

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Northumberland County Council** held on Wednesday 7 July 2021 at County Hall, Morpeth at 3.00 pm.

PRESENT

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

MEMBERS

Ball, C.	Nisbet, K.
Bowman, L.	Oliver, N.
Carr, D.J.	Parry, K.
Cartie, E.	Pattison, W.
Castle, G.	Ploszaj, W.
Cessford, 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.	Robinson, M.
Dunn, L.	Sanderson, H.G.H.
Ezhilchelvan, P.D.	Scott, A.
Foster, J.	Scott, P.
Gallacher, B.	Seymour, C.
Grimshaw, L.	Sharp, A.
Hardy, C.R.	Simpson, E.
Hill, G.	Stewart, G.
Horncastle, C.W.	Swinburn, M.
Humphrey, C.	Taylor, C.
Hunter, I.E.	Thorne, T.N.
Hutchinson, J.I.	Waddell, H.
Jones, V.	Wallace, A.
Kennedy, D.	Watson, A.
Lang, J.A.	Watson, J.G.
Lee, S.	Wearmouth, R.W.
Mather, M.	Wilczek, R.
Murphy, M.	

OFFICERS

Angus, K.	Executive Director HR/OD and Deputy Chief Executive
Hadfield, K.	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Lally, D.	Chief Executive
Lancaster, H.	Deputy Monitoring Officer
Masson, N.	Deputy Monitoring Officer

McEvoy-Carr, C.

O'Farrell, R.

Mitchell, A.

Roll, J.

Executive Director of Adult Social
Care and Children's Services
Interim Executive Director Place
and Regeneration
Head of Corporate Governance
Head of Democratic and Electoral
Services

18. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Bridgett, Clark, Ferguson, Homer, Morphet, Swinbank and Towns.

19. MINUTES

Councillor Hill referred to Minute No. 11 (Appointment of Leader) and the guidance on closure motions contained on page 100 (para 12.11) of the Constitution which allowed this to happen if the Chair felt the matter had been sufficiently discussed. She sought assurances that motions could be properly debated going forward and that the Chair would not immediately accept a closure motion to stifle debate. She felt clarification from the Constitution Working Group would be helpful.

The Business Chair responded that he had taken legal advice at the meeting and commented that at every Council meeting he had attended where the election of the Leader had been on the agenda, there had been no debate on it. However, he agreed that the issue could be the subject of future discussion.

Councillor Dickinson referred to Minute No. 13(7) (Standards Committee minutes) and the Leader's agreement to look at the position regarding the ongoing complaints. Given the significant issues to deal with, he asked why the Standards Committee had been cancelled recently. Councillor Wearmouth commented that he believed it had been due to lack of business. The Business Chair agreed to get clarification from the independent Chair of the Committee.

With regard to Minute No. 17 (Minutes), Councillor Dickinson commented that the Leader had agreed that the response to Councillor Hepple's question could be provided to him. This had not happened. The Leader advised that this was being dealt with.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the annual meeting of County Council held on Wednesday 26 May 2021 as circulated, be confirmed as a true record, signed by the Business Chair and sealed with the Common Seal of the Council.

20. DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Grimshaw declared an interest in item 12 on the agenda. Following advice from the Deputy Monitoring Officer she advised that she would leave the room whilst the matter was discussed.

21. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Business Chair advised that the following people, particularly connected with Northumberland, had received honours in HM The Queen's Birthday Honours List:-

Officers of the Order of the British Empire (OBE)

Charles Antony Elliott Braithwaite. For Political Service in the North East of England. (Hexham)

Professor Suzanne Cholerton. Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Newcastle University. For services to Higher Education. (Morpeth)

Timothy Charles Willbond DL. Vice Chairman, North of England Reserve Forces and Cadets Association. For services to the Reserve Forces and Cadets Association. (Morpeth)

Members of the Order of the British Empire (MBE)

Stephen Anthony Ball. For services to Rugby League Charities. (Hexham)

Robert Henry Mole. For services to the community in Hexham, Northumberland. (Hexham)

Josephine Sanderson. Finance and Business Support Manager, Forestry England. For services to Forestry. (Hexham)

The Leader welcomed the news that British Volt had received planning permission for their gigaplant which would provide 300 jobs and the prospect of more, which would encourage other businesses to come to the County. He expressed his thanks to Advance for the preparation work they had done on this and to Rob Murfin and the Planning team for the speed and efficiency in how they had dealt with the planning application.

