

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

At the Annual Meeting of the **Northumberland County Council** held on Wednesday 26 May 2021 at the Holiday Inn, Seaton Burn at 3.00 pm.

PRESENT

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

MEMBERS

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

OFFICERS

Hadfield, K.	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Lally, D.	Chief Executive
Lancaster, H.	Deputy Monitoring Officer
Masson, N.	Deputy Monitoring Officer
McEvoy-Carr, C.	Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services
O'Farrell, R.	Executive Director Planning and Economy
Mitchell, A.	Head of Corporate Governance
Morgan, L.	Director of Public Health

1. ELECTION OF BUSINESS CHAIR

Councillor Flux was nominated by Councillor Sanderson and seconded by Councillor Wearmouth. There were no other nominations.

RESOLVED that Councillor Flux be elected Business Chair for the ensuing year.

Councillor Flux in the Chair

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Darwin and Robinson.

3. APPOINTMENT OF CIVIC HEAD AND DEPUTY CIVIC HEAD

Councillor Hutchinson was nominated for Civic Head by Councillor Sanderson and seconded by Councillor Stewart. Councillor Cessford was nominated for Deputy Civic Head by Councillor Hutchinson and seconded by Councillor Homer. There were no other nominations.

RESOLVED that Councillors Hutchinson and Cessford be appointed Civic Head and Deputy Civic Head respectively for the ensuing year.

Councillor Hutchinson advised that £5,200 had been raised so far for his charity the Doddy Weir foundation, and he intended to continue supporting that this year.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the following meetings of County Council, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record, signed by the Business Chair and sealed with the Common Seal of the Council:-

- (1) Wednesday 10 February 2021
- (2) Wednesday 24 February 2021.

5. DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Dickinson asked whether it could be confirmed that all members had submitted their DoI forms. This would be checked.

6. REPORT OF THE RETURNING OFFICER

The Business Chair congratulated all members on their election and thanked the Returning Officer and her staff for the delivery of a safe and successful election in very challenging circumstances.

RESOLVED that the return of the persons elected as Councillors on 6 May 2021 (as set out in Appendix One to the agenda) be received.

7. APPOINTMENTS

(1) LEADER.

Councillor Dodd nominated Councillor Sanderson, seconded by Councillor J. Watson. There were no other nominations.

A member queried whether there could be a debate on this matter and was advised that this was not usual.

Councillor Dickinson asked why members were not being given the opportunity to explain why they were voting in a particular way. Members were advised by the Deputy Monitoring Officer that the Council rules of procedure allowed for debate to ensue following the proposing and seconding of a motion.

Councillor Jackson commented that the rules of procedure also allowed a member to close the debate and move straight to the vote. He proposed this, which was seconded by Councillor Castle. Members supported this by a majority vote.

A named vote was called for on the motion, which was supported by the required number of members. The votes were cast as follows:-

FOR: 39 as follows:

Bawn, D.L.	Mather, M.G.
Beynon, J.	Morphet, N.J.
Carr, D.	Oliver, N.

Castle, G.	Pattison, W.
Cessford, T.	Ploszaj, W.
Daley, W.	Reid, J.
Dodd, R.R.	Renner-Thompson, G.
Dunbar, C.	Riddle, J.R.
Ezhilchelvan, P.	Sanderson, H.G.H.
Ferguson, D.	Scott, P.
Flux, B.	Seymour, C.
Hardy, C.	Sharp, A.
Homer, C.R.	Stewart, G.
Horncastle, C.W.	Swinbank, M.
Humphrey, C.	Swinburn, M.
Hunter, E.I.	Thorne, T.N.
Hutchinson, J.I.	Towns, D.
Jackson, P.A.	Watson, J.
Jones, V.	Wearmouth, R.
Lee, S.	

AGAINST: 24 as follows:

Ball, C.	Murphy, M.
Bowman, L.	Nisbet, K.
Bridgett, S.C.	Parry, K.
Cartie, E.	Purvis, M.
Clark, T.	Richardson, M.
Dickinson, S.	Scott, A.
Dunn, L.	Simpson, E.
Foster, J.	Taylor, C.
Gallacher, B.	Waddell, H.

