

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

At a meeting of the **Cabinet** held at County Hall, Morpeth on Tuesday 11 October 2022 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillor G. Sanderson
(Leader of the Council, in the Chair)

CABINET MEMBERS

Horncastle, C.
Pattison, W.
Ploszaj, W.

Riddle, J.R.
Watson, J.G.
Wearmouth, R.

OTHER MEMBERS

Ferguson, D.
Flux, B.

Seymour, C.
Stewart, G

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Aviston, S.

Head of School Organisation and
Resources

Binjal, S.
Bradley, N.
Carney, N.
Hadfield, K.

Monitoring Officer
Director of Adult Social Services
Strategic Tourism Project Manager
Democratic and Electoral Services
Manager

Hunter, P.
Murfin, R.

Interim Senior Service Director
Interim Executive Director of
Planning & Local Services
Regeneration, Commercial &
Economy

Reiter, G.

Interim Joint Director of Children's
Services

Roll, J.

Head of Democratic and Electoral
Services

Taylor, M.

Interim Executive Director for
Communities and Business

Ch.'s Initials.....

Walsh, N.
Willis, J.

Development
Head of Cultural Services
Interim Executive Director of
Finance and S151 Officer

Five members of the public were present

40. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Renner Thompson.

41. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 21 September 2022, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

42. REPORT OF THE JOINT INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The Outcomes of Consultation on Berwick Partnership Organisation

This report set out the feedback received from stakeholders arising from Phase 1 of informal consultation with stakeholders in the Berwick Partnership area and other relevant parties on whether any models of organisation that may be brought forward with specific proposals for schools (Phase 2) should consist of only 3-tier models of organisation or include 3-tier and 2-tier (primary/secondary) models of organisation.

This report set out the findings of Phase 1 consultation and as a result of feedback received, Cabinet was recommended to approve Phase 2 consultation with stakeholders in the area served by Berwick Partnership and other interested parties on specific proposals for individual schools in the partnership within both a 3-tier and a 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure, including some school closures. This would consist of a 15-week (school weeks) consultation beginning on 31 October 2022.

The outcomes of Phase 2 consultation would be brought back to Cabinet at a later date, at which point Cabinet could be requested to approve the publication of statutory proposals (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix A, along with the report of the FACS OSC circulated at the meeting).

A detailed presentation was made by Sue Aviston and the Leader highlighted the report from FACS OSC and the report's recommendations.

Councillor Watson asked whether, for those making the choice to send their children outside the Partnership to Scottish schools, this was to two or three tier arrangements. Members were advised that both Scotland and the Alnwick Partnership had 2 tier arrangements though she could not comment on individual parental choice.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the feedback from the Phase 1 pre-Consultation set at paras. 21-54 when coming to the next stage decision be noted;
- (b) Cabinet note that Phase 1 consultation began on 23 May and was extended to 12 August to allow sufficient time for interested parties to respond;
- (c) Cabinet approve the Phase 1 consultation which identified significant support for both the current 3-tier and the 2-tier (primary/secondary) systems of school organisation;
- (d) Cabinet approve the initiation of Phase 2 pre-consultation for 15 school weeks setting out specific proposals for individual schools in the Berwick Partnership within both the 3-tier and 2-tier structure of organisation as set out at paras. 56 and 57, in the light of the significant support expressed for both models of organisation by consultees and taking into account the wider issues of viability and sustainability of schools, post-16 and post-18 provision, improved educational outcomes and capital investment in school buildings;
- (e) As part of Phase 2 pre-consultation, Cabinet approve consultation on the proposals set out at para. 59 to establish additional SEND provision within the Berwick area specifically to address the growing number of children and young people being diagnosed with a primary special educational need in Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) and Autism (ASD);
- (f) Cabinet approve the draft proposed models of school organisation within both the 3-tier and 2-tier structures suggested as the basis for consultation, including proposals for school closures;
- (g) Cabinet note the £39.896 million already identified in the Council's medium-term financial plan for investment in schools in the Berwick Partnership, including for the replacement and remodelling of Berwick Academy;
- (h) Cabinet approve expenditure of up to £250k for the development of the outline business case in relation to recommendation 7;
- (i) the decision to undertake further consultation on the proposal, if necessary, be delegated to the Joint Interim Director of Children's

Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People;

- (k) Cabinet note that local authorities do not have powers to propose or change the organisation of academies; therefore, any proposed changes to the organisation of Berwick Academy and St. Cuthbert's Catholic First School as part of a wider partnership reorganisation would need to be consulted on by the Trustees of those academies and taken to the Regional Schools Director for a decision;
- (l) should Cabinet approve a second stage of consultation, it be noted that the outcomes presented to Cabinet may include a recommendation to permit the publication of statutory proposals in relation to relevant maintained schools, including closure proposals;
- (m) the report of the FACS OSC be noted.

