

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

At a remote meeting of the **Northumberland County Council** held on Wednesday 24 February 2021 at 3.00 pm.

PRESENT

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

MEMBERS

Armstrong, E.	Kennedy, D.
Bawn, D.	Lang, J.A.
Beynon, J.	Lawrie, R.
Bowman, L.	Murray, A.H.
Bridgett, S.C.	Nisbet, K.
Campbell, D.	Oliver, N.
Cartie, E.	Parry, K.
Castle, G.	Pattison, W.
Cessford, T.	Quinn, K.
Clark, T.	Reid, J.
Crosby, B.	Renner-Thompson, G.
Dale, P.A.M.	Richards, M.E.
Daley, W.	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.
Gallacher, B.	Simpson, E.
Gibson, R.	Stewart, G.
Gobin, J.J.	Stow, K.
Grimshaw, L.	Swinburn, M.
Hepple, A.	Swithenbank, I.C.F.
Hill, G.	Thorne, T.N.
Homer, C.R.	Towns, D.
Horncastle, C.W.	Wallace, R.
Hutchinson, J.I. (part)	Watson, J.G.
Jackson, P.A.	Wearmouth, R.W.
Jones, V.	Webb, G.

OFFICERS

Angus, K.	Executive Director for HR/OD and Deputy Chief Executive
Elwood, C.	Consultant, SOLACE
Hadfield, K.	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
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

120. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors J.G. Davey, S. Davey, D. Ledger and M. Purvis.

121. MINUTES

Councillor Hill referred to pages 10 and 11 and her point about the Directors of Advance not declaring an interest and the minute which read "Councillor Wearmouth advised that his was a standing declaration for directors of Advance which was well known". She felt caution needed to be used with the term "advised" as it implied a value judgement, and also, there was an inconsistency because Directors of Advance had previously declared an interest, including at the previous Cabinet meeting. She felt people needed to be consistent in their declarations.

Councillor Wearmouth responded that he had been clear at the previous Council meeting, and at Cabinet.

Councillor Grimshaw referred to the final paragraph on page 17 and advised that she had not received the breakdown of the refurbishment costs promised by Councillor Oliver. She would also have appreciated seeing the result of the survey on the budget before today's meeting. Councillor Oliver apologised and promised a breakdown would be sent to all members in the next couple of days. He added that the survey results had gone out with the agenda papers over a week ago.

Councillor Dickinson referred to page 19 and the information he had requested on Adoption North East which had still not been received. Councillor Renner Thompson agreed to get this information to him.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of County Council held on 6 January 2021, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record, signed by the Business Chair and sealed with the Common Seal of the Council.

122. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Councillor Hill declared an interest in respect of the capital programme (item 11(1) on the agenda which referenced Berwick Port) as a Berwick Harbour Commissioner.

Councillor Dungworth declared an interest in the Seaton Valley Federation schools where she was Chair of Governors.

Councillor Dickinson declared that he worked for Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust and there were a number of loan arrangements in the budget report which related to them.

Councillor Hill commented that Councillor Oliver had declared an interest at a Scrutiny Committee when there had been a debt write off report. In view of the debt write off references within the budget report and the need to be careful regarding the legality of the budget, she queried whether Councillor Oliver had a declaration to make. Councillor Oliver replied that there were no debt write offs within the budget that he had an interest in, that he was aware of.

Councillor Hill asked for a legal opinion as to whether there were any concerns about Councillor Oliver presenting the budget given a previous declaration. The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that there would only be any issue for Councillor Oliver if he had an interest in the write offs.

123. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Business Chair reported to members on the recent death of former County Councillor Mick Scullion who had passed away on 31 January 2021. He had represented the Bothal Electoral Division from 1997 until 2005. Condolences were expressed.

He then advised that he was going to make a change to the running order of the agenda to allow consideration of the Budget and MTFP now. Councillor Dungworth wished to have it recorded that she was unhappy with the change in running order. This frustrated the ability of back bench members to be fully involved in the business of the Council by having their questions answered and was not a satisfactory way to conduct business.

124. BUDGET CONSULTATION 2021-22, BUDGET 2021-22 AND MTFP 2021-24 AND COUNCIL TAX 2021-22

These items on the agenda were dealt with as one.

Budget Consultation 2021-22

The report provided a summary result of the budget consultation undertaken between 10th December 2020 and 21st January 2021. The budget consultation helped to inform the Council's Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan.

Budget 2021-22 and MTFP 2021-24

The report provided the Revenue Budget for 2021-22 and Revenue Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2021-24 and the Capital Budget for 2021-22 and Capital MTFP to 2021-24, following the Government's Spending Round Announcement 2020 (SR 2020), on 25 November 2020, and the publication of the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement on 17 December 2020.

Addendum to the Budget 2021-22 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2021-24 Report

The report updated members with matters relating to the Budget 2021-22 which had arisen following publication of the report which was presented to an all member Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 8 February 2021 and Cabinet on 9 February 2021.

Council Tax 2021-22

The report provided Council Members with the financial information to enable the Council to calculate and set the Council Tax for 2021-22.

The Leader introduced these matters and referred to the high quality of staff who delivered the Council's services, adding that there would be no compulsory redundancies. Consultation had been much wider than in previous years and he thanked those who had participated in it. He detailed the key findings from the consultation and the main points of the Administration's achievements, priorities and investments.

Councillor Oliver commented that this was very positive and equitable budget with investment in all parts of the County. He thanked everyone who had been involved in putting the budget together. Regarding efficiencies, the aim was to improve front line services by finding more modern ways of doing things. Council Tax support would be doubled for those who needed it and one of the Administration's priorities was to rebuild the economy post Covid through jobs and investment. He recommended the budget to members.

