

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

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

PRESENT

MEMBERS

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

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 Young People
Masson, N.	Deputy Monitoring Officer
Murfin, R.	Director of Planning

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

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

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

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

Councillor Flux in the Chair

2. ELECTION OF DEPUTY CHAIRMAN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

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

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED that:-

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

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

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

6. CABINET MEMBERS

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

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

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

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

7. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

Establishment of Committees and Appointment of Chairs and Vice Chairs

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

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

RESOLVED that:-

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

8. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

Appointments to Outside Bodies 2023-24

Council was asked to agree its nominations to outside bodies.

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

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

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

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

RESOLVED that:-

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

9. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC AND ELECTORAL SERVICES

Timetable of Meetings for 2023-24

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

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

RESOLVED that:-

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

10. REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Corporate Plan 2023-26

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

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

A number of comments were made by members including:-

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

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

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

RESOLVED that:-

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

11. REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

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

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

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

A number of points were raised including:-

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

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

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

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

12. REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Review and Redraft of the Constitution 2023

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RESOLVED that:-

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

13. ANNUAL REPORTS

(1) Overview and Scrutiny Committees

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

(2) Standards Committee

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

(3) Armed Forces Forum

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

RESOLVED that the annual reports be received.

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Chair of the County Council

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Duly Authorised Officer