

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Northumberland County Council** held on Wednesday 21 February 2024 at County Hall, Morpeth at 2.00 pm.

PRESENT

Councillor B. Flux (Chairman in the Chair)

MEMBERS

Bawn, D.	Nisbet, K.
Beynon, J.	Oliver, N.
Bowman, L.	Parry, K.
Carr, D.	Pattison, W.
Cartie, E.	Ploszaj, W.F.
Castle, G.	Purvis, M.
Cessford, T.	Reid, J.
Chicken, E.	Renner-Thompson, G.
Clark, T.	Richardson, M.
Dale, A.	Riddle, J.R.
Daley, W.	Robinson, M.
Darwin, L.	Sanderson, H.G.H.
Dickinson, S.	Scott, A.
Dodd, R.	Seymour, C.
Dunn, E.	Sharp, A.
Fairless-Aitken, S.	Simpson, E.
Ferguson, D.	Stewart, G.
Hardy, C.R.	Swinbank, M.
Horncastle, C.	Swinburn, M.
Hunter, I.E.	Taylor, C.A.
Hutchinson, J.I.	Thorne, T.N.
Jackson, P.A.	Towns, D.
Jones, V.	Waddell, H.
Kennedy, D.	Wallace, A.
Lang, J.A.	Watson, J.
Lee, S.	Wearmouth, R.W.
Mather, M.	Wilczek, R.
Morphet, N.	

OFFICERS

Binning, G.	Chief Fire Officer
Bradley, N.	Executive Director – Adults, Ageing and Wellbeing
Elsdon, A.	Director of Finance and Procurement
Gerrard, S.	Director of Law and Corporate Governance (MO)
Hadfield, K.	Democratic Services Manager
Hunter, P.	Assistant Chief Executive

Kingham, A.	Executive Director – Children and Young People
Masson, N.	Deputy Monitoring Officer
Neilson, S.	Executive Director of Place and Regeneration
O'Neill, G.	Executive Director - Public Health, Inequalities, and Stronger Communities
Paterson, Dr H.	Chief Executive
Willis, J.	Executive Director for Resources & Transformation (S151)

Four members of the press and public were present

60. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Bridgett, Foster, Hill, Grimshaw and Murphy.

61. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of County Council held on Wednesday, 17 January 2024, be confirmed as a true record.

62. DISCLOSURES OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

The Chair reminded members that they did not need to declare a disclosable pecuniary interest in the council tax or precept so they were entitled to vote on the matter.

63. THE BUDGET

The Chair advised that he intended to take all of the budget related matters (i.e. 7.1 to .7 on the agenda) under one debate. He made some further introductory remarks, and reminded members that the recommendations in relation to items 7.4 and 75 on the agenda had been consolidated into one document which had been circulated to members. He then invited the Leader to present the budget.

The Leader advised that the proposed budget had been based on extensive consultation and he was grateful to everyone who had responded to it. It was a budget for everyone, which again had been based on the three key priorities. In terms of value for money, residents would benefit because front line services were being protected, more was being invested in roads, schools, leisure services, libraries, the climate and environment policy, major projects across the County and many other areas of investment.

Regarding tackling inequalities, he referred to the council tax support scheme and the compact with key partners in the inequalities field. Some great work

was being done by the Health and Wellbeing Board and in communities across the County, and in encouraging the development of new skills.

Regarding investment in business, he referred to the Northumberland Line, investment in Blyth and Ashington, investment in rural development, the benefits of the new mayoral combined authority and the maintenance of free town centre parking. Finally he paid tribute to the Chief Executive and the S151 Officer for the changes they had effected in the Council and in producing the budget. He moved the recommendations, which was seconded by Councillor Wearmouth. Some questions were asked as follows:-

- Councillor Reid queried whether Parish Councils could double their precept, as was being proposed for the council tax on second homes. Councillor Wearmouth confirmed that a parish council could set its own precept at whatever level it wished but could not levy its own second home taxation. Councillor Reid then asked whether any of this funding would be passed onto parish councils and the Leader responded that this would be considered.
- Councillor Morphet asked whether the empty homes premium would be applied retrospectively . Councillor Wearmouth confirmed that it would not.
- Councillor Robinson asked how many responses there had been to the consultation. The Leader replied that 388 had been received but there had also been a lot of other consultation activity.

The Chair then opened the meeting up for debate.

- Councillor Dickinson commented that the budget contained a large rent increase for the second year running, amounting to £30 a month extra which was a lot to find for those on low incomes. £0.5m was being lost from family hubs and £400,000 from adolescent services, which was a vital support post covid. £0.5m was proposed to be cut from the community plan which did not support the aim of empowering communities. Residents responding to the consultation had indicated that they were supportive of the elderly but the budget contained £3.8m of cuts to adult social care and cuts to young people's services. He did not support a consultation where outside organisations were involved in discussions before the Council's own members. The report also identified £3.77m worth of BEST savings which were being evaluated by external consultants. Members didn't know the detail of these but were expected to vote on them, and the Peer Review team had recently indicated that members should have more information about the BEST programme. He acknowledged that there were some good things in the budget but felt that open dialogue between members was needed in order to ensure residents got the services they needed.
- Councillor Morphet felt that the Administration and the S151 Officer had done a good job out of a bad situation but Cabinet had chosen to support the Government's line of the erosion of local government services. Members were being pushed to approve a 4.59% increase in council tax as a result, to eat even further into reserves and to make savings of £10.8m which would disproportionately affect women. His group would not be supporting the budget.