The Administration was now working on its new Corporate Plan to make Northumberland a stronger place through business investment and seeking out new jobs, whilst also looking after those who needed the Authority's help. There were still issues around health inequalities, fuel poverty and child poverty and these would also be a key priority.

The plan by Northumbria Police to reduce the opening hours of some of their stations would be looked at.

Finally, the Government was keen on enlarging the combined authority mayoral area. Discussions on this continued, but he wouldn't commit the

County Council to a larger area until a full discussion had taken place at Council by all members.

22. MEMBER QUESTIONS

Question 1 from Councillor Hunter to the Leader

Please can the Leader give me assurance that Northumberland County Council will respond the current consultation on the 2022 LNER timetable and support the residents of Berwick and the surrounding area by opposing the proposals which would mean there would be the following reduction of East Coast trains stopping in Berwick:

72 trains per week

288 trains per month

3744 trains per year

Berwick Railway Station is a well-used station by residents and visitors for a variety of reasons e.g. commuting, business, hospital appointments, pleasure.

The reduction of trains stopping in Berwick will increase the carbon footprint which goes against proposals to reduce carbon emissions. This also goes against the work by SENRUG, RAGES and pressure groups to re-open small stations and platforms along the East Coast line which were closed in the past.

Nationally they are saying the people using trains are at a record low, therefore if less trains going to stop in Berwick-upon-Tweed then less passengers will be able to use the service.

Therefore, I request that Northumberland County Council responds to the consultation before 5th August 2021.

I am also asking that the appropriate Scrutiny Committee urgently considers the current LNER timetable from 2022 consultation, as the changes will have a detrimental impact for Northumberland residents and visitors.

The Leader agreed this was a significant step backwards. Four operators were doing a consultation at the same time. The aim was to encourage people to take a quicker train, but this would mean taking slower trains off the track which would negatively impact on the Council's efforts to encourage people to use stations such as Berwick and Morpeth. He had written to the four MP's asking for their support in objecting to the proposed changes, and to the Secretary of State for Transport, the Department of Transport and the Council's other partners arguing that the consultation and the proposed changes should be put on hold and an 'East Coast Mainline Task Force' be established to look at the issues around capacity on the line. There was a very strong opposition to this regionally and the Council would continue to oppose any move to reduce commuter trains. He had no issue with Scrutiny looking at this issue also.

Question 2 from Councillor Bridgett to the Leader

Will this Administration and Council use its shareholding in Newcastle Airport to vote against the ridiculous idea from Sunderland Council in relation to renaming Newcastle Airport?

Councillor Bridgett was not present, but the Leader advised that he was not in favour of this, and he would not agree with it on any vote.

Question 3 from Councillor Bridgett to the Leader

Could the Leader of the Council please tell me if he still stands by his statement that he is “impressed” with the state of the roads in the Rothbury Division?

This would be moved forward to the next Council meeting in Councillor Bridgett’s absence.

Question 4 from Councillor Kennedy to the Leader

On being elected Leader of the Council Councillor Sanderson stated that public toilet facilities would be one of the county council’s priorities. Therefore can I ask, can the Hexham public facilities be one of the priorities? In particular the toilets at the Sele Park are in a poor state and are in a need of refurbishment and those behind the Queens Hall have been left abandoned and unused.

Do you agree these are a priority and if so when can the Hexham public expect action? I would like to invite you on an inspection tour of the facilities, would you like to come?

The Leader responded that the Council had taken proactive view to public toilet facilities and had made investment in significant improvements to the public toilets at Seahouses, Holy Island and Bamburgh. In addition to this, the Council had also allocated £1,000,000 in capital funding within its Medium-Term Financial Plan to improve the condition of public toilets across the whole county. This would address some backlog maintenance repairs, as well as some more significant refurbishment works to a number of key facilities. Officers had been asked to prepare a plan of action which would be led by Councillor Riddle.

With regards to the public toilets in Hexham, he was aware that there had been a number of useful meetings with Hexham Town Council and that Councillor Cessford had also raised the issue, and it would be looked at.