A number of comments were made including the following:-

- Councillor Dungworth commented this was an election year budget with lots of empty promises that would not be delivered. Half of the Administration's achievements had begun under the previous Administration and they had not delivered for schools in Seaton Valley, Amble and Berwick, they had not delivered regeneration for Bedlington and Ashington, and they had not significantly changed people's lives in the poorest communities in Northumberland. The vast majority of people in the County had seen no change. In the last ten years of Conservative Government there had been a £47.88m reduction in the Council's funding. The budget made no reference to outstanding liabilities currently facing the Council through Advance Northumberland and money spent on this meant less to spend on residents. She urged the Administration to properly start delivering for those communities that needed it.
- Councillor Dickinson asked whether the Leader or Councillor Oliver had just presented the budget. He agreed this was an election budget that would level £30m worth of cuts after it. It let communities down and would not deliver what it said. He also did not agree with the change in agenda order.
- Councillor Hill commented that some proposals in the budget were good, but she was very disappointed in what was happening with the investment in Berwick schools, which demonstrated the Administration's change in priorities and failure in leadership. Two years ago, £15m had been put into the budget to set the ball rolling but since then nothing had happened. This approach was likely to lead to complete failure of the project and Covid could not be blamed for the delays. The ambition had been capped. She had challenged the delays and the limitations to the project and had cross party support for that, but she did not know how to answer parents when they asked her what was happening. The situation was not acceptable and she proposed an amendment in the Capital Programme (pg 92) Berwick Partnership Schools to (1) increase the figure from 2021-22 from £0 to £250,000 to be taken from the contingency to support grant funded projects; and (2) to increase the additional budget commitment (pg 38) from £30.403m to £33.403m to ensure that the business case and other work could commence straight away and reverse the delays to the project. It increased the overall budget commitment from £19.74m to £40m. This was seconded by Councillor Dungworth.
- Councillor Renner Thompson replied that everyone agreed on spending money on the Berwick Partnership and that it needed to brought forward in as timely a way as possible. Officers had been working on this for some time, but it would not be possible to have a top down reorganisation of a partnership without taking the schools along. He was in discussion with the school and there were plans for consultation to begin in March, and if agreement could be reached then the funding would be brought forward. However, officers could not prepare the budget for it until the plan had been agreed by all parties. The £5m in the budget would build a high school. He wanted an academy on the site, but this had to be agreed.

- Councillor Oliver disagreed that the Administration had not delivered on its promises and detailed the priorities which had been delivered.
- Councillor Jackson commented that he was proud of the investment in schools over the last four years totalling £101.2m which had had a huge impact on the school estate. There had to be a clear plan for investment which was supported by the local community. This consensus of opinion had not been agreed in the Berwick area and it was irresponsible to pluck a figure of £40m out of the air.
- Councillor Bowman supported the amendment and expressed concern that £21m had been taken out of the budget for schools in Seaton Valley previously and had been again. Nothing had been delivered.
- Councillor Renner Thompson did not agree; the budget had been increased to £31.6m at the request of the Governing Body of the High School and work would begin in April 2022. The narrative that nothing was being delivered was just not true. There had been some slippage on the larger projects due to Covid.
- Councillor Dungworth proposed an amendment to Councillor Hill's amendment, with her permission, to bring forward the schools spending in Amble and Seaton Valley, and that a working group be set up to look at how the next two years projects could be brought forward into one year and started straight away. She was aware of why these projects had been pulled in the past and they had not been officer decisions, they had been political ones. Her Group fully supported the projects in Berwick, Seaton Valley and Amble, but they had been delayed numerous times.
- Councillor Clark supported the amendment because this investment was vitally needed in schools.
- Councillor Daley agreed that there had been a clear focus on attainment and investment from the Administration which had been achieved. He had a lot of sympathy with Councillors Hill's and Dungworth's comments and agreed that investment was very badly needed. Bringing £250,000 forward to produce a business case did not need an amendment. There was already an Education Improvement Board which could look at the assessment of capital bids going forward. However, there was a massive revenue implication for everyone million pounds of capital and whilst everyone wanted investment, he was concerned about trying to move significant amounts of money around at a budget meeting without proper assessment of the implications. He did agree with the sentiments expressed about the delivery of investment in Berwick.
- Councillor Dickinson commented that having Amble and Seaton Valley included in the amendment would show some commitment to the communities involved. The projects were viable as they had been in previous budgets and the pre-work had been done. It was eight years since the first business case had been put forward.
- Councillor Watson commented that there was money already in the budget for the consultation on Amble and did not need to be brought forward. The Headteacher of the school had said that the project had been pushed back because of Covid, and until there was an agreed plan then nothing could be built.

- Councillor Roughead did not feel that £40m was ambitious enough. He proposed a further amendment that as part of the £40m for Berwick, there would be engagement with higher education providers to make sure that there was adequate provision for the wider age group. He supported the amendment subject to that inclusion.
- Councillor Hill advised members that her amendment would not affect the revenue position or prudential indicators and had checked this with officers. She was not proposing bringing any funding forward, it was to increase the budget in 21-22 from £0 to £250,000, funded from the contingency from grant funded projects. Also, to increase additional budget commitment detailed on pg 38 from £13.403m to £33.403m which had been confirmed as being feasible without upsetting the budget. The idea of driving this forward was to demonstrate some commitment to a more ambitious project. She supported Councillor Dungworth's proposal, but there was no specific financial data attached to it. She repeated her amendment as detailed above, adding to it a commitment that the other schools which had been delayed should be considered as a matter of urgency
- Councillor Dungworth confirmed that the business cases for Amble and Seaton Valley were already completed and asked that the proposal that these be progressed urgently be included in Councillor Hill's amendment, which Councillor Hill confirmed was acceptable.
- Councillor Oliver sought clarification on whether Councillor Dungworth's proposal would change anything in the first three years of the budget or whether a commitment was just being made to move things along as quickly as possible. Regarding the additional £20m which Councillor Hill was proposing, he sought clarity that this was outside the three year term of the MTFP, as it would be irresponsible to agree to that at this stage. Councillor Hill replied that the money was there now to start the business case, and then the commitment was there to a realistic figure without affecting the prudential indicators and the revenue position.
- The S151 Officer advised members that Councillor Hill's substitution of one capital item for another would not have any impact on the overall quantum. Realigning profile spend or introducing additional capital spend would affect the revenue position and would require a recalculation of savings, prudential indicators and would affect the gross expenditure calculations which fed into the council tax assumptions. Any changes beyond the current year would require consideration by CSG, Cabinet and Council, if they were beyond the delegations to Cabinet.
- In view of the financial advice received, Councillor Dungworth withdrew her amendment to the amendment. The S151 Officer's advice had clarified that the money was not there this year to start doing anything.
- Councillor Hill then re-read her amendment. This would ensure that work on the business case could commence straight away and reverse the delay to the project. It would also increase the overall budget commitment from £19.74m to £40m. This had been seconded by Councillor Dungworth.

A named vote took place and the votes were cast as follows:-

FOR:46 as follows;

Armstrong, E.A.	Jackson, P.A.
Bawn, D.L.	Kennedy, D.
Bowman, L.	Lang, J.A.
Bridgett, S.C.	Lawrie, R.
Campbell, D.	Murray, A.H.
Cartie, E.	Nisbet, K.
Castle, G.	Parry, K.
Clark, T.	Pattison, W.
Crosby, B.	Quinn, K.R.
Dale, P.A.M.	Renner Thompson, G.
Daley, W.	Richards, M.E.
Dickinson, S.	Robinson, M.
Dunbar, C.	Roughead, G.
Dungworth, S.	Seymour, C.
Dunn, L.	Sharp, A.
Foster, J.	Simpson, E.
Gallacher, B.	Stow, K.
Gobin, J.J.	Swinburn, M.D.
Grimshaw, L.	Swithenbank, I.C.F.
Hepple, A.	Thorne, T.N.
Hill, G.	Towns, D.J.
Homer, C.R.	Wallace, R.
Horncastle, C.W.	Webb, G.