Grimshaw, L.	Wallace, A.
Hill, G.	Watson, A.
Lang, J.A.	Wilczek, R.

ABSTENTIONS: 2 as follows:

Dale, P.A.M.	Kennedy, D.
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It was therefore **RESOLVED** that Councillor Sanderson be elected Leader for a four year period.

(2) DEPUTY LEADER AND PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

The Leader announced his Cabinet Members as follows:-

Deputy Leader and Corporate Resources Richard Wearmouth
 Adults Wellbeing Wendy Pattison
 Community Services Colin Horncastle
 Business Wojciech Ploszaj
 Children and Young People Guy Renner Thompson
 Healthy Lives Jeff Watson
 Local Services John Riddle

Three Deputy Cabinet Members had also been appointed:
 Corporate Services Paul Scott
 Adults Wellbeing Catherine Seymour
 Community Services Christine Dunbar

He thanked previous Cabinet Members for their sterling service and all members who had supported him. He hoped all members could work together and was grateful to residents for allowing the Administration to continue with its programme of work. He welcomed all new members to the Council and asked them to contact him if they had any issues.

He was keen that long serving past members received some recognition of their service to the Council and announced that the possibility of granting honorary alderman status would be investigated.

He wanted to reintroduce regular visits to town and parish council meetings as soon as this was possible for Cabinet Members. These had been very helpful in the past.

There would continue to be interactive sessions for the public on issues such as the budget. There would also be a review of members' allowances as this hadn't been done since 2013 and there would be a review of the local area councils with the aim of having a refresh.

Finally, he had asked that recruitment begin for an independent Chair of the Audit Committee.

8. APPOINTMENTS - CHAIRS AND VICE CHAIRS AND COMMITTEES

The Chair advised that there had been some changes in terms of group sizes and updated information would be provided by Democratic Services. An updated appendix three had been circulated to all members and he encouraged all members to get in touch with him if they had any queries. He asked members to agree that authority to confirm the final appointments to the Committees by Groups be delegated to the Chief Executive.

Councillor Bridgett noted that there had been an increase in numbers on some of the committees and working groups, and sought clarification on a couple of committees regarding the gifting of places by the Administration to minority groups as some names were already identified, but in others they had not been. The Business Chair confirmed that some places had been gifted and that the document had been worked on right up to the last minute.

It was moved by Councillor Castle and seconded by Councillor Dickinson that the delegation to the Chief Executive as detailed above be agreed.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the appointment of the Chairs and Vice Chairs set out in Appendix two to the agenda be agreed;
- (b) the appointment of Committees and Working Groups detailed in Appendix three be agreed, and authority be delegated to the Chief Executive to confirm the final appointments to the Committees.

9. APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES

RESOLVED that the following nominations be made:-

Envt. Agency's Northumbria Regional Flood & Coastal Committee	One Nick Oliver
Kielder Water & Forest Park Development Trust	Two Cath Homer and Ian Hutchinson
National Park Authority	Six Alan Sharp, Mark Mather, John Riddle, Cath Homer, Eileen Cartie, Mark Purvis
North East Joint Transport - Audit Committee	One, plus one Sub John Beynon (sub David Bawn)
North East Joint Transport - Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Two, plus two Subs Gordon Castle, Ian Hutchinson