Councillor Kennedy commented that this was an issue which had been raised repeatedly at a recent Hexham Town Council public event. He welcomed the news that this would be seen as a priority and that the Leader would accompany him for a visit. The boarded up toilet behind Queens Hall had simply been abandoned.

The Leader responded that he understood there had been a lot of discussion with the Town Council about the toilets and he was happy to visit along with Councillor Riddle.

Question 5 from Councillor Kennedy to Councillor Horncastle

Northumbria Police own 10 properties at Fairfield Hexham. These 3 and 4 bed properties have been abandoned for a long period of time, a total waste of housing for Hexham families.

I invited the Police Commissioner to meet me at the site in 2020 but this invitation was unfortunately not accepted. I was hoping would it be possible for the County Council to exert some pressure on to Northumbria Police so elected officials can meet at this site and discuss a way forward please?

I am aware officers of the Police and County Council are discussing matters but the pace is rather pedestrian.

Councillor Horncastle confirmed that the County Council was in discussions with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner concerning the acquisition of the site for housing. At this time, the discussions were commercially sensitive, and it would not be appropriate to comment further. Personally, he agreed with everything the Council and the previous Cabinet member had tried to do on this matter. However, this was within the control of Northumbria Police. If he became aware of any further information he could share with Councillor Kennedy, then he would do.

Councillor Kennedy welcomed this and advised that he would write to the Police and Crime Commissioner and to Councillor Horncastle to invite them to a site visit.

Question 6 from Councillor Taylor to Councillor Wearmouth

At the last meeting Councillor Wearmouth agreed to ensure any updates for the Bedlington Town Centre development were shared with me, unfortunately this failed to materialise, so I have asked Advance directly for all releases to be shared with me so I don't have to see them via social media shared by another Bedlington Councillor. My question relates to the funding of this development, so could I have a breakdown of the funding allocations to the Bedlington Town Centre redevelopment over the past eight years (this had not been asked for in the original question but this was what was needed), and how we arrived at the current figures, and can you please provide details of the works that are currently happening on the remaining Town Centre site(excluding Aldi)?

Councillor Wearmouth advised that he had some data prepared by officers but as the question now being asked was different, he would ask officers to provide this information to her. If she had any further questions or comments he asked Councillor Taylor to get in touch

Question 7 from Councillor Taylor to Councillor Riddle

The grass cutting and weeding are sporadic this year, grass cutting has been atrocious, with little care on how it looked, clumps of grass left in the middle of a newly cut area and the spraying of weeds inadequate. I've walked around estates in my ward and it's really not good enough. Can I have an assurance that this will be tackled?

Councillor Riddle replied that there had been prolonged periods of rain towards the end of May, followed by much warmer conditions in June which had created prolific growing conditions for grass and weeds. With 8.5million square metres of grass to tackle each year, getting around it all took time. All grass cutting crews had been deployed but the long grass had resulted in more clippings being left behind than usual. Additional hours had been worked in June to try and catch up and although things were now getting back on schedule, this had taken a number of weeks because of the unusual growth rates.

Teams had also been deployed to the weed spraying quad bikes with additional people out on foot when wind and other weather conditions permitted. Good progress was being made with over 80% of the hardstanding areas across the county now complete. The action taken in June meant that grass cutting was back on track and residents should also be seeing significant amounts of weeds dying back now. He reassured members that the teams were doing everything possible.

Councillor Taylor asked whether it would be possible to revert to the use of blue weedkiller so residents could see that weeds had been sprayed. Councillor Riddle responded that he would ask officers to look at this.

Question 8 from Councillor Hill to the Leader (member response)

It is vitally important that an organisation such as NCC with it's size, scope of responsibilities and huge turnover of taxpayers' money functions properly and smoothly with harmonious and constructive working relationships. Do you agree with that statement and, from 0-10, how would you currently score the Council on this ?

The Leader agreed and replied that because of the number of people who worked for the Council he could not give a universal figure. Councillor Hill replied that the question was generally on how harmonious and smooth running the Council was, how would the Leader score it? The Leader replied that because the Council was such a large and complex organisation, relationships would vary from area to area and to find a mean average would be difficult and was not something he would try and do.

