

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

CRAMLINGTON, BEDLINGTON AND SEATON VALLEY LOCAL AREA COUNCIL

At a virtual meeting of **Cramlington, Bedlington and Seaton Valley Local Area Council** held on Wednesday, 20 January 2021 at 4:00 pm.

PRESENT

Councillor C Dunbar, Chair in the Chair

MEMBERS

L Bowman	M Robinson
W Crosby	M Swinburn
W Daley	I C F Swithenbank
S E Dungworth	R Wallace
B Flux	
A Hepple	

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

H Bowers	Democratic Services Officer
M Carle	Highways Delivery Manager
T Gribbin	Neighbourhood Services Manager
P Jones	Local Services Director
R O'Farrell	Corporate Resources Executive Director

ALSO PRESENT

N Oliver	R Wearmouth
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89. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Cramlington, Bedlington and Seaton Valley Local Area Council held on Wednesday, 18 November 2020, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

90. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No questions had been received.

Ch.'s Initials.....

Cramlington, Bedlington and Seaton Valley Local Area Council – 20 January 2021

91. PETITIONS

There had been no petitions submitted since the previous meeting, no reports for consideration and no updates to be provided.

92. BUDGET 2021-22 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The presentation outlined the Council's strategy to the 2021-22 Budget within the context of the Corporate Plan. The presentation provided details of the approach to setting the budget for the next financial year and the broad impact this would have on the delivery of services.

Councillors Nick Oliver, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Richard Wearmouth, Cabinet Member for Business & Tourism were in attendance to provide a power point presentation which outlined the Council's strategy to the 2021-22 Budget within the context of the Corporate Plan. A copy of the presentation would be filed with the signed minutes and be uploaded to the Council's website.

Councillor Oliver presented the following information:

Budget 2021-22 Approach

- Maintain high quality services most important to residents and businesses.
- Continue to support the most vulnerable in communities whilst giving communities more control.
- Leading economic recovery following Covid with an investment in a green recovery.
- Meet budget challenges through a programme of continuous innovation and improvement.

Councillor Oliver wished to place on record his thanks to officers across all services who had responded in an amazing way to provide an excellent service to residents in these unprecedented times. In Northumberland 10% of people had now been vaccinated and it was hoped the economy would re-open in the Spring. These had been very difficult times for many people and the Council must be geared up and ready for recovery.

State of the Area

- **Public Health** - the most up to date Covid figures were provided and it was hoped that the peak had been reached in Northumberland, however, there was no room for complacency, and it was important that everyone continued to follow the current Government guidelines to protect themselves and others. The North East was performing particularly well in the roll out of vaccinations.
- **Economy** – Rural and coastal areas had been hit harder by the impact of COVID having a strong tourism and hospitality sector. There had been an increase of 62% in unemployment figures since March 2020 and a rise in the claiming of benefits. This particularly affected young people working in the

sector and grants had been unprecedented. It was hoped the sectors would make a quick recovery following the lifting of restrictions. Vacancy levels across the County were provided and these were 3% less than in 2019. It was hoped vacancies would rise and fall again as jobs were filled going forward.

- **Council Services** - Throughout COVID the Council had maintained services most important to residents. Officers had reacted quickly and successfully and had adapted to new ways of working, embracing digital solutions, and continuing to improve services. Within 4 weeks, 4,000 people had been given access to remote working. Some changes would remain, and some would be for the short term and others permanent.

Budget 2021-22: Financial Context

- Next year savings target circa £8.3 million.
- Improving frontline services.
- Increasing demand for services.
- COVID-19 pandemic.
- Ambitious capital programme.
- Still investing in infrastructure and services whilst delivering savings.

Details were provided of the funding analysis from 2014 – 2024 along with the overall funding arrangements. Details of a one-year spending review, which were better than expected, had been received in December and figures were being reworked to reflect that. There had been a lot of support from the Government for the costs of COVID including replacing lost Council Tax and extra costs in delivering Adult Services. In line with the cap for core Council Tax it was proposed there would be a rise of 1.99% with 1.75% in the first year and 1.25% in the second year. The cap on Adult Social Care was 3%. Details were also provided on the savings to be made by each directorate with a summary of savings by year and changes in spending by service (gross). Movement in debt and details of the capital programme for 2021-2024 were highlighted and it was acknowledged that slippage had been more dramatic because of COVID.