43. REPORT OF THE INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND SECTION 151 OFFICER

Council Tax Support Scheme for 2023-24

The report sought approval for the local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2023-24 to continue to provide support at a maximum level of 92% of council tax liability (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix B, along with the report of the CSEG OSC circulated at the meeting).

The report was presented by Councillor Wearmouth who detailed the key points. The same level of support was planned again this year, which cost the Authority £25.7m. In previous years the remaining 8% had been provided by other means and this would be explored again this year.

Jan Willis advised members that the Authority was waiting to hear from the Government about Council Tax hardship funding again for 2023/24. However, it could be Christmas before the shape of the Local Government Finance settlement was known. In the meantime, other options to provide that additional support would be explored.

The Leader advised members that CSEG OSC had had a briefing note on the different support packages which were available. In their report, they had supported the recommendation.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) County Council be recommended to approve the Council Tax Support Scheme attached to the report as Appendix 1 to be adopted as the Council's local scheme for 2023-24; and
- (b) the report of the CSEG OSC be noted.

44. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ADULT SOCIAL SERVICES

The Market Sustainability and Fair Cost of Care Fund 2022 to 2023

The report updated Cabinet about the "fair cost of care" surveys required as a condition for receipt of this Government grant, and made recommendations about how the £1.027m grant allocated to the Council in the current financial year should be used to prepare for the impact of the planned national charging reforms on commissioned care services, including increases to the fees paid to the providers of key commissioned services (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix C).

Councillor Pattinson introduced the report and commented that the Council's home carers were very much appreciated. Neil Bradley took members through the detailed points of the report.

Councillor Riddle welcomed the report. It was a very important issue in rural parts of the County particularly given the current high cost of fuel.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Cabinet confirm that £310K from the Market Sustainability and Fair Cost of Care Fund grant should be used in the current year to fund an increase in fees paid to homecare providers in return for a commitment to pay a mileage rate of 45p per mile. This is confirmation of the funding arrangements for the scheme which were agreed at the Cabinet meeting on 21 September;
- (b) Cabinet note that the full year cost of the mileage rates scheme is estimated at £620K, and that it may be possible to fund this wholly or in part from sums allocated to the Council from this Fund in future years, but that while the Government has announced that the national total of the Fund will be larger than this year's total by a factor of 3.7, it is not yet known how this funding will be allocated after the current year or what grant conditions will be attached to these allocations;
- (c) Cabinet note that the grant conditions permit the Council to allocate an element of the grant not exceeding 25% (£257K) to offset costs incurred by the Council connected with the carrying out of "fair cost" surveys and other activity to prepare for the impact of the planned reforms to adult social care funding on commissioned care services, and that work is under way to estimate relevant costs in the current financial year;
- (d) Cabinet note that the grant conditions require that at least 75% of the grant (£770k) is used to increase fees paid to either home care providers or operators of care homes for older people, and confirm that the remainder of the grant, after deducting the costs described in

the recommendations above, will be used to fund a temporary increase to the fees paid to contracted homecare providers and care homes for older people in Northumberland for the remainder of the current financial year, the increase to be calculated as a standard percentage uplift based on the grant sum available;

- (e) Cabinet note that the Director of Social Services will be submitting to the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) on 14 October a completed template summarising the outcomes of the "fair cost of care" surveys which have been carried out; a report explaining how these figures have been calculated, and describing the areas of significant uncertainty in the figures; and a first draft of a "market sustainability plan" describing how the Council expects to approach the setting of fees for care services over the period of implementation of the planned reforms;
- (f) Cabinet note that these submissions to DHSC will not include any firm commitments about fee increases beyond the current financial year above the levels already provided for in the Council's existing contracts with care homes for older people and home care providers, and the mileage costs support scheme for home care, and that decisions about future fees will be made following further discussions with providers, including further exploration of issues arising from the survey returns, and the receipt of full information about the local government financial settlement for 2023/4, which the Government has indicated will include details of the allocation of the Fund in 2023/4; and
- (g) Cabinet note that DHSC intends to review the "fair cost of care" submissions received from local authorities, and that it appears likely that they may ask local authorities to revise their calculations if they believe that these are not in line with the Department's intentions, or if there appear to be significant differences between local authorities in the way in which they have interpreted DHSC guidance. Local authorities will be required to publish their "fair cost of care" figures and their explanations of how these have been calculated following this national review.

45. REPORT OF THE INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Revised Joint Charter with Town, Parish and Community Councils

The report updated Cabinet and sought approval for the publication of the revised joint Charter between the County Council and the Town, Parish and Community Councils (TPCCs) in Northumberland (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix D).