Question 9 from Councillor Hill to Councillor Riddle

Since 1st May 2017, what is the total amount NCC has spent on maintaining and running its cemeteries. How much has been received in burial fees during this time?

Councillor Riddle replied that some of the costs incurred in maintaining cemeteries sat in different budget areas with elements such as grass cutting in some cemeteries being undertaken by integrated NEAT teams. An analysis of 2020/21 shows the costs incurred in maintaining and running cemeteries was £628,569. The income received was -£592,980 so the net cost of running our cemeteries in 2020/21 was £35,589.

The team were undertaking the analysis for previous years and when this was complete he would reply to Councillor Hill in writing.

Councillor Hill asked whether, given the long term challenges with some of the cemeteries, there was any strategy to deal with this. Councillor Riddle replied that members and officers were aware of the sensitivities around cemeteries and monitored provision and capacity. There were none that would be full in the next 5 years, perhaps two within 5-10 years and planning permission had recently been granted for another crematorium in the County. However, the County Council could not be responsible for every fallen headstone.

Question 10 from Councillor Richardson to the Leader

I am receiving more and more complaints from residents about the cost of parking permits, especially when households have more than one vehicle. Would the Leader consider a scheme that reduces the cost for multiple car households, and in future consider further reductions for second or first green car incentive?

The Leader commented that this had been looked at previously, but it could be done again. The Authority was one of a very few that did not charge for town centre parking. The resident permit parking charge was currently £25 per permit per annum, and he did not feel that extending it would help in those areas where there was already a shortage of parking. Officers felt that the current policy should continue of increasing the number of static chargers and there would be a trial of on street car parking charges in seven towns in the County.

Question 11 from Councillor Nisbet to the Leader

The home zone at Cowpen Quay remains a mess despite the best efforts from the local members and residents. Will the Leader commit to working with me to ensure the Council has a robust plan to deal with this issue and resolve it for the local residents?

The Leader agreed that there was a long standing litter and fly tipping problem at this location and Councillor Nisbet and other local councillors had made great efforts to deal with the issue. It had been shown in other areas that these kind of problems got resolved when investment was made, and Blyth would receive significant investment over the next few years which would help. He asked Councillor Nisbet to contact Paul Jones to arrange a visit to the area.

Councillor Nisbet welcomed this and agreed that the fly tipping problem was a serious and long standing one, which needed to be addressed.

Question 12 from Councillor Murphy to Councillor Riddle

In Rotherham and other areas, miles of grass verges have been planted with wildflowers and, where it is safe to do so, grass has been allowed to grow. Will the Leader explain the Council's biodiversity policies and what progress the council has made and still aims to make in the light of these successes? We understand these don't work everywhere and it isn't an intention to make communities untidy but in places where it's possible could more be considered?

Councillor Riddle advised that the aim was to cut verges on the strategic road network during June and July, prioritising sight-lines on junctions etc, before then undertaking verge cutting on non-strategic verges. All cuts were between 1 and 1.5m wide, whole width cuts of any verge were rare and secondary cuts on certain strategic roads were only done where this was necessary for visibility.

The cutting of roadside verges was vital to ensure that vegetation did not restrict visibility for drivers, cyclists and pedestrians. In addition to the road safety benefits, the works also improved the look of an area and kept the road network in better condition by preventing plants encroaching onto the road and affecting the roadside drainage systems. The Council understood the importance of biodiversity and was fortunate to have verges with plant communities of particularly high conservation value in some parts of Northumberland.

In recent years the Council had worked with ecology and community groups including Natural England, North Pennines AONB and the Northumberland National Park Authority to agree where those verges were and to delay cutting until later in the season. The number of these verges had increased each year for the last 4 years and now totalled over 80 verges.

Residents understandably supported wildflower strips as a concept because the ones they saw were full of colour for months at a time during the growing season. These however were usually carefully managed floral displays that took a lot of maintenance and though they could be called wildflowers because of the seed mix, they did not have the same conservation value as a natural wildflower verge.

The requests the Council received every year regarding verge cutting were all somewhere on the scale between 'maintain everything more' and 'leave everything to grow wild'. Though the Council's approach was focused on the need to keep roads safe and provide amenity value, it would continue to work with partners to safely and sustainably improve the ecological value of the verges going forward.