Budget 2021-22: Summary

- The budget position, whilst challenging, was under control.
- Through managing debt better and driving efficiency the savings gap had been reduced.
- The organisation continued to improve frontline services and was determined to make the most of Government support.
- Increased costs and growing pressures in demand remained, particularly in adult and children's services.
- Tough decisions were still to be made but the Administration was committed to protecting the most vulnerable.
- Ambitious for the future with targeted £748 million capital investment programme.
- Investment from North of Tyne Devolution Deal to make a difference to people's lives.
- Borderlands Growth Deal could act as a catalyst for further investment.

- Determination to shine a light on all that was great about Northumberland as a place to work, live, visit and do business.

Budget 2021-22: Next Steps

- The budget consultation had started on 10 December and had been very well publicised. There had been in excess of 450 responses which was unprecedented.
- Views from the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Local Area Councils would be invited and the final version would be considered by Full Council in February.

Councillor Wearmouth presented details of the investment programme going forward.

- **Investing in Growth** – details of Northumberland’s strengths were highlighted. Home to leading global industries. This included reference to natural capital and green businesses in the Port of Blyth where there was an opportunity for offshore wind and the recent announcement by Britishvolt about manufacturing electric car batteries. Internationally recognised tourist sector.
- **Investing in the transition to a future economy** - opportunities in South East Northumberland to lead the green revolution and ensure that residents would benefit from the jobs created. Significant projects in offshore.
- **Investing in our places, culture and tourism** – the introduction of passenger rail services between Ashington and Newcastle were close to being secured and funding was being sought to transform the corridor throughout that route; A town deal for Blyth was underway and would hopefully be secured for Ashington and Bedlington (whether specific or as part of the Borderlands Growth Deal). There was an Ambitious Capital Development Programme and as part of Borderland Investment, potential for mini town deals, was already being discussed for Newbiggin, Haltwhistle and Rothbury.
- **Investing in transport and digital connectivity** - improvements to address gaps in infrastructure for internet and broadband connectivity; Plans for the Northumberland Line to be completed by 2023; dualling of the A1 and strategic road improvements.
- **Investing in people, jobs, skills and livelihoods** – project in Blyth for Energy Learning Hub; maximise training and opportunities for local residents in SE Northumberland, part of which was ensuring the influence of the Kickstart programme; ensuring the Education Challenge Fund would come to the North East as proposed in the Devolution deal.
- **Investing in a rural green recovery** - significant aims in terms of Low Carbon Heat Networks, eg, heat recovery from mine water; discussions with the Great Northumberland Forest, funding for renewable energy to carry out feasibility studies to assist with that process; infrastructure for electric vehicle charging and investing in green homes.

In response to questions/concerns raised by members, the following information was provided:

- The net impact of Covid – there was no precise figure but was around £10 million short this year. It was expected to deliver forecast outturn of an underspend and deliver a budget either on target or below target.
- Not all money had been assigned to projects. There was a degree of flexibility for opportunities and deliverability.
- Natural Capital included projects such as Bedlington/Blyth Estuary and forestry projects around Kielder and the coastline.
- The financial benefits of being carbon negative - Northumberland by far had a huge component of carbon absorption and a geography of peatland and wetland which had a monetary value.
- In respect of investment of green homes, this would affect more of the housing stock and developers would be encouraged to build to those standards.
- The gross budget was increasing by £23 million to drive greater efficiency. Northumberland faced inflation and demographic pressures and was investing in heavy investments which would drive further efficiencies.
- In respect of the number of employees in business, the information had come from officers in preparation of the presentation. There were a lot of jobs outside the county with a lot of people commuting. The Local Plan contained a lot of employment land with a rapid build out of land in Bedlingtonshire, which would help alleviate problems such as Moor Farm Roundabout. In terms of information relating to green homes, written feedback could be provided.
- In relation to S106 agreements, money was still available and well as other sources.

The Chair thanked Councillors Oliver and Wearmouth for their presentations and for answering the questions put forward.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

95. LOCAL SERVICES ISSUES

The Neighbourhood Services Area Manager and Highways Delivery Area Manager were in attendance to provide verbal updates about any key recent, ongoing and/or future planned Local Services work and to respond to issues raised by members.