- Councillor Horncastle reminded members that the Housing Revenue Account was a ring fenced account which was financed purely by rents. These funded the repairs and maintenance programme, affordable housing and contributed to meeting the Government's energy efficiency targets and the Housing Regulation Bill. All other authorities and social landlords were having to do the same thing. 70% of Council tenants did not pay rent. Of the 30% that did, they were supported by the Council's hardship fund which had been under utilised last year.
- Councillor Bawn commented that setting a budget and being in opposition were both difficult jobs at budget time. He felt a weak argument against the budget had been made by the opposition for what was a balanced and sensible budget. The proposed Council Tax increase was dwarfed by the rise proposed by the Police and Crime Commissioner for the police precept. No alternative to the budget was being offered by the opposition and he urged all members to support it.
- Councillor Reid commented that of the 388 responses, 16 of those were councillors indicating that these respondents were so detached from the consultation with members, they felt the only way to get their voice heard was to complete the public consultation document. He referred to a number of elements in the consultation that the Administration wasn't taking heed of and could not therefore understand why so much effort was taken on the consultation, when the results seemingly did not determine where money was spent or cuts made. Policy conferences were not how members wanted to be engaged with. This should be done by small groups of members talking to chief officers where choices could be made. He suggested that a task and finish group representing all groups be formed for next year so they could report back in an informed way to their groups. All the effort should be put into engaging with the decision makers which would then provide the Administration with a proper steer. He also referred to the judgement of the external auditor that the Council was not providing value for money.
- Councillor Castle commented that the Council should always be looking at value for money and this was being achieved wherever possible. This year had seen the most comprehensive consultation process, and whilst 388 responses wasn't a large response rate, everyone had been given the opportunity to have their say and it was not a referendum. He had completed the form as a member, adding that all members had access to officers for advice.
- Councillor Pattison referred to the comments on the savings to the adult social care budget which had not been accurate. It was hoped to make £3m of efficiencies, which were not the same as cuts, and individual cases were being looked at with case managers to see what would meet their assessed needs in an efficient way.
- Councillor Oliver felt it was important to see the context in which the budget had been put together on the back of a pandemic, rising costs and the war in Ukraine. He felt that the years of careful budget management allowed the Council to continue investing in communities and business opportunities. The budget was also good for the west of the County which hadn't always been the case, and he urged members to commend it.
- Councillor Ball commented that she understood consultation meant listening to what came back from those being consulted. She had asked in the Scrutiny meeting what changes had been made as a result of what had come out of the

consultation and she was still waiting for an answer. She didn't think residents had been listened to on the budget, nor was all the budget information available at the Scrutiny meeting, so she questioned how members could make an informed decision. More funding was needed for the voluntary and community sector as more services were pushed their way. The claims the Administration made about what was happening on the ground could not be borne out.

- Councillor Dale commented that all Councils were struggling to set their budget because the Government had not completed its fair funding review. She felt there was a need to go back to base budgeting taking into account the Council's key performance indicators. She felt that an assessment needed to be made of the value of the consultation exercise. In the west of the County, the major issue for residents was the state of the roads.
- Councillor Hunter welcomed the investment planned for Berwick and hoped that it would all be delivered in the next few years of the MTFP. She also hoped that as much external funding for The Maltings as possible could be found. She did have some concerns about using reserves to balance the budget as this was not sustainable.
- Councillor Dodd commented that it had been the case in previous years that some alternative budget proposals had been put forward by the opposition.
- Councillor Ezhilchelvan commented that members should be focussing on what the budget said, what it aimed to deliver and how it was defined. He felt it was the most balanced and multi objective budget that could be achieved in the current economic climate. Baseline services were being protected whilst at the same time, investments were being made in the future. Good achievements were also being made in tackling inequalities.
- Councillor Mather thanked the Administration and officers for producing this budget, adding that he would have liked to have seen an opposition budget. He referred to a meeting of the inequalities working group which had taken place in his area recently and which had highlighted the great work being done. A significant amount of funding was allocated in the budget over the next two years to tackle potholes and U and C roads, and he thanked the Leader and Cabinet for listening to what people wanted.
- Councillor Robinson commented the report had more information and explanation of budget matters than ever before, which was to be welcomed. However, he was concerned about the number of assumptions which it contained. He was one of the members who had complete the questionnaire, and he felt that the questions had been very leading. His own residents wanted the Council to deliver the basics better and forget about vanity projects.
- Councillor Kennedy commented that every year the current Administration had been in power they had increased the Council Tax by the maximum, making a Band D property now £2,076 per year. However, the plan was also to use reserves to balance the budget in the amount of £16.5m. This was not sustainable given the current level of reserves. He also remarked that households had already received their bills for garden waste collection, at the higher rate proposed in the budget, on the authority of an officer. This did not make members feel engaged with the budget and took decision making away from members. He then referred to an allocation of £5m mentioned in a Conservative election leaflet for the last by election, which had been ringfenced for Hexham, and which had now been removed and put into a

general fund. He also asked why the masterplan for the Hexham Middle School site had taken three years to produce.