The Leader felt that great progress had been made in the last couple of years, including Cabinet Member visits to town and parish council meetings.

There were also plans for three conferences to be held in Hexham, Alnwick and Morpeth which would allow interaction with key services, senior directors and Cabinet Members.

Mr Murfin advised of the following provisional dates: Alnwick 16 January 2023, County Hall 23 January 2023 and Hexham 24 January 2023. The report included the revised version of the Charter which was the first substantive revision since 2019 and work had been done in consultation with NALC. The revised Charter provided greater clarity on election charges and that no changes would be made to assets and services run by town and parish councils without their agreement.

RESOLVED that the revised joint Charter attached as Appendix A to the report be approved.

46. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF CULTURAL SERVICES

Endorsement of the Northumberland Destination Management Plan 2022-2032

The report requested that the County Council endorse the Vision, Partnership Principles, Strategic Aims, and Priorities of the 10 year Destination Management Plan for Northumberland (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix E, along with the report of the Communities and Place OSC circulated at the meeting).

Councillor Watson introduced the report. The Destination Management Plan would coordinate activities in this very important area of tourism. The report had been considered by Communities and Place OSC who had fully supported the recommendations.

Nigel Walsh reported to members that Northumberland was now recognised as a leading destination in the UK, following recent unrivalled growth in both visitor numbers and the value of tourism. Tourism was now recognised as a key industrial growth opportunity. The challenge was to continue to attract that public and private sector investment whilst achieving the right balance of being an attractive destination for visitors and being mindful of the needs of residents, communities and the environment. This was key to the Destination Management Plan, which was a Plan for the County, not just the County Council.

He reported that there would be a Tourism Conference on 1 November where the Management Plan would be launched, and all partners and sector groups at the conference would be asked to advocate and distribute it. Neil Carney then provided members with some information regarding the Action Plan Forum which would address the four key priorities in the Plan.

The Leader suggested that a bite size briefing on this be incorporated into the town and parish council conferences in January. It was noted that Communities and Place OSC had supported the report.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the Vision, Partnership Principles, Strategic Aims, and Priorities of the Destination Management Plan for Northumberland 2022-2032 be approved; and
- (b) the report of the Communities and Place OSC be noted.

47. REPORT OF THE INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR COMMUNITIES AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Working together with Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise

This report sought approval to expand the current Northumberland Communities Together (NCT) and Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Infrastructure contract to include management of additional funding transferred to NCC from NHS Northumberland CCG, now the Integrated Care Board (ICB), under a section 256 agreement, to support the Thriving Together work between Northumberland Communities Together and the VCSE (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix F).

Councillor Pattison introduced the report and Maureen Taylor detailed the key points for members. The initiative fitted well with the tackling inequalities programme.

The Leader welcomed this and asked that members' thanks be passed on to the team.

RESOLVED that Cabinet approve a contract variation (of the existing contract which commenced on 1st September 2021 due to end 30th September 2023) to the value of £0.03m to the current Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) / Northumberland County Council contract.

48. REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE & JOINT INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Supported Accommodation and Lodgings for Care Leavers and Young Homeless – Permission to Tender

The report sought permission from Cabinet to go to the market to commission a range of services to provide supported accommodation and lodgings for Northumberland care leavers and young homeless to assist the Council in meeting its statutory duties (copy attached to the signed minutes

as Appendix G, along with the report of the FACS OSC circulated at the meeting).

Graeme Reiter presented the report for members and it was noted that FACS OSC had supported the report.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Cabinet note the information presented in the report regarding the creation of a Dynamic Purchasing System to support access to a range of services to provide supported accommodation and lodgings for Northumberland care leavers and young homeless;
- (b) Cabinet note that the value of the contract is approximately £1.25M per annum which over a 10-year period suggests a total value of £12.50M;
- (c) the Service Director of Children's Social Care & Joint Interim Director of Children's Services be authorised to undertake a procurement exercise and award of the contracts; and
- (d) the report of the FACS OSC be noted.

49. REPORT OF THE INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND SECTION 151 OFFICER

Summary of New Capital Proposals considered by Officer Capital Strategy Group

The report summarised proposed amendments to the Capital Programme considered by the officer Capital Strategy Group (CSG) via email on 2 September 2022 (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix H).

49.1 Ashington High Street Innovation Programme

The Leader thanked the North of Tyne Combined Authority for its assistance with this scheme. Hopefully the town deal bid would be successful and that would enable a major transformation of Ashington.