Neighbourhood Services

Tony Gribbin, Neighbourhood Services Manager, stated that it had been a long and challenging year, with front-line staff out working across the entire Christmas period.

Delivering the following services:

- Bereavement Services
- Refuse collections
- Public convenience increased cleaning
- Emptying litter bins
- Street cleansing to ensure streets remained clean and tidy
- Continuing other winter works programme
- Winter maintenance

Since the lockdown on 23 March 2020, social distancing restrictions had been implemented with teams adapting to revised working practices to ensure they continued to deliver the high profile services across all the LAC areas. Embracing challenges in an extremely professional way. He acknowledged the efforts of front-line teams and the back office staff, during what continued to be one the most difficult and challenging periods ever faced.

Bereavement Services

The teams in both the crematorium and cemetery staff had worked magnificently. There had been an initial surge in services at the beginning of the lockdown, but thankfully, service numbers had returned to what was expected at this time of year. Monitoring took place on a daily basis to ensure that staff were available to provide services for families.

Waste Service update

Refuse collection service had worked very well over the Christmas period. There had been some unfavourable weather conditions but minimal missed bins in this area. A good communication strategy ensured that substitute collection days were successful. Refuse staff collected around 1530 tonnes of residual waste and 230 tonnes of recycling waste on the collections after the Christmas and New Year period, a 15% increase of residual (household) waste and 25% increase of recycling compared with the previous period last year.

Grounds Maintenance

Regular winter works were well under way and requests made by members would be addressed. Members were requested to submit any further winter work requests (e.g. hedges and shrub maintenance) for assessment. These would be added to the schedule, if appropriate, and carried out if there were available resources subject to any new COVID restrictions.

Street Cleansing

Leaf clearance routes were now completed with a return to regular sweeping schedules. These had been suspended for a few days due to the snow and ice. Other cleansing activities were ongoing as usual.

Additional information

Free Tree Scheme – during December, free trees were given out to residents at 11 locations across the county. Ultimately, the aim was to give away 15,000 trees and were on target to achieve this in January, but as a result of the current national lockdown this was being reviewed.

Mr Gribbin noted the following concerns and agreed to look at them or forward them to the relevant officer as appropriate:

- Councillor Flux passed on thanks from a resident in relation to the Free tree scheme.
- The system for the changing of bins to larger ones. The comment would be picked up however, there was an electronic system for requesting a new bin or larger bin.
- Recycling of glass – the recycling trial was still in place and it was important to know what the take up would be. If this went ahead, there would have to be investment in additional refuse collection vehicles. Details of the timescale and roll out could be forwarded.
- Residents being omitted from the Free Tree Scheme. Mr Gribbin asked for the details to be emailed to him and he would pass to the relevant officer.
- Mr Gribbin was aware of the water drainage problem at Westlea Cemetery, and Aimrange would be going out to look at the problem. Once he had further information, he would feed this back.
- The increase in traffic and traffic management in popular coastal areas, eg Seaton Sluice. Mr O' Farrell advised that this was being monitored and extra signage being used to dissuade people to travel. The Council was in discussion with the Police and messages were being sent through the Council's website. Officers would work with the Ward Councillor regarding this.
- Service absence - Robust business continuity plans were in place and reviewed by the Business Interruption Management Team (BIMT) which met on a weekly basis to discuss all services and risks.
- Cllr Dunbar wanted to formally thank all members of the front-line teams for their work generally and particularly during the pandemic.
- Cllr Hepple, also formally thanked the teams for their work during this time too.

Technical Services

Michael Carle, Highways Delivery Area Manager, provided an update on maintenance:

Work had been carried out at the following locations:

Tarmac Patching and Resurfacing

- Thornhill Close – Seaton Delaval
- Millfield West – Bedlington
- Sudbury Way – Cramlington
- Humford Way – Bedlington
- Furnace Bank – Bedlington
- Cramlington Village – NCC have completed a six-week prep and resurfacing scheme.
- Moorland Way – Cramlington

Drainage Improvements:

Drainage works had been completed at the following locations:

- A192 Fire Station Roundabout – NCC have installed a new field drain to catch the water run-off from the central reservation. This was a problem area for a while and is now fixed
- Rothesay Terrace –Bedlington
- Beacon Lane –Cramlington

Hedge to hedge work has now been completed at the following locations:

- A1068 Cramlington
- Furnace Bank – Bedlington
- East Cramlington to Wheatfields Roundabout

Other works

NCC were currently working on a new safety scheme at Shankhouse Roundabout Cramlington, most of the work is now completed with just the road markings to install.

