

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

At a remote meeting of the **Northumberland County Council** held on Wednesday 6 January 2021 at 3.00 pm.

PRESENT

Councillor B. Flux
(Business Chair of the Council) in the Chair

MEMBERS

Bawn, D.	Lang, J.A.
Beynon, J.	Lawrie, R.
Bowman, L.	Ledger, D.
Bridgett, S.C.	Murray, A.H.
Campbell, D.	Nisbet, K.
Cartie, E.	Oliver, N.
Castle, G.	Parry, K.
Cessford, T.	Pattison, W.
Clark, T.	Purvis, M.
Crosby, B.	Quinn, K.
Dale, P.A.M.	Reid, J.
Daley, W.	Renner-Thompson, G.
Davey, J.G.	Richards, M.E.
Davey, S.	Rickerby, L.J.
Dickinson, S.	Riddle, J.R.
Dodd, R.R.	Robinson, M.
Dunbar, C.	Roughead, G.
Dungworth, S.	Sanderson, H.G.H.
Dunn, L.	Seymour, C.
Foster, J.	Sharp, A.
Gibson, R.	Simpson, E.
Gobin, J.J.	Stewart, G.
Grimshaw, L.	Stow, K.
Hepple, A.	Swinburn, M.
Hill, G.	Swithenbank, I.C.F.
Homer, C.R.	Thorne, T.N.
Horncastle, C.W.	Towns, D.
Hutchinson, J.I.	Wallace, R.
Jackson, P.A.	Watson, J.G.
Jones, V.	Wearmouth, R.W.
Kennedy, D.	

OFFICERS

Angus, K.

Executive Director for HR/OD and

Elwood, C.	Deputy Chief Executive
Foote, P.	Consultant, SOLACE
Hadfield, K.	Deputy Monitoring Officer Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Hand, C.	Executive Director of Finance
Lally, D.	Chief Executive
Lancaster, H.	Deputy Monitoring Officer
McEvoy-Carr, C.	Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services
McLoughlin, J.	Executive Director Regeneration, Commercial and Economy
Mitchell, A.	Head of Corporate Governance
Morgan, L.	Director of Public Health

105. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Armstrong, Gallacher and Wilson. It was noted that Councillor Webb was having technical problems joining the meeting.

106. MINUTES

With regard to Minute No. 104 (Designation of Northumberland County Council's Audit Committee as Group Audit Committee), Councillor Jackson advised that Councillor Reid had proposed an amendment and he himself had proposed that a vote be taken. This had been ignored which was against the constitution. Councillor Reid's amendment had been valid and he felt Councillors would have agreed with that. He suggested that the video footage of the meeting be checked and the minutes amended to reflect that.

The Business Chair advised that the video footage was reviewed after the meeting and the debate which had followed Councillor Reid's amendment was detailed in the minute. Councillor Jackson advised that he had proposed that the motion be put.

Councillor Hill confirmed that Councillor Jackson had asked for a vote, but after legal advice Councillor Reid had agreed to withdraw his amendment, which no-one had objected to. She added that no disclosures of interest had been made, which she recollected as being correct. However, she wanted to double check that no-one had declared an interest in the meeting, including the directors of Advance, when there was an item on the agenda about the audit arrangements.

Regarding the reference to the minuting of herself and another councillor on page 24, she asked if the Business Chair would accept that if a member was rude to another member who then objected, then that member should be challenged by the Chair about their behaviour rather than both just being muted. The Business Chair advised that in the atmosphere of a live meeting the situation may not always be clear and the best thing to do would be to

mute the participants to restore order. He suggested that in those circumstances, the best course of action would be to raise it with him after the meeting.

Councillor Hill suggested that if a member was rude and objectionable the Chair should pick it up immediately rather than let it spiral. The Chair agreed that this would be best practice but with so many participants in the meeting it was not always easy.

Councillor Wearmouth advised that his was a standing declaration for directors of Advance which was well known.

The Business Chair asked members for a show of hands on the accuracy of the minutes as detailed in the agenda and members indicated this through the electronic hand facility. 38 Members voted in support of this, and as this was a majority, it was therefore

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of County Council held on 4 November 2020, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record, signed by the Business Chair and sealed with the Common Seal of the Council.

107. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Councillors Bawn and Wearmouth disclosed a personal and prejudicial interest in respect of item 13 on the agenda (Community Governance Review – Morpeth) as a member of Morpeth Town Council and advised they would leave the meeting.

Councillor Sanderson declared an interest in the same item and advised he would also leave.

108. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Business Chair reported the deaths of three former colleagues. Former County Councillor and Honorary Alderman Pat Dodds sadly passed away at the end of November. Pat had been a councillor for Blyth Valley Wensleydale from 1981 until 1989. She was also Chairman of the Council from 1986 - 1987.

Former County Councillor and Honorary Alderman Bill Purdue passed away during November, at the age of 79. Bill represented the Allendale Electoral Division from 1989 until 2001.

Former County Councillor George Todd passed away on 11 December. George was a former Wansbeck District Councillor and was elected to the County Council, representing the Bedlington West Electoral Division 1997 - 2001 and 2008 - 2012. He was Vice Chairman of the Council 2010-2011, Chairman of the Council 2011-2012 and served on many committees.

All three Councillors served on many Committees and outside bodies and were fondly remembered by current members and staff.

He also advised that the following people particularly connected with Northumberland, had received honours in HM the Queen's New Year Honours list:-

Commanders of the Order of the British Empire (CBE)

Barbara Helen Dean. Chief Executive Officer, Nest Corporation. For services to Pension Saving. (Alnwick)

Patricia Ann Ritchie. Chief Executive, Newcastle City Council. For services to Local Government and to Public Service Reform. (Corbridge)

Officers of the Order of the British Empire (OBE)

Katherine Sarah Jane Dawson. Founder and Director, The All-in-One Company. For services to Business and Frontline Workers during the Covid-19 Response through the Scrub Hub Ashington. (Newbiggin-by-the-Sea)

Samantha Orde. National Chair, Riding for the Disabled Association. For services to People with Disabilities. (Morpeth)

Members of the Order of the British Empire (MBE)

Lesley Braiden. Lately Academic Registrar, Newcastle University. For services to Higher Education. (Ponteland)

Pamela Fry Clouston JP. For services to the community in North East England. (Rothbury)

Stephen Holmes. Service Director, Adult Social Care, Northumberland County Council. For services to Adult Social Care during Covid-19. (Corbridge)

Councillor Dungworth offered her congratulations to Stephen Homes. When a Council employee was recognised in such a way then it was a good reflection on the Council. The citation was for Stephen's role during Covid, but recognition for his wider work in Adult Services was also deserved.