- Councillor Renner Thompson commended a budget which was based on the Children's Services capital programme with new schools across the County, new SEN provision and new sports facilities,. The Council's family hubs set up had been recognised by the Government and renowned Labour MPs as one of the best in the country. Funding had not been taken away from them, in fact they would receive a further £0.5m grant from the Government to replace funding coming out of the central budget. He thanked the Administration for listening to his concerns about public toilets with provision in the budget for keeping them open during the winter, and welcomed the additional funding for U and C roads.
- Councillor Riddle defended the Council's work on potholes, which included dedicated gangs, and reminded members about the additional funding in the budget over and above the LTP programme. There were five gulley cleansers in the County, not one as had been commented, and area managers had the authority to hire in additional resource as needed. The Administration had listened, as one of the things which had come out of the town and parish council forum had been to keep public toilets open during the winter, and those who currently paid for this would not be paying in future.
- Councillor Waddell felt members needed to remember that they were there in the chamber to represent the public, and not to repeat what they had been briefed to say. She asked what Councillor Pattison believed the difference to be between an efficiency and a cut. As a social worker, she understood how these efficiencies affected the people she worked with as it was her role to explain the changes to them. She urged members to think from residents' point of view and consider what they were voting for today.
- Councillor Wilczek commented that some members had not received their agenda papers until Saturday. She welcomed the EIA for the budget but felt one should be done for the budget setting process itself because as a working parent, she did not feel she had had sufficient time to read through a lot of documentation. Regarding the budget itself, Bedlington was mentioned once and it related to funds from last year, phase 1 and phase 2. She queried what the plan was for the town centre.

Councillor Wearmouth felt the budget was an excellent one for the Council and the people of Northumberland. The signs could already be seen across Northumberland of the progress which had been made in areas such as the unemployment rate and average wage rates. There were always ways to do things more efficiently and this was what would be delivered by the BEST programme. The Administration was spending £40m to deliver an ambitious affordable housing programme and major capital projects were planned for Blyth, Ashington and Bedlington through various funding mechanisms. Residents had been listened to and £36m put into the budget to fix roads and pavements. He urged members to support the budget.

The Leader then summed up and reminded members of some of the key proposals contained within it.

The Chair then led members through the recommendations for each report.

63.1 Budget 2024-25 – Report under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003

The report provided Members with information on the robustness of the estimates and the adequacy of reserves in the Cabinet's budget proposals for 2024-25. Provision of this information was a legal requirement and ensured that all Members had regard to the professional authoritative advice provided by the Council's Chief Financial Officer when final budget decisions were being made at the meeting.

RESOLVED that members note the report and the opinions contained and set out in the report regarding the Budget and the level of Council Tax for 2024-25.

63.2 Budget Engagement Report

The report provided a summary of engagement on the Council's Budget which commenced in July 2023 and included a Budget Survey which closed on 26th January 2024. This engagement helped to inform the Council's Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan.

RESOLVED that the Budget engagement activities and the summary results of the Budget Consultation Survey undertaken between December and January 2024 be noted.

63.3 Budget 2024-25, Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-28 and 30 Year Business Plan for the Housing Revenue Account

The report sought Council approval for the updated Budget 2024-25, Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2024-28 and 30-year Business plan for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

On the recommendations being put to the vote there voted FOR: 37;
AGAINST: 22; ABSTENTIONS: 3.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) Council approve the Housing Revenue Account 2024-25 budget as detailed within Appendix 1, which will reduce the balance on the HRA reserve from £28.175 million at 31 March 2024, to £19.193 million at 31 March 2025; and note the indicative budgets to 2027-28 which will reduce the balance of the HRA reserve to £13.708 million;

(b) Council note that from 1 April 2024, social housing rent will be increased by Consumer Price Index (CPI) plus 1.00% as per the previously agreed Rent Standard. The budget detailed in Appendix 1 assumes that rents will rise by CPI 6.70% plus 1.00% with recoverable service charges also rising by CPI plus 1.00% for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025;

(c) Council approve the increase of 7.70% for housing rents from 1 April 2024 in line with the Government rent standard;

- (d) Council approve the increase of 7.70% for housing service charges from 1 April 2024;
- (e) Council approve the Non-Recurrent Growth Item Hardship Fund of £0.350 million for 2024-25 to support NCC tenants who may, due to their income, not be eligible to receive any financial assistance through existing benefits (Housing Benefit/Universal Credit/Discretionary Housing Payment) (detailed in points 6.5 & 6.11);
- (f) Council approve that any unspent balance in relation to the Hardship Fund for 2023-24, can be carried forward as an earmarked reserve into 2024-25 (detailed in point 6.5) and added to the 2024-25 in-year budget allocation;
- (g) Council note the indicative 30-year Housing Revenue Account business plan as detailed within Appendix 1’;
- (h) Council approve the estimated pay inflationary increase for 2024-25 of 4.00% totalling £0.447 million (detailed in point 6.10);
- (l) Council approve the Non-Pay Inflation Schedule for 2024-25 totalling £0.280 million (detailed in point 6.10);
- (j) Council approve the Recurrent Growth as follows:
- a) Housing Disrepair of £0.275 million from 2024-25 to cover the costs of housing disrepair mitigation and resolution; and note that the budget will be reduced by £0.150 million after 5 years (detailed in point 6.11).
 - b) Additional staffing budget of £0.367 million from 2024-25 (detailed in point 6.11).
 - c) Additional budget for consumable materials for void properties of £0.159 million from 2024-25 (detailed in point 6.11).
- (k) Council note the Recurrent Saving in relation to the Introduction of phased Service Charges for Sheltered Housing tenants, with estimated additional income of £0.120 million in 2024-25 (50.00%), £0.180 million in 2025-26 (75.00%) and £0.240 million 2026-27 (100.00%) as agreed within the budget and MTFP 2023-24 (detailed in point 6.12);
- (l) Council note and approve the expenditure plan relating to £41.434 million which has been set aside over the 4-year period 2024-25 to 2027-28 in the HRA Capital programme to invest in Affordable Housing. Details are set out in Appendix 1; and
- (m) Council approve an amendment to the Housing Rent policy, to enable re-let of HRA properties at Formula Rent from April 2025 (detailed in point 6.29).