AGAINST: 6 as follows;

Beynon, J.	Jones, V.
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Cessford, T.	Oliver, N.
Dodd, R.R.	Watson, J.G.

ABSTENTIONS:7 as follows;

Flux, B.	Sanderson, H.G.H.
Gibson, R.	Stewart, G.
Reid, J.	Wearmouth, R.
Riddle, J.R.	

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that the amendment be accepted.

The debate on the budget continued and included the following:-

- Councillor Bridgett commented that in his area in the last four years the Administration had promised nothing and delivered nothing, and the proposed budget delivered nothing but council tax rises. He informed members that there were homes in his division that were using diesel generators to power their homes and that was a huge shame and did nothing for the environment. His division was not the only one. He called on the Council to work with partner agencies to provide mains services for all residents. He asked Councillor Oliver if account had been taken in the MTFP of potential claims against the Council and would the position be defended if it reached a judicial process. Councillor Oliver confirmed this was the case.
- Councillor Dale commented that she had concerns about recovery from Covid and that the Administration had not kept within the finance and contract rules in its relationships with corporate bodies in bringing forward capital spend. RAP had not met for a long time and this was concerning as it was part of finance and contract rules. Another S151 Officer was about to be appointed which would make the 6th appointment since 2017. She had concerns also about the amount spent on capital and not enough being spent on revenue.
- Councillor Reid commented that the proposed council tax rise was actually the same as everywhere else in the region, but the adult social care element had not been factored in. A small amount of people were carrying the burden for adult social care and this was not fair. It was a national problem and should be dealt with accordingly. Regarding the savings, it was all about reviews. These were not real savings. He also raised concerns about income from planning, which were explained by Councillor Riddle.
- Councillor Jackson commented that Finance staff should be congratulated for managing the Covid crisis. Regarding previous comments made, he

felt the public should have high expectations. The reality was that budgets were going up and he urged opposition members to stop talking the Council down. He referred to a number of other achievements the Administration had secured in the last four years.

- Councillor Dickinson commented that opposition members were very conscious of the fantastic work done by staff during Covid, despite the dreadful treatment they had suffered. He had raised issues with various aspects of the budget previously and he detailed these. He strongly denied that Opposition members rubbished the County or its staff.
- Councillor Grimshaw asked whether it was correct that not fit for purpose IT equipment was being sold back to schools at £50 a time, without charging trolleys or appropriate licensing.
- Councillor Hill referred to the budget line about further loans to Advance Northumberland and asked what reassurance there was around drawing down any further loans to them.
- Councillor Daley referred to special education needs and was proud of the work he had done in 2017 to get the team and offer in this area right. Investment had been put in to get the educational health care plans right. Great work had also been done on building children's homes.
- Councillor Dungworth commented that the budget was simply a list of reviews which enabled the Administration to put a figure into the budget without a commitment to actual savings and transferred responsibility to the next Administration. The reality was that residents would be paying more and getting less and there was less support for local government despite the role it had played in the recent pandemic. She also stressed that no-one in the Labour Group talked staff down.
- Councillor Dunn felt that council tax rises were not long term solutions to pressures faced by Councils, particularly adult social care, which was in desperate need of reform. These increases were coming at a time when families could least afford it. She appreciated the remedial work being done at Lynemouth, but this would not have an immediate betterment for her residents. Regarding the additional income from Planning, she referred to the 70 enforcement orders which had been issued on Lynemouth residents and felt this was the Council simply cashing in. There had not been a lot of investment in south east Northumberland, or her ward.
- Councillor Gallacher asked what the Administration had done for Ashington. Promises had been made and they had all been broken and something had to be done. The Town deal issue had not got anywhere.

Councillor Oliver then recommended the budget to Council, and the Deputy Monitoring Officer reminded members of Councillor Hill's amendment which had already been agreed and which affected recommendations 37, 38 and 42. Councillor Dickinson sought clarification about who had moved and seconded the budget and the Deputy Monitoring Officer confirmed that it had been the Leader and Councillor Oliver respectively.

Before members voted on the substantive motion, the Deputy Monitoring Officer advised members of the effect of the amendment they had agreed on the

report's recommendations. This added wording to recommendations 37, 38 and 42 as follows:-

37. Approve the Capital Strategy 2021-22 to 2023-24 contained within Appendix 12, with the following amendments to reflect the agreed motion in relation to Berwick Partnership Schools:

- *Update the capital expenditure in the table on pg 89 in Appendix 12*
- *Finance row from £37.264m to £37.014m in 2021-22*
- *Schools row from £24.566m to £24.816m in 2021-22*

38. Approve the revised Capital Programme as detailed within Appendix 13; and the projects highlighted within the main body of the report which will complete after 2023-24, with the following amendments to reflect the agreed motion in relation to Berwick Partnership Schools:

- *Increase the budget for 2021-22 for the project Berwick Partnership Schools in Appendix 13 on page 92 by £0.250m from £0 to £0.250m*
- *Reduce the budget for 2021-22 for contingency to support grant funded projects in Appendix 13 on pg 91 by £0.250m from £1.405m to £1.155m*
- *To increase the gross budget figure for Berwick Partnership Schools for 2024-25 to 2025-26 on pg 34 point 134 by £20m from £13.403m to £33.403m*

42. Approve the Prudential Indicators based on the proposed Capital Programme detailed within Appendix 14 with the following amendments to reflect the agreed motion in relation to Berwick Partnership Schools:

- *Update the capital expenditure in the table on pg 95 in Appendix 14 in respect of Finance row from £37.264m to £37.014m in 2021-22*
- *In respect of Schools row from £24.566m to £24.16m.*

On the substantive motion being put to the vote the votes were cast as follows:-

FOR: 37 as follows:-

Armstrong, E.	Oliver, N.
Bawn, D.L.	Pattison, W.
Beynon, J.A.	Quinn, K.
Castle, G.	Renner Thompson, G.
Cessford, T.	Riddle, J.R.
Crosby, B.	Robinson, M.
Daley, W.	Roughead, G.
Dodd, R.R.	Sanderson, H.G.H.

Dunbar, C.	Seymour, C.
Flux, B.	Sharp, A.
Gibson, R.	Stewart, G.
Hill, G.	Stow, K.
Homer, C.R.	Swinburn, M.D.
Horncastle, C.W.	Thorne, T.N.
Jackson, P.A.	Towns, D
Jones, V	Wallace, R.
Kennedy, D.	Watson, J.G.
Lawrie, R.	Wearmouth, R
Murray, A.H.	