109. COVID UPDATE

Liz Morgan made a presentation to members which covered the following main points:-

- In the three week period to 3 January both case rates and cases had doubled – quite a significant increase in a relatively short period of time. High rates in the west had started to spread across the rest of the County.
- Cases had peaked on the 29th of December with 272 cases recorded. This pattern was replicated across the North East. Across the north east case rates ranged from 243 in Newcastle to nearly 800 in Hartlepool.
- There was more cases now being seen in care homes and domiciliary care providers and 13 outbreaks were being actively managed. There was an ongoing outbreak in HMP Northumberland and a couple of

cross border workplace outbreaks, including two significant incidents in workplaces north of the border, which were having an impact on cases in Berwick and the surrounding area.

- It was hoped to schedule the local mobile testing unit for a couple of days a week in the Haltwhistle area once the regional testing facility had moved on.
- Efforts had been re-prioritised to supporting the school testing process. The value of school testing was in the serial element of it which allowed pupils to remain in school when they might otherwise have had to stay at home. The intention was still to offer regular testing for key high risk individuals and front line staff.
- Regarding the vaccine rollout, to date over 12,000 people over the age of 80, front line health and social care staff and care home residents had been vaccinated. There were a number of hospital hubs across the north east and the ones supporting Northumberland were in the Centre for Life and some hospitals in Northumberland.
- The vaccination programme had gone live on 15 December and the vaccinations sites would be rolled out in waves.
- There had been a decision to extend the period between the first and second dose by the JCVI to provide immunity to as big group of people as possible before offering the second dose.
- Phil Soderquest provided some headline information to members on lockdown and the new regulations, which had been published the day before. However, they had only just been published in final form. One set of regulations had been issued, which amended two sets of regulations. The government had amended the current all tier regulations by strengthening the current tier 4 restrictions. This potentially did not create the lockdown that people expected because there were some activities which could continue. The expiry date of the regulations had been extended to 31 March 2021.
- He provided some details of the kind of business premises that had to close and work was ongoing to develop some regional consistency.
- There were no arrangements for takeaway service of alcohol from hospitality venues though it could be delivered if pre-ordered. Off licenses still remained open as an essential business.
- The national lockdown stay at home guidance had been included in the prime minister's statement on Monday evening. Officers were working through the regulations to see what was actually included and how it related to the guidance.
- He detailed some of the exceptions in the regulations. "Staying local" was not defined within the regulations though it was referred to in the guidance and this was being looked at by the TCG. The aim was to find common agreement as to definition, but he acknowledged this would be a challenging area to enforce.

Members asked a number of questions, including:-

- Councillor Bridgett was concerned that the County was not getting a regular and consistent supply of vaccine. He knew the CCG were doing their best to keep supply going but the issue seemed to be with NHS England and he hoped this was a logistical problem. Could the Army be used to support this where necessary? He felt the guidelines were very

weak and could not be enforced by the Police. Liz agreed about the need for regular and consistent supply adding that the problem was not unique to Northumberland. When the vaccine had been licensed, the manufacturers didn't have 50 million doses of it waiting to be rolled out. The vaccine had to be wrapped and packed and then distributed after a QA process and this took time. However, the consistency of supply would improve as time went on.

- Councillor Watson asked what people were allowed to do who had had the vaccine because they weren't being given any information about this. Liz advised that they shouldn't behave any differently because it was unknown whether the vaccine prevented transmission of the virus to others. A very cautious approach should be maintained.
- Councillor Dungworth asked if there was any knowledge about why the new variant was so much more transmissible. Also, she asked if there was still an exemption for people offering support or care to others. Liz replied that it was not clear what the biological mechanism was, though it appeared to interact in the body in a way which enabled it to cause infection more readily. About 30% of the cases across the north east as a whole were of the new variant and there had been a report that nearly half of new cases in Northumberland could be the new variant though she couldn't comment about how accurate that was. The same interventions needed to be adopted whatever the variant. Phil advised that there were a number of exceptions in the Regulations which extended to childcare, support services, support bubbles etc. The detail of these needed to be checked however, which would be done and shared with members. Councillor Dungworth felt it was important for members to know exactly what was allowed as many were providing support to residents.
- Councillor Hill referred to an email she had received from a resident of Cornhill who had not been contacted about getting the vaccine. She was concerned that this was because the resident, like others in Cornhill, was registered at a GP practice in Coldstream and they could therefore miss out. She also asked how the rollout was being handled and whether it was simply on the basis of age. Liz advised that she would ask the CCG to respond regarding the first issue. Regarding the second, the primary care networks were working out the vaccination programme in terms of contacting patients and the prioritisation list had been put in place by JCVI. However, the key message from the CCG and GPs was not to contact surgeries. Patients would be contacted as lists got worked through.
- Councillor Dickinson was disappointed that there had been no communication with local members given the additional restrictions about the effect on local shops from visitors travelling to beauty spots and then buying up a lot of supplies from local shops on the way home. He was concerned about the effect of travel out of local areas and felt there was a need for discussion with members about what could be done, including information on the Council's website to discourage visitors. The Leader confirmed that he was in discussion with officers about this and agreed to look at it.
- Councillor Robinson asked for detail about the types of testing being done in schools and whether plans were sufficiently developed for the mass vaccination programme which was coming. Was the supply of

vaccine going to be adequate? Liz advised that lateral flow devices would be used in schools. Those that gave a positive result would be asked to do a confirmatory test. None of the devices used were 100% infallible. Regarding the programme, no-one underestimated the size of the task but at the moment the focus was on the clinical risk groups oriented around age, which should result in a reduction in admissions and deaths. Once these were done then consideration would be given to how the remaining population would be prioritised. The NHS were vastly experienced in dealing with such matters.