The Chair reminded members that they would be voting on the consolidated recommendations for agenda item 7.4 and 7.5 together. A named vote would be taken.

63.4 Budget 2024-25 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2024-28 and Update to the Budget 2024-25 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-28

The report provided the Revenue Budget for 2024-25 and Revenue MTFP 2024-28 and the Capital Budget for 2024-25 and Capital MTFP 2024-28, following the Government's Autumn Statement on 22 November 2023, and the publication of the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement on 18 December 2023. The Update report updated Members with matters relating to the Budget 2024-25 which had arisen following the publication of the final Local Government Finance Settlement and publication of the Budget reports, one of which was presented to the all OSC Member Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 29 January 2024 and the second to Cabinet on 13 February 2024.

On the consolidated recommendations being put to the vote, the votes were cast as follows:-

FOR: 36 as follows:

Bawn, D.	Jackson, P.A.
Beynon, J.	Jones, V.
Carr, D.	Mather, M.
Castle, G.	Oliver, N.
Cessford, T.	Pattison, W.
Chicken, E.	Ploszaj, W.
Dale, P.A.M.	Renner Thompson, G.
Daley, W.	Riddle, J.R.
Darwin. L.R.	Robinson, M.
Dodd, R.R.	Sanderson, H.G.H.
Dunbar, C.	Seymour, C.
Ezhilchelvan, P.	Sharp, A.
Ferguson, D.	Stewart, G.
Flux, B.	Swinburn, M.
Hardy, C.	Thorne, T.N.
Horncastle, C.W.	Towns, D.
Humphrey, C.	Watson, J.
Hutchinson, J.I.	Wearmouth, R.

AGAINST: 21 as follows:

Ball, C.	Parry, K.
Bowman, L.	Purvis, M.
Cartie, E.	Richardson, M.
Clark, T.	Scott, A.
Dickinson, S.	Simpson, E.

Dunn, L.	Taylor, C.
Gallacher, B.	Waddell, H.
Kennedy, D.	Wallace, A.
Lang, J.A.	Watson, A.
Lee, S.	Wilczek, R.
Nisbet, K	

ABSTENTIONS: 5 as follows:

Fairless Aitken, S.	Reid, J.
Hunter, E.I.	Swinbank, M.
Morphet, N.	

Council therefore **RESOLVED** to:-

1. Note that the figures contained within the Budget 2024-25 within Appendix 1 are based on the final Local Government Finance Settlement of 5 February 2024.
2. Approve:
 - a) the Revenue Budget for 2024-25 including the efficiencies totalling £10.834 million for 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1 (detailed in Appendix 10); and,
 - b) the Schedule of Efficiencies totalling £14.939 million for 2025-26 contained within Appendix 1 (detailed in Appendix 10) noting that the efficiencies identified may be progressed during 2024-25 in order to realise the efficiencies early.
3. Note the Revenue MTFP covering the period 2024-28 detailed within Appendix 1 and the requirement to deliver budget balancing measures of £15.920 million in 2026-27 and £14.238 million in 2027-28.
4. Note the estimated receipt of Revenue Support Grant of £14.020 million for 2024- 25 contained within Appendix 1.
5. Note the estimated retained Business Rates and the Top-Up Grant funding to be received by the Council for 2024-25 of £104.445 million and £326.550 million over the remaining period of the MTFP contained within Appendix 1.
6. Note the estimated surplus from prior years on Collection Fund Business Rates balance of £3.471 million in 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.
7. Note the estimated receipt of Rural Services Delivery Grant of £3.178 million for 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.
8. Note the estimated receipt of the New Homes Bonus of £1.682 million (excluding service element of £0.028 million) for 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.
9. Note the estimated receipt of Improved Better Care Funding Grant of £12.496

million for 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.

10. Note the estimated receipt of Social Care Grant funding of £28.990 million for 2024- 25 contained within Appendix 1.
11. Note the estimated receipt of Adult Social Care Discharge Grant funding of £2.920 million in 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.
12. Note the estimated receipt of Adult Social Care Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund Grant of £6.656 million in 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.
13. Note the estimated receipt of the Services Grant of £0.481 million in 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.
14. Approve a 2.99% increase in Council Tax for 2024-25, noting that this is in line with the Government's assumptions regarding the Council's Core Spending Power; and, within the Government's referendum limit of 3.00%.
15. Note that the MTFP 2024-28 includes a 2.99% annual increase in Council Tax for 2025-26 and then 1.99% thereafter for the remaining years of the MTFP and, that an estimate of annual tax base growth has been included.
16. Note the non-collection rate for Council Tax purposes remains at 1.00% for 2024- 25 (1.00% in 2023-24).
17. Note the estimated surplus of £4.149 million from prior years on the Collection Fund Council Tax balance for 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.
18. Approve the Council Tax Support Hardship Scheme 2024-25; a reduction of up to £100.00 to council tax bills for all working age Council Tax Support claimants; and those pensionable age Council Tax Support claimants that do not receive 100.00% Council Tax Support, once all other discounts have been applied.
19. Approve a 2.00% increase in Council Tax for 2024-25 for use on Adult Social Care services; raising an additional £4.993 million to support the Budget 2024-25 and note that the assumed increase included in the MTFP is 2.00% for 2025-26 and zero thereafter.
20. Approve the Reserves Policy 2024-25 detailed in Appendix 2.
21. Note the Schedule of Reserves and Provisions contained within Appendix 3.
22. Approve:

The net contributions from the Strategic Management Reserve of £16.504 million in 2024-25 and note the proposed net contributions from reserves of £6.503 million in 2025-26 and £0.027 million in 2026-27, and the proposed net contribution to the reserves of £0.997 million in 2027-28, contained within Appendix 1, comprising:

 - a) non-recurrent pressures of £7.147 million for 2024-25, and note the non-recurrent pressures totalling £2.084 million in 2025-26, £0.027 million in

- 2026- 27, and £0.028 million in 2027-28, (as detailed within Appendix 9; excluding the Adult Social Care Discharge Fund, Locality Coordinators, Hirst Welfare Centre – transitional support, Council Tax Support Hardship Scheme, and BEST Initiative);
- b) delayed investment interest due from the airport as a result of Covid-19 will be repaid to the Strategic Management Reserve. It is anticipated that the airport will start to repay the delayed interest over a three-year period, commencing in April 2027 at £1.025 million per annum;
 - c) revenue contribution to capital (RCCO) of £13.171 million in 2024-25; comprising of £8.171 million for investment in the Schools’ Development Programme, and £5.000 million for investment in the enabling works at strategic employment sites within Northumberland; and £6.591 million in 2025- 26 for investment in the Schools’ Development Programme; and,
 - d) contribution to the reserve of £3.814 million in 2024-25 and note the subsequent proposed contribution to the reserve of £2.172 million in 2025-26.
23. Approve the use of the Public Health Revenue Grant Reserve of £0.428 million in 2024-25, and note the proposed contribution from this reserve of £0.180 million in 2025-26 and £0.100 million in 2026-27 contained within Appendix 1, comprising:
- a) four fixed term Locality Coordinators totalling £0.178 million in 2024-25; and,
 - b) Hirst Welfare Centre – transitional support at £0.250 million in 2024-25, £0.180 million in 2025-26, and £0.100 million in 2026-27.
24. Approve the use of the Council Transformation Fund Reserve of £3.000 million to fund BEST programme delivery costs in 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.
25. Approve the use of the Council Tax Hardship and Discount Scheme Fund Reserve of £1.726 million in 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1 to fund the Council Tax Support Hardship Scheme for 2024-25.
26. Note the Schedule of Service Specific Grants of £263.870 million contained within Appendix 4, and that some are still indicative pending final confirmation.
27. Note the Schedule of Fees and Charges 2024-25 contained within Appendix 5.
28. Approve the Inflation Schedule for 2024-25 totalling £28.559 million detailed in Appendix 6.
29. Approve the Recurrent Growth and Pressures Schedules of £14.823 million and the additional revenue costs associated with the Capital Programme of £19.100 million for 2024-25; and note the Growth and Pressures of £2.265 million in 2025-26; £3.130 million in 2026-27; and, £0.875 million in 2027-28 and the additional

revenue costs associated with the Capital Programme of £12.609 million in 2025-26; £6.000 million in 2026-27; and £6.000 million in 2027-28 included within Appendices 1, 7 and 8.

30. Approve the Non-Recurrent Pressures of £15.221 million for 2024-25 and note the Non-Recurrent Pressures of £2.264 million for 2025-26, £0.127 million for 2026-27, and £0.028 million in 2027-28 included within Appendix 9.
31. Approve the Non-Recurrent Income of £5.475 million for 2024-25 and note the Non- Recurrent Income of £0.314 million for 2025-26; £0.283 million for 2026-27, and £0.269 million for 2027-28 included within Appendix 9.
32. Approve the identified budget balancing measures contained within Appendix 10 of £10.834 million for 2024-25 and £14.939 million for 2025-26; and note those budget balancing measures totalling £6.002 million already identified for 2026-27 to 2027- 28.
33. Note the Corporate Equality Impact Assessment at Appendix 11.
34. Note the Budget by Service Area 2024-25 detailed in Appendix 12.
35. Note the receipt of Dedicated Schools Grant of £175.086 million in 2024-25; and note the revised allocation of £158.046 million for 2023-24. This is following the conversion of four schools to academy status during 2023-24.
36. Approve the Capital Strategy 2024-25 to 2027-28 contained within Appendix 13.
37. Approve the revised Capital Programme as detailed within Appendix 14 and note the increase in the Capital Programme 2024-28 of £277.560 million detailed in Appendix 15.
38. Approve the delegation of the detail of the final Local Transport Programme and any subsequent in-year amendments to the Executive Director Place and Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet Member responsible for improving our roads and highways.
39. Approve the delegation of the detail of the capital allocation for Highways Maintenance Investment in U and C Roads and Footpaths, and the Highway Maintenance and Pothole Repair Fund to the Executive Director Place and Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet Member responsible for improving our roads and highways.
40. Approve the Capital Prudential Indicators 2024-25 to 2027-28 based on the proposed Capital Programme detailed within Appendix 16.
41. Approve the Annual Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy detailed in Appendix 17.
42. Approve the Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2024-25 detailed in

Appendix 18.