Councillor Murphy agreed there was a role for public education going forward so that people could understand that an area looked "messy" it may in fact be an area of great biodiversity. If the Council was to continue with this approach then it needed to be hand in hand with public education. Councillor Riddle agreed there was a place for such verges, but public safety had to be maintained.

Question 13 from Councillor Ball to the Leader

Members' inboxes are full of questions relating to weed spraying and general street maintenance. Has the council considered a more environmentally friendly approach including some trialled by other areas? Will the Leader set out the council's plans to tackle these issues, including the resulting staffing requirements and assure members that short term agency staff, which costs the taxpayer more with potentially lower standards of service, will not be used?

The Leader replied that proposed staffing cuts in the budget had been turned down last year because the Administration had felt it was important to maintain these services which were valued by the public. Weather conditions this year had made it very difficult to keep on top of weeds and grass and some areas had been more successful in this than others, though not through lack of effort.

The Council was trialling a range of products and methods of weed control this year and members would be updated members on the effectiveness of alternatives to glyphosate application, including foam, heat and vinegar-based products.

There was a core team of staff and during the summer seasonal workers were taken on for the 26 week growing season which worked very well. Agency staff were only used when absolutely necessary. There was a fantastic team of staff on the front line who had done their best to keep on top of things but in some areas the adverse weather had prevailed.

Councillor Ball invited the Leader to visit the colliery rows in Ashington where some of the work had just not been good enough. The Leader accepted the invitation to do that with Councillor Riddle and Councillor Gallacher if he was available.

Question 14 from Councillor Dickinson to Councillor Seymour

Can she confirm to elected members what events she attended and the promotion she did during Pride month in June and what she plans to promote the Northumberland Pride month as the member responsible for this area of work within the Council?

Councillor Seymour advised that she had only taken responsibility for this area a short while ago and Pride Month had followed straight on from the election. During this time she had been familiarising herself with the portfolio, had met with key officers, attended the staff network groups and supported initiatives. However, there had been restrictions on events, so she had not been able to be as active on the ground as she would have liked. Pride was supported at the annual event and all year round and she the thanked the staff for all the work they did. This Year's Northumberland Pride was on 28 August at People's Park, Ashington and she would be doing some media work to support this event. She hoped to make equality and diversity training available for all councillors.

Councillor Dickinson was pleased to hear that Councillor Seymour would be attending Northumberland Pride and doing media work to support the event. It was important for the Council to be seen at the forefront of all types of equality. He asked whether Councillor Seymour could commit to further work in relation to equality across the Council and ensure that there was a cross party working group set up to look at this. Councillor Seymour agreed to do this.

Question 15 from Councillor Purvis to Councillor Pattison

Elected members are reading about various issues relating to Care homes and the inadequate nature of some, I must stress that the majority provide

good care in Northumberland, but can we confirm how many are currently rated inadequate and did the Council have action plans around those rated as failing before the CQC rated them that way?

Councillor Pattison replied that there were currently 100 registered residential services in Northumberland and of these, 71 were older persons and 29 were specialist services for people with physical disabilities, learning disabilities and people with mental health problems. With the exception of a small number of specialist services operated by the council, all services were operated by external organisations that the Council had a contractual relationship with, but did not directly operate. Council officers worked closely with the CQC to spot concerns at an early stage and there were facilitated programmes to share good practice from homes rated outstanding. Officers also ran an excellence course to develop the skills and knowledge of care managers to increase their resilience and bring through the next generation of manager. There were also plans to support Northumberland providers with recruitment issues.

There was one home currently rated as inadequate in Northumberland and the Council was supporting it to make the required quality improvements whilst also undertaking its safeguarding and care management functions, and helping the residents, including those who wished to move to another establishment. She provided some figures for members as follows:-

Older persons	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Outstanding	0	0	0	2	2	3
Good	32	45	47	51	60	57
Requires Improvement	23	26	16	15	8	8
Inadequate	1	0	1	2	0	1
Not yet inspected	?	7	9	3	3	2

Councillor Purvis asked that this be sent to him in writing and if there were any issues arose with care homes, that members be informed at an early stage.

Question 16 from Councillor Wallace to Councillor Horncastle

Previously, administration members have made statements about reviewing LAC planning arrangements, can he explain if a review is underway and if so, what cross-party input will be given?