- Councillor Dale asked about the issue of shielding letters and felt that those who had the virus should be stopped from going out because there was some confusion in the messages that were going out. Liz replied that the shielding letters came out from Government and she would check that they had been received. The message from the Council about it being absolutely imperative to stay at home if you had the virus could be reiterated.
- Councillor Campbell asked if the public were provided with evidence that they had had the vaccination. Liz advised that it would be on the clinical record.

110. QUESTIONS

Question 1 from Councillor Hill to the Leader

In relation to the fact that around £315,000 is being spent by this authority on refurbishing the public toilet blocks in Seahouses and Holy Island, are the loo seats going to be lined with gold or are taxpayers getting a bum deal?

The Leader advised that the Administration was going against the national trend of closing public toilets because they were important for residents and visitors and the Council had begun investing in its most heavily used facilities in the key tourist destinations. This work had been carried out under normal tender process, but there was a substantial amount of work to be done. In addition, fully accessible toilets (Changing Places facilities) were being developed in these two areas. Town and Parish Councils had been asking for public toilets to be improved for some time, this investment was now being delivered and there were plans for more.

Councillor Hill sought clarification that other areas such as Berwick, Alnwick and Newbiggin would receive investment also. The Leader confirmed this was the case and that the cost of the work in Seahouses and Holy Island was £315,000, which was in the public domain.

Question 2 from Councillor Crosby to Councillor Oliver

Several of my residents have raised concerns about the cost and function of the Council's 'International Team' particularly the costs involved and whether there are any benefits. Could some reassurance be provided?

Councillor Oliver replied that he was not in a position to provide that reassurance at the moment.

Councillor Crosby asked if there were no benefits from the Team, should it be scrapped to make savings. He asked if the International Team would be looked at as a matter of urgency by the relevant Committee ahead of the next budget debate. Councillor Oliver was happy to support any request for scrutiny. He did not say that the International business was not a worthwhile exercise, he just could not give that assurance, and he agreed to contact Councillor Crosby before the next meeting.

Question 3 from Councillor Hill to the Leader

Are you aware of any suggestions or attempts by members of your administration to put this authority into special measures?

The Leader replied that he was not aware of this though he was aware that opposition members had raised this some months' previously. He could not see why this should even be suggested and reminded members that despite the Covid crisis, the Council's fantastic staff had continued to deliver, investment in leisure and schools, roads and pavements had continued, as had investment in projects across the County and the Council had been acknowledged as a leader in its work on climate change. This came from strong political leadership and strong officer support and a staff that were second to none.

Councillor Hill replied that there had been rumours that members of the Administration had in fact sought this. If these rumours were true, what would the Leader say about that? The Leader replied that if members had asked members of parliament for the Council to be placed in special measures, he would be interested to hear about that.

Question 4 from Councillor Dungworth to the Leader

Councillor Dungworth commented that she was very concerned about today's meeting in terms of connections. There needed to be a plan in place for adjournment when participants were lost.

Members of the public have raised concerns about the behaviour of some members in council meetings, particularly towards women councillors, including shouting at, talking over and ridiculing. What is the Leader's view about this?

The Leader replied that the code of conduct was clear that members should treat others with respect. This applied to all genders. He had also received complaints from the public and staff about the negative posts by some members on their social media pages. The need for respect was not confined to meetings but also covered how members behaved on social media. The negative and disrespectful posts on social media were highly damaging to the Council and the code of conduct was very clear about the need for respect.

Councillor Dungworth agreed on the need for respect but felt this wasn't being observed in meetings. The Leader's reluctance to provide a direct answer regarding the behaviour of members in meetings was not acceptable and she felt it was inexcusable for him to bring officers in when the question had been about member to member conduct.

The Leader replied that the question had asked for his views and he had answered that respect was paramount in all member conduct. If there were problems of disrespect in member conduct in any forum then these issues needed to be taken up seriously. Councillor Dungworth responded that she had raised such issues previously with the Leader and these had not been dealt with, which was why she had put the question forward.

Question 5 from Councillor Hepple to Councillor Riddle

In 2018/19 big announcements were made about housing ambitions, despite the administration reducing the housing numbers by withdrawing the Core Strategy and leaving the Council without a plan. Can he advise us how many affordable rental properties the Council has actually built?

Councillor Dickinson advised that a written response would be accepted for this question, which would be provided by Councillor Riddle.

Question 6 from Councillor Grimshaw to the Leader

A former leader famously said that County Hall merely needed a lick of paint to be brought up to standard for our employees and the functions of an organisation this large. Can he tell us how much has been spent to date renovating County Hall?

Councillor Oliver advised that the spend to date was £6.34m.

Councillor Grimshaw asked for details of what the money had been spent on to date. She also asked what the revenue forecast was pre-Covid for letting office space, how much revenue was predicted once renovations were complete to justify the investment and why the Administration believed businesses would be interested in coming into the building going forward when many more people would be working from home. She also referred to matters she had raised at the last Council meeting for which answers were still awaited.

Councillor Oliver was not aware that there had been a request for a written response on County Hall (CH) but a breakdown could be provided on the £6.34m figure. He advised that the budget for the refurbishment would be reduced by £3m in the forthcoming budget. He acknowledged that ways of working had changed as a result of Covid. There had been no assumptions regarding any firm revenue from renting out office space though he was aware it was an option. The CH solar panel capital project was being delivered and there were plans to improve the green credentials of the building.

Question 7 from Councillor Gallacher to the Leader

£400 trees were offered to residents to plant for free, can he advise us how many residents have requested delivery to their homes to plant?

Councillor Gallacher was not present but the Leader advised that the free tree scheme was an important part of the climate change action plan. Within four days the 10,000 trees offered were all taken so another 5,000 were ordered, which had also been taken. Each tree with its guard had cost £2 and he thanked Rachel Bruce and all the team for making the free tree offer work as well as it had. It would be rolled out again next year.

