was embedded to drive change and improvement.

She drew members' attention to Section 3 of the report which contained a commentary on progress against each of the Caller recommendations. Members needed to be clear on how the changes were embedded in the organisation and how they would impact on the Council going forward through the Corporate Plan and the Code of Conduct.

Paragraphs 3.18 and 3.19 drew out the importance of a clear improvement plan so members could identify progress made against the various actions. Paragraphs 3.23-3.29 dealt with the need to ensure that all members were heard across the Council as a whole and that all members were supported with the right tools to do their jobs.

She encouraged the Authority to continue to be self-critical but also to celebrate success and the three recommendations would support that. She also drew attention to recommendations 5 and 6 and the recommendation that the Authority have a corporate peer challenge before the end of the municipal year. Finally, she thanked the Challenge Board members for their work and expertise.

The Chairman then invited members to ask any questions.

- Councillor Dickinson welcomed that the Council had made a response to the Challenge Board's report. He was concerned that there were still some significant areas of work still to be tackled, notwithstanding the work which had been done so far, including monitoring performance of the Corporate Plan. He was particularly concerned that each report from the Board referenced the need to engage properly. His questions were - did the Challenge Board feel the Council had engaged properly with the process, were the actions the Council had put forward robust enough and did the Challenge Board feel that the Council was ready to be cut free from external scrutiny?
- Councillor Kennedy referred to the conclusions and asked the Challenge Board how much work they felt they still had to do to challenge the Council and he asked what they felt the issues were associated with governance, systems, behaviours, trust and culture.

- Councillor Morphet asked what the ideal corporate peer challenge would involve and what powers it would have to encourage the Council to do better.

Stephen Houghton responded that there was no evidence that the Council hadn't engaged properly with the Challenge Board and everything which had been asked for had been provided. The Challenge Board's work was complete. The covering report on actions went some way to addressing whether the identified actions were enough but there were other areas to be looked at in more detail. The covering report was not the improvement plan, but a summary of the detail. The key would be the Improvement Plan. He felt it would be advantageous to the Council to have some independent oversight of the Improvement Plan going forward.

Regarding the embedding of the culture change, Pat Ritchie commented that it would take time to rebuild trust and confidence through the organisation and the work already started was the means of driving that forward. Things were moving in the right direction and there was lots of evidence of good progress but there was still some way to go, which would take time.

Mark Edgell advised that the corporate peer challenge was a normal piece of support available from the LGA. The team would be comprised of a range of different councils including a leader and chief executive and would hold up a mirror for the Authority to see how things which had been put in place had been successful and a more general health check about priorities, financial sustainability, governance and culture and capacity to improve. The review usually took about four days and would feed back to full Council through a report. An Action Plan in response to this was expected with a follow up after six months to check progress.

The Leader commented that he and the Chief Executive had made the decision to ask for a peer review as he was keen to ensure that the momentum was continued. All Group Leaders would be involved in the preparation for this.

Regarding the robustness of the process, Wallace Sampson confirmed that this had been robust, and there had been engagement, but there was work still to consider as part of the Improvement Plan.

- Councillor Murphy asked the Challenge Board thought they had fulfilled their public sector equality act duty in the way they had produced the report given that they had raised points about women members saying they struggled to be heard. However, no context had been provided for this and no recommendation was made on it. She thanked the Leader for picking up on this point and taking action on it.
- Councillor Hill asked the Board to expand on two points. Firstly, the reference in the report to officers speaking truth to power and the perception by some that the primary officer role was pleasing the Leader and Cabinet, and the reference in the Caller Report to the "climate of fear". Secondly, the reference to Advance Northumberland and "significant risks".

- Councillor Chicken commented it had not been her experience that female councillors were not heard and she asked if there had been any evidence of this or was it just opinion.
- Councillor Dale queried whether the Audit Committee would still be reviewing the Challenge Board's report. Also, since 2017 the County Council's accounts had been qualified because of not providing best value which was a significant challenge for the Authority. Regarding the peer review, she asked if the Challenge Board were making a recommendation that the Council itself take forward the change on behaviour issues which was required and which had been needed for a long time.
- Councillor Grimshaw commented that opposition members still did not feel trusted and asked the Challenge Board whether they felt things had moved on in this area.

In response to some of these points, Pat Ritchie replied that the point about women struggling to be heard had been made in a number of discussions. This had been raised with the Chief Executive and it was important for the Council to reflect on it. As she understood it, the equalities duty sat with the Council so it was for the Council to decide how to respond. On governance and audit, the Board had flagged up in the report the role that audit could potentially play and she recommended that some consideration be given to that. This also linked to the recommendations on change and oversight of change, and where that sat was for the Council to decide upon. On the point about Advance, a lot of the changes had happened before the Board came in but the Council needed to ensure that the reforms around the shareholder function were done in a robust way. The Board had not picked up on a climate of fear, but one where the organisation was going through change and there was need to ensure that voices were heard as part of that.

Regarding the point of no recommendation on voices not being heard, Mark Edgell responded that this was a good challenge back to the Board but it was clear that the Council had heard this message and further work was the correct next step. There was no evidence that the Council was not up to meeting the challenges moving forward but the Council needed to draw all of its improvement plans together into one place, there needed to be some ongoing, cross party and preferably independent oversight of progress and the Council should open itself up to periodic, external challenge.

On the point about speaking truth to power, Wallace Sampson commented that the Board had felt there was an important role for officers to play in this and that they had the confidence to be able to do so. Officers needed to understand that they had a role to support the Administration but also serve the whole Council.

- Councillor Dickinson referred to the point about people having a voice and sometimes feeling intimidated in meetings. He felt members worked quite well but if there were issues then these needed to be addressed. He was disappointed with the Council's response and would have liked to have seen a much more robust set of actions and consultation on those actions. His Group therefore would not be able to support the recommendations without more detail.

- Councillor Kennedy agreed with these points. The Council was at a starting point and there was still a long way to go before culture was changed.
- Councillor Reid felt things had improved in the last 7-8 months and relationships were better. He felt officers were able to speak truth to power and do their jobs properly. He was content that the Council was at the point where it should accept the recommendations and move on. Councils worked because of relationships and these could not be regulated. If any member felt they could not speak up in front of a particular person, then they should raise it with them.
- Councillor Morphet commented that his Group were grateful for the Challenge Board's help and would support the recommendations.
- Councillor Castle commented that things were now improving in Council meetings. He understood it was the opposition's role to hold the Administration to account but there needed to be a sense of common purpose for residents. The Council as a body should operate with common cause and he believed that it was now going in the right direction. "Huge and rapid progress" was an important statement and the process of improvement would not end. He was disappointed that Labour could not support the report because it was the right way to go and he commended all members for contributing to the progress which had been made.
- Councillor Ball thanked the Challenge Board for their work and was disappointed that they would not be part of the next stage of the journey because behaviour and culture change would take time, and she felt this would come about more quickly if the scrutiny was maintained. She looked forward to seeing improvement through KPIs and how staff would be positively impacted by the changes.
- Councillor Renner Thompson reassured members that the Labour shadow portfolio holder for children's services received the same information on KPIs as he did and these would be available on the Council's website very soon.
- Councillor Oliver felt the Council was much more focussed on delivery for residents and was a happier place to be. The report was excellent and he welcomed the emphasis on individual responsibility but would have liked to have seen a little more on accountability. He welcomed the Action Plan report coming to Audit Committee and the plan for a peer review. He thanked the Leader and other Group Leaders and the members of the Challenge Board for their work, which had made a difference.
- Councillor Ezhilchelvan felt the Council had now turned a page and that it should be able to be self-managing without the need for external oversight. He commended the Leader for initiating the governance review. Regarding the comments which had been made about female members being heard, he was not concerned about this and felt each comment needed to be taken in context. In his opinion, the Challenge Board had been extremely inclusive in its workings.
- Councillor J. Watson thanked the Board for highlighting these issues to be addressed. He referred to a comment about the robustness in relation to Advance Northumberland. Having been the Chair for 18 months with everything that entailed and all of the in depth work which had been done, he was disappointed at the suggestion that there were still things wrong and that the achievements of the company had not been recognised.
- Councillor Ferguson felt the recommendations in para 4.7 were vague and open ended. This was not a criticism but showed that there was still a long

way to go. The Council needed to take ownership of its improvement and he felt asking the Challenge Board to stay would prevent that happening.