43. Approve a delegation whereby the Executive Director for Transformation and Resources (the Council's Section 151 Officer) to draw down a total of £2.000 million from the Council's Transformation Fund Reserve and £0.800 million from the Estates Rationalisation Reserve in order to expedite work required with regard to the BEST initiative. Also, to note that Cabinet will receive updates of any drawdowns in the quarterly financial monitoring reports.

63.6 Revenues and Benefits Policies for 2024-25

The report updated Members on the policies governing the administration of Revenues and Benefits and sought approval for the updates and amendments highlighted.

On the report's recommendations being put to the vote there voted FOR: 41; AGAINST: 20; ABSTENTIONS; 1.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Council approve the Revenues and Benefits Policies attached as Appendix 1 to Appendix 6.
- (b) Council approve implementing the 100% Empty Homes Premium after one year from 1 April 2024; and
- (c) Council agree to implement a 100% premium for second homes to increase the council tax charge to 200% from 1 April 2025.

63.7 Council Tax 2024-25

The report provided Council Members with the financial information to enable the Council to calculate and set the Council Tax for 2024-25.

On the recommendations being put to the vote, the votes were cast as follows:-

FOR: 36 as follows:

Bawn, D.	Jackson, P.A.
Beynon, J.	Jones, V.
Carr, D.	Mather, M.
Castle, G.	Oliver, N.
Cessford, T.	Pattison, W.
Chicken, E.	Ploszaj, W.
Dale, P.A.M.	Renner Thompson, G.
Daley, W.	Riddle, J.R.
Darwin, L.R.	Robinson, M.
Dodd, R.R.	Sanderson, H.G.H.
Dunbar, C.	Seymour, C.
Ezhilchelvan, P.	Sharp, A.

Ferguson, D.	Stewart, G.
Flux, B.	Swinburn, M.
Hardy, C.	Thorne, T.N.
Horncastle, C.W.	Towns, D.
Humphrey, C.	Watson, J.
Hutchinson, J.I.	Wearmouth, R.

AGAINST: 22 as follows:

Ball, C.	Nisbet, K.
Bowman, L.	Parry, K.
Cartie, E.	Purvis, M.
Clark, T.	Richardson, M.
Dickinson, S.	Scott, A.
Dunn, L.	Simpson, E.
Fairless Aitken, S.	Taylor, C.
Gallacher, B.	Waddell, H.
Kennedy, D.	Wallace, A.
Lang, J.A.	Watson, A.
Lee, S.	Wilczek, R.

ABSTENTIONS: 4 as follows:

Hunter, E.I.	Reid, J.
Morphet, N.	Swinbank, M.

1. Council **RESOLVED:-**

- a) That the Council Tax Requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2024-25 (excluding Parish Precepts) is £232,953,108.
- b) That the following amounts be calculated for 2024-25 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Act:
 - i. Being the aggregate amount of gross expenditure which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31 A (2) of the Act taking into account all precepts issued to it by Parish Councils: £929,205,900.
 - ii. Being the aggregate of the gross income which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31 A (3) of the Act: £685,374,250.
 - iii. Being the amount by which the aggregate at (b) i) above exceeds the aggregate at (b) ii) above, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 31 A (4) of the Act as its Council Tax requirement for the year. (Item R in the formula in Section 31B of the Act) (including Parish Precepts): £243,831,650.
 - iv. Being the amount at (b) iii) above (Item R), all divided by Item T, above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act as the basic amount of its Council Tax at Band D for the year (including Parish Precepts): £2,173.47.

- v. Being the aggregate amount of all special items referred to in Section 34 (1) of the Act (total all Parish Precepts): £10,882,376.
 - vi. Being the amount at (b) iv) above less the result given by dividing the amount at (b) v) above by Item T, above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34 (2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax at Band D for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no Parish Precept relates: £2,076.47.
- c) That the Council Tax for 2024-25, excluding the Police Precept, will be increased by 4.99% (including the Adult Social Care Precept of 2.00%), equating to a charge per Band D household of £2,076.47 (excluding Special Expenses). For other bands different proportions will apply. For example, Band A properties will be charged 6/9 (two thirds) of a Band D property and Band H properties will be charged 18/9 (double) of a Band D property.

The relevant valuation bands are as follows:

Valuation Band	Northumberland County Council	Adult Social Care Precept	Total
	£ : p	£ : p	£ : p
A	1,181.64	202.67	1,384.31
B	1,378.58	236.45	1,615.03
C	1,575.52	270.23	1,845.75
D	1,772.46	304.01	2,076.47
E	2,166.34	371.57	2,537.91
F	2,560.22	439.13	2,999.35
G	2,954.10	506.68	3,460.78
H	3,544.92	608.02	4,152.94

- d) Under Section 52ZB of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 that the Council's basic amount of Council Tax for 2024-25 is not excessive in accordance with principles approved under Section 52ZC(1) of the Act.