Question 8 from Councillor Dunn to the Leader

Despite being the last in the region to agree, this council has finally agreed to provide a free phone number for vulnerable people in Northumberland to contact the council for support. Can the Leader confirm this free phone line will continue after the pandemic?

Councillor Jones responded for the Leader and advised that the freephone number was set up on a pay monthly basis so there was no end date as such. It would depend on take up, cost and budget as to whether it was extended out in terms of duration or including other lines. She also advised that the customer service centres/community hubs would be opened as soon as it was safe to do so, meaning there would be a free of charge walk in facility too, with active signposting and local visibility, intending the most effective and appropriate response for residents.

Councillor Dunn supported the initiative and asked if the Leader could confirm when the freephone number would be available and how it would be publicised as members had not been aware of it. Councillor Jones replied that full information was given out to members and on the Council's website.

Question 9 from Councillor Dickinson to Councillor Renner Thompson

Fostering and Adoption should be a top priority for our Council. Following the recent publication of the Adoption North East annual report, can the member confirm that a thorough review of Adoption North East will take place to ensure value for money in the interests of Northumberland children?

Councillor Renner Thompson advised that as part of the oversight and scrutiny of ANE, there were regular operational and strategic meetings in place to assess the work of ANE and ensure that children were being matched and placed accordingly. A range of actions were being put in place to underpin the ongoing development and improvement of the service. This included a planned review of the funding structure and contributions from all constituent authorities. He met regularly with the other regional lead members and the group were clear that they wanted greater scrutiny of the Agency. He would keep members updated on this.

Councillor Dickinson referred to the concerning data in the report regarding comparators to when the service had been run by the authority itself on placements, support for children and placement numbers. He welcomed plans for additional scrutiny but asked what the timeframe would be for a review of finances and data that was collected from the Agency on Northumberland children. Councillor Renner Thompson replied that he would get that answer for Councillor Dickinson.

Councillor Hill asked, in regard to Councillor Oliver's response to Q2, if that was his response or if it was a response prepared by an officer. The Business Chair advised that he had been temporarily out of the meeting whilst that question had been responded to. Councillor Hill asked Councillor Oliver to confirm following the meeting.

111. CABINET MINUTES

Councillor Dale asked if the budget settlement had been received from the Government yet. Councillor Oliver advised that a spending review confirmation had been received before Christmas which was very positive. This would be reflected in the budget in February. The details of the CSEG OSC meeting would be circulated to all members, as per the Leader's previous agreement. The Leader confirmed that a broad approach was being taken to the budget this year.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the following meetings of Cabinet be received:-

(1) Tuesday 10 November 2020

(2) Tuesday 8 December 2020

112. COMMITTEE MINUTES

(1) Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC

These were presented by Councillor Bawn.

With regard to Minute No. 66 (Disclosures of Interest), Councillor Purvis asked if the declaration by Councillor Oliver was a rolling one in everything to do with finance, or should it be? Councillor Oliver advised that the answer to both was no.

With regard to Minute No. 68 (Dignity at Work Update), Councillor Swinburn advised that he had dialled into a meeting the previous evening, not of this Authority but involving members, and had heard a derogatory and personal conversation about elected MPs which members of staff had also witnessed. He felt it was inappropriate for staff to have to listen to such comments, and members needed to know that this wasn't appropriate. Staff were there to do a job.

Councillor Dickinson agreed, but it was unfortunate that staff here had also suffered from inappropriate behaviour on the part of members, and all members had a duty to call any councillors doing that to account, whatever party was involved. He welcomed the work detailed in the report and the Committee's requests for additional information and queried the timeframe for that. However, Councillor Bawn could not give a definite timescale at the moment.

Councillor Dale commented that with regard to council tax debt, unless the Council acted on this it would be in breach of the law relating to non recovery. This needed to be looked at more closely.

Councillor Hill advised members that she had established that since May 2017 no member of the Council had been in council tax arrears. The issue of members' other debt did need to be looked at in more detail.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC be received.

(2) Family and Children's Services OSC

These were presented by Councillor Swinburn.

With regard to Minute No.106 (Provision of Free School Meals), Councillor Dickinson asked if an urgent briefing could be sent to members about this was being handled under the current lockdown arrangements so members could provide support to those who needed it.

Councillor Renner Thompson advised that the voucher system established at Christmas was being rolled on but he would ensure a briefing was sent out.

Councillor Dungworth referred to Minute No. 98 (Covid Recovery Report) and asked for information on the provision of laptops to children and young people as she understood the original order to schools had been cancelled in the summer.

Councillor Oliver agreed this was an important issue and advised that funding had been received both from NoTCA and from the DfE to purchase equipment. A private company had donated hundreds of devices and old council devices were also being reformatted. A report would be circulated to all members on progress.

Councillor Dungworth referred to the stress that staff in schools were under and the swift change in plans over a three day period had been very difficult. She hoped as much support as possible was being provided to leaders in schools. Councillor Renner Thompson asked Councillor Dungworth to send him the information she had about the cancelled laptop orders as he was unaware of it. A new scheme had recently been launched whereby a parent or carer could apply to school, who would then apply to the DfE for a device. Regarding support to school staff, this was being done, and he acknowledged that they could not have worked harder under very stressful circumstances.

Councillor Oliver also reported that the Government had just announced a scheme for extra broadband capacity for people using mobile devices.

Councillor Bridgett echoed Councillor Renner Thompson's comments on the work of staff, and particularly mentioned Audrey Kingham who was a credit to the Council.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Family and Children's Services OSC be received.

(3) Health and Wellbeing OSC

These were presented by Councillor Beynon.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Health and Wellbeing OSC be received.

(4) Health and Wellbeing Board

These were presented by Councillor Dodd.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Health and Wellbeing Board be received.

(5) Audit Committee

These were presented by Councillor Hill.

Councillor Dale asked if there had been any progress on the audit of the street lighting replacement programme. Councillor Hill agreed to chase this up and report back to members.