- Councillor Hill commented that things had definitely improved and the Leader had skilfully managed a difficult situation within the Council. However, she was not comfortable about some things which she felt had been covered up. Regarding female members not being heard, she felt it was not so much that, as being heard without being shouted at or disrespected. A pattern of this negative behaviour had developed, though it had got better recently.
- Councillor Grimshaw agreed with these comments. She had been in meetings where female members had been treated with a great deal of disrespect and criticism. She welcomed the improvement which had been made and hoped that it would continue.
- Councillor Wearmouth thanked the Challenge Board. In response to some of the points which had been raised, he commented that it was the County Council part of Advance governance which needed work not Advance itself. Regarding voices being heard, he could relate to this and appreciated the Leader's comments on work to be done. It was important to learn how members wanted to engage as not everyone wanted to stand up in the Council Chamber and some of this would be picked up in the changes in Scrutiny. Speaking truth to power and officers' feedback was also an important issue. His own approach was to ask for feedback from officers. One issue which had been raised with him was members going round officers when they did not like an answer and he encouraged members to think how this could be changed. There was work still to be done on changing culture but this would take time.

The Leader noted the views which had been expressed. He was content that the Council was moving in the right direction and that members would work together to get where they needed to be.

On the report's recommendations being put to the vote there voted FOR: 36; AGAINST: 21; ABSTENTIONS: 2.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that:-

- (a) the Challenge Board report as attached at Appendix 1 be noted and received;
- (b) the Challenge Board Recommendations be noted and received;
- (c) the Council's responses to each of the Recommendations as set out in paragraph 5.10 of the report be approved;
- (d) the work of the Challenge Board is now complete and that their work with the Council will conclude; and
- (e) the Chair and all Challenge Board members be thanked for their support, advice and guidance during the past year.

.....
Chair of the County Council

.....
Duly Authorised Officer

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Northumberland County Council

COMMITTEE: COUNCIL

DATE: 6TH SEPTEMBER 2023

Annual Portfolio Report – Improving Our Roads and Highways

Report of: Councillor John Riddle, Cabinet Member for Improving Our Roads and Highways

Responsible Officer: Simon Neilson, Executive Director for Place and Regeneration

1. Purpose of report

1.1. This is the Annual Report from the Cabinet Member for Improving our Roads and Highways. The Report contains issues that set the context for delivery of the Portfolio. It highlights achievements over the past year and, outlines the areas of focus for the coming year.

2. Recommendations

2.1.1. Council is recommended to:

- (i) Note the Cabinet Member for Improving our Roads and Highways' Annual Report.

Link to Corporate Plan

- **Achieving Value for Money** – The Portfolio contributes to Value for Money by securing best value in contracting, commissioning and income raising initiatives. We also aim for continuous improvement and innovation in our services to residents.
- **Tackling Inequalities** – The Portfolio plays a vital role in driving delivery of the Council's Inequalities Plan through creating and maintaining a safe and sustainable transport network for all, and in particular, putting in place the infrastructure to encourage more people to cycle and walk.
- **Driving Economic Growth** - The Portfolio contributes to driving economic growth through building and maintaining the infrastructure and services that support thriving businesses across our towns and villages.

3. Key issues

3.1. The Annual reports from each of the Council's Cabinet Members provide a valuable 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. The Council adopted the Corporate Plan at its Annual General Meeting 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 Portfolio report provides an opportunity for Members to drill down further into the work of the Improving our Roads and Highways Portfolio.

5. Context

- 5.1. The Highways Teams use an asset management approach for maintenance of roads, footways, cycleways, bridges and street lighting, including winter and severe weather response. It conducts highways and bridges inspections, network management, including parking and 'streetworks.' The Team also undertakes design and project management of highway and transport improvement schemes, road safety and delivery of Local Transport Plan capital programme. All of this work underpins vibrant places and local economies, ensuring businesses can thrive and grow. Equally important, it helps our residents to access services, jobs, access to leisure and other opportunities.
- 5.2. In the past year, the country has experienced high levels of inflation, and this impacts on almost all of the goods and services used by the Highways Team. This places even greater importance on our ability to secure value for money and innovation in everything we do, and this will be a core theme for this Portfolio in the coming year.

6. Achievements

- 6.1. We have continued investing in our highways network, with a £23.4m Local Transport Plan (LTP) programme delivered in 2022/23 across sustainable transport, road safety, roads, bridges, and landslips. Work is also now well underway on a further £23.4m LTP programme for 2023/24.
- 6.2. Much of this investment has been on maintaining the roads, footways and structures that form our highways asset. This is managed through a formal Transport Asset Management Plan to ensure comprehensive knowledge of all aspects of the network, to manage inspections and provide condition data for planning investment interventions. Over the past year, the Transport Asset Management Plan has been subject to a comprehensive review and refresh. Associated systems are also being put in place to deliver better services. For example, we are implementing the new, 'Alloy maintenance management system' which uses Artificial Intelligence to help us develop a smarter maintenance programme. We are also in the final stages of implementing 'Appyway,' a map-based system which will streamline our process for issuing Traffic Regulations Orders for on-street parking.
- 6.3. The LTP programmes for 22/23 and 23/24 have provided over £40m of capital investment in the roads, footways and bridges on our network. In addition, we have successfully completed a further £2.225m programme of capital maintenance to U and C roads and footways from own capital. A further £3.872m was received from Government in the March 2023 budget and the programme for these road repairs has been approved and is being delivered. With regard to the 23/24 LTP programme the

£4.3m surface dressing programme has been successfully delivered across the summer by our own workforce, providing improved road surfaces to over 386,000 square metres of road on over 45 miles of the network.

- 6.4. We have also completed the Steel Bridge Refurbishment project, which has allowed the painting and refurbishment of eight of our large steel bridges and which was 75% funded by additional funding won through the DfT Highway Maintenance Challenge Fund. And of course, we have completed the restoration and re-opening of the historic 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 and the work has received international recognition as well as a national award.
- 6.5. This Summer, we started our Enhanced Pothole Repair Trial, investing just under £500k to conduct a twelve week trial of first-time patch repair. This 'invest to save' trial is progressing well, and we look forward to analysing the outcomes on its completion. Potholes are, of course, a challenge for all councils, but in Northumberland we are determined to innovate and find new solutions to old challenges.
- 6.6. Members will also be aware of the work that has been undertaken to improve our systems for public reporting through the introduction of 'Fix My Street Pro.' The system makes reporting issues, providing locations and adding photographs all much easier for residents. It also helps us to feedback to residents on the issues they have raised. Since the launch we have received over 10,000 reports across Local Services. Continuous improvements are being made to the Fix My Street system with updates being made weekly to help inform people who are reporting issues through the system and to further develop the system itself. This includes working with Customer Services teams and across a range of Council departments.
- 6.7. We have continued to invest in new plant and equipment to ensure operations are efficient.. For winter services, nine new gritters were brought into service for winter 22/23. And the winter services weather stations across the County were renewed and upgraded to ensure information used to control our winter operations is accurate and up-to-date.. This investment secured another very effective season of winter services operations. We have also invested in four new replacement 'gully emptiers' with enhanced capabilities which have been added to the fleet. And we have acquired a multi-functional 'Pothole Pro' road patching and repair machine which is being used to great effect to carry out efficient repairs to our roads. Our teams are well-equipped to deliver the services residents, businesses and visitors expect.
- 6.8. The past year has seen the completion of a number of key car park improvements schemes, with the opening of new car parks at Goosehill in Morpeth, Alemouth Road in Hexham and Turner Street in Amble and the extension of the Quayside car park in Berwick. These car park improvements have provided much needed additional capacity in these areas to assist in boosting the economies of the towns. The introduction of contactless payments in car parks has increased the reliability of the ticket machines and reduced the reliance on cash and cash collection activities.
- 6.9. We have also been carrying out a trial of Motorhome parking. This has allowed Motorhomes to stay overnight in three sites in the county, Links Road, Bamburgh, Amble Braid and Beadnell overflow car parks. There have been over 1,000 bookings since implementing the scheme and we have received over 300 survey responses

from past users. Feedback on the scheme has been very positive. We are now considering how this scheme can be extended to other locations.

