

## NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

### CABINET

At a meeting of the Cabinet held at County Hall, Morpeth on Tuesday 12 December 2023 at 10.00 am.

### PRESENT

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

### CABINET MEMBERS

|                     |               |
|---------------------|---------------|
| Horncastle, C.      | Riddle, J.    |
| Jones, V.           | Stewart, G.   |
| Pattison, W.        | Watson, J.G.  |
| Ploszaj, W.         | Wearmouth, R. |
| Renner Thompson, G. |               |

### OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| Aviston, S.          | Head of School Organisation   |
| Bradley, N.          | Executive Director for Adults, Aging & Wellbeing                                |
| Gerrard, S. (remote) | Director of Law and Governance  |
| Hadfield, K.         | Democratic and Electoral Services Manager                                       |
| Kingham, A.          | Executive Director for Children, Young People and Education                     |
| Masson, N.           | Deputy Monitoring Officer   |
| Neilson, S.          | Executive Director for Place and Regeneration                                   |
| O'Neill, G.          | Executive Director for Public Health (DPH), Inequalities & Stronger Communities |
| Paterson, Dr H.      | Chief Executive   |
| Willis, J. (remote)  | Executive Director for Transformation and Resources (S151)                      |

One member of the public was present.

#### 48. MINUTES

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 7 November 2023, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

**49. REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES**

**Budget 2024-25 – Draft Engagement Document**

The report set out the draft Budget Engagement document for 2024-25 (attached as Appendix 1).

The report was presented by Councillor Wearmouth. This would be discussed at Local Area Committees soon. No changes to service provision were proposed.

**RESOLVED** that the Draft Budget Engagement Document be agreed as the basis for consultation with residents, business and partners on the 2024-25 Budget proposals.

**50. REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES**

**Budget 2024-25 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2024-2028**

This report provided an update on the development of the 2024-25 Budget and the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) covering the period 2024 to 2028.

The Leader made some introductory comments on the report and referred particularly to the three corporate priorities. The report was then presented by Councillor Wearmouth.

**RESOLVED** that:

- (a) Cabinet review and note the revisions to the assumptions (and the risks) within the 2024-25 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan;
- (b) Cabinet note that further work is required to refine and finalise the Medium-Term Financial Plan;
- (c) Cabinet note that the revenue implications of the Capital Programme are still to be updated; and
- (d) Cabinet note that there are still budget balancing measures required to be identified over the term of the Medium-Term Financial Plan and that it is intended that budget balancing measures for the two years 2024-25 and 2025-26 are agreed at the full Council meeting on 21 February 2024.

**51. REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES**

**Setting of the Council Tax Base**

The report advised Cabinet of the tax base calculation for 2024-25 for all domestic properties liable to pay council tax. The tax base had to be set by the statutory deadline of 31 January 2024.

**RESOLVED** that Cabinet approve the council tax base for 2024-25 as detailed within Appendix A, equating to 112,185.46 Band D equivalent dwellings. This is an increase of 2,033.16 Band D equivalents from 2023-24.

## **52. REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES**

### **Risk Management Report Update**

The report informed Cabinet of the latest position of the County Council's corporate risks following review by Executive Management Team and Cabinet portfolio holders, and provided an update in relation to the Council's risk management arrangements.

The report was introduced by Councillor Wearmouth.

**RESOLVED** that:-

- (a) Cabinet agree the contents of the report in accordance with its responsibility for ensuring effective risk management throughout the organisation; and
- (b) Cabinet note that this report will be presented to the next meeting of Audit Committee as a source of assurance in its role of monitoring the effective development and operation of risk management and risk-related issues across the County Council, and as part of its ongoing evaluation of the framework of governance, risk management and control within Northumberland County Council's accounting group boundary.

## **53. REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES**

### **Financial Performance - Position at the end of September 2023**

The report informed the Cabinet of the current and forecast financial position for the Council against the Budget for 2023-24.

The report was introduced by Councillor Wearmouth. It was good to note that the Council was in a comfortable position and the modest projected overspend was likely to be reduced by the end of the financial year. He thanked all of the service teams for their work.

**RESOLVED** that:

- (a) Cabinet approve the re-profiling to the Capital Programme of £55.961 million from 2023-24 to 2024-25 to reflect estimated expenditure levels in the current financial year; and.
- (b) Cabinet note:
- the projected overspend on services of £0.593 million and the assumptions outlined in this report.
  - the projected net overspend of £0.949 million after accounting for outstanding inflationary pressures and the utilisation of the Exceptional Inflation Reserve and contingency.
  - the supplementary estimates at Appendix A and the required changes to the budgets.
  - the delivery of the approved savings at Appendix B.
  - the use of the contingency shown at Appendix L.
  - the use of reserves shown at Appendix M.
  - the virements requested by services shown at Appendix N; and
  - the details of capital project reprofiling shown at Appendix O.