(i.e. the proposed Council Tax increase for 2024-25 means that the Council does not need to hold a referendum on its proposed Council Tax. The regulations set out in Section 52ZC of the Act requires all billing authorities (Council and precept authorities (i.e. Fire and Police authorities)) to hold a referendum on their proposed level of basic Council Tax each year if they exceed government guidelines which are set out annually. For 2024-25 the guideline increase for Northumberland is 5.00% (including the Adult Social Care Precept).

As the Council is proposing a Council Tax increase of 4.99% (including Adult Social Care Precept and Special Expenses) for 2024-25 then the above regulations have no impact for 2024-25.

2. Council APPROVED:

- a) That the matters listed in section 3 (c) of this report are identified as Special Expenses and that all other matters which might otherwise be considered to be Special Expenses under the prevailing legislation are deemed to be General Expenses.
- b) That the Council Tax Leaflet continues to be made available via the Council's website, rather than enclosed with Council Tax bills, and that the final document is delegated to and finalised by the Section 151 Officer.

3. Council NOTED:

- a) The Police and Crime Commissioner has agreed the recommended level of precept of £20,399,804 for 2024-25. This represents an increase of 7.70%, equating to an additional £13.00 on a Band D property; the resulting valuation bands will be as follows:

Valuation Band	Northumbria Police Authority
	£: p
A	121.23
B	141.43
C	161.64
D	181.84
E	222.25
F	262.66
G	303.07
H	363.68

- b) The Aggregate of Council Tax requirements, including that of Northumbria Police Authority, the Council's own requirement and that for Adult Social Care purposes (excluding Parish Precepts), are as follows:

Valuation Band	Northumberland County Council	Adult Social Care Precept	Northumbria Police Authority	Total
	£ : p	£ : p	£ : p	£ : p
A	1,181.64	202.67	121.23	1,505.54
B	1,378.58	236.45	141.43	1,756.46
C	1,575.52	270.23	161.64	2,007.39
D	1,772.46	304.01	181.84	2,258.31
E	2,166.34	371.57	222.25	2,760.16
F	2,560.22	439.13	262.66	3,262.01
G	2,954.10	506.68	303.07	3,763.85

H	3,544.92	608.02	363.68	4,516.62
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- c) The total amount of Parish Precepts requested is £10,878,542 and is detailed in Appendix 1. This represents an increase of £584,683 when compared to 2023-24.
- d) Branxton Parish Council has not submitted a precept. The Council is inquorate. No precept has been assumed for the purpose of the calculations contained within this report.
- e) Hartleyburn Parish Council has not submitted a precept. The Council is inquorate. No precept has been assumed for the purpose of the calculations contained within this report.
- f) Special expenses of £3,834 are applied to North Sunderland Parish only in relation to play area inspection and maintenance. This has increased from £3,662 in 2023-24.

4. Council NOTED:

- a) The basic Council Tax valuation bands are shown in paragraph 3 (b).

The detailed Council Tax calculations are set out in Appendices 2 and 3. Analysis of the Council Tax by parish is provided at Appendix 2 excluding Northumbria Police Precept. Appendix 3 shows the total Council Tax charge by parish (including the Council only element and Adult Social Care Precept, Northumbria Police Precept, Special Expenses and Parish Precepts).

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 3.55 pm for a comfort break. The meeting reconvened at 4.10 pm.

64. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR SUPPORTING BUSINESS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Strategic Acquisition Fund

The report sought the approval of Council to make a £15.000 million provision in the Capital Programme, for the current year, 2023-24, for the acquisition of strategic land and/or property in support of economic growth and job creation in the County.

The Chair advised that he had agreed to take this matter as urgent business in order to safeguard the Council's ability to take advantage of a unique commercial opportunity which had recently arisen. He had exercised his powers to include this as an extraordinary urgent item. He invited the Leader to present the report.

The Leader advised that he had discussed this report with the Group Leaders and this would continue as matters moved forward. He proposed the recommendations, which was seconded by Councillor Reid. Councillor Ferguson proposed that Council move to the vote on this, which was supported by a substantial majority.

On the report's recommendations being put to the vote there voted FOR: a substantial majority; AGAINST: 2; ABSTENTIONS: 1.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that:-

- (a) Council approve the creation of a £15.000 million Strategic Acquisition Fund, to be added to the Council's 2023-24 Capital Programme;
- (b) Council agree that an allocation of £15.000 million is made from the Strategic Management Reserve to fund the Strategic Acquisition Fund;
- (c) Council note that the money from the Strategic Management Reserve will be transferred to the revenue budget and there will be a contribution made from revenue to fund the expenditure incurred from the Strategic Acquisition Fund at the appropriate time;
- (d) Council note that there may be the requirement to reprofile all or some of the £15.000 million allocation and funding into financial year 2024-25 from 2023-24. Members will be advised if this is necessary through the financial monitoring reports produced by the Executive Director of Transformation and Resources;
- (e) Council agree that in order to replenish the Strategic Management Reserve, £15.000 million of the money set aside during 2022-23 for the early repayment of debt as voluntary minimum revenue provision (MRP) is reversed in 2023-24 as part of the close down of the Council's accounts. This creates the headroom in the revenue budget to make a contribution of £15.000 million to the Strategic Management Reserve; and
- (f) Council approve a contribution of £15.000 million to the Strategic Management Reserve from the revenue budget in 2023-24.

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

Corporate Fraud Policies 2024-25

The report provided an update on the County Council's policies in relation to Corporate Fraud activity and sought approval for updated policies.

The report was introduced by Councillor Wearmouth and he proposed the recommendations, which was seconded by Councillor Reid.