- 6.10. Road safety continues to be a key focus in my Portfolio. Despite the excellent work on road safety engineering, enforcement and education, we must do all we can to avoid and reduce casualties on our roads. We undertake significant analysis of road accident data and accident clusters, with much of the analysis showing that individual accidents have been caused by driver behaviour such as inappropriate overtaking, loss of concentration, use of mobile phones, speed and drink or drug impairment. We have continued our extensive programme of providing engineering solutions, including improved signage, speed limits, traffic calming and pedestrian crossings. Over the past year we have also carried out eight route action schemes and 15 high risk site improvements. We have implemented 20mph schemes at 147 schools, with a further five currently in construction..
- 6.11. In addition to engineering schemes, we have also carried out road safety education and behaviour change activities including cyclist and horse rider campaigns, motorcycle safety signs, supporting regional and national road safety awareness campaigns and working with schools and family hubs. Staff are currently engaged with over 50% of the schools in the County and have been using new methods to spread the road safety message including using Padlet computers and Green Cross Coding – learning the right actions to cross a road safely through programming the actions in computer code.
- 6.12. The Big Northumberland Gear Change has promoted community walking, cycling and cycle repair and the six-week walking and cycling summer challenge. We have also supported balance bike libraries, community cargo bikes and free cycle training as well as working with schools to encourage walking and cycling through Mode shift Stars and provided bike ability training to over 2500 children.
- 6.13. As part of our overall ambitions to improve walking and cycling facilities we have completed cycle and walking improvement schemes at Waterloo Road, Blyth and at Wylam Wagonway and have commenced work on the first phase of the Ponteland to Callerton cycleway.
- 6.14. The Green Spaces and Countryside Team's public rights of way staff developed and implemented a number of improvement projects to enhance and improve public access across the county. Works have been completed on the King Charles III England Coast Path (formerly known as the England Coast Path). The official opening of the Bamburgh to the Scottish Border section in August will mean that residents and visitors in Northumberland will be able to follow the county's coastline along this most recent addition to the National Trail family. The Council's Green Spaces and Countryside Team, in partnership with Forestry England, recently appointed an Assistant Area Countryside Officer (Forest Trails) to improve the investigation and resolution of rights of way issues in forested areas.
- 6.15. Cutting sections of the Highway Verge is essential for road safety but the Council understands the need to balance this with improving biodiversity and we are fortunate in Northumberland to have verges with plant communities of particularly high conservation value. This year we have further increased the number of Highway

Verges we cut later in the season and there are now over 90 verges that we maintain in a different way for the benefit of nature.

- 6.16. In addition to the comprehensive refurbishment of Seahouses and Holy Island (Green Lane) public toilet facilities, full refurbishment and modernisation works have now been completed in three further facilities (The Shambles in Alnwick, Wooler Bus Station & St Mary's Wynd in Hexham), with full refurbishment work also underway at Castlegate in Berwick. Essential refurbishment works have also now been delivered in four toilet facilities with a further six due to start imminently. Where schemes have been delivered, the Council has received excellent feedback from both local stakeholders and visitors acknowledging the investment made, the good standard of work undertaken and the quality of toilet provision in that locality.
- 6.17. The last year has been challenging for Markets which, along with high street businesses, are experiencing significant change to shopping patterns. Fewer new traders are coming forward to replace those who leave Northumberland as the competition from discount retailers and online sales make traditional markets less viable. The Council has worked closely with partners to try new speciality markets such as Vegan or Craft markets and introduced a range of incentives to attract new traders. We are keen to expand this approach with Local Councils to improve their local markets.
- 6.18. The 2022/2023 Fleet Replacement Programme delivered 81 new vehicles at a cost of £2.93m. A further ten vehicles were on order with suppliers at cost of £0.9m
Fleet Workshops now maintain 766 vehicles and over 1,000 items of small plant and equipment. There are 37 Electric Vehicles (Small Vans) with another seven ordered with suppliers.

7. Key Areas of Focus for the Coming Year

- 7.1. Over the next year we will continue to develop our highway asset management and highway maintenance systems to improve their effectiveness and integration. We will focus on the full implementation of Alloy and the development of Horizons, as well as further embedding the use of Fix My Street. We will assess the outcomes of the Enhanced Pothole Repair Trial to identify lessons learned and next steps. A review will also be undertaken of our gulley cleaning operations and policies utilising data on productivity from the operation of the new 'gulley emptiers.' We will also be developing a new Network Management Plan.
- 7.2. We will continue to deliver the LTP capital programme for 23/24 and other associated capital maintenance programmes. The major landslip repair scheme at Todstead will be completed and a major refurbishment scheme for the stonework of Berwick Old Bridge will be undertaken. We will also develop the programme for Local Transport Plan 2024/25.
- 7.3. There are still a number of schemes that are under development for our car parking improvements such as at Corbridge and the old Duchess school site in Alnwick. We will further develop these and other potential schemes to increase necessary capacity. In parallel, we will deliver a programme of cycling and walking infrastructure to support sustainable transport. These include schemes for Blyth, Ashington, Bedlington and Hexham to Corbridge. We will build on the success of our Local

Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and continue our behaviour change initiatives.

- 7.4. We will work with partners such as the Police, other local authorities and Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service to improve road safety and will prepare a new Road Safety Strategy. We will complete the 20mph at schools programme and will investigate a potential trial for average speed cameras.
- 7.5. The publication of the Council's new Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) is scheduled for 2024. This involves a review of the previous ROWIP, consultation with stakeholders, consideration of plans, proposals, and resources available. The new plan will set out the Council's approach to its management of public rights of way across the following 10-year period. The recent launch of Fix My Street as a user-friendly way for members of the public to report issues and problems on public rights of way has paved the way for the implementation of the Alloy asset management system in 2024. This system will receive and handle complaints and reports, improve customer service and provide officers with an efficient system for managing operational performance.
- 7.6. We will undertake a review of the Council's Markets strategy with partners and local stakeholders. Through this, we will identify how we can work together with Local Councils to improve their local markets.
- 7.7. This year the Fleet Replacement Programme includes the purchase of 338 vehicles to ensure we continue to have a modern, fit for purpose fleet, which is essential for the delivery of a wide range of Council services. We will be further improving our regulatory compliance by introducing digital pre use checks for drivers and defect reporting via a mobile app following procurement, we will introduce a fully automated fuel management system to ensure we make the most efficient use of our supplies.

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 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 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	
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Neil Masson
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Jan Willis
Relevant Executive Director	Simon Neilson
Cabinet Member (s)	John Riddle

Author and Contact Details

David Laux/ Greg Gavin

CORPORATE SERVICES AND ECONOMIC GROWTH OSC

REPORT TO COUNCIL

6 SEPTEMBER 2023

INTERIM SCRUTINY REPORT

As part of the review and redraft of the Council's Constitution (agreed at the Annual Council meeting), members also approved a review of the Council's scrutiny function. The review provided members with clarity on how we should approach scrutiny, in particular, setting our own work programme in accordance with the Committee's priorities and by ensuring that scrutiny can be effective in supporting policy development and monitoring performance in critical areas.

1. Work Programme

At our meeting held on 26 June 2023, I asked Simon Neilson, Executive Director – Place and Regeneration and Jan Willis, Executive Director – Transformation and Resources (S151 Officer) to provide the Committee with an outline of the key issues that are expected to emerge over the next six months or more, so that members could identify which of those matters could be developed or monitored through the work programme

The Committee identified the following areas for further examination:

- Regeneration – whilst we welcomed the progress with many of the initiatives that were being developed, particularly around Energising Blyth, members remained concerned regarding the former British Volt site. Although we acknowledged the commercial sensitivities in this area, it was something that we intend to keep under review.
- BEST – although we had previously received reports on establishing the BEST programme, members requested an update on progress so that we could identify the work streams which we felt needed more detailed examination and monitoring.
- Capital Programme – members expressed their concern regarding delays in delivering some projects which, in some cases, had led to increased costs due, in part, to higher construction and raw material prices. We will therefore monitor the delivery of the capital programme to ensure that any delays are kept to a minimum.