With regard to Minute No. 63 (Governance Framework), Councillor Dickinson asked if members could have sight of a flow chart for the arrangements. Councillor Hill agreed that this would be done.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Audit Committee be received.

(6) Constitution Working Group

These were presented by Councillor Flux.

With regard to the rules of debate, Councillor Dale felt that members should have a right of reply if they were named. Councillor Dodd explained that this could not be taken out of the constitution because it was not **in** the constitution and that's what the discussion had been about.

Councillor Roughead asked why the notes of the meetings had come to Council when the report from the working group was on the agenda. Also, he asked what a lengthy supplementary question was, as this would vary from person to person and the need to set context to a question, so there should be some flexibility. Finally, with regard to Minute No.20 and the reference to including a session on the constitution in the member induction programme, he recalled the session on the constitution in the last induction programme had been very poorly attended and he felt this should be mandatory, along with the issue of copies of the constitution.

Councillor Flux noted the point regarding the minutes but felt that it was useful to have them to provide background. Regarding the length of questions, he felt this was important in terms of meeting management.

Councillor Dickinson thanked Councillor Flux for his chairing of the Working Group. There had been good cross party investigation into the issues and he welcomed the external support which had been brought in. There had been a lot of robust discussion and the notes demonstrated that. There was a lot more work to be done and he paid tribute to Ms Elwood for her work and to members for their contributions. The Group had worked very well together.

Councillor Dungworth commented that the Group reported to Council because the constitution was the responsibility of Council. Regular meetings were planned to be held and there would be links to the document online. Paper copies would be available if needed. Regarding induction, the idea was to talk about the constitution in the context of how the Council worked and how it could help members perform their role, which should make it easier to

understand. She also reassured members that they would still have the ability to raise a matter if they had been named and they felt it was wrong.

Councillor Hill welcomed the additional information provided by the working group notes and felt it was reassuring to see the reasoning and the range of officers and experts giving advice. The comments from members detailed in the notes inspired confidence in those who had carried out this vital work.

(7) Food Poverty Working Group

These were presented by Councillor Pattison.

Councillor Nisbet asked which Scrutiny Committee this working group would report to. Councillor Pattison advised that this would be FACS OSC. However, it would be some time before a comprehensive report would be ready on such a wide ranging and complex issue.

Councillor Dale referred to work done previously on the Marmot review which contained some very useful information. Food poverty was part of a bigger picture which the Council needed to tackle as a whole. Councillor Pattison agreed that food poverty had a devastating effect on lives and the Group was taking this very seriously.

Councillor Dungworth commented that the Working Group should report to Health and Wellbeing OSC as it had been agreed when it was set up that it was about food poverty generally. Councillor Bowman agreed with this and felt there was a need for urgent action.

Councillor Dickinson welcomed the Group but felt there needed to be further clarity on its scope which he would speak to the Chair about. There was a network of people to get involved and discussion on this had started. Communities across Northumberland, along with Northumberland Communities Together, had done a fantastic job. However, he was keen that more progress should be made and the Group meet more often to gain some momentum and get things moved on to the next stage. Councillor Pattison advised that it was hoped to hold another meeting before the end of January.

Councillor Stewart commented that food poverty was also an issue in rural and affluent areas and he stressed the need for a holistic approach across the county regardless of area.

113. DELEGATED DECISIONS

RESOLVED that the delegated decisions taken since those reported to County Council on Wednesday, 2 September 2020 be received.

114. MOTIONS

Motion No.1

In accordance with Council Rules of Procedure No.10, Councillor Dungworth moved the following motion, received by the Head of Democratic and Electoral Services on 2 December 2020:-

“This Council notes the importance of providing support to the most vulnerable families in Northumberland. In addition, we recognise that those families struggling to survive need to maintain the current level of income to provide them with the basics every household need. Councillors commend the work of Northumberland Together and the foodbanks in supporting families across our county, but recognise a further reduction of support would push more families into needing foodbank support. We say no family should need to use foodbanks in 2021, no family in Northumberland or the UK should need to access them to survive. We must provide a system that supports everyone and in doing so we propose the following.

This Council resolves that:

- 1. We write to the Chancellor warning of the detriment a reduction of £20 will make to families and local economy in Northumberland and ask that it be maintained.*
- 2. Press forward at speed with the Poverty Working Group, to support families across Northumberland and look for sustainable solutions.*
- 3. Work with the Local Government Association and trade unions to make representation collectively on behalf of councils across the country about this cut, which is levelled at the most vulnerable in our communities.*
- 4. Recognise and note the increase in families in Northumberland having to use Universal Credit, through a change of circumstances. To specifically note that the constituency levels of people needing to access support currently sits at, Berwick Upon Tweed 2005 people, Blyth Valley 3780 people, Hexham 1580 people and Wansbeck 3600 people”.*

This was seconded by Councillor Dickinson.

Councillor Jones commented that the number of people needing support had increased with additional demands on foodbanks as a result of Covid and communities had pulled together to provide support, and she was grateful to these communities and Northumberland Communities Together (NCT). She did agree with the spirit of the motion but felt the wording was inaccurate and failed to recognise the work of many, including Council staff and members who had provided money from their small schemes allocation to support free school meals.

The increase of £20 per week was an annual increase of £240 in income per household for a single person and this had had a positive effect on claimants and the local economy. NCT and the five food partnerships were working together to build sustainable answers to food insecurity, moving away from food parcels to community food. The Food Poverty Working Group was taking a strategic approach to the situation. She then proposed an amendment as follows:

“This Council notes the importance of providing support for the most vulnerable families in Northumberland, and recognises the need for them to be provided with the basics of household need. We have seen an increase in demand for support as a result of COVID-19, and commend the work of NCT and the foodbanks in supporting families across our County and acknowledge the work of NCT and the food network partnership in

developing more effective and sustainable answers, together with the work of the Council's Poverty Working Group to tackle disadvantage across the County. We welcome the additional Government funding to support vulnerable families, including free school meals which totalled £1.35m in the last six months, and also welcome the allocation by NoTCA recovery fund of £500,000 to develop future projects and initiatives in our communities in Northumberland, and we recognise the Council's funding to the Northumberland Community Bank of a £40,000 grant and a further £50,000 loan. This Council welcomes the increase from the Government of £20 per week in Universal Credit and tax credits during the pandemic and writes to the Chancellor to ask that the increase be extended for a further period, and recognises the work of NCT and the Poverty Working Group in supporting vulnerable families".