RESOLVED that Council approve the updated Anti-Money Laundering Policy and Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy, attached as Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 to the report.

66. REPORT OF THE LEADER, CHAIR OF THE STAFF AND APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE

Pay Policy Statement of Northumberland County Council 2024/2025

The report asked Council to receive and consider the report and the recommendation of the Staff and Appointments Committee that met on 8 February 2024, in respect of the proposal that the amended pay policy statement for 2024/25 is approved for adoption.

The report was presented by Councillor Wearmouth, and he moved the report's recommendations, which was seconded by Councillor J. Watson.

RESOLVED that Council approve the recommendations from the Staff and Appointments Committee held on 8 February 2024 to adopt the amended Pay Policy Statement 2024-25 (Appendix 1).

67. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Annual Portfolio Report – Public Health and Wellbeing

This was the Annual Report from the Cabinet Member for Public Health and Wellbeing. The report contained issues that set the context for delivery of the Portfolio. It highlighted achievements over the past year and, outlined the areas of focus for the coming year.

The report was presented by Councillor Jones. The report highlighted the many achievements which had taken place in the past year and she thanked Councillors Pattison and Ferguson who had been part of that work. She detailed some of the key points in the report and encouraged members to contact her direct if they had any detailed questions.

Councillor Dickinson referred to dentistry and oral health and all of the conditions which could stem from that. He asked whether the oral health strategy could be considered by a wider group of members as the issue affected so many members and their communities. Councillor Jones agreed this could be done. Oral health had previously been discussed at Health and Wellbeing OSC and related to many other health conditions

Councillor Ball expressed her concerns about the Council as a point of contact for those in crisis. Services were working hard but there were not enough people available to deal with everything, and she felt more should be done and more funding invested to get ahead of the problem through cross party working. Councillor Jones replied that there was cross party working on the issues Councillor Ball had highlighted and there were forums where these issues were discussed and members could input. She agreed working together "in house" was very important.

Councillor Dodd referred to a really useful meeting about defibrillators which had taken place under the Health and Wellbeing OSC working group. This had

highlighted a lot of further work which could be explored. Councillor Jones agreed this could be taken forward with officers.

Councillor Hunter welcomed the report and the work which Northumberland Communities together did but felt there was still work to do to reach those people who really needed this support, but were reluctant to reach out for help. The economic situation was only likely to get worse and more effort was needed to signpost people to the help which was available. Councillor Jones responded that the Council had put more money in to the CAB to help with that. Thriving Together supported the voluntary sector and she also mentioned Mobilise, an organisation which helped to identify and support carers. There was also a web based directory of support services which provided a link to all of the organisations available to provide support.

Councillor Dale referred to the responses from the public consultation on the budget which contained some useful information on public health and she suggested that Health and Wellbeing OSC look at this. Councillor Jones agreed this could be done.

Councillor Ezhilchelvan echoed previous comments about the value of cross party working and if any member was interested in a particular issue, they should let him know so he could raise it for Health and Wellbeing Board and the member be involved when it was discussed.

Councillor Bowman commented that dentistry services were being privatised by the back door. The Committee had looked at this and he urged all members to raise this as an issue with Government because communities were suffering and having to pay for private services. Dentists were being forced into this position because they weren't receiving proper funding from the Government and there were areas in Northumberland now where you could not access an NHS dentist. Councillor Jones responded that this was an issue for the Government rather than the Council, though the Committee was doing the work as best it could

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

68. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR PROMOTING HEALTHY LIVES

Annual Portfolio Report – Promoting Healthy Lives

This was the Annual Report from the Cabinet Member for Promoting Healthy Lives. The report contained issues that set the context for delivery of the Portfolio. It highlighted achievements over the past year and, outlined the areas of focus for the coming year.

The report was presented by Councillor Jeff Watson. The report was a comprehensive one, but he drew members' attention to his ongoing commitment to the development of the Library Service, and the Archives Service, which had delivered 3000 exhibitions, attended by 9,000 visitors. The Leisure Service had undergone some major changes in the last year and he thanked Active Northumberland for their work in the past nine years, which

was demonstrated by the usage figures. Northumberland had the highest rate of physically active adults in the North East.

Councillor Robinson asked if he could have a written response on the detail for the innovative solutions for Bedlington Library. This had been mentioned previously and had caused some local concern.

Councillor Hunter referred to the closure of Barclays Bank in Berwick recently. This caused problems for Parish Councils trying to bank cash if they did not have a debit card. She asked if this could be raised with Barclays. Councillor Watson replied that banking was available in some leisure centres and would be rolled out further. He would follow up Councillor Hunter’s point.

Councillor Wilczek commented that Bedlington was not mentioned once in the report and she asked when the town would be considered for an appropriate leisure facility. Councillor Watson responded that Bedlington was on the Administration’s radar and pledges had been made. However, he would look at this further and come back to her.

Councillor Ball expressed her thanks to staff in the Library Service who were now delivering a whole range of services to the public. However, they were a small team and she stressed that they should not be stretched too far to the point that subject specialists were lost. She asked for a commitment that these staff be protected as they were doing fantastic work to deliver a high performing service. Councillor Watson agreed, and acknowledged that there had been some pressure points due to sickness. There was always the need to find value for money, but he would continue to fight to maintain current levels of service and take on board the Councillor’s points.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

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Chair of the County Council

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Duly Authorised Officer