In addition, the Committee had agreed to receive at forthcoming meetings a performance update on the Northumberland Lottery; the Council's Workforce Annual Workforce Update, and on the operations of Advance Northumberland.

2. Financial Performance

Also in June, the Committee considered the provisional outturn of the Council against the budget for 2022-23 which was based on the position at the end of February. Although members were content with the comprehensive report, they identified two issues which would require further examination by the Committee:

- Vacancies – members noted that a recurring theme in the Financial Performance reports was the number of vacancies that had remained unfilled. Although we understood that a review of vacancies was necessary as part of the budget reduction process, it was also acknowledged that there were some issues regarding recruitment. We there agreed to explore this further within BEST.
- Parks and Green Spaces Programme – we were concerned that the £250,000 approved in 2022-23 for this programme had not been utilised. We have therefore requested that a report be presented to the next meeting which we expect will include an assurance that the schemes will be progressed expeditiously.

3. Debt Recovery

The Committee continues to monitor the Council's debt position. Although we acknowledged the hard work of the recovery team, we noted at the last meeting that sundry debt had increased, partly due to the backlog created by the pandemic, but also because claimants were moving over to Universal Credit which made it difficult for overpayments to be reclaimed. However, additional staff were now in post, so we anticipate that the issue will have eased by the time of our next six-monthly report.

I can therefore report that I am happy with the direction the Committee is taking following the recent review and intend to ensure that the OSC will be more proactive in early stage development work in formulating new policies and strategies; to investigate matters of interest and concern to the wider community, and to keep under review the performance and financial position of the Council.

COUNCILLOR DAVID BAWN

CHAIRMAN



Northumberland County Council

COUNCIL

DATE: 6 SEPTEMBER 2023

Political Proportionality

Report of the Director of Law and Corporate Governance and Monitoring Officer,
Stephen Gerrard

Link to the Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan

This report links to all aims and priorities of the 2023-2026 Corporate Plan.

Purpose of report

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

Recommendations

It is recommended that Council:

- 1. Notes that following the notification by the Labour and Independent Group Leaders of changes to the number in the Labour and Independent groups, the total number of councillors in each political group on the County Council is now Conservative 33, Labour 19, Independent 8, Liberal Democrat 4, Green 2 and 1 un-grouped member.**
- 2. Confirms that the political proportionality of the Groups is as follows: Conservative 49.25%, Labour 28.36%, Independent 11.94%, Liberal Democrat 5.97%, Green 2.99% and un-grouped 1.49%.**
- 3. Agrees to continue to use the method for determining allocations to Committees as agreed by Full Council at its meeting of 30 March 2022.**
- 4. Approves the provisions of Appendix 1 which sets out the proportional allocation of places on committees in accordance with the proportionality approved above.**

5. **Agrees the allocation of seats to Northumberland County principal/decision making Committees set out in Appendix 2 to this report.**
6. **Agrees allocations to working groups set out in Appendix 3 to this report.**
7. **Authorises the Director of Law and Corporate Governance, in consultation with the Group Leaders, to give effect to the wishes of the Group Leaders to fill the committee places allocated to their respective Groups in accordance with the provisions of Sections 15 and 16 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.**

Link to Corporate Plan

This report links to all aims and priorities of the 2023-2026 Corporate Plan.

Key issues

Democratic Services has received notice that one councillor who was previously a Labour Group member is now a member of the Independent Group. In accordance with the provisions of Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990, as amended, the County Council is under a legal obligation to review its proportionality and re-allocate seats on committees to reflect the new political balance of Council.

Background

1. Section 15 of the 1989 Act (Duty to Allocate Seats to Political Groups) sets out the requirements as to political proportionality on Council bodies and requires the Council, in allocating seats on committees and sub-committees of the Council to political groups, to give effect, so far as practicable, to the following four principles:
 - (a) that not all seats on the committee/sub-committee are allocated to the same political group;
 - (b) that a political group having a majority of seats on the Council should have a majority on each committee and sub-committee;
 - (c) that, subject to (a) and (b) above, the number of seats on the Council's committees and sub-committees allocated to each political group, bears the same proportion to the total number of such committee/sub-committee seats as the number of members of that group bears to the membership of the full Council; and
 - (d) that, subject to (a) to (c) above, seats will be allocated on each committee and sub-committee in the same ratio as exists on the full Council.
2. Section 16 of the 1989 Act (Duty to Give Effect to Allocations) requires the Council to give effect to the allocations determined as set out above in accordance with the wishes of the relevant group.

3. The precise methodology for determining allocations to Committees is not prescribed in the legislation. In March 2022, Council resolved to continue with the convention in Northumberland on its method of allocating Committee seats. This convention is that having calculated the overall proportion of Council seats held by each party, places on individual Committees are allocated on the basis of whole numbers, and adopting this approach again has been endorsed by the Group Leaders. Using this method, remainders of over '0.5' are rounded up to whole numbers and any remainders below '0.5' allocated to a pool from which seats are allocated to minority groups to achieve the correct overall proportionality.
4. This results in over or under representation at the level of individual committees. However, given the duty to look at proportionality overall, when all the seats on committees are aggregated, the Council can agree adjustments to correct, so far as reasonably practicable, any imbalance and ensure that any ungrouped members are allocated seats on committees and indeed this is normal practice. It is also open to the Council to change the number of seats on individual Committees should members wish. This often assists in adjusting imbalances or lack of representation of particular groups on some committees.
5. Appendix 1 to this report sets out a table showing the proportional allocations to committees based on the overall number of Committee seats, worked out to two decimal places.
6. Appendix 2 shows group allocations to principal/decision making Committees. Appendix 3 shows group allocations to working groups. In each case the over or under allocation of seats to each group relative to overall proportionality is shown.
7. If Recommendation 7 above is approved, the Director of Law and Governance will write to all Group Leaders asking them, within 5 working days, to specify names of councillors to be appointed for each committee (including working groups). The Director of Law and Governance will ensure that Members fill the seats on each committee (including working groups), as per the seats allocated to the political groups in accordance with the nominations of the Group Leaders.

Decision Options

The following decision options are available for consideration by Council:

Option 1 - Accept all of the recommendations and proposals

Option 2 - Make amendments to the recommendations; or

Option 3 - Reject some or all of the recommendations

Option 1 is the recommended option.

Reasons for recommended option:

Option 1 is recommended for the following reasons:

It will ensure that the Council acts in accordance with the provisions of Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990, as amended.

Implications

Policy	This report links to all aims and priorities of the 2023-26 Corporate Plan.
Finance and value for money	No direct costs will be incurred
Legal	The rules on political balance are contained in Sections 15 to 17 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990, as amended. This report is consistent with these.
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	N/A
Crime & Disorder	N/A
Customer Consideration	N/A
Carbon reduction	N/A

Health and Wellbeing	N/A
Wards	All Wards

Background papers:

N/A

Linked Reports

- Full Council report and Mins of the 30th March 2022.
[01.1 Proportionality.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)
[02.01 Council 200220 \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

Report sign off.