This was seconded by Councillor Pattison.

Councillor Dungworth commented that her motion had been about giving people the dignity to provide for themselves and about recognising that people needed the £20, and that it wasn't just about the pandemic. Council staff, members, and residents had all been fantastic, and that went without saying. The motion was very clear about not wanting to have foodbanks and about everyone having the same options to spend their own money wherever they chose. She was disappointed that voting against Councillor Jones' amendment made it seem that her Group did not support staff or what the Council was doing. There was nothing political in her motion and no reason why every member couldn't support it.

A number of members spoke including: -

- Councillor Dickinson commented this was a very serious issue and the amendment totally changed the context of the original motion, which was about the single issue of families receiving support. The motion had been in for some time and there had been ample opportunity for the Administration to discuss amendments with the proposer if there had been a genuine will to do that. NCT was about coping with wider pandemic issues, not families in Northumberland who were struggling to put food on the table.
- Councillor Reid commented that the genuine sentiment behind Councillor Dungworth's motion was being undermined by the amendment which was politically motivated, and he would not vote on the issue.
- Councillor Grimshaw asked members to think about what would happen when the £20 was taken away from those who were really struggling on top of reducing tax credits. This was a political game when all members should have been behind the motion. She urged members to act with a conscience.
- Councillor Dunn felt that the amendment was a complete rewrite of the original motion and she could not support it. Members had not had time to consider it properly and it was much more than an amendment should be.
- Councillor Bowman echoed Councillor Grimshaw's comments and hoped members would support the motion.

- Councillor Rickerby commented that she agreed with the original motion but also parts of the amendment so now would either not have to vote at all or vote for something she didn't support 100%. She queried whether the Government would actually listen and whether there was a better option for effective action.
- Councillor Hill referred to a number of local Berwick companies who had provided free food during the pandemic and before, and agreed that it was frustrating when there was a good motion in front of members for an amendment to then be submitted. The Conservative led Administration were in a strong lobbying position with the Government and she suggested that this should be considered.
- Councillor Purvis felt the amendment was hypocritical on behalf of the Administration and reminded members that the Government had stated recently that it would help the Authority with anything it needed.
- Councillor Swithenbank commented that the motion was about offering dignity and allowing people to live their lives in a better manner.
- Councillor Jones commented that her amendment did still support the retention of the increase and she had referred to the support made available to those in debt. Her amendment had been a genuine attempt to improve the wording and the Government would be written to. Following a request from Councillor Dungworth Councillor Jones re-read the amendment.

Councillor Hutchinson reminded members of the need to suspend standing orders as the meeting was approaching the three hour duration point. This was agreed.

On the required number of members calling for a named vote on the amendment, the votes were cast as follows:-

FOR: 32 as follows;-

Bawn, D.L.	Oliver, N.
Beynon, J.A.	Pattison, W.
Castle, G.	Quinn, K.
Cessford, T.	Renner Thompson, G.
Daley, W.	Riddle, J.R.
Dodd, R.R.	Roughead, G.
Dunbar, C.	Sanderson, H.G.H.
Flux, B.	Seymour, C.
Gibson, R.	Sharp, A.
Homer, C.R.	Stewart, G.

Horncastle, C.W.	Stow, K.
Hutchinson, J.I.	Swinburn, M.
Jackson, P.A.	Thorne, T.
Jones, V.	Towns, D.
Lawrie, R.	Watson, J.G.
Murray, A.H.	Wearmouth, R

AGAINST: 26 as follows;

Bowman, L.	Gobin, J.J.
Bridgett, S.C.	Grimshaw, L.
Campbell, D.	Hill, G.
Cartie, E.	Kennedy, D.
Clark, T.S.	Lang, J.
Crosby, B.	Nisbet, K.
Dale, P.A.M.	Parry, K.
Davey, J.G.	Purvis, M.
Davey, S.	Richards, M.E.
Dickinson, S.	Robinson, M.
Dungworth, S.	Simpson, E.
Dunn, L.	Swithenbank, I.C.F.
Foster, J.	Wallace, R.

ABSTENTIONS:1:

Rickerby, L.J.	
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At 18:10, the Chair agreed a short adjournment. The meeting reconvened at 18:15.

Members then voted by show of hands on the substantive motion, and by a clear majority in favour of it, it was **RESOLVED** that:

“This Council notes the importance of providing support for the most vulnerable families in Northumberland, and recognises the need for them to be provided with the basics of household need. We have seen an

increase in demand for support as a result of COVID-19, and commend the work of NCT and the foodbanks in supporting families across our County and acknowledge the work of NCT and the food network partnership in developing more effective and sustainable answers, together with the work of the Council's Poverty Working Group to tackle disadvantage across the County. We welcome the additional Government funding to support vulnerable families, including free school meals which totalled £1.35m in the last six months, and also welcome the allocation by NoTCA recovery fund of £500,000 to develop future projects and initiatives in our communities in Northumberland, and we recognise the Council's funding to the Northumberland Community Bank of a £40,000 grant and a further £50,000 loan. This Council welcomes the increase from the Government of £20 per week in Universal Credit and tax credits during the pandemic and writes to the Chancellor to ask that the increase be extended for a further period, and recognises the work of NCT and the Poverty Working Group in supporting vulnerable families".

115. REPORTS OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR: CORPORATE ASSURANCE

(1) Registration of Interests – Referral from Council 4 November 2020

This reported back to full Council on the issue of the declaration of member interests which had been referred to Constitution Working Group following a question raised at full County Council by Councillor S. Dickinson.

The Chair highlighted the report's recommendations.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) members be reminded of the need to register interests in "bodies with charitable purposes" with an explanation of the type of bodies these might cover;
- (b) the Standards Committee undertake targeted training on the relevant provisions of the Code which deal with the declaration of member interests; and
- (c) Council note the progress towards the implementation of a national model code of conduct.

