

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

At a meeting of the Cabinet held at County Hall, Morpeth on Tuesday 9 April 2024 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

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

CABINET MEMBERS

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

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Aviston, A.	Head of School Organisation and Resources
Bradley, N.	Executive Director for Adults, Aging & Wellbeing
Brown, J.	Public Health Consultant
Gerrard, S. (remote)	Director of Law and Corporate Governance
Hadfield, K.	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Hunter, P.	Assistant Chief Executive
Kingham, A.	Executive Director for Children, Young People and Education
Neilson, S.	Executive Director for Place and Regeneration
Paterson, Dr H.	Chief Executive
Willis, J. (remote)	Executive Director for Transformation and Resources (S151)

90. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 12 March 2024, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

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

Q3 Corporate Plan Performance Report

The report provided a summary of the progress against the Council's three Corporate Plan priorities using the Council's performance at the end of Quarter 3, 2023/24 (Q3) (copy attached to the signed minutes).

The report was presented by Councillor Wearmouth, who highlighted the key issues.

Councillor Renner Thompson commented that it was great to see that the vast majority of primary schools in the County now rated as good or outstanding and that most of these were still maintained schools. The Leader responded that the Authority's own target had been exceeded, which was very welcome.

Councillor Jones welcomed the £200,000 funding provision for the voluntary sector in Northumberland. This enabled them to provide much needed support, particularly in the area of tackling inequalities. The increase in spend with local providers was also great news as this helped to support local jobs.

The Leader agreed that the partnership working with the voluntary sector was essential to the delivery of the work on equalities.

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

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

Hirst Masterplan

The report introduced the Hirst Masterplan to Cabinet and sought authorisation to move forward in developing its contents further.

The report was presented by Councillor Wearmouth. This was a very significant, and long term project, and the first of its kind to tackle the long term future of the Hirst. There were many complex issues involved, not least having the finance in place, but it was also important to ensure that residents and landlords were fully engaged with the process.

The aim of the masterplan was to make a significant intervention in the north west quarter of the Hirst and would show what could be done in the wider Hirst area. This would also bring the Coulson Park school site, which had been empty for a number of years, into use for decanting. A lot of work had already gone into the masterplan by officers, but this was very much the early part of the journey. Two new staff would be appointed and these officers would work closely with tenants, residents and property owners. The work was intended to dovetail with the work already going on in the town centre, and on the college and new station for the Northumberland Line.

Councillor Horncastle set the background to the development of the Hirst area which had been created originally to house the miners and their families at nearby collieries. However, with the decline of the industry, the area was now classed as deprived with longstanding problems of unemployment,

empty houses, absent landlords, lack of investment, anti social behaviour, energy and insulation problems. This was the biggest project he had seen the Council undertake and was why it would take 15 years to complete. Many partner organisations would be involved, and he assured members that the most important part of this would be engagement with the community.

Councillor Jones commented that this was a very exciting and ambitious project. Good housing and healthy neighbourhoods had been identified as the building blocks of a healthy life. This project would make a huge difference to residents and she fully supported the “do maximum” option.

Councillor Wearmouth agreed that community engagement was the most important part of the plan and he had already begun to get emails on the topic. If anyone had any questions at this early stage, he encouraged them to get in contact.

The Leader endorsed the comments made and expressed thanks to officers, Advance Northumberland and Bernicia for their contributions so far.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Cabinet note the attached Executive Summary of the Hirst Draft Masterplan and outline options for the long-term regeneration of the area;
- (b) Cabinet support the aspiration to work towards the ‘Do Maximum’ option, as set out in section 6.1 of this report, during the ongoing development process;
- (c) Cabinet approve the establishment of a ‘Hirst Partnership Board’, to be Chaired by the Director of Housing & Planning and to comprise stakeholders, partners, and Senior Officers from Northumberland County Council (NCC);
- (d) Cabinet approve the recruitment to two collaborative Hirst regeneration posts, to be funded equally by key stakeholders NCC Housing, Advance Northumberland, and Bernicia for three years. The posts will be hosted by the Strategic Housing function within the NCC Housing Service. NCC element will be funded through Housing Reserves; and
- (e) Cabinet note that communications on the Hirst Masterplan will be integrated into the overall communications strategy for the town as linked to the Ashington Town Board.

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

Summary of New Capital Proposals considered by Officer Capital Strategy Group

The report summarised proposed amendments to the Capital Programme considered by the Capital Strategy Group.

93.1 Berwick Culture and Creative Zone

Councillor Watson introduced the report and explained to members what was meant by the creation of a culture and creative zone. He also referenced the other funding which had gone into the town in the development of the new

sports centre. This was already seeing benefits as the number of children learning to swim had doubled in the last year.

RESOLVED that

- a) Cabinet accept capital grant funding of £0.330 million for the Berwick Culture and Creative Zone (CCZ) and approve the amendment to the Capital Programme to include the capital grant funding in 2024-25;
- b) Cabinet note the reallocation of grant funding from revenue to capital of £0.110 million and approve the amendment to the Capital Programme to include the capital grant funding in 2025-26; and
- c) Cabinet approve the amendment to the Capital Programme to reprofile £0.100 for the CCZ project from 2024-25 to 2025-26.