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

	Full Name of Officer
Director of Law and Governance/Legal	Stephen Gerrard
Executive Director	N/A
Chief Executive	Dr Helen Paterson
Relevant Portfolio Holder(s)	N/A

Report Author:

Stephen Gerrard, Director of Law and Corporate Governance

Stephen.gerrard@northumberland.gov.uk

Appendix 1 Proportionality Table

Number of seats on committees	Cons 33 49.25%	Lab 19 28.36%	Ind 8 11.94%	Lib Dem 4 5.97%	Green 2 2.99%	UG 1 1.49%
3	1.48	0.85	0.36	0.18	0.09	0.04
4	1.97	1.13	0.48	0.24	0.12	0.06
5	2.46	1.42	0.60	0.30	0.15	0.07
6	2.96	1.70	0.72	0.36	0.18	0.09
7	3.45	1.99	0.84	0.42	0.21	0.10
8	3.94	2.27	0.95	0.48	0.24	0.12
9	4.43	2.55	1.07	0.54	0.27	0.13
10	4.93	2.84	1.19	0.60	0.30	0.15
11	5.42	3.12	1.31	0.66	0.33	0.16
12	5.91	3.40	1.43	0.72	0.36	0.18
13	6.40	3.69	1.55	0.78	0.39	0.19
14	6.90	3.97	1.67	0.84	0.42	0.21
15	7.39	4.25	1.79	0.90	0.45	0.22
16	7.88	4.54	1.91	0.96	0.48	0.24

67 Members

Total Committee Places
Decision Making 168

Total Committee Places
Working Groupsg67

Cons	33 (49.25%)	83	33
Lab	19 (28.36%)	48	19
Ind	8 (11.94%)	20	8
LD	4 (5.97%)	10	4
Green	2 (2.99%)	5	2
UG	1 (1.49%)	2	1

Principal Decision-Making Committees (168 total committee places)

Committees of 4 (1)

Appointments Committee – School Governors and Academies

Committees of 5 (2)

Employment Appeals Committee (from a pool of 20)

Grievance Committee

Committees of 8 (4)

Audit Committee

County Emergency Committee

Dismissal Advisory Committee

Disputes Panel (FRS)

Committees of 9 (4)

Petitions Committee

Rights of Way Committee

Staff and Appointments Committee

Standards Committee

Committees of 10 (4)

Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Committees of 15 (2)

Licensing Committee

Licensing and Regulatory Committee

Committees of 16 (1)

Strategic Planning Committee

Appendix 2 – Group Allocations (Decision Making Committees)

Number Seats (on Ctees)	Cons 33 49.25%	Lab 19 28.36%	Ind 8 11.94%	Lib Dem 4 5.97%	Green 2 2.99%	UG 1 1.49%	Pool
3 (0)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
4 (1)	2	1	0	0	0	0	1
5 (2)	4	2	2	0	0	0	2
6 (0)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
7 (0)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
8 (4)	16	8	4	0	0	0	4
9 (4)	16	12	4	4	0	0	0
10 (4)	20	12	4	4	0	0	0
11 (0)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
12 (0)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
13 (0)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
14 (0)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
15 (2)	14	8	4	2	0	0	2
16 (1)	8	5	2	1	0	0	0
Total	80	48	20	11	0	0	9
=/-	-2	0	0	+1	-5	-2	+9

Appendix 3 Group Allocations (Working Groups)

Committees of 4 (2)

Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education
Town and Parish Liaison Working Group

Committees of 6 (1)

Local Plan Working Group

Committees of 8 (1)

Inequalities Working Group

Committees of 9 (5)

Climate Change Working Group
Constitution Working Group
Member Services Working Group
Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting Working Group
VCS Liaison Group

Number Seats (Ctees)	Cons 33 49.25%	Lab 19 23.36%	Ind 8 11.94%	Lib Dem 4 5.97%	Green 2 2.99%	UG 1 1.49%	Pool
4 (2)	4	2	0	0	0	0	2
6 (1)	3	2	1	0	0	0	0
8(1)	4	2	1	0	0	0	1
9 (5)	20	15	5	5	0	0	0
Total	31	21	7	5	0	0	3
+/-	-2	+2	-1	+1	-2	-1	+3

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Northumberland County Council

COUNCIL

DATE: 6TH SEPTEMBER 2023

Establishment of Rights of Way Committee and other Governance Matters

Report of the Director of Law and Corporate Governance and Monitoring Officer, Stephen Gerrard

1. Link to the Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan

This report links to all aims and priorities of the 2023-2026 Corporate Plan.

2. Purpose of report

- (1) To make arrangements for the discharge of the non-executive functions of the County Council through the appointment of the Rights of Way Committee, following the review of Local Area Committees undertaken earlier this year and agreed by Council in June, to appoint Members to that committee in accordance with the proportionality of the Council, including the Chair and Vice Chair, and to agree its terms of reference.
- (2) To receive the name of the Cabinet Member for Improving Public Health and Wellbeing.
- (3) To appoint a number of Chair and Vice Chair places on Committees.
- (4) To nominate Members to the outside bodies listed in paragraph 5.3.

3. Recommendations

It is recommended that Council:

- 1. Establishes the Rights of Way Committee, agrees its size and terms of reference detailed in paragraph 5.1 of the report, and appoints the Chair and Vice Chair;**
- 2. Receives the name of the Cabinet Member for Improving Public Health and Wellbeing from the Leader;**
- 3. Appoints:**
 - Councillor Richard Dodd as Chair of Health and Wellbeing OSC**
 - Councillor Eve Chicken as Vice Chair of FACS OSC**
 - Councillor Catherine Seymour as Vice Chair of Licensing/Licensing and Regulatory Committees**

Councillor Anna Watson as Vice Chair of the Local Plan Working Group
Councillor Veronica Jones as Vice Chair of the Inequalities Working Group.

4. **Nominates Members to the outside bodies listed in paragraph 5.3**
5. **Authorises the Director of Law and Corporate Governance, in consultation with the appropriate Group Leader(s), to make any changes to memberships of the main outside bodies/ joint bodies approved by Council, which may become necessary during the course of 2023/24.**

4. **Key issues**

The Council agreed in May 2023 to re-establish a Rights of Way Committee as part of the Review of Local Area Committees.

The change in portfolio holder for Improving Public Health and Wellbeing from Councillor David Ferguson to Councillor Veronica Jones initiated a number of changes to Committee Chair and Vice Chair positions and Council is asked to approve the resulting changes to these positions, as well as the Vice Chair of the Local Plan Working Group.

Some minor changes to outside body nominations are also requested.

5. **Background**

5.1 **Rights of Way Committee**

Appointment of Committees is not an executive function and falls to the Council to determine the arrangements which can include delegation of functions to a committee as recommended here.

Rights of Way Committee

Membership

9 members (4:3:1 Ind Gp, 1 LD) (One Con place gifted to Green Party)

Quorum – 3

Chair: J.I. Hutchinson

Vice Chair: A. Wallace

Conservative	Labour	Independent Group	Liberal Democrats	Green Party	Ind Non-Grouped
C. Hardy	L. Bowman	A. Dale	A. Sharp	M. Swinbank	
J.I Hutchinson	J. Foster				
D. Towns	A. Wallace				

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Appropriate Ward Members be invited to attend.

Terms of Reference:

To exercise the following functions:-

(i) the Council's functions in relation to the survey, definition, maintenance, diversion, stopping up and creation of public rights of way.

(ii) the Council's functions as the Commons Registration Authority for common land and town/village greens in Northumberland.

(iii) the Council's functions in relation to the preparation and maintenance of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

(iv) the Council's functions in relation to the Northumberland National Park and County Joint Local Access Forum (Local Access Forums (England) Regulations 2007.

(v) the Council's role in encouraging wider access for all to the County's network of public rights of way and other recreational routes.

5.2 Portfolio Holder for Improving Public Health and Wellbeing and Chair and Vice Chair Positions

Following notification by the Leader that Councillor Jones is Portfolio Holder for Improving Public Health and Wellbeing, Council approval is sought to the following appointments as a result:-

Councillor Richard Dodd as Chair of Health and Wellbeing OSC

Councillor Eve Chicken as Vice Chair of FACS OSC

Councillor Catherine Seymour as Vice Chair of Licensing/Licensing and Regulatory Committees

Councillor Anna Watson as Vice Chair of the Local Plan Working Group

Councillor Veronica Jones as Vice Chair of the Inequalities Working Group

5.3 Outside Body Nominations

Council is asked to confirm the following nominations to outside bodies:

Rural Services Network – G. Sanderson, J. Riddle (sub)

Northumberland Coast AONB – L. Bowman to replace M. Murphy

North East Combined Authority – L. Grimshaw to replace M. Murphy and A. Wallace to replace L. Grimshaw as the sub

Decision Options

The following decision options are available for consideration by Council:

Option 1 - Accept all of the recommendations and proposals

Option 2 - Make amendments to the recommendations; or

Option 3 - Reject some or all of the recommendations

Option 1 is the recommended option.

Reasons for recommended option:

Option 1 is recommended for the following reasons:

It will ensure that the Council acts in accordance with the provisions of Local Government legislation.

