

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

TYNEDALE LOCAL AREA COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Tynedale Local Area Council** held at Hexham House, Gilesgate, Hexham, Northumberland, NE46 3NH on Tuesday, 16 January 2024 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor T Cessford
(Chair), in the Chair)

MEMBERS

C Horncastle
D Kennedy
N Morphet
N Oliver
JR Riddle

A Scott
A Sharp
G Stewart
H Waddell

OTHER MEMBERS

R Wearmouth

Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder
for Corporate Services

OFFICERS

I Hewitt

Rural Business Growth Programme
Manager

N Turnbull

Democratic Services Officer

ALSO PRESENT

1 member of the press.

34. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dale, Fairless-Aitken and Hutchinson.

35. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the following meeting of the Tynedale Local Area Council, held on 21 November 2023, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

Ch.'s Initials.....

36. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions from members of the public.

37. PETITIONS

This item was to:

a) Receive any new petitions:

It was reported that a new e-petition 'Implement traffic calming measures on Causey Hill, Hexham had been opened on the Council's website.

The e-petition 'A68 Safety Improvements' had been closed with 81 signatures. A report would be prepared for a future meeting.

b) Consider reports on petitions previously received:

There were none to consider.

c) To consider updates on petitions previously considered:

There were none to consider.

38. BUDGET 2024-25 AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

Councillor Wearmouth, Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services gave a presentation to outline the approach being taken to set the budget for the next financial year with focus on its key priorities including achieving value for money, tackling inequalities and driving economic growth as well as working towards net zero.

He outlined the consultation process taking place between 12 December 2023 and 26 January 2024 which included presentations at all 5 of the Local Area Committees, an online questionnaire, policy conference, briefings for the political groups and individual meetings, and an online Question and Answer session by the Leader on 31 January 2024. The detail regarding initiatives and schemes would be presented at a meeting of the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee which all members would be invited to. (A copy of the presentation is enclosed with the signed minutes.)

Members were referred to 3 important documents which provided relevant information to the budget consultation:

- Budget Engagement 2024/25
- Agenda papers for the meeting of Cabinet on 16 January 2024
- Capital Programme

The presentation outlined:

- The sources of revenue funding:
 - Council Tax;
 - Government grants;
 - Business Rates; and
 - Fees and charges for services
- Options for achieving a balanced budget.
- Background to the Council's finances.
- Proposals for all of the service areas including details of current budget pressures, investments planned and proposals for what could be done differently (the details was contained within the online Budget Engagement documentation):
 - Enabling Services – savings proposed of £2.854 million.
 - Adults – budget £235 million; savings proposed of £3.63 million.
 - Children, Young People and Education – budget £269.2 million; savings proposed of £2.084 million.
 - Public Health, Inequalities and Stronger Communities – budget £32.8 million; savings proposed of £0.7 million.
 - Place and Regeneration – budget £131.7 million; savings proposed of £1.591 million.

Many areas of the Council were experiencing:

- Increasing costs for supplies and services including energy.
- Increasing demands on Children's and Education budgets.
- Increasing demand for care and support to vulnerable adults and older people.
- Interest rates had also increased leading to a review of the Capital Programme. The programme was funded by borrowing; for every £1 million borrowed, the cost to the revenue budget was approximately £0.088 million.

The following comments were made in response to members questions:-

- £5 million had been set aside for projects in the Hexham area including the Hexham High Streets Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ), the Corbridge to Hexham Cycle Route as well as additional funds in a pot of money identified for strategic regeneration projects. These were not itemised individually to provide flexibility on how the budget was spent in year. Discussions were ongoing regarding a large site within the town and would be progressed if the scheme represented value for money for the Council and residents.
- Compulsory redundancies were not envisaged by the Council. Some services were contracted to other providers.
- A procurement exercise had seen the leisure contract awarded to a new supplier with effect from 1 April 2024 which would hopefully provide some additional social value to residents. It was hoped that the Portfolio Holder

for Promoting Healthy Lives would be arranging an information event for all councillors nearer to the handover date. The majority of Active Northumberland staff would be TUPE transferred to the new provider. The Council had made significant investment in its leisure services with membership numbers increasing at a time when other local authority leisure establishments were being closed around the country.

