

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

At a meeting of the **Cabinet** held at County Hall, Morpeth on Tuesday 13 July 2021 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

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

CABINET MEMBERS

Horncastle, C.	Riddle, J.R.
Pattison, W.	Watson, J.G.
Ploszaj, W.	Wearmouth, R.
Renner-Thompson, G.	

OTHER MEMBERS

Dunbar, C.	Scott, P.
Flux, B.	Seymour, C.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Angus, K.	Executive Director of HR/OD and Deputy Chief Executive
Barnes, G.	Revenues and Benefits Manager
Bradley, N.	Service Director – Adult Services
Bridges, A.	Head of Communications
Dorward, N.	Senior Manager - Education Development & Collaborative Projects
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
Mitchell, A.	Service Director: Corporate Assurance
O’Farrell, R.	Interim Executive Director of Local

Ch.’s Initials.....

One member of the press was present.

9. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 8 June 2021, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

10. REPORT OF THE INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND SECTION 151 OFFICER

Write Offs 2020-21

The purpose of the report was to report on debt written off during the 2020-21 financial year (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix A).

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

11. REPORTS OF THE INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF LOCAL SERVICES AND REGENERATION

(1) Establishment of a Northeast Enhanced Bus Partnership

The report outlined the rationale for and implications of the creation of a Northeast Enhanced Bus Partnership and the associated preparation of a Bus Service Improvement Plan by the Northeast Joint Transport Committee to conform with the Government's National Bus Strategy (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix B).

It was noted that the County Council was making a significant financial contribution to this and would be pushing the case regarding what was essential for Northumberland.

A member asked how this was likely to be funded going forward. The Leader replied that if the Authority worked well with its partners then it was hoped that Government would help to maintain services through grant funding and the Authority would also have a role to play.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Cabinet fully support and endorse the creation of an Enhanced Bus Partnership by the North East Joint Transport Committee for the region, in accordance with the National Bus Strategy;
- (b) Cabinet approve a one-off financial contribution to Transport North East of £204,694 from contingencies to support the work to create the Enhanced Bus Partnership over the next 9 months; and

- (c) Cabinet agree to receive further reports on the progressive development of the Enhanced Bus Partnership and its implications for Northumberland.

(2) Energising Blyth Programme

The report updated Cabinet on the establishment, development and delivery of the Energising Blyth Programme supported by the Government's Towns Fund including the Future High Streets Fund and Town Deal (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix C).

Councillor Ploszaj highlighted the key points of the report for members. The programme totalled almost £70m in funding streams which would make Blyth a thriving national and international centre for renewable energy and innovation. He detailed the 12 projects involved and the projected achievements, and he thanked Rick O'Farrell and Janice Rose and all of the officers involved for their work on this.

Members' attention was drawn to the proposed delegation which was needed following the expected announcement from Government in around three weeks.

Councillor Wearmouth complimented Councillor Ploszaj on the way in which he had picked up this work as portfolio holder. There was much going on in Blyth now and it was a great example of the levelling up agenda. There were some excellent projects in the programme, and he thanked others who were involved including Alan Ferguson on the Town Deal Board and Tony Quinn at the Catapult. There was a significant commitment from the County Council for the programme outlined in the report of over £20m.

Councillor Dunbar commented this was going to be fantastic for the whole of the south east of the County.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) the establishment of the Energising Blyth Programme be agreed as set out in section 1 of the report noting the role and implications on the council as funding recipient and Accountable Body regarding the HM Government Towns Fund;
- (b) the process for developing the Town Deal as set out in section 1 be noted;
- (c) Cabinet agree that following receipt of the Town Deal Heads of Terms from HM Government in Summer 2021, the final deal arrangements will be confirmed, and final approval of the deal be delegated to the Head of Paid Service in liaison with the Leader of the Council and Town Deal Board Chair;
- (d) Cabinet agree the establishment of the associated programme management and assurance arrangements to support the Programme's delivery as set out in section 2 of the report whilst noting:

- the staffing and resource arrangements to support the development and delivery of the Programme as set out in section 2; and
 - that this significant body of work as a new devolved regeneration programme in Northumberland will be kept under constant review regarding any additional resources that may be needed to support the programme's delivery;
- (e) Cabinet note the financial profile of the Programme as set out in section 3 of this report and agree that individual project business cases will be approved by Cabinet. NCC match funding is identified currently within the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) which will be updated during the annual budget setting process to take account of the Town Deal outcome which is expected in June/July 2021; and
- (f) Cabinet note that the Northern Gateway Phase 1 Project approved last year has been formally added to the Energising Blyth programme as set out in section 1.