AGAINST: 0

ABSTENTIONS: 21 as follows;

Bowman, L.	Gobin, J.J.
Bridgett, S.C.	Grimshaw, L.
Campbell, D.	Hepple, A.
Cartie, E.	Lang, J.
Clark, T.S.	Nisbet, K.
Dale, P.A.M.	Parry, K.
Dickinson, S.	Reid, J.
Dungworth, S.	Simpson, E.
Dunn, L.	Swithenbank, I.C.F.
Foster, J.	Webb, G.
Gallacher, B.	

The following resolutions were therefore agreed:

124.1 Budget Consultation 2021-22

RESOLVED that the summary results of the budget consultation undertaken between 10th December 2020 and 21st January 2021 be noted.

124.2 Budget 2021-22 and MTFP 2021-24

RESOLVED that:-

1. Council note that the figures contained within the Budget 2021-22 within Appendix 1 are based on the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement of 17 December 2020. Members noted the Revenue Support Grant of £10.508 million in each year of the MTFP, contained within Appendix 1.
2. Council approve the revenue budget for 2021-22 including, the budget balancing targets totalling £8.172 million contained within Appendix 1.
3. Council note the Revenue MTFP covering the period 2021-24 detailed within Appendix 1 and the requirement to deliver budget balancing measures in 2022-23 of £10.542 million and 2023-24 of £12.527 million.
4. Council note the estimated retained Business Rates and the Top-Up grant funding to be received by the Council for 2021-22 of £82.669 million and £173.556 million over the remaining period of the MTFP.
5. Council note the estimated deficit on Collection Fund Business Rates balances of £21.427 million.
6. Council note the estimated receipt of Rural Services Delivery Grant of £2.456 million for 2021-22 and the indicative allocation of £2.456 million for both 2022-23 and 2023-24.
7. Council note the estimated receipt of the New Homes Bonus of £4.303 million for 2021-22 and the indicative allocation of £1.337 million for 2022-23.
8. Council note the total estimated receipt of Improved Better Care Fund grant (including Winter Pressure funding) of £12.128 million for 2021-22 and the indicative allocations of £12.128 million for both 2022-23 and 2023-24.
9. Council note the receipt of Social Care funding of £9.534 million for 2021-22 and the indicative allocations of £9.534 million for both 2022-23 and 2023-24.
10. Council note the indicative receipt of non-recurrent Covid-19 Support Grant Funding of £13.087 million in 2021-22 and note the intended use of the grant. This comprises of:
 - £8.509 million Covid-19 Support Grant, and
 - £4.578 million Local Council Tax Support Grant.
11. Council note the receipt of non-recurrent Lower Tier Services Grant of £0.429 million in 2021-22.
12. Council approve a 1.99% increase in Council Tax for 2021-22, 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 2.00%.

13. Council note that the MTFP 2021-24 includes a 1.99% annual increase in Council Tax for 2022-23 and 2023-24, and, that an estimate of annual tax base growth has been included.
14. Council note the non-collection rate for Council Tax purposes has been increased to 1.00% for 2021-22 (0.70% 2020-21).
15. Council note the estimated deficit on the Collection Fund Council Tax balance of £2.376 million which will be recovered over the three years of the plan.
16. Council approve a 1.75% increase in Council Tax for 2021-22 for use on Adult Social Care services; raising an additional £3.305 million to support the Budget 2021-22.
17. Council approve the remainder of the 3%, an increase of 1.25% in Council Tax to be introduced in 2022-23 for use on Adult Social Care services; raising an additional £2.616 million to support the Budget 2022-23.
18. Council note that the MTFP assumes no future increases in council tax for use on Adult Social Care services beyond 2022-23.
19. Council note the schedule of Service Specific grants of £247.195 million contained within Appendix 2.
20. Council approve the recurrent growth and pressures of £8.519 million and the additional revenue costs associated with the capital programme of £2.805 million for 2021-22; and, note the growth and pressures of £1.708 million in 2022-23 and £1.654 million in 2023-24, and the additional revenue costs associated with the capital programme of £4.058 million in 2022-23 and £6.366 million in 2023-24, included within Appendices 1, 3 and 4.
21. Council approve the non-recurrent pressures of £1.325 million for 2021-22 and note the non-recurrent pressures of £0.565 million for 2022-23 included within Appendix 5.
22. Council approve the use of the Strategic Management Reserve of £4.862 million 2021-22, £2.205 million 2022-23, and £1.640 million 2023-24, as follows:
 - non-recurrent pressures of £1.325 million for 2021-22, and £0.565 million in 2022-23 (as detailed within Appendix 5),
 - the Active Northumberland Management fee of up to £1.000 million per annum for the three years of the plan,
 - delayed receipt of investment income of £1.025 million in 2021-22 and note that £0.256 million is forecast to be repaid into the reserve in 2022-23 and 2023-24 in this respect, and
 - Collection fund Deficit (not subject to Government Grant relief):
 - Business Rates; £0.244 million in 2021-22, and £0.342 million in each year, 2022-23 and 2023-24; and,
 - Council Tax; £1.268 million in 2021-22, and £0.554 million in each year, 2022-23 and 2023-24.
23. Council approve the use of the Invest to Save Reserve to fund the costs of the Improvement and Innovation Team of £1.196 million per annum for the three years of the plan.