(2) Update to Constitution – Council Procedure Rules and Terms of Reference

The report sought Council approval to update and amend the Council's Procedure Rules at Part 5 of the Constitution and the Terms of reference for full Council in Part 3, following detailed consideration by the members of the Constitution Working Group.

With regard to pg 147 state of the area debate, Councillor Roughead suggested it should refer to municipal year rather than civic year. Councillor Flux advised that this had been debated in full at the Working Group and the preferred reference was civic year.

Councillor Dickinson sought confirmation that the alterations which had been agreed at the Working Group had been incorporated into the table. This was confirmed. He also drew members' attention to the point about not taking phone calls during meetings.

Councillor Reid welcomed the changes and reminded members this was a living document.

Councillor Hill commented that with regard to the debate about declaration of interests on bodies with charitable purposes, members should simply consider declaring everything. Also, if a member was a member of a freemason lodge, they were expected to have a high degree of loyalty to the other members, which raised concern about possible conflict with public interest and duties as a councillor. She sought reassurances that that particular aspect had been considered. Ms Elwood advised that a very full report had previously been considered by the Standards Committee which had explored all possible options about how to proceed with the freemasons. The Committee had agreed to amend the register of interests to say that if a member was declaring a charitable body and they had any doubt about it to speak to the Monitoring Officer. She agreed that the safest action was to declare if there was any doubt. Councillor Hill asked whether any member had sought such advice from Ms Elwood; she confirmed that she had not provided such advice to any member here, but had in other authorities.

Councillor Dale remarked that standards in local government had gone down in her view and she hoped that the new model code of conduct would result in improved standards of conduct as a result of stronger sanctions. Members needed to be reminded about the code of conduct and particularly member/officer relations. Ms Elwood replied that the LGA had recently consulted on a new national model code and the idea was that authorities would move away from local codes of conduct to ensure a more level playing field. This had now been issued and would be considered by the Council's Standards Committee.

Councillor Seymour asked what would happen if the constitution was not up to date with the latest legislation, and which would take precedence in the event of any disparity. Ms Elwood advised that it would depend on the legislation, but generally this would take precedence. Councillor Seymour suggested that the risk assessment be amended to reflect this, which Ms Elwood would pick up.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the amended Council Procedure Rules in Part 5 of the Constitution as set out in Appendix A to the report be approved; and
- (b) the amended Terms of Reference for full Council in Part 3 of the Constitution and as set out at Appendix B to the report be approved.

(3) Update to Constitution – Parts 1 and 2

This report sought full Council approval to update and amend Parts 1 and 2 of the Council's Constitution following detailed consideration by the members of the Constitution Working Group.

Councillor Roughead pointed out that the NoTCA was created in 2018, and with regard to the NE LEP, after the strategic economic plan it should include the Local Industrial Strategy. Regarding the Cabinet Portfolios and the Equality and Diversity Champion, he queried whether, if there were different categories of Member Champion, this should be reflected in the terminology. Councillor Dungworth agreed on the need for consistency and if one champion was to be treated differently to the others, this needed some kind of explanation in the Constitution. The Business Chair agreed this should be considered at a future meeting.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Council approve the Introduction to the Constitution in Part 1 of the Constitution as set out in Appendix A to the report;
- (b) Council approve the amended Articles in Part 2 of the Constitution and as set out at Appendix B to the report subject to the typos mentioned above; and
- (c) Council note the intention to move to an online interactive version of the Constitution going forward.

116. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Community Governance Review – Morpeth

In accordance with Minute No. 107 above, Councillors Bawn, Sanderson and Wearmouth left the meeting.

Council was asked to consider the outcome of a community governance review in the County.

Councillor Oliver introduced the report, highlighting the main points. The two principles of such reports were that any changes should be both in the interests of the community and be effective and convenient. Following a prompt from Councillor Reid, Councillor Oliver advised that it would be better to consider each issue/area separately, and he would need to advise members about the potential effect on county electoral division boundaries and elections.

Councillor Watson advised that he would be asking for a named vote on this issue, given the importance of the matter to town and parish councils and the need for openness. This was supported by the required number of members.

Councillor Dickinson sought clarification that if a particular proposal was not agreed by members then that would mean no change. Councillor Oliver confirmed this would be the case.

Councillor Oliver advised that when an order required minor changes to existing parish boundaries it could come into force on any date. However, when boundary changes were more than minor and would affect many electors, the guidance said that those changes must come into force on 1 April before the next scheduled election for the parishes concerned. This was because precepting authorities could only issue precepts for an entire financial year and so that local people could vote for their new parish councillors. The election timetable for the polls taking place on 6 May 2021 had the notice of election date of 29 March 2021, and any changes agreed today would become effective at the scheduled elections in 2025.

Councillor Towns asked whether there was necessarily a knock-on effect on the County electoral divisions. Mr Foote advised that ordinarily, the electoral divisions would be co-terminous with parish boundaries. It wasn't within the function of the County Council to change the divisions, which had to go the Boundary Commission for England. If the Council was minded to agree some of the recommendations which affected the boundaries which were co-terminous with the divisions, members may feel it was appropriate to have regard to changing the division boundaries, though this could only be done by the Boundary Commission. Had the governance review been completed in accordance with the scheduled timetable the report would have been completed in summer 2020 and it would have been possible to make the orders to come into effect for the forthcoming elections. This was not now possible.

In response to a query from Councillor Dale, Mr Foote confirmed that the request to the Boundary Commission for division changes would have to be made by the County Council.

Councillor Town's concern was that he had not been consulted on a potential change to electoral division boundaries and he did not support the Council requesting this of the Boundary Commission. If this was not necessary, he proposed that recommendation (3) be deleted. Mr Foote confirmed that it was permissible to do that but ordinarily it was advisable for the electoral divisions and parish boundaries to be co-terminous as it created complications for the running of elections.

In response to a query from Councillor Oliver, it was confirmed that there were already division boundaries which were not co-terminous with parish boundaries affecting Councillor Dickinson's, Councillor Bridgett's and Councillor Towns' divisions.