Implications

Policy	None
Finance and value for money	None
Legal	The report relates to functions set out in the Local Government Acts 1972 and 2000 and is in line with the Council's Constitution.
Procurement	None
Human Resources	None
Property	None
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	None
Risk Assessment	N/A
Crime & Disorder	N/A
Customer Consideration	N/A
Carbon reduction	N/A
Health and Wellbeing	N/A
Wards	All

Background papers:

[Review of the effectiveness of LACS \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](http://modern.gov.co.uk)

Report sign off.

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

	Full Name of Officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Stephen Gerrard
Relevant Executive Director	N/A
Chief Executive	Dr Helen Paterson
Portfolio Holder(s)	N/A

Author and Contact Details

Stephen Gerrard, Director of Law and Corporate Governance
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Northumberland County Council

COUNCIL

06 SEPTEMBER 2023

REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

Report of the Director of Law and Corporate Governance and Monitoring Officer, Stephen Gerrard

Cabinet Member: Councillor Richard Wearmouth

1. Purpose of report

To consider the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel (the Panel) and decide if the recommendations set out in the Panel's report should be adopted.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To consider and decide if the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel should be adopted, and commission the Panel to conduct a Full Review of the Members Allowance Scheme.**
- 2.2 That the Constitution of the Council is updated with a revised Member's Allowance Scheme to reflect any changes approved by Council.**

3. Link to Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan

This links with the Achieving Value for Money priority of the Corporate Plan 2023-2026.

4. Background

4.1 All Councils are required to convene an Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) and seek its advice before they make any changes or amendments to their allowances scheme. Interviews were held with several Cabinet Members, Deputy Cabinet Members and Group Leaders, and to provide a more rounded and transparent approach, a survey was circulated to all 67 Members asking for feedback.

- 4.2 At the meeting of Full Council of the 4 May 2022 the IRP were asked to consider:
1. A more considered and detailed review of the Members' Allowances Scheme;
 2. The Parental Leave Policy adopted by the Council in September 2021 (subject to consideration by the IRP); and,
 3. The provision of payment of broadband / line rental allowances.
- 4.3 This has been done, however a full review of the Member Allowance scheme has not been carried out for approximately ten years and the Leader has requested that the Panel be asked to carry out a full 'root and branch' review immediately following on from consideration of the current report.
- 4.4 The final report of the Panel is attached at Appendix A and its recommendations below will be advertised in the local press.

Decision Options

The following decision options are available for consideration by Council:

Option 1 - Accept all of the recommendations and proposals;

Option 2 - Make amendments to the recommendations; or,

Option 3 - Reject some or all of the recommendations.

Option 1 is the recommended option.

Reasons for recommended option:

Option 1 is recommended for the following reasons:

The Panel have prepared a report which now needs to be considered, however further work relating to the Members Allowances Scheme needs to be carried out.

5. Implications

Policy	None
Finance and value for money: eg: What are the financial implications and how will this be funded.	Implementation of the Option 1 stated above would result in a cost of £1,582,446 within 2023-24, with the current budget being £1,532,140; this results in a budget shortfall including on costs of £54,743 (full year effect). The current year pressure of £54,743 will be subject to a contingency funding bid, with 2024-25 onwards subject to a recurrent growth bid as part of the budget setting process.
Legal	Contained within the report
Procurement	None
Human Resources	None
Property	None

Equalities Act: is a full impact assessment required and attached?" Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	None
Risk Assessment	None
Crime & Disorder	None
Customer Consideration	A statutory notice will be placed in a local newspaper giving notice that a report has been received and a summary of the recommendations contained therein.
Carbon reduction	None
Health and Wellbeing	None
Wards	All

6. Background papers

Benchmarking Analysis
 Summary of Survey of Members
 Questions asked at interviews with Members

7. Links to other key reports already published

Northumberland County Council Constitution
 The Local Authority (Members' Allowances (England) Regulations 2003 (as amended)
 Guidance on Member' Allowances for Local Authorities in England (The Guidance)
 Local Government Act 1972
 Northumberland County Council's Members' Allowances Scheme
 Members' Allowances Schemes of regional authorities and statistical neighbours (as defined by CIPFA)
 Northumberland County Council's Parental Leave Policy
 Northumberland County Council's Dependent Carers Policy
 Northumberland County Council's Travel and Subsistence Policy

Report sign off.

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

	Full Name of Officer
Director of Law and Governance/Legal	Neil Masson on behalf of Stephen Gerrard

Executive Director	N/A
Chief Executive	Dr Helen Paterson
Relevant Portfolio Holder(s)	Councillor Richard Wearmouth
Executive Director of Finance and Resources/s.151 Officer	Jan Willis

Report Author:

Neil Masson, Head of Legal services

Neil.masson@northumberland.gov.uk

REPORT OF THE NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL****06 SEPTEMBER 2023****1. Introduction**

- 1.1** The Remuneration Panel has been established and maintained under the provisions of the Local Authority (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003.
- 1.2** The current Panel comprises the following members:
- John Anderson (Chair), Chairman of the North East Business Innovation Centre;
 - Allison Thompson, Chair of South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Trust) and Acting Chair of the Panel for this Review;
 - Hayley Hall, self-employed with experience in public and patient involvement and current member of the Standards Committee at South Tyneside; and
 - Eric Richards, a former council chief officer, former chair of an NHS appeal panel and Chair of Newcastle Independent Remuneration Panel.
- 1.3** The Panel was convened on 23 February 2023 at the request of Council on 4 May 2022 and asked to consider the following:
1. A more considered and detailed review of Members' Allowances Scheme;
 2. The Parental Leave Policy adopted by the Council in September 2021 (subject to consideration by the IRP); and
 3. The provision of payment of broadband / line rental allowances.
- 1.4** During the Review, the Panel also gave further consideration to the level of special responsibility allowances, including those attached to the posts of Deputy Cabinet Members which were appointed to in May 2021, an issue raised by some Members during discussions.

2. Approach

- 2.1** Whilst acknowledging the impact of austerity on the Council and its residents, Independent Remuneration Panels have a duty to assess what the appropriate rate of allowances should be considering the level and range of responsibilities carried out by Members, irrespective of the financial context within which the Council operates.
- 2.2** The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 provide for independent remuneration panels to make recommendations:
- a) as to the responsibilities or duties in respect of which the following should be available:

- (i) special responsibility allowance;
- (ii) travelling and subsistence allowance; and
- (iii) co-optees' allowance.

- b) as to the amount of such allowances and as to the amount of basic allowance;
- c) as to whether dependants' carers' allowance should be payable to members of an authority, and as to the amount of such an allowance;
- d) as to whether, in the event that the scheme is amended at any time so as to affect an allowance payable for the year in which the amendment is made, payment of allowances may be backdated in accordance with [regulation 10\(6\)](#);
- e) as to whether adjustments to the level of allowances may be determined according to an index and if so which index and how long that index should apply, subject to a maximum of four years, before its application is reviewed;
- f) as to which members of an authority are to be entitled to pensions in accordance with a scheme made under [section 7](#) of the [Superannuation Act 1972](#); and
- g) as to treating basic allowance or special responsibility allowance, or both, as amounts in respect of which such pensions are payable in accordance with a scheme made under [section 7](#) of the [Superannuation Act 1972](#).

2.3 In carrying out their work, the Panel has considered the workload and levels of responsibility of elected Members and has had regard to the level of allowances in nearby authorities together with authorities named by CIPFA as being the most closely comparable councils.

2.4 The Panel were conscious of outside factors such as local government pay awards, the wider inflationary environment (e.g. the Customer Price Index) and the national minimum wage.

2.5 The Panel also considered benchmarking information which compared the Council against a combination of its CIPFA "nearest neighbours" and the other North East councils to provide both demographic and geographic comparators. This considered:

- Average Basic Allowances and Special responsibility Allowances per Councillor
- Allowance movements over time
- Allowances as a percentage of local authority budgets
- Per capita analysis of Basic Allowances and Special Responsibility Allowances, and
- Proportion of Members in receipt of a Special Responsibility Allowance

- Consideration was also given to the “Public Service Discount”, the element of Members’ time that is given freely as public service (i.e. not remunerated) to broadly reflect the proportion of time spent on Council-related duties devoted to representing constituents, wards and local communities. It recognises that Members are not employees and that their role must be viewed, in part, as unpaid voluntary service. Consequentially some panels (but certainly not all) apply a percentage discount in the calculations of the basic allowance. The most common percentage discount applied has been estimated at around 33% but examples have been noted as high as 50%¹.