	(subs Cath Homer, John Beynon)
North East Joint Transport Committee	One, plus one Sub Glen Sanderson and Richard Wearmouth
North of England Reserve Forces & Cadets Association	One Gordon Castle
North of Tyne Combined Authority - Audit and Standards	Three, plus three Subs Mark Swinburn, Gordon Castle (subs John Beynon, Catherine Seymour) Scott Dickinson (sub Holly Waddell)
North of Tyne Combined Authority - Cabinet	Two, plus two Subs Glen Sanderson and Richard Wearmouth (subs John Riddle and Guy Renner Thompson)
North of Tyne Combined Authority - Housing and Land Board	Two Peter Jackson and Nick Oliver
North of Tyne Combined Authority - Overview and Scrutiny	Three, plus three Subs Paul Scott and Catherine Seymour (subs Cath Homer and John Beynon) Les Bowman (sub Mary Murphy)
North Pennines AONB Partnership	One Colin Horncastle
Northumberland Coast AONB Partnership	Four (inc one Cabinet Member for Economic Growth or remit which includes Planning Service) Colin Hardy, Colin Horncastle, Wendy Pattison, Liz Dunn
Northumberland College Board of Governors	One Guy Renner Thompson
Northumberland Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authority	Six Barry Flux, Colin Hardy, Guy Renner Thompson, Catherine Seymour, Eileen Cartie, Liz Dunn
Northumbria Police and Crime Panel	Two (Conservative) Christine Dunbar and Colin Horncastle
NTC Touring Theatre Company	One Jeff Watson
Pupil Referral Unit Management Committee	One Guy Renner Thompson
FPS Local Pension Board	Two (must be members of CSEG OSC (but not the Chair). Must not be members of the Fire Disputes Panel) Peter Jackson and Nick Oliver
Tyne and Wear Pension Fund Pensions Committee	One and one substitute Richard Dodd, Nick Oliver (sub)

10. COVID UPDATE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Liz Morgan, Director of Public Health covering the following main points:

- There were rises in community infection rates.
- LA7- five authorities had relatively low rates, including Northumberland.
- There was a lot of concern about the new variant particularly in North Tyneside. The majority of cases of the variant were linked to this North Tyneside cluster. In Northumberland there had been less than a handful of cases.
- This variant was more transmissible than the Kent variant and the impact of this was being seen already. However, there was emerging evidence that the vaccines were effective against it after two doses.
- North Tyneside had put in additional testing and increased the opportunity for vaccination which was being supported by the County Council's roving bus.
- From a Northumberland perspective, active surveillance of the data continued to establish any linked cases and further actions had been taken on testing arrangements.
- In Northumberland over 322,000 vaccinations had been delivered to Northumberland residents and 92% of the population over 40 had had the first vaccine, and 90% of over 65s had had the second vaccine. As a County, the uptake of the vaccine had been really high.
- Planning was currently focussed on the Autumn booster programme and ideally the flu jab would be given at the same time.
- The key message to communities was that we were not out of the woods and people needed to follow the guidance, and take up the vaccinations offer. People also needed to regularly test and get tested if they felt symptomatic.

Councillor Hill referred to the ongoing issue of people being reluctant to get vaccinated for fears of complications. She asked the Director of Public Health what she believed was the percentage of people who would suffer a serious complication or die from having one of the vaccines. Ms Morgan replied that concerns to date had been around the Astra Zeneca vaccine but no vaccine was side effect free. The data showed the risk for the very rare clotting and bleeding incidents was about 1:250,000, and the risk of death was about 1:1,000,000.

Councillor Dale asked how the Covid briefings would be taken forward as it was important for members to receive regular updates and understand the issues. The Business Chair replied that it was likely briefings would take place as and when required. Ms Morgan added that if anything significant emerged then it would be communicated as part of the routine members' briefing.

Councillor Hunter commented that there had been some anti vaccination incidents in the north area. This was upsetting to the community and could lead to people deciding against vaccination. Ms Morgan advised that there had been a similar problem in Morpeth – signs had been vandalised and this information had been shared with Northumbria Police.

11. MEMBER QUESTIONS

Question 1 from Councillor Hill to the Leader

Between 1st May 2017 and 1st May 2021, how much has Northumberland County Council spent on the employment of dog wardens and what is the total amount of fines issued for dog fouling during this time?

Councillor Riddle responded that the dog warden functions of the Council were delivered by a Senior and 4 Animal Welfare Officers within Public Protection. They had a wide range of duties including investigation of dog welfare and cruelty cases, stray dog collection, dog fouling and support for the Council's Green Dog Walkers scheme. In their role, they were supported by Environmental Enforcement Officers, who also undertook dog fouling patrols.