#### **54. REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES**

##### **Q2 Corporate Performance Report**

This report provided a summary of the progress against the Council's three Corporate Plan priorities using the Council's performance at the end of Quarter 2, 2023/24 (Q2).

Councillor Wearmouth presented the report, highlighting some of the key points.

Councillor Stewart welcomed the messages which had been put on social media to address some of the abuse which Council staff had experienced at the hands of the public. This was not acceptable. Councillor Wearmouth agreed that it was important for the public to realise that Council staff had a job to do and that they should be treated with respect.

Councillor Watson commented that the vast majority of the targets were achieving good results which was excellent news and compared favourably with many other Councils. The Leader added that action was being taken in those areas where it was needed.

**RESOLVED** the progress against the three Corporate Priorities as summarised in the report be noted.

**55. REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES**

**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.

**RESOLVED that:**

**(1) Blyth Relief Road**

- (a) Cabinet authorise the allocation of £0.561 million from the 2023-24 budget allocation for the Salt Barns project to the Blyth Relief Road project. Then subsequently reallocate £0.561 million from the Blyth Relief Road project to the Salt Barns project in 2024-25; and
- (b) Cabinet authorise the amendment of the Medium-Term Financial Plan spend profile for the Blyth Relief Road as set out in Table 2.

**(2) Kyloe House New Recreation Area**

- (a) Cabinet approve spend of £0.271 million for a recreation area and secure walls to the High Dependency Unit at Kyloe House. Note the spend is externally funded by the Department for Education (DfE); and
- (b) Cabinet authorise the amendment of the capital programme as outlined in the spend profile in Table 1.

**(3) Kyloe House New Media System**

- (a) Cabinet approve spend of £0.043 million for a new media system at Kyloe House. Note the spend is externally funded by the Department for Education (DfE); and
- (b) Cabinet authorise the amendment of the capital programme to include the proposed spend in 2023-24

**56. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER OR CARING FOR ADULTS**

**Adaptations for Disabled People**

Cabinet was informed about additional Disabled Facilities Grant funding received from Government, and was asked to consider the case for revisions to the Council's discretionary grants policy.

The report was presented by Councillor Pattison. She drew members' attention to the key points and stressed the need for these revisions to the policy.

Councillor Jones welcomed this as the limitations of the previous scheme had been of concern and had caused distress. She endorsed the proposal to make these improvements, which would also contribute to the tackling inequality priority.

**RESOLVED** that:-

- (a) Cabinet approve the revised version of the Council's discretionary housing grants policy attached as the Annex to the report, which adds to the existing policy two new elements:
- a scheme under which non-means-tested grant of up to £6500 (a figure which may be revised to take account of changing costs) will be offered to fund the cost of urgently-needed adaptations for people with a rapidly-progressing health condition that is expected to result in their death;
  - the transfer to the adaptations budget of funding responsibility for ceiling track hoists, which are currently funded through the Council's equipment loan service, and an amendment to the discretionary grant policy to enable the full cost of this adaptation to be covered by grant, so that people who need it will still not be required to contribute towards the cost, regardless of their financial means;
- (b) the Executive Director for Adults, Ageing & Wellbeing be requested to prepare a future report on the options for further changes to the discretionary housing grants policy, at a point when the future level of costs chargeable against the capital grant from the Government for adaptations and other social care capital costs can more confidently be predicted; and
- (c) Cabinet confirm the inclusion of the additional Disabled Facilities Capital Grant funding of £290,484 in 2023/24 to the Council's capital plan, and note that a small further addition to the national total of this Capital Grant is expected in 2024/25, though the allocation of 2024/25 funding between local authorities has not yet been confirmed.

## **57. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR INSPIRING YOUNG PEOPLE**

### **Outcomes of the Tender for New School Buildings for Astley High and Whytrig Middle Schools**

The report updated Cabinet on the outcomes of the tender process for the construction of new school buildings for Astley High School and Whytrig Middle School and sought delegated approval to award the construction contract.

An outline capital allocation for investment in Education had already been made within the Council's medium term capital programme of £37,097,847. The Final Business Case sought to confirm the capital required for the construction and management of the proposed scheme, being £50,124,185.