- 2.6** Whilst no amount is mentioned in the Local Authority (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003, it is discussed in the guidance document ‘Guidance on Members’ Allowances for Local Authorities in England (“the Guidance”) At para. 68 the Guidance states *‘It is important that some element of the work of members continues to be voluntary - that some hours are not remunerated. This must be balanced against the need to ensure that financial loss is not suffered by elected members, and further to ensure that, despite the input required, people are encouraged to come forward as elected members and that their service to the community is retained.’*
- 2.7** Interviews were held with several Cabinet Members, Deputy Cabinet Members and Group Leaders, and to provide a more rounded and transparent approach, a survey was circulated to all 67 Members asking for their feedback. 16 Members responded to this survey and those responses were considered by the Panel. This provided the opportunity for all Members to give their views.
- 2.8** The changes in the Council’s decision-making structure approved by the Council at their meeting on 17 May 2023 have been considered.

3. Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs)

- 3.1** There was a view gained from the interviews and the survey that the levels of SRAs were not consistent with the workload and level of responsibility required. This was voiced especially in relation to the additional vice-chairs for Local Area Committees and the Deputy Cabinet Members, and in some cases, the working groups.
- 3.2** The Panel noted that the proportion of members in receipt of SRAs (73%) is high compared to an average of 55% in the comparable authorities. The Guidance on Members’ Allowances for Local Authorities in England 2003 states:
- “If the majority of members of a council receive a special responsibility allowance, the local electorate may rightly question whether this was justified. Local authorities will wish to consider very carefully the additional roles of members and the significance of these roles, both terms of responsibility and real time commitment before deciding which will warrant the payment of a special responsibility allowance”*
- 3.2** It should also be possible to compare the SRAs with those of other authorities but recognising the differing needs of the Council and the consequential committee / panel structure.

¹ Examples noted at 50% include Epsom & Ewell, Herefordshire and Lewes & Eastbourne

- 3.3** During this review process the Panel reviewed some specific roles with SRAs attached to them in particular the Deputy Cabinet Members.
- 3.4** The Panel acknowledged there are few analogous roles in the benchmarking groups used in connection with this authority's Panel reviews. Interviews were conducted with several Cabinet Members and two of the three Deputy Cabinet Members to ascertain their workload and portfolio responsibilities and also via the limited information gained from the survey from those Members both in support of, and against the principle of the provision of a Special Responsibility Allowance to the role.
- 3.5** The Panel felt that on the evidence presented, the Portfolio responsibilities of Cabinet Members were not consistent and, in some cases, extremely onerous and widespread. Consequently, the level of responsibilities and workloads falling to the Deputies were similarly onerous and could justify a higher SRA. The Panel noted that the Deputies had no speaking or voting rights at Cabinet which hampered their work and restricted participation.
- 3.6** Following the Annual Meeting on 17 May, the Panel noted that Council approved the recommendation to appoint 8 Cabinet Members (an increase of 2) in addition to the Leader and Deputy Leader and deletion of the 3 Deputy Cabinet members. The Panel recognise that the committee structure is for the Council to agree, and their responsibility is to assess the implications for the special responsibility allowances. However, the Panel considered the new agreed Portfolio responsibilities and agreed that this is consistent with their deliberations.
- 3.7** Other decisions taken at the Annual Council on 17 May have also been noted, including the reinstatement of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Rights of Way Committee and the implications for SRA's.

RECOMMENDATION 1: that the Panel note the decision made by the Council at their meeting on 17 May and that the SRA for Cabinet Members be increased from 6 to 8 (in addition to the Leader and Deputy Leader) and that the SRAs to Deputy Cabinet Members be deleted.

RECOMMENDATION 1.1: That further in-depth consideration of all SRAs be carried out at the next Review and that role profiles and responsibilities of all Members receiving an SRA be provided to the Panel to aid their deliberations.

4. Travel and Subsistence Allowance

- 4.1** The Travel and Subsistence Allowances are set out in the Council's Travel and Subsistence Policy and reflect the levels set by HRMC.
- 4.2** As an aside one comment was common among Members that they found difficulty in submitting expenses. Whilst outside the remit of the Panel, the Council may wish to consider further training to address this.

RECOMMENDATION 2: that the basis for payment of travel and subsistence expenses should remain as at present, i.e. consistent with HMRC levels and the Council's Travel and Subsistence Policy.

5. Co-optees' Allowances

5.1 The Panel may recommend payments for those who serve on committees or sub committees of the authority but who are not members of an authority and also to make recommendations as to the level of such allowances.

5.2 The Panel were made aware of a number of allowances made to co-opted Members, including those below:

- Independent Chair – Standards Committee £2,700 p.a. x 1
- Independent Co-opted Members – Standards Committee £500 p.a. x 3
- Independent Co-opted Members - Audit Committee £1,000 p.a. x 1
- Independent Chair – Audit Committee £4,005 p.a. x1
- Independent Chair – Pension Fund Panel £4,005 p.a. x1

RECOMMENDATION 3: that allowances paid to co-opted Members be considered at their next Review and role profiles be provided to aid their deliberations.

6. Basic Allowances

6.1 At their meeting in May 2022, Council agreed that the level of basic allowance for Members be maintained at the current level of £15,033 for 22/23 municipal year, with index linking previously agreed for the allowance to be continued². The basic allowance for 22/23 is therefore £16,476. The Panel have reconsidered the position for 2023/24.

6.2 This allowance is intended to cover a range of incidental expenses incurred by Members, including stationary, postage, printing, telephone calls etc; and to recognise the work spent on ward matters. As mentioned in 2.6 above, the element of the work of Members considered to be voluntary must be taken into account, balanced against the need to avoid financial loss.

6.3 The Panel acknowledged the increase in homeworking and virtual meetings during, and following, the Covid pandemic and the saving in time and travel claims because of this, as well as contributing to the Council's green policies. However, they understand that decision-making meetings must be held face to face and further, given the geography of electoral divisions (particularly in the more rural areas), Ward and community work could demand significant travelling time.

6.4 The Panel also noted the long-standing Council decision to link the level of allowances and the annual pay uplift for local government staff (i.e. 75% of NJC scale point 6). During interviews with Members, they appeared to accept this as satisfactory.

² Within the Council, Members' basic allowances are paid at 75% of the National Joint Council for Local Government's agreed scale point 6 and are automatically uplifted based on annual pay awards

- 6.5 The Panel accept this is a convenient method but feel that it may not always be appropriate. For instance, this does not have regard to any structural changes which may occur and due to the cash salary award employees received in 2022/23 (and predicted for 2023/24), this resulted in a significant increase in Members' allowances without having regard to any changes in their workload.
- 6.6 Therefore, whilst agreeing that some form of linking may be appropriate, the Panel agreed that further consideration needed to be given to such anomalies.
- 6.7 The Panel agreed that for 2023/24, it was appropriate to keep the existing link between the Members' Basic Allowance and the annual salary increase for local government staff, as previously agreed by the Council, in accordance with the recommendation of the previous Review conducted by the Independent Remuneration Panel in 2022.

RECOMMENDATION 4: that for the current Municipal Year, the Basic Allowance remains as current and indexed linked in line with the annual percentage salary increase for local government staff for 2023/24, but that index linking should receive further consideration in the next Review for 2024/25 onwards.

7. Dependent Carers Allowance

- 7.1 The Council in exercise of the powers conferred by the local Government Act 1973, agreed a scheme which provides for Members to be reimbursed their carer's costs when engaged in official County Council business. The scheme came into effect in October 1998 and was reviewed in December 2013.
- 7.2 The allowance is payable in respect of the caring for children aged 14 and under, and in respect of dependent relatives who are suffering from illness or disability, and who the Occupational Health Service have confirmed require constant care.
- 7.3 The current allowance is £7.74 per hour for weekdays and £9.21 per hour for weekends, providing this does not exceed the actual cost of care and is inclusive of all travel costs etc of the carer.
- 7.4 The Panel have discussed the Dependent Carers' Allowance scheme in detail and feel that it should be reviewed. Panel Members agreed that the removal of the requirement to have an Occupational Health Assessment as being unnecessary and intrusive. They also suggest that, as Northumberland County Council became a Living Wage Council in 2015/16, payments be consistent with the Living Wage Foundation's Living Wage rate.
- 7.5 As an aside, several Members voiced that they were unaware of the Scheme (which is included as Schedule 3 of the Member Allowance Scheme (Part 7) in the Council's Constitution.

