

**NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**  
**CASTLE MORPETH LOCAL AREA COUNCIL**

At a virtual meeting of the **Castle Morpeth Local Area Council** held on **Monday, 11<sup>th</sup> January, 2021** at **2.00 pm**

**PRESENT**

Councillor E. Armstrong  
(Chair in the Chair)

**MEMBERS**

Bawn D.L.	Jackson P.A.
Beynon J.	Ledger D.
Dodd R.R.	Sanderson H.G.H.
Dunn L.	Towns D.
Foster J.	

**OFFICERS**

Dixon L.	Democratic Services Assistant
Jones P.	Service Director, Local Services
King M.	Highways Delivery Area Manager
Lally D.	Chief Executive
Little L.	Senior Democratic Services Officer
Mowatt R.	Web Communications Assistant
Wardle S.	Neighbourhood Services Divisional Manager

**ALSO PRESENT**

Oliver N.	Cabinet Member
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**183. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dickinson, Jones and Wearmouth along with P. Lowes

**184. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held of the Castle Morpeth Local Area Council held on Monday 7 December 2020, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

## **185. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

No questions had been submitted.

## **186. PETITIONS**

There had been no petitions submitted since the previous meeting, no reports for consideration and no updates to be provided.

## **187. LOCAL SERVICES ISSUES – Neighbourhood Services**

S Wardle, Neighbourhood Services Divisional Manager advised that once again, following what had been a very long and challenging year front-line staff had been out working across the entire Christmas period, carrying out various tasks in the community. He asked that the Committee join him in recognising and praising the huge efforts of our front-line teams over what has been the most difficult period we have ever faced.

The refuse collection service had worked very well over Christmas period, during some unfavourable weather conditions but there had been minimal missed bins in this area. A good communication strategy had ensured that substitute collection days were successful. Refuse staff collected around 495 tonnes of residual waste and 160 tonnes of recycling waste on the collections after the Christmas and New Year period, a 10% increase of residual and 18% increase of recycling compared with the previous weeks.

The regular grounds maintenance winter works were well under way. Any further requests for winter work (e.g. hedges and shrub maintenance) which Members may wish to make should be forwarded to Local Services and they would be assessed and added to the schedule if appropriate and resources allowed.

In respect of street cleansing, leaf clearance routes were completed and the regular sweeping schedules were now being used. There had been three of the trial kerbside glass collections and presentation rates and yields had exceeded expectation. During December, free trees were given out to residents at 11 locations spread across the county as part of the Free Tree Scheme. Ultimately, the Council aimed to give away 15,000 trees and was on target to achieve this in the coming months.

It was requested that the Committee's congratulations and praise be passed on to the front-line staff who had done an excellent job throughout the year which had also been recognised by residents.

Information on the glass collection rates for Stobhill would be provided to Councillor Beynon following his request.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

## 188. COVID UPDATE

The Chair advised that this item had been withdrawn as Members had received an update at Council the previous week and regular briefings for Members were being held.

## 189. BUDGET 2021-22 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

Councillors N Oliver, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and G Sanderson, Leader, provided a power point presentation which outlined the Council's strategy to the 2021-22 Budget within the context of the corporate plan. A copy of the presentation would be filed with the signed minutes and be uploaded to the Council's website, with the following information noted.

### Budget 2021-22 Approach

- Maintain the frontline services important to residents and businesses
- Continue to support the most vulnerable in communities whilst giving communities more control.
- Leading economic recovery following Covid and investment in a green recovery.
- Meet budget challenges through a programme of continuous innovation and improvement.

### State of the Area

- **Public Health** - the most up to date Covid figures were provided and it was hoped that the peak had been reached in Northumberland. Hospitals were extremely busy and it was important that everyone followed the current Government guidelines to prevent infections.
- **Economy** – Covid had created a major shock to the economy, however there was a need to create an environment to allow the economy to recover quickly. A lot of workers had been furloughed during the pandemic and there had been an increase of 62% in unemployment figures since March 2020, with retail, leisure and hospitality sectors hit. It was hoped the sectors would be able to recover quickly following the lifting of restrictions with work being undertaken to development the tourism sector.
- **Council Services** - Throughout Covid the Council maintained the services most important to residents and successfully adapted to news ways of working, embracing more use of digital solutions and by continuing to improve and innovate services. Children's Services were rated by Ofsted as 'Good' in 2020. Local democracy was maintained by successfully switching to virtual meetings and, critically, preparing for the coming local elections.

### Budget 2021-22: Financial Context

- Next year savings target circa £8.3 million.
- Improving frontline services.
- Increasing demand for services.
- Covid-19 pandemic.
- Ambitious capital programme.
- Still investing in infrastructure and services whilst delivering savings.

Details were provided of the funding analysis from 2014 – 2024 along with the overall funding arrangements, including the decision to increase the Adult Social Care by the minimum of 3% over two years. Details were also provided on the savings to be made by each directorate and the summary of savings by year. It was proposed that Council Tax would be increased by 1.99%. In respect of debt, Members were advised that there was a need to balance investment with manageable debt and it had not been considered that the previous levels were sustainable.