The cost of the Council's dog warden function (including the assistance from Environmental Enforcement Officers) was, for the four years from 1st May 2017 to 1st May 2021, estimated at a total of £1,086,280 which was an average cost for that period of £271,570 per year.

During the same period, a total of £15,240 in fixed penalty fines for dog fouling was issued. An additional £2,442 in fines and costs was obtained through prosecution at the Courts for dog fouling offences.

Councillor Hill asked if there was an option or model which could be adopted which would make it more cost effective, or was it the case that the service needed more teeth. Councillor Riddle replied that the Council did try to take a proactive approach but the fines were unlikely to ever balance the cost of enforcement. However, the overall benefits made it worth the efforts that were made.

Question 2 from Councillor Hill to the Cabinet Member for Planning

In light of the fact that the Government has not currently extended the law allowing Council meetings to be held remotely what reassurance can you give that we are not about to enter a period where all (or virtually all) planning applications are going to be determined under delegated powers and outside of committee?

Councillor Flux responded that arrangements were being finalised for the return of physical planning committees, with the first meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee being scheduled for 8 June. Public speaking in person would return, and non-participating members of the public would be able to attend or watch the Planning Committee via live streaming.

Councillor Hill replied that her concern was that more planning applications would be determined under delegated powers. She asked for some reassurance that if a member wanted to call in an application for justifiable reasons that it would be called in. Councillor Flux replied that he would respond in writing on that point.

Question 3 from Councillor Taylor to the Leader

Bedlington Town Centre redevelopment commenced with a budget of £12.5m. I understand this was to include land acquisition fees £3.5m and planning fees of £1.7m. What is the current available funding and what are the plans to deliver a revitalised town centre for Bedlington?

Councillor Wearmouth responded that, following the acquisition of the site, Cabinet agreed in June 2019 a revised development budget of £8.735m. However, following the Covid pandemic and national retailers withdrawing from the original scheme, a revised approach was developed in order to retain Aldi, who remained keen to proceed as the anchor to the development. The new phased approach had been agreed and approved by Cabinet on 12th Jan 2021. The funding provision for this was £5.42 m. This would see the delivery of:

Phase 1 - the new Aldi store and site works (services, car parking and access roads); and

Phase 2 - the redevelopment of the Market Place to provide a new retail terrace with residential units above.

Aldi started works on site on 26th April and the store and car parking would be completed and open in time for Christmas 2021. Demolition work was scheduled to start on the Market Place in early June with the main redevelopment works commencing shortly after, and the new terrace was scheduled to be complete by end March 2022.

The County Council continued to work with Advance on options for future phases which could potentially include a new cultural / leisure hub.

Councillor Taylor asked if the plans could be shared with residents and whether there was any more funding that could potentially become available. Councillor Wearmouth agreed and looked forward to when regular public consultation processes could begin again after being restricted.

12. CABINET MINUTES

(1) Tuesday 23 February 2021

(2) Tuesday 9 March 2021

(3) Tuesday 6 April 2021

With regard to Minute No. 164 (Financial Support to Advance Northumberland), Councillor Dickinson asked if Opposition Group Leaders could be given an update on the current position by the Leader. The Leader confirmed that he would do that.

RESOLVED that the minutes be received.

13. COMMITTEE MINUTES

(1) Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC

These were presented by Councillor Bawn.

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.

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

(3) Communities and Place OSC

These were presented by Councillor Reid.

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

(4) Health and Wellbeing OSC

These were presented by Councillor Beynon who drew members' attention to two small typos.

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

(5) Health and Wellbeing Board

These were presented by Councillor Dodd.

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

(6) Audit Committee

These were presented by Councillor Hill.

Councillor Dale referred to Minute No.96(b) External Audit Update and the 2019-20 audit which Mazars had said would be qualified. She referred to other external bodies which were to report back on the work of the Council and was pleased that CIPFA were to come in and do a financial review of the Council's financial management. She hoped that everyone would wait for all of the reports to come in before any decisions were taken about changing anything.