(3) Borderlands Place Programme: Town Prioritisation and Place Preparation Framework for Northumberland

The report outlined the implications of the Borderlands Place Programme for those towns prioritised in the Business Case approved by the Government to prepare a Place Plan to identify economic projects eligible for investment from the Borderlands Growth Deal (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix D, along with the report of the Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC circulated at the meeting).

The Leader introduced the report and noted that Scrutiny had been fully in favour of the recommendations. Councillor Watson welcomed the detail provided regarding the selection of towns as he was sure members would be asked about this. He was surprised that Amble was not included and could not see how it was already benefitting from a catalytic regeneration mechanism or external funding investment, which had caused it to be rejected from the start.

Councillor Wearmouth replied that much investment had been delivered in Amble including Morrison's, the Amble Inn and more phases were to be developed on the Northumberland Foods site. Work had been done on parking and work on the schools programme would be coming soon.

The Chief Executive advised that Scrutiny had had a detailed presentation which covered the reasons for selection. The important point was that this did not mean all other towns were off the list forever, but prioritisation had taken place around a number of key factors and Janice Rose could provide further detail of that to any member who wanted it.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) the 4-stage process agreed with the UK Government by which investment from the Borderlands Place Programme will be drawn down be noted;
- (b) the list of 7 towns prioritised to prepare Place Plans by the application of the Borderlands Town Index be endorsed;
- (c) the approach and timeline set out in the Place Plan Preparation Framework be approved;
- (d) Cabinet note that following the preparation of Place Plans, the subsequent scoping of projects to be included in the Borderlands Town Investment Plan for each town will inform any capital investment decisions required by the Council to support delivery; and
- (e) the report of the Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC be noted.

12. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PLANNING

Funding for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Current funding arrangements for the Northumberland Coast AONB Partnership and the North Pennines AONB Partnership ended at the end of the last financial year. Ongoing funding is available from Defra, but this is conditional on at least 25% match funding being secured from local authorities. The report sought approval for funding from NCC for the next three years (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix E, along with the report of the Communities and Place OSC) .

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the Council's annual funding contribution towards the Northumberland Coast AONB and the North Pennines AONB be maintained over the next three years, to enable the funding contribution from Defra to continue to be obtained and to enable the important work of the AONB Staff Units to be continued;
- (b) as the Council's contributions to the two AONBs has not increased since 2007, Cabinet agree that this is increased by 10% this year, taking the contribution to the Northumberland Coast AONB from £33,700 to £37,070 per year, and the contribution to the North Pennines AONB from £22,660, to £24,926; and
- (c) the report of the Communities and Place OSC be noted.

13. REPORT OF THE CORPORATE COMPLAINTS MANAGER

Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Contact Policy

The report proposed the adoption of an updated Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Contact Policy, which was necessary to allow Northumberland County Council to operate a fair, effective, and efficient complaints process, and also to reflect good practice advocated by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix F, along with the report of the Communities and Places OSC).

Councillor Wearmouth advised that in some very rare instances members of the public continued a dialogue with the Council which tied up officer time needed to sort other issues. He stressed that it would only get used in the most extreme of circumstances.

Councillor Riddle understood there was a need for the policy but queried whether would be a time limit on someone categorised as vexatious or unreasonably persistent. Councillor Wearmouth advised that this relate to the specific circumstances or be the judgement of the officer team that they had no further response to make on a specific query. It was not intended to shut down other queries.

The Chief Executive agreed with this and reassured members that this policy would relate to a very small number of individuals, but proper protections needed to be in place for staff, the public, members and sometimes the individuals themselves.

Councillor Wearmouth referred to Scrutiny's comments and the recommendation that the decision on declaring a complainant as unreasonably persistent and/or vexatious be taken in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services. Members supported this.