Councillor Bridgett commented that in respect of these issues, he always deferred to the local councillor, and he would support whatever their views were.

Councillor Beynon suggested that it made sense for all changes to be made at the same time to both divisions and boundaries, and supported Councillor Bridgett's views.

Councillor Dickinson sought clarification that all members in the affected areas had had the full information, given Councillor Towns' comments about the division boundaries. Councillor Beynon responded that he had received some information at the start of the process but had held off responding until he had residents' comments.

Councillor Towns commented that he had been kept aware of developments through colleagues on Morpeth Town Council. He was happy with the proposed change to Hebron Parish Council boundary, who had no concerns about the proposals, but until this report he had not been consulted about any potential change to the division boundaries.

Councillor Oliver confirmed that the consultation was not about the county division boundaries. This had emerged at a later stage so there was no risk that the consultation had not been thorough.

Mrs Roll advised members that if the Council agreed any changes to parish boundaries, then the Council had to inform the Boundary Commission and the decision lay with them. Mr Foote confirmed that once the order was made the Council had to notify various bodies, including the Boundary Commission.

Councillor Watson asked whether it was advisable to delay and make a decision on all changes at the same time as previously mentioned. Councillor Oliver replied that this matter had been around for some time now and a decision needed to be made. If there was no desire from Morpeth Town Council to get this resolved then maybe it should be delayed as if it was going to affect county divisions, then it might need wider consultation. Mrs Roll advised members that the review needed to be completed within 12 months, which was January 2021.

Councillor Beynon proposed that the report be deferred and all changes considered at the same time. Mrs Roll advised that only Morpeth Town Council could withdraw the request for a review.

Councillor Daley commented this was an important issue and sought clarification about how many members had left the meeting since it had begun. He would also be supportive of a short deferral if this was procedurally possible.

Councillor J.G. Davey believed that Councillor Beynon's proposal meant that the Council would be forced into an all area boundary review within 12 months without a meeting taking place to consider this. He would not support that.

Councillor Reid moved the recommendations as written, without asking the Boundary Commission for a review, as the Boundary Commission would have to be informed of the changes in any case. This was seconded by Councillor Towns.

Councillor Reid urged that, when housing development applications were submitted, some investigation should be made about the effect of parish boundaries and whether these needed to be changed before housing development began. Such action would have avoided the current situation. He

was also sure that Turners Flats at Stobhill were in Stobhill division meaning the boundary wasn't co-terminous.

Councillor Dickinson was not comfortable with the report. There were a number of substantial objections and members had to take into account the views of residents. One local member was not in support of the proposals and he felt that they should therefore be rejected. As mentioned, the issue would be coming back from the Boundary Commission in the future and could be dealt with as part of that.

Councillor Castle commented that he didn't have enough information to differ from the officer recommendation and he would therefore support what had been moved and seconded.

Councillor Renner Thompson commented that the estates were part of Morpeth and should therefore be part of Morpeth Town Council.

Councillor Towns pointed out that the most of the recommendations outside of Hebron Parish were to not allow the changes so all of those who had objected were being listened to. The one area which was being recommended for agreement was in Hebron, where there had been very few representations from the public and which the Parish Council supported. He agreed with Councillor Reid's motion and accepted that the matter had to be reported to the Boundary Commission. What he had not supported was actively trying to get them involved.

Councillor Reid commented that the main point was that the majority of people who had lobbied against not being included in Morpeth were getting their wish.

Councillor Oliver reinforced the point that on the parish boundaries there had been a very robust consultation and the review of county boundaries by the Boundary Commission would not automatically change parish boundaries so there was logic to consider the motion put forward.

As a named vote on the motion had been called for and agreed, the votes were cast as follows:-

FOR: 23 as follows;

Castle, G.	Oliver, N.
Dale, P.A.M.	Reid, J.
Daley, W.	Renner Thompson, G.
Dodd, R.R.	Riddle, J.
Dunbar, C.	Roughead, G.
Flux, B.	Seymour, C.
Gibson, R.	Stewart, G.

Horncastle, C.W.	Swinburn, M.D.
Jackson, P.A.	Thorne, T.
Jones, V.	Towns, D.
Lawrie, R.	Watson, J.G.
Murray, A.H.	

AGAINST: 19 as follows;

Beynon, J.	Gobin, J.J.
Bowman, L.	Grimshaw, L.
Cartie, E.	Hill, G.
Clark, T.S.	Lang, J.
Davey, J.G.	Nisbet, K.
Davey, S.	Parry, K.
Dickinson, S.	Purvis, M.
Dungworth, S.	Simpson, E.
Dunn, L.	Swithenbank, I.C.F.
Foster, J.	

ABSTENTIONS:10 as follows;

Bridgett, S.C.	Rickerby, L.J.
Cessford, T.	Robinson, M.
Crosby, B.	Sharp, A.
Hutchinson, J.I.	Stow, K.
Pattison, W.	Wallace, R.

It was therefore **RESOLVED:**

(1) that the outcome of the Community Governance Review for Morpeth be agreed as follows and for the reasons laid out in the report:-

(1) Hebron

- agree to transfer the area of land marked A on map 3 from Hebron Parish Council to Morpeth Town Council

- agree to transfer the area of land marked B on map 3 from Morpeth Town Council to Hebron Parish Council

(2) Hepscoth

- agree to transfer the Stobhill estate shown to the south of the A192 on map 3 and Turner Square shown to the north of the A192/A196 roundabout from Hepscoth Parish Council to Morpeth Town Council.
- refuse the proposal to transfer of the Southfield Estate from Hepscoth Parish Council to Morpeth Town Council.

(3) Mitford

- refuse the proposal to transfer the area of land marked D on map 3 from Mitford Parish Council to Morpeth Town Council; and

(2) that the Head of Democratic and Electoral Services be authorised to make, sign and seal the appropriate orders for the changes by virtue of the powers contained in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act.

The Common Seal of the County Council
of Northumberland was hereunto affixed
in the presence of:-

.....
Chair of the County Council

.....
Duly Authorised Officer