24. Council approve the use of the Collection Fund Smoothing reserve of £20.499 million in 2021-22, to part fund the 2020-21 forecast deficit of the Business Rates aspect of the Collection Fund.
25. Council approve the Inflation Schedule for 2021-22 totalling £10.974 million detailed in Appendix 6.
26. Council approve the identified budget balancing measures contained in Appendix 7 of £8.172 million for 2021-22.
27. Council note the Corporate Equality Impact Assessment at Appendix 8.
28. Council note the 2021-22 budgets by service area detailed in Appendix 9.
29. Council note the Summary of the Reserves and Provisions contained within Appendix 10.
30. Council approve the contribution to reserves of £8.509 million in 2021-22 for Covid- 19 grant funding, to be used in relation to pressures caused by the Covid-19 pandemic as they occur. It is also recommended that authority to utilise this grant is delegated to the Section 151 Officer in conjunction with the Portfolio holder for Corporate Services.
31. Council approve the transfer to the General Fund Reserve of £0.540 million in 2021- 22.
32. Council note the receipt of Dedicated Schools Grant of £146.181 million in 2021-22; and note the revised allocation of £139.315 million for 2020-21. This is following the conversion of six schools to academy status during 2020-21.
33. Council agree the Housing Revenue Account 2021-22 budget as detailed within Appendix 11, which will reduce the balance on the HRA reserve from £28.264 million at 31 March 2020, to £19.023 million at 31 March 2022; and note the indicative budgets to 2023-24 which will reduce the balance on the HRA reserve to £16.180 million. This will fund, alongside additional borrowing and grant funding, a Housing Investment Programme over the period to 2023-24 of £45.980 million of new investment in council housing.
34. Council note that from 1 April 2021 in line with the Rent Standard for rent setting for Council tenants, the budget detailed in Appendix 11 assumes that rents and service charges will rise by the Consumer Price Index of 0.50% plus 1.00% for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.
35. Council approve the increase of 1.50% for Housing rents from 1 April 2021.
36. Council note the indicative 30-year Housing Revenue Account business plan as detailed within Appendix 11.
37. Council approve the Capital Strategy 2021-22 to 2023-24 contained within Appendix 12, amended as follows:
 - *Update the capital expenditure in the table on pg 89 in Appendix 12*
 - *Finance row from £37.264m to £37.014m in 2021-22*
 - *Schools row from £24.566m to £24.816m in 2021-22*
38. Council approve the revised Capital Programme as detailed within Appendix 13; and, the projects highlighted within the main body of the report which will complete after 2023-24, amended as follows:
 - *Increase the budget for 2021-22 for the project Berwick Partnership Schools in Appendix 13 on page 92 by £0.250m from £0 to £0.250m*

- *Reduce the budget for 2021-22 for contingency to support grant funded projects in Appendix 13 on pg 91 by £0.250m from £1.405m to £1.155m*
 - *To increase the gross budget figure for Berwick Partnership Schools for 2024-25 to 2025-26 on pg 34 point 134 by £20m from £13.403m to £33.403m*
39. Council approve the delegation of the detail of the final Local Transport Programme, any Pothole and Challenge Fund Grant received and any subsequent in year amendments to the Interim Executive Director Local Services and the Leader of the Council.
40. Council approve the delegation of the detail of the capital allocation for highway maintenance investment in U and C roads and footways to the Interim Executive Director of Local Services and the Leader of the Council.
41. Council agree delegation to Cabinet to approve individual projects which propose to utilise the flexibilities of capital receipts.
42. Council approve the Prudential Indicators based on the proposed Capital Programme detailed within Appendix 14 amended as follows:
- *Update the capital expenditure in the table on pg 95 in Appendix 14 in respect of Finance row from £37.264m to £37.014m in 2021-22*
 - *In respect of Schools row from £24.566m to £24.16m.*
43. Council approve the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy detailed in Appendix 15.
44. Council approve the proposed Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2021-22 detailed in Appendix 16.
45. Council approve the Revenues and Benefits Policies for 2021-22 contained within Appendix 17 and note the proposed changes to the Council Tax Discounts, Corporate Debt, Local Welfare Assistance and Rate Relief policies.
46. Council approve the Pay Policy Statement for 2021-22 at Appendix 19 and note the Equality Impact Assessment.
47. Council approve a delegation to amend the Budget 2021-22 and MTFP in light of any changes as a result of the final Local Government Finance Settlement to the Council's Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Portfolio holder for Corporate Services

124.3 Addendum to the Budget 2021-22 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2021-24 Report

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Council note that the Final Local Government Finance Settlement 2021-22 has now been received and there are no changes required to be made to the figures shown in the 2021-22 Budget;
- (b) Council note the amendments to the report outlined in Section 4.
- (c) Council note that all Town and Parish Council Precept demands have been received.

124.4 Council Tax 2021-22

1. Council resolves:

- (a) That the Council Tax Requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2021-22 (excluding parish precepts) is £195,025,410.
- (b) That the following amounts be calculated for 2021-22 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:
£837,102,251.
 - 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:
£632,685,484.
 - 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): £204,416,767.
 - 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): £1,911.60.
 - v) Being the aggregate amount of all special items referred to in Section 34 (1) of the Act (total all parish precepts): £9,394,573.
 - 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: £1,823.75.
- (c) That the Council Tax for 2021-22, excluding the Police precept,

will be increased by 3.74% (including the Adult Social Care Precept of 1.75%), equating to a charge per Band D household of £1,823.75 (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 £ : p	Adult Social Care Precept £ : p	Total £ : p
A	1,092.29	123.55	1,215.84
B	1,274.33	144.14	1,418.47
C	1,456.38	164.73	1,621.11
D	1,638.43	185.32	1,823.75
E	2,002.53	226.50	2,229.03
F	2,366.62	267.68	2,634.30
G	2,730.72	308.87	3,039.59
H	3,276.86	370.64	3,647.50

- (d) Under Section 52ZB of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 that the Council's basic amount of Council Tax for 2021-22 is not excessive in accordance with principles approved under Section 52ZC(1) of the Act.

(i.e. the proposed Council Tax increase for 2021-22 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 2021-22 the guideline increase for Northumberland is 5% (including the Adult Social Care Precept).

As the Council is proposing a Council Tax increase of 3.74% (including Adult Social Care and special expenses) for 2021-22 then the above regulations have no impact for 2021-22.

2. Council approves:

- (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 notes:

- (a) The Police and Crime Commissioner has agreed the recommended level of precept of £15,381,664 for 2021-22. This represents an increase of 4.99%, equating to an additional £6.84 on a Band D property; the resulting valuation bands will be as follows:

Valuation Band	Northumbria Police Authority £: p
A	95.89
B	111.88
C	127.86
D	143.84
E	175.80
F	207.77
G	239.73
H	287.68

- (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 £ : p	Adult Social Care Precept £ : p	Northumbria Police Authority £ : p	Total £ : p
A	1,092.29	123.55	95.89	1,311.73
B	1,274.33	144.14	111.88	1,530.35
C	1,456.38	164.73	127.86	1,748.97
D	1,638.43	185.32	143.84	1,967.59

Valuation Band	Northumberland County Council	Adult Social Care Precept £ : p	Northumbria Police Authority £ : p	Total £ : p
E	2,002.53	226.50	175.80	2,404.83
F	2,366.62	267.68	207.77	2,842.07
G	2,730.72	308.87	239.73	3,279.32
H	3,276.86	370.64	287.68	3,935.18

- (c) The total amount of parish precepts requested is £9,391,357 and is detailed in Appendix 1. This represents an increase of £51,140 when compared to 2020-21.
- (d) Special expenses of £3,216 are applied to North Sunderland Parish only in relation to play area inspection and maintenance. This has increased from £3,190 in 2020-21.

4. Council notes:

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

An adjournment was called at 18:16. The meeting reconvened at 18:21

125. CABINET MINUTES

- (1) Tuesday 12 January 2021**
- (2) Tuesday 9 February 2021**

RESOLVED that the minutes of Cabinet be received.