RECOMMENDATION 5: that the requirement to have an Occupational Health Assessment be removed from the criteria within the Dependent Carer Allowance scheme and the allowance payments be consistent with the Living Wage Foundation's Living Wage rate.

8. Local Area Committees

- 8.1** The Panel noted that at the AGM, approval was given to the current charring arrangements being retained but that discussions take place to determine whether it was more appropriate for each LAC to have one Chair and one vice-chair. The Panel will consider the implications for Special Responsibility Allowances once those discussions have concluded.
- 8.2** Again, to aid this discussion, a role profile of the chair and vice chair(s) would aid the Panel's discussion at that time.

RECOMMENDATION 6: that the Panel consider the implications for Special Responsibility Allowances once the Council's agrees the structure for the Local Area Committees.

RECOMMENDATION 6.1: that Role profiles for the Chair and Vice-Chairs be provided to the Panel at that time to aid their deliberations.

9. Broadband and Telephone Rental payments

- 9.1** The Panel were informed that payments for broadband and in some cases telephone rental, were being paid to some Councillors, but not others. These were historic payments given for special circumstances at the time. The Panel were asked to consider whether these payments should continue.
- 9.2** However, prior to consideration by the Panel, the Head of Democratic and Electoral Services met with the Members involved to discuss the current situation, and, in all cases, Members agreed that the payments should cease forthwith.
- 9.3** The Panel still discussed the issue to give clarity for the future and agree that most properties now have broadband installed and it would be impossible to ascertain the level of usage for private as against council business. Furthermore, all members are issued (should they wish) with mobile phones. No other comparative authorities pay such allowances.

RECOMMENDATION 7: That no special allowance be given for broadband or telephone line rental, and that these should be regarded as being included as part of the Basic Allowance.

10. Parental Leave Policy

- 10.1** The Panel were provided with a copy of the Parental Leave Policy (drafted by the Member Services Working Group), introduced by a member motion and adopted by Council in September 2021. They also received a copy of the discussion and minute of the decision. It was noted that several Members were not aware of this policy, highlighting the need to publicise it more.
- 10.2** Extensive consideration was given to the implications of such a policy, including the equality issues, a need to widen participation and policies to support this. Consideration was given to whether any SRA should be afforded to the Member on leave as well as those covering the role in their absence where necessary, and the impact of such on the Member Allowance Scheme.
- 10.3** Many other Councils have adopted the Policy with similar wording.

10.4 The Panel accepted that a member could currently decide not to attend a meeting for 6 months, an absence that could be extended if agreed by Council and discussed the implications of this against the Policy.

RECOMMENDATION 8: that the Policy, as written and adopted by the Council be supported. However, it became clear during the interviews that Members were unaware of the current policies which identified a need for wider publicity and guidance.

11. Pensions

11.1 From April 2014 Councillors are no longer entitled to be part of the Local Government Pension Scheme and as such are required to make their own arrangements for pensions.

12. Other Issues:

Future Reviews

RECOMMENDATION 9: that a Review be carried annually to assess any changes in the structure of committees and appointments, and to consider any changes in workloads. Timing of these Reviews should feed into the Budget-setting process.

RECOMMENDATION 10: that a full review of all SRAs be planned. Role profiles indicating the responsibilities for each appointment that receives an SRA be provided to assist in this determination.

RECOMMENDATION 11: that allowances paid to co-opted Members be considered at their next Review and role profiles be provided to aid their deliberations.

Issues to be considered at next Review:

- Local Area Committees structure
- Basic Allowances and index linking
- Further review of Special Responsibility Allowances
- Working Groups/Sub-Committees and SRAs

13. Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the County Council - Civic Dignitaries' Allowance

13.1 In addition to the provisions in the Regulations, there are provisions under the Local Government Act 1972 for a principal council to pay their Chairman and Deputy Chairman a 'civic dignitaries' allowance' as deemed reasonable. The Panel were made aware of the decision taken at the Council AGM on 17 May relating to Civic

and Ceremonial Duties and that a local protocol was being developed which would set out those arrangements.

13.2 They note that:

- The Chairman will predominantly lead on matters of Council business and will be known locally as 'Chairman of County Council'.
- In the absence of the Chairman of County Council, the Deputy Chairman will lead predominately on ceremonial matters and will be known locally as the Ceremonial Head at civic events and functions.
- The Deputy Chair (known locally as Ceremonial Head) will appoint a Councillor to assist in her / his role and this assistant will be known locally as the Assistant Ceremonial Head at civic events and functions, in the absence of the Chairman of County Council.

RECOMMENDATION 12 that no civic dignitary allowance be paid to the Chairman or Deputy Chairman of the Council, recognising that their respective SRAs include an element for ceremonial duties. However, that an allowance of £ 1,620 be paid to the Assistant Ceremonial Head.

14. Summary of Recommendations:

The Panel Recommends that:

RECOMMENDATION 1: that the Panel note the decision made by the Council at their meeting on 17 May that the SRA for Cabinet Members be increased from 6 to 8 (in addition to the Leader and Deputy Leader) and that the SRAs to Deputy Cabinet Members be deleted.

RECOMMENDATION 1.1: That further in-depth consideration of all SRAs be carried out at the next Review and that role profiles and responsibilities of all Members receiving an SRA be provided to the Panel to aid their deliberations.

RECOMMENDATION 2: that the basis for payment of travel and subsistence expenses should remain as at present, i.e. consistent with HMRC levels and the Council's Travel and Subsistence Policy.

RECOMMENDATION 3: that allowances paid to co-optees be considered at the next Review and role profiles be provided to aid their deliberations

RECOMMENDATION 4: that for the current Municipal Year, the Basic Allowance remains as current and indexed linked in line with the annual percentage salary increase for local government staff for 2023/24, but that index linking should receive further consideration in the next Review for 2024/25 onwards.

RECOMMENDATION 5: that the requirement to have an Occupational Health Assessment be removed from the criteria within the Dependent Carers Allowance scheme and that allowance payments be consistent with the Living Wage Foundation's Living Wage rate.

RECOMMENDATION 6: that the Panel consider the implications for Special Responsibility Allowances once the Council's agrees the structure for the Local Area Committees.

RECOMMENDATION 6.1: that Role profiles for the Chair and Vice-Chairs be provided to the Panel at that time to aid their deliberations.

RECOMMENDATION 7: That no special allowance be given for broadband or telephone line rental, and that these should be regarded as being included as part of the Basic Allowance.

RECOMMENDATION 8: that the Parental Leave Policy, as written and adopted by the Council be supported. However, it became clear during the interviews that Members were unaware of the current policies which identified a need for wider publicity and guidance.

RECOMMENDATION 9: that a Review be carried annually to assess any changes in the structure of committees and appointments, and to consider any changes in workloads. Timing of these Reviews should feed into the Budget-setting process.

RECOMMENDATION 10: that a full review of all SRAs be planned. Role profiles indicating the responsibilities for each appointment that receives an SRA be provided to assist in this determination.

RECOMMENDATION 11: that allowances paid to co-opted Members be considered at their next Review and role profiles be provided to aid their deliberations.

RECOMMENDATION 12 that no civic dignitary allowance be paid to the Chairman or Deputy Chairman of the Council, recognising that their respective SRAs include an element for ceremonial duties. However, that an allowance of £ 1,620 be paid to the Assistant Ceremonial Head.

RECOMMENDATION 13: Any amendments made to the scheme of allowances be backdated to 1 April 2023 or to 17 May AGM as appropriate.

15. Related Background Documents and references

- The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003
- 'Guidance on members' allowances for local authorities in England ("the Guidance")
- Members' Allowances Schemes of regional authorities and statistical neighbours (as defined by CIPFA)
- Local Government Act 1972
- Local Government Act 2000
- Northumberland County Council's Constitution
- Northumberland County Council's Members' Allowances Scheme