Upcoming Tarmac Patching

- Links Road – Seaton Sluice
- Netherton Road – Bedlington
- Avenue Road – Seaton Delaval
- Nelson Avenue – Cramlington
- Hester Gardens – New Hartley
- Linden Road – Seaton Delaval
- Dudley Lane – Cramlington
- Cramlington Cycle Tracks

Upcoming Flags to flex

- Harwood Close – Cramlington
- Dunsale Road – Seaton Delaval
- Hareside – Cramlington
- Porchester Drive – Cramlington

Winter Services Update

There had been a very mixed winter so far with predominantly marginal temperatures across the county, including a small amount of larger temperature dips. A mixture of precautionary gritting runs from high route runs to full runs had been carried out. The end of October 2020, to the beginning of December 2020 had been fairly quiet with just precautionary runs taking place. Since the start of December until 9 January 2021, there were three small weather events, predominantly 150-200ft in the higher ground. The events involved increased gritting runs and ploughing as well as the involvement of Winter Services Farmers and Sub Contractor framework to support the snow clearing efforts. In Allendale the snow blower had been required to clear some

of the smaller road. As of 08:00 hours on 11 January, the following had been carried out:

- 49 full gritting runs involving all 28 front line gritters
- 6 additional reduced runs including all routes defined as west of the A1 (where the level above sea increases out of Zone 1 (Coastal)). This still included 22 front line gritters
- 10 additional high route runs on routes over 800 ft
- Secondary routes had been treated on numerous occasions when the conditions persisted for prolonged periods into the day (snow/ice persisting into the day past 10:00 am) or in advance of expected snow/ice

Excluding the three smaller snow events 10,000 tonnes had been used on the gritting network. An additional 1,500 tonnes had been used on snow events etc. Since then, there had been another weather event which required all farming support out west of the A1. Gritters were also redeployed from coastal routes inland to support the ongoing cleaning efforts. Salt levels were being checked for a refill in early February 2021.

Mr Carle noted the following concerns and agreed to look at them or forward them to the relevant officer as appropriate:

- Grit bins on new estates – if roads were not adopted, gritting would be carried out if possible. There was an online request form but there was already a number of bins in the Cramlington area supplied by Cramlington Town Council, but the situation was always being reviewed.
- Road surface at Carisbrooke, Bedlington. Mr Carle would ask the relevant officer to inspect.
- The price of additional grit bins. Councillor Robinson to email Mr Carle and this would be looked at.
- The speed limit at the roundabout at Broadoaks development - Mr Carle would report to the relevant officer who would be in touch.
- Potholes on estate roads – the inspection regime was higher on main roads and any information on potholes on estate roads were welcomed. This could also be reported on the Council's website.
- Missed works on Acombe Avenue, Seaton Delaval – this would be checked, and the relevant officer would respond.
- Major works by utility companies – this would be inspected by a Street Works team who liaise directly with the utility company and would replace on a like for like basis. This would be looked into and an answer provided.
- Inspection of footpaths – these tend to be inspected whilst carrying out carriageway check. Details to be forwarded and the relevant officer would inspect.

Thanks were conveyed to Mr Gribbin and Mr Carle and their teams for their quick responses to requests, this was echoed by the Chair who requested that the thanks be conveyed to Neighbourhood Services and Highways teams and also for the recent work carried out at Shankhouse roundabout.

96 LOCAL AREA WORK PROGRAMME

Members received the latest version of agreed items for future Local Area Council meetings (attached to the signed minutes as Appendix **A**).

RESOLVED – that the Work Programme be noted

97. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting would be held on Wednesday 17 February 2021.

The meeting closed at 5.40 pm

CHAIR _____

DATE _____