The report was presented by Councillor Renner Thompson. He advised that this was the next stage in the Council's leading programme of school investment. He then detailed the key points of the report.

Councillor Wearmouth welcomed that this project was finally happening as so much work had gone into it to develop the final solution.

The Leader added that he was also pleased to see this taking place as many projects of this size would have been delayed or cancelled. The details of the leisure side still needed to be sorted out.

**RESOLVED** that:-

- (a) Cabinet note the outcomes of the tender process and agree to delegate the final award of contract to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council;
- (b) Cabinet agree to issue an early works instruction as an extension of the current preconstruction services agreement (PCSA) up to the value of £1.4m to prevent any increases in cost or delays in programme until the award of contract is complete in February 2024; and
- (c) Cabinet note the revised allocation of £50,427,220 capital funding (an increase of £13,282,200, £10,282,200 NCC borrowing, which is subject to Full Council approval) to amend the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-28 to deliver the scheme.

## **58. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR INSPIRING YOUNG PEOPLE**

### **Education, SEND and Skills Report 2022-23**

The Annual Report 2022-23 highlighted actions and progress against the key priorities for Education, SEND and Skills 22-24.

The report was presented by Councillor Renner Thompson. The excellent results spoke for themselves and with the investment in vocational skills, the service was coming on leaps and bounds.

In response to a question from Councillor Stewart regarding the breadth of provision in SEND across the County, Councillor Renner Thompson replied that there had been a 75% increase in Plans since 2020, largely due to the effects of the pandemic. There had been a significant investment in physical premises across the County with the development of a number of new facilities. This provided coverage across the County, and more educational psychologists were being employed to get ECHP plans completed as soon as possible.

Councillor Pattison thanked the Executive Director and her team for their work to develop the curriculum to meet an identified need.

**RESOLVED** that:

- (1) Cabinet agree that Members provide scrutiny and challenge to the service responses and developments detailed in the Education, SEND and Skills Annual Report for 22-23 as appropriate;
- (2) Cabinet receive and review the annual report and recognise the performance given the continued challenges in bouncing back from the impact of the pandemic;
- (3) Cabinet note the education achievements of our children, young people, and residents across Northumberland in 2022/23; and
- (4) Cabinet note the valuable support provided to all learners within:
  - Early Years Settings and Schools
  - Special Education Needs support and service
  - Virtual School
  - Learning and Skills Service
  - School Organisation and Resources

**59. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR PROMOTING HEALTHY LIVES**

**Northumberland Leisure and Wellbeing Procurement and Provision**

The report provided an update to Cabinet following the conclusion of the Leisure and Wellbeing Service procurement process. The report also sought permission to implement arrangements to ensure continuity of provision for the six community facilities excluded from the core contract from 1 April 2024.

The report was presented by Councillor Watson. He advised members this was the end of a long and complicated procurement process. It had not been easy, and he paid tribute to the team and the officers involved for their meticulous work. The resulting proposal offered a first class leisure service, and he detailed each of the individual proposals for each leisure centre, recommending that Cabinet accept them.

Councillor Wearmouth commented that the service had been in a poor position when the current Administration had taken over in 2017 and sustained efforts had been made since then to get things back on track. He felt that the Authority was leading the way nationally in this service now, which had been a major journey and would complete the tidying up of the portfolio. He thanked the Active Northumberland staff, some of whom would transfer over into the new arrangements.



Councillor Watson echoed this. Active had done a great job in the last eight years and had worked co-operatively in the changeover.

**RESOLVED** that:-

- (a) Cabinet acknowledge that the delegated authority decision notice was approved on 14th November 2023 enabling the award of this contract to be made by the Executive Director of Public Health, Inequalities and Stronger Communities to the successful operator, to deliver the Northumberland Leisure and Well-being Service;
- (b) Cabinet note and accept the report as a conclusion of the leisure procurement conducted in accordance with the Contract Concessions Regulations 2016;
- (c) Cabinet agree, in principle, that the Dave Stephens Centre and Blyth Beach Huts are packaged within a combined Community Asset Transfer to Blyth Valley Enterprise from 1 April 2024, and that the transfer is supported with a one-year revenue allocation of £50,000 and a £72,000 capital allocation to cover outstanding maintenance;
- (d) Cabinet agree that responsibility for the management of Northburn Sports and Community Centre is transferred to Northumberland County Council from 1 April 2024 with a two-year revenue contribution of £58,000 per annum;
- (e) Cabinet agree that responsibility for the management of Druridge Bay Fitness Centre is transferred to Northumberland County Council from 1 April 2024 with a two-year revenue contribution of £61,000 per annum;
- (f) Cabinet agree that responsibility for the management of Rothbury Sports Centre is transferred to Northumberland County Council from 1 April 2024 with a two-year revenue contribution of £48,000 per annum;
- (g) Cabinet agree to support Hirst Welfare Centre Trustees to commence management of the Hirst Welfare Centre from 1 April 2024 with a year one contribution of £250,000, a year two contribution of £180,000 and a year three contribution of £100,000 (funded from the Public Health Grant); and
- (h) Cabinet note the preferred bidder and the outcome of the procurement exercise is Places for People Leisure Management Limited (PfPLM).