### **Budget 2021-22: Summary**

- The budget position, whilst challenging, was under control.
- Through managing debt better, revising assumptions around social care and local government reform, the savings gap had been reduced.
- The organisation was in much better shape to do more and provide better value.
- Increased costs and growing pressures in demand remain, particularly in adult and children's services.
- Tough decisions were still to be made but the Administration was committed to protecting the most vulnerable.
- Ambitious for our future with targeted £748 million capital investment programme.
- Investment from North of Tyne Devolution Deal to really make a difference to people's lives.
- Borderlands Growth Deal could act as a catalyst for further investment.
- Determined to shine a light on all that is great about Northumberland as a place to work, live, visit and do business.

Details of investments going forward were highlighted, including the strengths of the current pharmaceutical and global industries, agriculture, natural resources, the importance of tourism and the upcoming investments in Energy Central within Blyth along with the transformations in travel and connectivity and the green recovery.

In response to a question regarding the challenges the County would have to overcome which had been created by the Covid Pandemic, Councillor Sanderson advised that there was already a recovery plan in place and this was to be updated next month. The Business Hub and Communities Together Hub would remain and would continue to support businesses and residents going forward. There was a need to be confident on what the Council already had in place and the expertise of the workforce along with the natural assets Northumberland already had. Councillor Oliver advised that a presentation

had been made at the Corporate Services and Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee that morning and highlighted the speed at which business grants had been given out in Northumberland and the transformational news around BritishVolt which would have an impact across the region. Tourism would be a key part of recovery for the rural communities and the Council would continue to work towards delivery digital connectivity and lobbying for improvements to roads in the County. The key sector to focus on was the offshore green recovery.

The Chair thanked Councillors Oliver and Sanderson for their presentation.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

## **189. LOCAL SERVICES ISSUES – Highway Services**

M. King, Highways Delivery Area Manager provided an update on Highway Services within the Castle Morpeth area. He advised that a weekly Covid risk assessment and improvements to security had improved safety to operatives. No positive cases had been reported from the Area Team to date. All officers were instructed and encouraged daily to follow the social distance guidelines and report any failings. Town centres were checked weekly for Covid signage with continuous replacement of missing signage.

A mixture of precautionary gritting runs from high route runs to full runs had been undertaken. Between the end of October 2020 to the beginning of December 2020 precautionary runs took place, however since the start of December till 9<sup>th</sup> January 2021 there had been three small weather events predominantly 150-200ft in the higher ground which involved increased gritting runs and ploughing as well as the involvement of the Winter Services Farmers and Sub Contractor framework to support the snow clearing efforts. In Allendale a snow blower was also required to clear some of the smaller roads.

As of the 8:00 hrs on 11<sup>th</sup> January the following had been carried out:

- **49** Full gritting runs involving all 28-front line gritters
- **6** additional reduced runs including all routes defined as west of the A1 (where the level above sea increases out of Zone 1 (Coastal)). This still included 22 front line gritters.
- **10** additional high route runs on routes over 800 ft.
- Secondary routes had been treated on numerous occasions when the conditions persisted for prolonged periods into the day (snow/ice persisting into the day past 10.00 am) or in advance of expected snow/ice

Excluding the three smaller snow events there had been **10,000 tonnes** of salt used on the gritting network. An additional **1,500 tonnes** had been used on snow events etc.

Current salt levels were being assessed for a refill in early February 2021.

Routine Inspections were ongoing and up to date in respect of reactive maintenance. Reactive third party inspections were still rising since coming out of lockdown, and with the third lockdown along with poor weather conditions it was likely that teams would require support and extra resource. The completion of reactive works was hitting most target dates

The routine gully maintenance programme was on target for completion of the 18-month cycle (average 80 per day) and reactive requests were up to date as an additional vehicle had been added to assist with backlog.

Details were provided on the drainage works undertaken along with the both the minor patching work and major schemes. The Castle Morpeth Team, had recently completed a recruitment programme to expand the team to meet demand in relation to extra road works over and above the normal LTP and funded schemes.

Councillor Bawn thanked staff for their response to requests for re-filling grit bins within the area which had been undertaken very quickly.

Councillor Dunn highlighted that, whilst the C123 road had been gritted, there had been at least three accidents in the same spot over the weekend due to the surface water running off from fields and requested that this be investigated to ascertain what remedial steps could be undertaken to prevent a fatal accident happening at this spot. Mr King acknowledged that whilst that was one of the first areas to be gritted it would not help if there was run-off from the field and a longer term solution would need to be found. Discussions would be held with the landowner on how water could be retained on site and improvements made to the drainage. He advised that the gully wagon cleans the area on a regular basis, but this would not stop the run-off. He would escalate the issue and ask Engineers to look at a long term solution.

#### **190. WORK PROGRAMME**

The Castle Morpeth Local Area Council work programme (attached to the signed minutes as Appendix A was presented.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

#### **191. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting was scheduled to be held on Monday 8 February 2021 with the time to be confirmed.

**CHAIR** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE** \_\_\_\_\_