RESOLVED that the updated Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Contact Policy attached as Appendix A to the report be approved, subject to the inclusion of the recommendation from Scrutiny detailed above.

14. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Blyth Welding & Fabrication Training Centre

The report summarised for Cabinet the outcomes of the Outline Business Case for Blyth Welding & Fabrication Training Centre capital investment. The investment of £1.08m would deliver a technical vocational training centre in the Port of Blyth industrial area focused upon training school leavers, adults and sector employees in welding and fabrication disciplines, management of sector related apprenticeships and delivery of mandatory professional

industry qualifications which were unique to the sector (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix G).

Councillor Renner Thompson introduced the report, highlighting that this was the first of many projects to widen the vocational offer across the County which could expand into other areas such as bricklaying, construction and panel beating. It stemmed from a piece of work done by staff a couple of years previously to look at the educational offer and link it to future industrial need. The project was in partnership with Northumberland College and fitted in with the strategic vision of keeping as many young people in the County as possible for their education.

Councillor Ploszaj welcomed the report. Partners were looking for this kind of facility in Blyth and it was very welcome.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Cabinet recommend Council to approve a budget of £1,082,000;
- (b) subject to Council approval, Cabinet approve commencement of work to negotiate the lease;
- (c) subject to Council approval, Cabinet approve commencement of building works planning and tendering;
- (d) subject to Council approval, Cabinet approve commencement of procurement of machinery and equipment; and
- (e) subject to Council approval, Cabinet approve development of collaboration agreement with Northumberland College.

15. REPORTS OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

(1) Hexham Neighbourhood Plan

The report sought approval to formally 'make' the Hexham Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan passed independent examination in January 2020. A local referendum held in the Parish of Hexham on 6th May 2021 returned a majority vote in favour of using the Plan to make decisions on planning applications. The Council was now obliged by statute to make the Neighbourhood Plan unless it considered that doing so would breach European Union obligations (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix H).

The report was introduced by Councillor Horncastle. Councillor Wearmouth commented on the amount of work which went in to producing these plans by everyone involved.

RESOLVED that:-

- i. the referendum outcome of 6th May 2021 be noted;
- ii. Cabinet agree to formally 'make' the Hexham Neighbourhood Plan in accordance with section 38A(4)(a) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004;
- iii. Cabinet approve the decision statement (attached at Appendix 1) required under Regulation 19 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012,as amended; and
- iv. Cabinet agree that both the Hexham Neighbourhood Plan and the decision statement are published on the Council's website and publicised elsewhere in order to bring it to the attention of people who live, work or carry out business in the neighbourhood area; and for the decision statement to be sent to the qualifying body and anyone else who asked to be notified of the decision.

(2) Alnmouth Neighbourhood Plan

The report sought approval to formally 'make' the Alnmouth Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan passed independent examination in December 2020. A local referendum held in the Parish of Alnmouth on 10 June 2021 returned a majority vote in favour of using the Plan to make decisions on planning applications. The Council was now obliged by statute to make the Neighbourhood Plan unless it considered that doing so would breach European Union obligations(copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix I).

RESOLVED that:-

- i. Cabinet note the referendum outcome of 10 June 2021;
- ii. Cabinet agree to formally 'make' the Alnmouth Neighbourhood Plan in accordance with section 38A(4)(a) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004;
- iii. Cabinet approve the decision statement (attached at Appendix 1) required under Regulation 19 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012,as amended; and
- iv. Cabinet agree that both the Alnmouth Neighbourhood Plan and the decision statement are published on the Council's website and publicised elsewhere in order to bring it to the attention of people who live, work or carry out business in the neighbourhood area; and for the decision statement to be sent to the qualifying body and anyone else who asked to be notified of the decision.

(3) Craster Neighbourhood Plan

The report sought approval to formally 'make' the Craster Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan passed independent examination in October 2020. A local referendum held in the Parish of Craster on 10 June 2021 returned a majority vote in favour of using the Plan to make decisions on planning applications. The Council was now obliged by statute to make the Neighbourhood Plan unless it considered that doing so would breach European Union obligations (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix J).