- The Conservative administration had adopted a different economic model in 2017 to reduce high levels of debt which would have been unsustainable. Similarly high levels of borrowing had recently seen some local authorities become bankrupt. Council reserves had been utilised in the short term to meet a revenue gap which should be corrected over time. The BEST programme would place the Council in a strong position in the future.
- Government funding for the Capital Programme was to be spent by 2026 when it was anticipated that the scale of the programme would be reduced. Further information could be provided outside of the meeting.
- The cost of Home to School transport for SEND students was unknown and potentially not itemised. Further information should be requested outside of the meeting. Consideration was being given on how services could be better delivered to meet the needs of children and young people within Northumberland.
- Public conveniences in Haltwhistle and Hexham were due to be refurbished within the next year as part of a £150,000 programme.
- Additional resource had been allocated to progress the Borderlands programme which had unfortunately been delayed due to a number of staff leaving. Further details on the programme could be obtained from the Portfolio Holder for Supporting Business and Opportunities or the Executive Director – Place and Regeneration.

Councillors who had made suggestions regarding expansion of Hexham Priory School into Dene Park House and enquired about the home to school transport for students with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) were requested to put these in writing to the Deputy Leader so that more detailed replies could be provided by the Executive Director - Children, Young People and Education.

The Chair thanked Councillor Wearmouth for his presentation.

RESOLVED that the presentation be received.

39. UPDATE ON FUNDING PROGRAMMES

Ivan Hewitt, Rural Business Growth Programme Manager, Economy & Regeneration Service, was in attendance to give a presentation about current funding programmes.). (A copy of the presentations are enclosed with the signed minutes).

The Northumberland Small Business Service (NSBS) was delivered by Advance Northumberland on behalf of Northumberland County Council and

part funded by the North of Tyne Combined Authority Investment Fund and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Rural England Prosperity Fund. The 3-year Programme would deliver business growth, diagnostic and brokerage services to all small and micro businesses (10 and 50 employees or less) across Northumberland, except the former areas of Wansbeck District Council and Blyth Borough Valley Council, to unlock the barriers to growth specifically for rural businesses.

He summarised the objectives of the programme and the 4 strands of support available:

- Growth and Resilience Support
- Start up and Enterprise Support – delivered by the SME Centre for Excellence
- Farming Enterprise Support – delivered by the Northumberland National Park Authority
- The NSBS Grant Investment Fund

For each strand of support the following was outlined:

- An overview of the types of support available including 121s and workshops on a range of subjects depending on the strand.
- Eligibility criteria.
- Grant application process.

In respect of the NSBS Grant Investment Fund, he explained that there was a minimum grant value of £10,000 up to a maximum of £300,000 (subject to Subsidy Control Thresholds) with a 40% intervention rate (the minimum project value equated to £25,000.)

Businesses were required to register with the Northumberland Small Business Service Website via the website at www.northumberlandsmb.co.uk.

In addition, a second presentation was also shared with the committee on the Rural Asset Multiplier Pilot Programme (RAMP) which would provide support for community organisations which were not traditionally income generating in two pilot areas, the Northumberland Coast AONB area and Northumberland National Park area although bids from projects in other rural areas would be considered if they met criteria. Examples of eligible activities were set out as well as ineligible sectors or activities that would not be funded.

Members of the committee were asked to share and promote information about the support and grant funds available.

In response to questions, the following information was provided:-

- It was expected that the new Combined Authority, replacing North of Tyne, would continue as the lead authority for the distribution of Shared prosperity funding or equivalent going forward.

- Whilst some of the funds were required to be utilised by March 2025, it was anticipated that further funding would be made available for the programmes to continue beyond this period.
- The presentations would be circulated electronically following the meeting.
- In principle, community rural energy projects and feasibility studies could be eligible for RAMP funding.
- Up to 100% funding could be available for projects such as cycle tracks, foot paths, nature reserves where no income was generated. Organisations such as village halls which generated income through the hire of facilities could potentially receive 80% project funding. The minimum grant funding for organisations / business which generated income and made a profit was 40%.
- Whilst the first deadline for the submission of RAMP had closed in December 2023 and had been oversubscribed. Those applications were in the process of being appraised and not all of the funding had been allocated. Therefore, there could potentially be a second call for projects in the next few months if there was a project underspend. Organisations were therefore encouraged to contact the service to see what assistance could be provided be available.

RESOLVED that the presentations be received.

40. LOCAL AREA COUNCIL WORK PROGRAMME

A list of agreed items for future Local Area Council meetings was circulated. (A copy is enclosed with the minutes.)

Members were invited to email any requests to the Chair and / or Democratic Services Officer between meetings.

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

41. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on Tuesday 13 February 2024 following the meeting of the Tynedale Local Area Planning Committee to consider the draft Local Transport Plan.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____