126. COMMITTEE MINUTES

(1) Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC

Councillors Dale, Dungworth and Grimshaw expressed concern about behaviour of the Chair and other members towards the Chief Executive at the meeting, and that this behaviour had begun at the pre-meeting. Members appealed to the Business Chair to get control of the situation as he had mentioned previously that he would.

Councillor Homer commented that some of the remarks made were hearsay and speculation and this did not help the Council's reputation. Any concerns needed to be raised through the proper procedures.

Councillor Beynon commented that he had been very concerned about the behaviour towards the Chair at the meeting, and he would be taking further action on it. Opposition members also needed to observe respect.

Councillor Dickinson commented that this was not the first time there had been issues in this Committee. The footage was on Youtube for all to see so was not speculation. He suggested that a line be drawn under matters and a fresh start made rather than clogging up the formal procedures.

Councillor Webb commented that he had watched the footage and had been appalled. These were Standards Committee issues.

Councillor Bawn advised members that these matters were now subject to formal complaint made by him and would be investigated. The behaviour in the meeting by members had not been acceptable, and had been perpetrated by both sexes.

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.

Councillor Dickinson suggested that the staggered reopening of schools needed to be looked at urgently with officers in terms of the impact on the transport plan.

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

(3) Communities and Place OSC

These were presented by Councillor Reid.

With regard to Minute No 73.1 (Monitoring Arrangements for Active Northumberland) Councillor Dunn asked whether there had been any discussions about the period beyond 2022 and when councillors could expect to receive details of the recovery plan.

Councillor Watson replied that officers and members were looking now at how best to manage the reopening. Some centres were being used as testing stations, but a plan should be available in the next couple of weeks.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Communities and Place OSC be received.

(4) Health and Wellbeing OSC

These were presented by Councillor Beynon.

Councillor Simpson commended the work being done on the vaccination programme.

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

(5) Health and Wellbeing Board

These were presented by Councillor Dodd, who drew members' attention to the mobile testing units across the County.

Councillor Dickinson commented that the third sector testing arrangements were working really well, and the number of volunteers working on the testing programme was excellent.

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

(6) Audit Committee

These were presented by Councillor Hill, who asked members to look particularly at the Advance reports detailed at pg 134 onwards which were of wider importance.

Councillor Dickinson sought confirmation that the governance and legal arrangements were adopted by Cabinet and implemented immediately. Councillor Hill replied that the recommendations had gone to Cabinet but was unsure whether she could report the outcome given that the matter was confidential. The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that if they had been considered in private then they should not be discussed.

With regard to Minute No.83 (Minutes 16 December 2020), Councillor Oliver commented that he had made a declaration at that meeting and asked the Chair for details of who the other members were who had emailed the Chair making declarations, and whether she was one of them.

Councillor Hill responded that Councillor Oliver had made a declaration because of ongoing complaints quite correctly. She had not made a declaration because she had not made a complaint but was aware that others had. There were no others present at the meeting who had fitted that category. Councillor Oliver replied that this was not his recollection but would pick it up with Councillor Hill after the meeting.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Audit Committee be received.

(7) Food Poverty Working Group

These were presented by Councillor Pattison.

Councillor Daley very much welcomed this work and felt there was more to be done. Ensuring people had food was only one part of a wider strategic plan.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Food Poverty Working Group be received.

127. COVID UPDATE

Members received an update from the Director of Public Health.

128. REPORTS OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR: CORPORATE ASSURANCE

(1) Update to Constitution – Fire & Rescue Service & Audit Committee & Communities & Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee

The report sought members' approval to proposed amendments to the Constitution to include additional details of the Fire & Rescue Authority, the role of the Council's Audit Committee and amendments to the terms of reference of the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the amended Articles and Terms of Reference at Appendices A and B to the report be approved and Council note the intention to insert an additional paragraph on the Fire and Rescue Service in the Introduction to the Constitution;
- (b) Council note the intention to delete existing references in Article 8 (Regulatory & Other Committees) and in Part 3 (Committee Terms of Reference)) to the NCC LGPS Local Pension Board and to the FPS Local Pension Board for the reasons set out in paragraphs 6 and 7 of the report; and
- (c) Council approve the amended Terms of Reference for Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee at Appendix C to the report.

(2) Update to Constitution – Access to Information Rules of Procedure and Officer Delegation Scheme

The report sought Council to proposed amendments to the Access to Information Rules of Procedure which sat within Part 5 of the Council's Constitution and to the Officer Delegation Scheme in Part 4 of the Constitution.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Council approve the amended Access to Information Rules of Procedure at Part 5 of the Constitution attached as Appendix A to the report; and
- (b) Council approve the amended Officers Delegation Scheme at Part 4 of the Constitution and attached as Appendix B to the report.

**129. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION,
COMMERCIAL AND ECONOMY**

**Northumberland Line Project: Transport and Works Act Order
Application**

The report sought approval under the provisions of section 239 of the Local Government Act 1972 (which applies in this case by virtue of section 20 of the Transport and Works Act 1992) for the Council to submit an application for The Northumberland Line Order (the Order) to the Secretary of State for Transport under the Transport and Works Act 1992 (the Application) and to approve delegations to the Head of Paid Service to finalise the details of the Application and progress certain matters.

The report was introduced by Councillor Wearmouth. In response to a question regarding funding for the Metro link at Northumberland Park from Councillor Bowman, Councillor Wearmouth advised that that wasn't relevant to the matters which were subject to the report but officers would see what could be done to make it as seamless as possible.

Councillor Dale referred to the risk assessment and the potential cost to the Council should there be a public inquiry. Councillor Wearmouth advised this could be circulated to all members.

Councillor Gallacher welcomed this and asked that local members be kept updated, especially regarding site visits.

Councillor Webb expressed concern that the connection to Northumberland Park Metro had to be secured to make this successful. Councillor Wearmouth agreed that this was a critical link and was covered.

In response to other member comments, Councillor Wearmouth agreed to circulate contacts within the Project Team and that regular presentations to affected LACs would be helpful. There would be free parking at stations, and he noted points made about accessibility and journey times.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Council approve the submission of the Application by the Council to the Secretary of State for Transport for the purposes of section 239 of the Local Government Act 1972;
- (b) Council approve the delegation of powers to the Head of Paid Service to:
 - a. finalise the various documents required for the Application.
 - b. progress negotiations with any affected parties or objectors to the Application with the aim of avoiding, or securing the withdrawal of, any objections to the Application.
 - c. comply and deal with any public local inquiry processes and procedures arising or resulting from the submission of the Application.
 - d. progress negotiations with any landowners and leaseholders and make necessary arrangements to acquire the land within the

proposed Order, conditional on the basis the Order will be made;
and

- (c) Council approve the delegation of powers to the Head of Paid Service to negotiate, agree, enter into, execute, and serve (where appropriate) all relevant legal agreements, notices, and other documentation necessary to facilitate and underpin the Application and Order.