RESOLVED that:-

- i. Cabinet note the referendum outcome of 10 June 2021;
- ii. Cabinet agree to formally 'make' the Craster Neighbourhood Plan in accordance with section 38A(4)(a) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004;
- iii. Cabinet approve the decision statement (attached at Appendix 1) required under Regulation 19 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, as amended; and
- iv. Cabinet agree that both the Craster Neighbourhood Plan and the decision statement are published on the Council's website and publicised elsewhere in order to bring it to the attention of people who live, work or carry out business in the neighbourhood area; and for the decision statement to be sent to the qualifying body and anyone else who asked to be notified of the decision.

(4) Embleton Neighbourhood Plan

The report sought approval to formally 'make' the Embleton Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan passed independent examination in October 2020. A local referendum held in the Parish of Embleton on 10 June 2021 returned a majority vote in favour of using the Plan to make decisions on planning applications. The Council was now obliged by statute to make the Neighbourhood Plan unless it considered that doing so would breach European Union obligations (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix K).

RESOLVED that:-

- i. Cabinet note the referendum outcome of 10 June 2021;
- ii. Cabinet agree to formally 'make' the Embleton Neighbourhood Plan in accordance with section 38A(4)(a) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004;

iii. Cabinet approve the decision statement (attached at Appendix 1) required under Regulation 19 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, as amended, and

iv. Cabinet agree that both the Embleton Neighbourhood Plan and the decision statement are published on the Council's website and publicised elsewhere in order to bring it to the attention of people who live, work or carry out business in the neighbourhood area; and for the decision statement to be sent to the qualifying body and anyone else who asked to be notified of the decision.

(5) Lesbury Neighbourhood Plan

The report sought approval to formally 'make' the Lesbury Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan passed independent examination in June 2020. A local referendum held in the Parish of Lesbury on 10 June 2021 returned a majority vote in favour of using the Plan to make decisions on planning applications. The Council is now obliged by statute to make the Neighbourhood Plan unless it considered that doing so would breach European Union obligations (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix L).

RESOLVED that:-

i. Cabinet note the referendum outcome of 10 June 2021;

ii. Cabinet agree to formally 'make' the Lesbury Neighbourhood Plan in accordance with section 38A(4)(a) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004;

iii. Cabinet approve the decision statement (attached at Appendix 1) required under Regulation 19 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, as amended; and

iv. Cabinet agree that both the Lesbury Neighbourhood Plan and the decision statement are published on the Council's website and publicised elsewhere in order to bring it to the attention of people who live, work or carry out business in the neighbourhood area; and for the decision statement to be sent to the qualifying body and anyone else who asked to be notified of the decision.

16. REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - STRATEGIC COMMISSIONING AND FINANCE

Summary of New Capital Proposals Considered by Officer Capital Strategy Group

The report summarised proposed amendments to the Capital Programme considered by the officer Capital Strategy Group via email on 01 June 2021 (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix M).

New Projects:

16.1 Solar PV

RESOLVED that the capital budget requirement of £84,000 for installation of Solar PV panels at the new Morpeth Leisure Centre be approved, to be met from the renewable energy provision within the 2021-24 Medium Term Financial Plan.

16.2 Blyth Free School

RESOLVED that Cabinet approve payment of a capped contribution of £1,057,675 for S278 works and abnormal ground works for the new Blyth SEND Free School being built by the DfE. The payment is to be funded through the Special Needs Budget line in the Medium Term Plan which will necessitate bringing forward £1,057,675 of budget from 2022/23 to 2021/22.

Additional grant funding:

16.3 New Hartley Section 106 Highway Improvements

Councillor Scott asked for details of the works to take place, which would be provided.

RESOLVED that:

- the funding contribution of £162,400 for highway improvements secured via a Section 106 agreement from a housing development site in New Hartley be noted: and
- Cabinet approve the addition of this amount to the Council's capital programme in 2021-22 and agree to its expenditure on the works identified in New Hartley.

16.4 SEND Capital Funding

RESOLVED that Cabinet accept the additional grant award of £851,302 from the Department for Education (DfE) for the growth in capacity for children with special educational needs and approve the associated increase in budget provision within the Council's Medium Term Capital Programme, noting further detailed reports will follow to allocate funding to specific projects.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....