93.2 Northumberland Playzones

Councillor Watson presented the report. There were sixteen sites planned across the County, mostly funded from external sources. Work was just about to start on the first two sites at Alnwick and Amble and he was aware that some members had contributed member small schemes funding in their areas, which was welcomed.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Cabinet note the 75% grant contribution of £1.396 million from the Football Foundation for the 6 sites within Portfolio 1 and approve the amendment to the capital programme to include the grant funding in 2024-25;
- (b) Cabinet note the Section 106 funding of £0.284 million and approve the amendment to the Capital Programme to include the funding in 2024-25;
- (c) Cabinet note the other external funding of £0.050 million detailed in the report and approve the amendment to the Capital Programme to including the funding in 2024-25;
- (d) Cabinet note the £0.020 million contribution from Cllr Stewart and Cllr Scott and approve the amendment to the Capital Programme to reallocate £0.020 million from the Member's Local Improvement Schemes budget to the Northumberland Playzones Project in 2024-25; and
- (e) Cabinet approve the proposed spend of £0.111 million which will be funded using the existing Northumberland Playzones project in the Capital Programme, which has a current budget of £0.300 million in 2024-25.

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

Energy Central Campus Phase 1 – Technical Training Kit: Outline Business Case

In accordance with the Energising Blyth Programme - Local Assurance Framework, the report sought approval of the Outline Business Case (OBC) for the Energy Central Campus Phase 1 – Technical Training Kit which is part of development and delivery of the £20.71m Levelling Up Deep Dive (LUDD) funding awarded to Blyth earlier this year.

The report was presented by Councillor Ploszaj. He detailed the key points of the report and urged members to support the recommendations so the facility could be ready to open in September of this year.

Councillor Renner Thompson welcomed this next phase of a fantastic project. For the young people of Blyth and the surrounding area it would be transformational. It was investment like this that would keep young people in their home towns. The green industry sector had a great future in this area and it was therefore important to develop the skills locally for that industry.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Cabinet approve the Outline Business Case for the Energy Central Campus Phase 1 – Technical Training Kit to enable progression to Full Business Case;
- (b) Authority be delegated, in accordance with the Local Assurance Framework, to the Council's s151 Officer following consideration of the recommendation of the Energising Blyth Programme Board to approve the Full Business Case;
- (c) Authority be delegated to the Council's s151 Officer to enter into a Grant Funding Agreement between the Northumberland County Council as the fund Accountable Body and Energy Central Campus Ltd; and
- (d) Authority be delegated to the Executive Director of Place and Regeneration to enter into any contracts relating to the project up to the value of £1.45m, subject to confirmation of associated funding being in place and the appropriate procurement processes being followed.

95. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR LOOKING AFTER OUR ENVIRONMENT

Housing Regeneration Report – Stock Rationalisation

The report sought Cabinet approval:

- To place on hold lettings for empty homes and any homes that become empty in the addresses listed within this report (Appendix 1A);
- To give priority status for re-housing to all customers who currently reside in any of the addresses detailed in this report;
- To approve the award of Home loss & Disturbance payments for any customers relocating from the properties detailed in this report;
- To authorise the progression of any Compulsory Purchase Order process for adjacent properties and Buy backs for any leaseholders if required for the redevelopment proposal;
- To approve the demolition of low demand stock in Blyth detailed in this report.

The report was introduced by Councillor Horncastle. The properties which were proposed for demolition were in very low demand and in poor condition. There were problems with anti social behaviour as the properties were

empty, which was leading to costly repairs having to be done by the Housing Team. The existing tenants would be prioritised for re-housing and the empty sites would be available for modern, affordable and fit for purpose new properties.

He advised that an amendment was needed to recommendation 4, so that the delegation was to the Executive Director for Place and Regeneration, and he proposed the recommendations, as amended. These were seconded by Councillor Stewart.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Cabinet approve placing lettings on hold within these low demand blocks;
- (b) Cabinet approve the prioritisation of customers for rehousing; the issuing of Homeloss and disturbance payments as appropriate;
- (c) Cabinet approve the removal of the existing void properties from the Housing Revenue Account rent roll;
- (d) Authority be delegated to the Executive Director for Place and Regeneration to commence negotiations to acquire the two residential leasehold properties and develop a suitable compensation package. Should negotiations not be successful, to compulsorily acquire the properties using compulsory purchase powers as a last resort;
- (e) Cabinet approve Compulsory Purchase Order process for adjacent properties if required; and
- (f) Cabinet approve the demolition of low demand stock in Blyth as detailed in the report.

96. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR INSPIRING YOUNG PEOPLE

Outcome of the Tenders for the Coquet Partnership

The report updated Cabinet on the outcomes of the tender process for the construction of extension to the feeder primary schools in Amble and also the refurbishment of South Avenue site for the relocation of Amble First Schools and the creation of a New Special School Barndale by the Sea. The report also sought approval to award the contracts.

The report was presented by Councillor Renner Thompson.

Councillor Watson very much welcomed the report. These developments had been a long time in the making and he very much looked forward to seeing them completed. He hoped that the new school would become the centre of the community.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Cabinet note the outcomes of the tender process and approve the delegation to award the contract to Robertsons Construction for the refurbishment works on the South Avenue Site and to Portakabin for the extensions required at the feeder first schools, to the Executive Director for Children, Young People and Education; and
- (b) Cabinet note that, in order to complete the works within the implementation timescales approved by Cabinet on 17th November 2022, a Letter of Intent

was issued for works up to a capped value of £989,194.87 prior to the final award of contract. This was undertaken to prevent any increase in cost or delays in programme until the award of contract is complete in April 2024.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....