With regard to Minute No. 101 Councillor Dickinson commented that a shareholder update had been received on the wholly owned company arrangements. Councillor Swinburn had suggested that the information needed a wider audience, and he asked whether the Leader agreed with this.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Audit Committee be received.

(7) Standards Committee

These were presented by Councillor Flux.

Councillor Dickinson commented that reference was made to a “large number” of complaints and asked how many complaints were rolling forward into the new Council.

The Leader replied that he did not know the exact position but he had asked for the figures. He agreed that he did not want this to be a continuing situation.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Standards Committee be received.

(8) Food Poverty Working Group

These were presented by Councillor Pattison.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Food Poverty Working Group be received and the recommendation detailed at the end of the report be agreed.

14. DELEGATED DECISIONS

Councillor Hill sought assurances that the projects in the current LTP would remain, given cuts to LTP budgets. The Leader replied that more funding had been received last year than expected and the Council had also contributed extra. He believed the figure was about what it normally was, but he could provide the exact figures in writing.

Councillor Bridgett asked for the detail of the decision taken regarding the LTP programme for unclassified and C roads and footways as he had residents who could not get their bins emptied because of the state of the U roads to their properties.

The Leader replied that he had been impressed with the state of the roads in the Rothbury ward although there were some areas that needed investment, and he was sure this area would receive the attention it deserved.

RESOLVED that the delegated decisions be received.

15. ANNUAL REPORTS

(1) Overview and Scrutiny Committees

(2) Standards Committee

(3) Pension Fund Panel

Councillor Kennedy drew members' attention to the performance of the Panel detailed on pg 255 and its decision making. Between 2010 and 2020, £719m had been turned into £1.4bn which meant the Fund value had doubled in the ten-year period. Also, a lot of equities had been moved from the UK into more global markets as a way of managing risks, which had been a good decision with hindsight in light of Covid.

The Panel had worked very well and co-operatively together and the figures bore out what could happen when this was achieved.

Councillor Dickinson asked that ethical investments were considered and asked that members be kept updated on this.

Councillor J. Watson agreed with Councillor Kennedy' comments and assured Councillor Dickinson that ethical investments were already considered, members were trained and the advisers were fully up to speed.

Councillor Dale suggested that a report on the age profile of the active fund membership would be useful to inform the Council's liability.

(4) Armed Forces Forum

Councillor Bridgett remarked that he was aware of serving and former personnel who were struggling to access mental health support. He had been approached by a number of such personnel who had highlighted the difficulties they were having, particularly in accessing support for PTSD, and he would welcome a discussion with Councillor Castle and Watson on this for advice.

Councillor Watson replied that the Council had employees already to provide this kind of support and he asked Councillor Bridgett to provide the details of the people concerned. There were numerous support services available.

Councillor Dickinson welcomed the report and referred to the RAFA association which worked on behalf of veterans in Northumberland. There was a greater demand for support at the moment because of increased hardship and other issues, and felt an index of support would be a good idea to help communicate to those in need what support was available. Councillor Flux felt this would be of benefit to all members.

Councillor Watson commented there was a myriad of support organisations available and asked members to let him know of any organisations they were aware of so this information could all be drawn together.

RESOLVED that the annual reports be received.

16. 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 involved 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
19	1 Information relating to Information relating to any individual.
AND	The public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure because of the need for confidentiality when considering matters concerning individual officers.

17. MINUTES

A number of comments were made by members on the content of the minutes. Councillor Dickinson referred to the question put by ex Councillor Hepple to the Leader at the budget meeting in February regarding the support in place for the Chief Executive, and asked if this could be shared with him as Group Leader. He hoped these issues could be put to rest now and advised the Leader that he wanted to work with him on this to ensure that all members behaved in an appropriate manner.

RESOLVED that the confidential minutes of the meeting of Council held on Wednesday 10 February 2021, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record, signed by the Business Chair and sealed with the Common Seal of the Council.

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

.....
Chair of the County Council

.....
Duly Authorised Officer