## **60. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR LOOKING AFTER OUR COMMUNITIES**

### **Merger of North and South Northumberland Coroner Areas**

The report sought Cabinet approval to the proposed merger of the North and South Northumberland Coronial areas and the Business Case for the merger, detailed in the confidential appendix elsewhere on the agenda.

The report was presented by Councillor Stewart. He thanked the Coroners' Court and all those involved for their work on this.

**RESOLVED** that Cabinet agree:-

- (a) to the merger of the North Northumberland and the South Northumberland Coronial areas and to endorse the Business Case for the merger included on the agenda as a confidential appendix for submission to the Ministry of Justice;
- (b) that the name of the new service will be the 'Northumberland Coroner Area';
- (c) to authorise the Executive Director of Public Health, Inequalities and Stronger Communities in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Looking After our Communities to take all necessary steps to progress the Business Case including (but not limited to) making amendments or adjustments to the Business Case and to authorise the submission of the Business Case to the Ministry of Justice on behalf of the Authority; and
- (d) to authorise the Executive Director of Public Health, Inequalities and Stronger Communities, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Looking After our Environment, to take any further steps necessary to facilitate the merger of North and South Northumberland Coronial areas on behalf of the Authority.

## **61. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR LOOKING AFTER OUR COMMUNITIES**

### **PFI Furniture, Fixtures and Equipment (FF&E) Responsibilities**

The report provided the detail of this provision and sought Cabinet approval for the removal of the loose furniture, fixtures and equipment (FF&E) element of the current North East Fire & Rescue Authority (NEFRA) Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contract. The proposal had potential to achieve a total efficiency of £1,375,750, from its proposed effective date of 1st April 2022 to the expiration of the contract in 2035/36.

**RESOLVED** that

- (a) Cabinet approve the removal of the FF&E element of the current NEFRA PFI contract, in order to realise efficiencies in the region of £1,375,750 from its proposed effective date of 1st April 2022 up to the expiration date of the contract in 2035/36 and delegates authority to the Chief Fire Officer to authorise the deed of variation to be entered into, to effect this variation; and

- (b) an earmarked reserve be created to facilitate an alternative more cost effective solution for FF&E ongoing repair, maintenance and parts, following the proposed withdrawal from the existing FF&E element of the current NEFRA PFI contract. The reserve will be created from the remainder from the efficiency saving of £1,375,750 after the existing savings target of £60k pa has been realised.

## 62. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

### RESOLVED

- (a) That under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items on the agenda as they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A of the 1972 Act, and
- (b) That the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure for the following reasons:-

| <b>Agenda Item</b> | <b>Paragraph of Part I of Schedule 12A</b>   |
|--------------------|--|
| 19                 | Paragraph 3 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information).   |
| AND                | The public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the interest in disclosure because disclosure could adversely affect the business reputation or confidence in the person / organisation, and could adversely affect commercial revenue.               |
| 20                 | Paragraph 3 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information).   |
| AND                | The public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the interest in disclosure because disclosure would prejudice the ability for Northumberland County Council to obtain a competitive price through the re-tendering of the design and build contract . |
| 21                 | Paragraphs 1 and 3 – Information relating to an individual (1) and Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information) (3).  |
| AND                | The public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the interest in disclosure because disclosure could adversely affect confidence in the Authority’s ability to maintain the personal data of individuals.  |

The following three confidential appendices relating to matters in the open part of the agenda were noted.

**63. REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES**

**Risk Management Report Update**

**64. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR INSPIRING YOUNG PEOPLE**

**Outcomes of the Tender for New School Buildings for Astley High and Whytrig Middle Schools**

**65. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR LOOKING AFTER OUR COMMUNITIES**

**Merger of North and South Northumberland Coroner Areas**

**CHAIR.....**

**DATE.....**