130. ANNUAL TIMETABLE OF MEETINGS 2021-22

RESOLVED that the timetable of meetings for 2021-22 be approved.

131. MEMBER QUESTIONS

Question 1 from Councillor Hill to the Leader

It is always interesting to hear what political leaders' top priorities are. A former PM famously said that his top 3 priorities were all education. The Leader of NCC has recently said that his number one priority, above everything else, is climate change. Could the Leader enlighten us as to what his 2nd and 3rd priorities are and at what number does education come in at?

Councillor Sanderson replied that what he had said at the recent Scrutiny Committee was that climate change remained a priority. This was in addition to other corporate priorities, alongside all the joint working arrangements which took place. The Council had taken a proactive approach to dealing with climate change and he hoped members would support this

Councillor Hill sought clarity that climate change was not the top priority, just one of the main ones. The Leader confirmed that it would remain very much a priority.

Question 2 from Councillor Hill to Councillor Riddle

Since May 2017, the Portfolio Holder for Community Services, has been one of the two representatives from NCC on the Northumbria Police and Crime Panel. How many Northumbria Police and Crime Panel meetings have there been since then and how many have you attended?

Councillor Riddle responded that he had attended 15 out of a possible 23 meetings. Councillor Hill replied that she would come back to that.

Question 3 from Councillor Robinson to the Leader

We have all just seen the effects the weather is having on various aspects of the county. I want to ask about the disturbing flooding issues we have seen at West Lea Cemetery in my ward. I know there are schemes being proposed and looked into, and thanks to the Leader and Service Director for agreeing that, but I want to ask will the necessary funding be found to finally resolve what is a very emotive situation and one we have known about for many

years. It's one thing agreeing to look into something, quite another to make the funding available, so that's what I want to make sure of.

The Leader agreed that was a very emotive issue and it was right to be raised. Some pumping equipment had been brought in previously and survey work would be done in order to design a scheme to alleviate the flooding. Provision for this would be made from the funds allocated to flood protection measures.

Question 4 from Councillor Robinson to Councillor Oliver

Given that the Town Centre scheme for Bedlington focussing on retail development has had its funding included in 2 or even 3 budgets I know of, yet never actually taken place and a vastly different scheme is in place now, what investment will there be in Bedlington Town Centre going forwards?

Councillor Wearmouth responded that the first couple of phases were getting underway with funding from the County Council and Government. There now needed to be a fresh look at what happened next including leisure facilities and some form of business hub and there were good opportunities for Bedlington in light of the future development at Sleekburn. The situation remained fluid at the current time but there were a number of different funding opportunities including S106 funding.

Councillor Robinson replied that he had been pursuing this already and added that there needed to be public sector investment to drive forward retail development. He hoped the Council would grasp the opportunities that were there.

Question 5 from Councillor Kennedy to the Leader

In the Journal 23 January 2021, the former leader of the council stated following the outcome of the CEO employment tribunal, that "...which leads me to believe that there has been a large degree of political bias" and that "...I was acting on behalf of and in the best interests of the council when I suspended the Chief Executive in August 2020". Do you agree or disagree with these statements and why?

The Leader replied that because of the ongoing live confidential issues he could not discuss this. The process that was referred to was not part of the Cabinet/Executive arrangements and had been overseen by the JNC and officers. The proceedings of the EAC remained highly confidential and the comments attributed to specific members still remained a live issue. If and when he was ever able to, he would discuss these issues with Councillor Kennedy.

Councillor Kennedy replied that he hadn't raised confidential issues and was disappointed with the response. He had been advised that by virtue of the constitution, the Leader would not be able to respond to his questions, and he hadn't been able to verify this for himself because the constitution was not on the website. This was about accountability and openness.

The Leader replied that there were still live issues that could not be discussed because of the impact on staff and legal matters.

Question 6 from Councillor Seymour to Councillor Riddle

Our council is moving ahead leaps and bounds with its forward thinking climate change emergency plan to save energy and reduce carbon emissions. Many residents throughout Berwick are keen to conserve and preserve the environment. What is the Council doing to encourage architects, designers and contractors in regards to planning applications and building control consents in the use of green ecological-based materials and energy saving constructions?

Councillor Riddle replied that Local planning authorities were bound by the legal duty in Section 19 of the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (as amended) to ensure that, taken as a whole, local plan policies contributed to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change. In Northumberland planning applications were now required to include a Design Statement, and this included how the proposal has responded to climate change in the design choices made in the construction proposal. This issue was the subject of detailed negotiations and officers looked to secure the best combination of carbon-efficient measures.

The new Local Plan included an entire suite of new requirements, under policies addressing;

The overarching approach to climate change

Location of new development and transport

Sustainable design and construction of new buildings

Renewable energy

Protection of carbon sinks

Resilience to climate change

Question 7 from Councillor Nisbet to the Leader

Given some members of this council have tried to rubbish the EAC report, can the Leader confirm who wrote the report and what process it went through to ensure it was accurate?

The Leader replied that this was still a confidential matter, but he confirmed again that the JNC process had been independent of the Council. He did not know who had written the report or what process it had gone through as he hadn't been involved. He referred Councillor Nisbet to officers.

Question 8 from Councillor Hepple to the Leader

What action has the Leader taken to support the CEO since this report was presented and the actions agreed by the committee?

The Leader responded that there was formal process of support between himself and the Chief Executive. If she was happy for that to be shared, he would meet Councillor Hepple to go through it in more detail.

Question 9 from Councillor Dungworth to the Leader

How could members of the LGA be aware of this and other reports that went to the EAC, including confidential content details, and the membership and date of the committee meeting prior to it being on the council website?

The Leader repeated that this was an independent process. However, he had asked officers to look into this particular question. Councillor Dungworth asked that this aspect be included in the investigation into these matters given the ongoing leaks from the Council since mid-summer, and hoped it would be given the same level of resource as other investigations into leaks. The Leader confirmed it would be looked at by the officers who were looking at the data breaches.

Question 10 from Councillor Dungworth to the Leader

This Council has and continues to be subject to a period of instability, turmoil and well publicised risk. Why has the risk appraisal panel not met since 3rd of January 2019?

Councillor Oliver set out what he saw as instability, turmoil and risk, adding that there were risks associated with the previous administration which were not well known and which the current Administration had had to deal with. The RAP was not a decision making body and custom and practice had been for it to consider large loans to outside bodies, which there had not been any of. He was confident that the Council's risk management processes were very robust.