RESOLVED that

- the Ashington High Street Innovation Programme (HSIP) be established in the Capital Programme with a capital budget of £1,263,766 and funding profile as set out in the table in para 5.9 and an NTCA grant of £828,766 be accepted towards the capital element of the project to be added into the Council's budget and £1,068,842 to cover the full revenue costs associated with the project; and
- Cabinet approve the allocation of a sum of £435,000 as per the profile in para 5.9 from the Council's Strategic Regeneration Project to acquire 2-4

Woodhorn Road and contribute to the public realm capital works associated with establishing the Grand Corner Gateway.

49.2 Berwick Culture and Creative Zone

Members welcomed the funding which had been made available.

RESOLVED that approval be given to the establishment the Berwick Culture and Creative Zone Project (CCZ) in the Capital Programme at a cost of £100,000 and to accept a grant from NTCA of £100,000 into the Council's budget to fully cover this project cost which is to be invested during 2022/23.

49.3 Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure (LCWIP)

Members welcomed this much needed investment, much of it external. There were other projects in the pipeline which hopefully would also be successful in attracting funding.

Jan Willis drew members attention to the table in para 7.4 advising that as usual, the external funding had been applied first. Of the Council contribution of £3m towards this scheme, there was currently £2.3m which had not been allocated, but £2m of that would be used as match funding for the levelling up bids if they were successful. If not, the whole of the £2.364m would be available for Cabinet to reallocate to other projects within the overall Strategy.

RESOLVED that

- Cabinet approve the inclusion of the Ponteland to Callerton Cycle Route into the Capital Programme as per the profile detailed in para 7.4, accept the Transforming Cities Fund grant for the sum of £816,000 to be added into the Council's budget and approve an allocation of £50,000 from the LCWIP budget to the project.
- Cabinet approve the inclusion of the Blyth Town Centre to South Beach Route into the Capital Programme as per the profile detailed in para 7.4 and accept the Active Travel Fund Tranche 3 grant for the sum of £1,965,744 to be added to the Council's budget.
- Cabinet approve the inclusion of the Ashington Town Centre to North Seaton Route into the Capital Programme as per the profile detailed in para 7.4, accept the Active Travel Fund Tranche 3 grant for the sum of £1,496,500 to be added to the Council's budget and approve an allocation of £500,000 from the LCWIP budget to the project.

49.4 The Reivers Trails

Councillor Riddle supported this. It would provide a safe link for all types of users between the Sill and the Kielder Landscape Discovery Centre.

Rob Murfin reported to members that the branding of the project would be primarily a County Council scheme and would include the logos of other partner organisations. The Leader felt it was important for the Council's contribution to be acknowledged and asked that the branding come to members in draft form for endorsement before it was finalised.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) Cabinet approve an allocation of £150,000 in 2022/23 from the Strategic Regeneration Projects budget to be awarded as a grant to the Kielder Water and Forest Park Trust to deliver the first phase of The Reivers Trail initiative; and

(b) members receive the draft communications and branding for endorsement prior to finalisation in order to recognise the Council's role as a key partner in this project.

49.5 Wooler Visitor Infrastructure

Councillor Ploszaj reported that NEAS would be relocating to the fire station which would be welcomed by residents.

Councillor Watson welcomed the fact that many of the items in the report were about improving the Council's appeal to visitors and most had been externally funded. The Council was contributing to this project and Wooler would benefit a great deal from this. The Ad Gefrin project was a fantastic investment and would contribute to the DMP previously discussed because it was important to recognise that there were other great places to visit as well as the Coast.

RESOLVED that Cabinet approve a request to allocate £220,000 from earmarked funds in the Strategic Regeneration Projects Budget to cover the cost of a number of visitor infrastructure improvement projects in Wooler as detailed in para 9.4 of the report.

49.6 Blyth Relief Road

Councillor Ploszaj advised that this was a critical project to future proof and fix existing transport problems in Blyth. Design works were a very important step in this process to make sure the project was feasible and that it served its purpose as a relief road without causing additional traffic problems elsewhere. It would have a significant impact for the community as well as the environment.

Jan Willis advised members that until the outcome of the application for Department of Transport funding was known, then the design works were being undertaken at risk but the works did need to proceed given the importance of finding a solution to the traffic problems. Councillor Wearmouth added that there had been a lot of discussion with DfT and Transport for the North over the years about this to allocate this as a priority 4 and this was

being done as a calculated risk to achieve what was needed for Blyth. He was confident that funding would be forthcoming.

RESOLVED that Cabinet approve an allocation of £640,000 of NCC Funds from the existing Blyth Relief Road budget to enable design work to progress in 2022/23.

49.7 Sealodge Wet-room, Cresswell

RESOLVED that Cabinet approve capital expenditure of £30,870 to create a new wet-room within the Sealodge Care Facility at Cresswell to be funded through the Adult Care Community Capacity Grant in 2022/23.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....