Councillor Dungworth replied that members were being silenced and information to councillors was being suppressed. Councillor Oliver's response to the question indicated just how seriously he took this risk to the Council and it was not just Councillor Oliver's decision about what posed risk to the Authority, it was a decision for the wider Council. She asked when a RAP would be called.

Councillor Oliver replied that he had never declined to hold a RAP meeting and leaks had not come from the Administration. If there was a need for a meeting and officers recommended it then he would support that. Councillor Dunn commented that the leaks had not come from the Labour Group either.

Question 11 from Councillor Gallacher to the Leader

Why were councillors not informed of the decision made by the EAC immediately after the Chief Executive was notified so we knew the position?

The Leader replied that he had asked the question about sharing the outcome and had been advised that he could not because of the confidentiality and it being an independent process. However, events had overtaken this.

Question 12 from Councillor Bowman to the Leader

Why have no political actions been taken by the Conservative Group against those involved in this when other cabinet members felt the need to resign over the behaviour of these members?

Councillor Bowman was unwell and unable to put his question.

Question 13 from Councillor Dunn to the Leader

Can the Leader confirm that the CEO has his full backing and he does not condone any continued coordinated attacks against her and other members of the executive team?

The Leader confirmed that he and the Chief Executive had a good working relationship and he would not condone bad behaviour of any kind.

Question 14 from Councillor Grimshaw to the Leader

Why aren't the cross party agreed actions from the audit committee to try and save Advance Northumberland and mitigate costs potentially levelled at the taxpayer not on this agenda as an urgent item.

Councillor Dodd responded and advised that the Audit Committee performed a very important role, with oversight of governance across the Authority. He valued this role immensely and actively supported the important work of the Audit Committee. The Audit Committee would from time to time receive information which was exempt from publication. This could not be discussed in the public domain, and he was unable, along with every other member of the County Council, to discuss exempt information in open session. This was set out clearly in the Constitution.

He assured Councillor Grimshaw and all members of the County Council, that he would work closely with the Chief Executive and all members of the Executive Management Team to ensure that the governance arrangements were sound. This extended to all aspects of the County Council's operations, including group entities. The Administration would continue to work closely with the Executive Management Team, and should any matters need to be brought to Council, then this would be done. At the current time, Cabinet and the County Council's senior management were managing all aspects of governance in the expected usual way, and no matters had been identified which would require a decision of Council.

Councillor Grimshaw replied that he understood that this group had only involved group leaders and was therefore confidential in any regard. She suggested that this matter could be considered by RAP because of the ongoing concerns around Advance.

Question 15 from Councillor Simpson to Councillor Jones

What assurances can the Cabinet member give to reassure elderly residents and their families when they hear that subsidies for older people's telecare, such as red cord, are being reduced?

Councillor Jones replied that this was a review which hadn't yet been completed, and which would be brought back to members for the final decision about how to make the target saving. The review was looking at the telecare service overall, which had a number of different functions, some of which weren't connected to the alarm call systems installed in people's homes, and some of the savings options which were being considered would not affect that part of the service. The call centre which the service operated also provided a call handling service for some Council and non-Council services, and one strand in the review would be looking at the efficiency of that call handling service and opportunities to increase its income.

Question 16 from Councillor Gallacher to the Leader

Many of the cuts are levelled as expected or hoped to achieve so if they aren't achieved in these areas, what's plan B?

Councillor Oliver replied that there was no plan B, it was not needed. He was confident that this budget was deliverable, as it had been in the last four years.

Question 17 from Councillor Clark to the Leader

Members are concerned to hear the sale of Amble Links, a prime site formerly owned by the Council has been sold off. Will this affect local residents' use of the popular leisure facilities?

Councillor Wearmouth replied that it had not been sold off though an offer was being considered. This was a commercial matter and should not be discussed in public and he would be interested to learn how the information had got out. The current arrangements in relation to the use of the leisure facilities would continue.

Question 18 from Councillor Foster to the Leader

Can the Leader confirm that the leisure facilities promised to Bedlington in various press releases aren't actually coming forward and no business case is in place?

Councillor Watson advised that the current development in Bedlington Town Centre did not include leisure facilities in the form provided by Active Northumberland on behalf of the Council. The first two phases built upon the success of securing £2m from the Getting Britain Building Fund. The first two phases secured the new Aldi store, along with a marketplace and public realm updates. The remaining two phases were subject to full business case and would come back to Cabinet once officers had done further work. Further work would need to be done before any plans for the remaining phases could be agreed., Any opportunities to increase engagement in physical activity and sport would be considered.

Question 19 from Councillor Dickinson to Cllr Renner-Thompson

Children's and adult services management have been put together and one of the largest cuts is £160k of management posts from children's services. How confident are you that services will not suffer or that the pressure on the remaining managers will not be untenable? Which posts will actually go?

Councillor Renner Thompson replied that in terms of Children's Services, he was confident that services would not suffer nor that the pressures on remaining managers would be untenable. The restructure had taken place following the planned retirement of two senior managers. There had been a reduction of one post and a regrading of another post. Responsibilities had been realigned across the management team and this had allowed for better integration between line management of key areas e.g. In-house placement provision with line management of fostering and residential now combined. Similarly, quality assurance included management of the IRO service and workforce development under one senior manager. There was also now increased integration of the management of urban and rural social work services.

The management team had been consulted about the proposals, appointments to two of the posts had been completed following expressions of interest and all were positive about the changes which would come into effect on 15th March 2021.

132. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

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

Agenda Item	Paragraph of Part I of Schedule 12A
16	1, 3 and 4 Information relating to Information relating to any individual, information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) and information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the Authority..
AND	The public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure because disclosure would adversely affect the Authority's ability to conduct its affairs.

133. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Approval of Interim Executive Director of Finance & Section 151 Officer

The report sought approval of the appointment of an Interim Executive Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer for Northumberland County Council (copy attached to the sealed minutes, coloured pink and marked “not for publication”).

Members wished Chris Hand well in his new role and asked questions around the recruitment process for the interim appointment and for the permanent appointment.

A query was also raised about the number of previous incumbents in the last four years and the reasons for this, and the period of notice which had been required from the S151 Officer. In view of the nature of the questions being asked, the Chief Executive asked all Executive Directors, apart from the Deputy Chief Executive to leave the call. She then replied that she could provide an answer in writing on the point if required. Regarding the processes, the usual processes had been adopted and would continue to be, and she explained the position regarding the period of notice.

RESOLVED that recommendations 1-4, as detailed in the report of the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council, be agreed.

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

.....
Chair of the County Council

.....
Duly Authorised Officer