Councillor Horncastle advised that the Leader had mentioned a possible review of the LACS at the last Council meeting, but he felt this had mainly referred to non-planning matters. The planning arrangements would remain as they were with a little fine tuning. Councillor Castle chaired the LAC Chairs' meeting which had opposition members on it, but he was very happy for any member to contact him with their views. If there was to be a formal review then there would be cross party input. Members could also approach their planning chairs.

23. CABINET MINUTES

(1) Tuesday 8 June 2021

With regard to Minute No. 3 (f) (reserve for one off costs relating to transfer from NHS Partnership changes), Councillor Dale asked for further information on this so members could be aware of it. She also referred to an underspend of £55,000 in the street lighting modernisation programme. She had understood that the Audit Committee had been going to look at the failings of the programme and questioned whether this had taken place.

The Leader replied that this would be looked at. Regarding the first point, the Business Chair advised that a report was coming to Cabinet on 3 August on this.

Councillor Ezhilchelvan referred to Minute No.4.4 and welcomed the funding. He asked whether this funding would be used to complete the Cramlington cycleway programme. The Business Chair advised that he was sure this was the case.

Councillor Dickinson referred to Minute 3(e) (Social Fund top up) and asked for the reason behind this, and whether it was covid related. Councillor Wearmouth believed this was related to additional relief provided to particular people, but he would get a response provided in writing.

RESOLVED that the minutes be received.

24. COMMITTEE MINUTES

(1) Health and Wellbeing OSC

These were presented by Councillor Reid.

RESOLVED that the minutes be received.

25. DELEGATED DECISIONS

RESOLVED that the delegated decisions taken since those reported to County Council on Wednesday, 26 May 2021 be received.

26. MOTIONS

Motion No. 1

The motion was set out in the agenda. However, Councillor Dickinson advised that he wished to defer it to September's meeting to iron out some of the wording and to get some cross party agreement. The Business Chair welcomed this.

27. REPORT OF THE BUSINESS CHAIR

Proposal to Appoint Independent (Co-opted) Chair of Audit Committee

Further to the announcement by the Leader of the County Council at the meeting of full Council on 26 May 2021 that the Authority would move to establish an independent (co-opted) Chair of Audit Committee as soon as possible, the report proposed the relevant changes required to the Constitution to enable an independent (co-opted) Chair of Audit Committee to be so appointed; together with information on steps taken to expedite the appointment. A supplementary report had been circulated to members which proposed that, following advertisement of the proposed role of Independent (Co-opted) Audit Committee Chair, and competitive interviews undertaken by the Panel, Mr Stephen Watson be appointed by County Council as the Independent (Co-opted) Chair of Audit Committee.

Councillor Dickinson referred to a letter sent to Group Leaders about the process which would be followed and sought assurances that this process had been. The Leader confirmed that it had.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Council agree that an independent (co-opted) Chair of Audit Committee should be established, in addition to the 8 elected members and 2 co-opted members currently appointed to the Audit Committee;
- (b) Council agree that the Constitution be amended to reflect the County Council's agreement to this proposal;
- (c) Council agree the role definition and person specification for the independent (co-opted) Chair of Audit Committee, which had been prepared based on national good practice for such co-opted roles and Nolan principles, attached as **Appendix A** to the report;
- (d) Council note that the proposed role of Independent (co-opted) Chair of Audit Committee had been advertised openly in local media, and that applicants would be subject to a competitive recruitment process which would evaluate their ability to fulfil the competencies set out in the proposed role definition and person specification attached to the report as **Appendix A**;
- (e) Council agree that applicants meeting the essential criteria for the role would be invited to interview by a panel comprising Cllr Barry Flux (Business Chair), Mrs Jan Willis (Executive Director for Finance) and Mrs Allison Mitchell (Director of Corporate Assurance), with the individual recommended to be appointed to the role of Independent (Co-opted) Chair of Audit Committee following that competitive process to be reported to County Council for approval;
- (f) Council agree that the proposed term of office for the Independent (co-opted) Chair of Audit Committee will be two years, after which time the

role will again be subject to re-advertisement and a competitive selection process, with future appointments to the role to be agreed by County Council;

- (g) Council agree that Independent (co-opted) Chair of Audit Committee will be paid an allowance at the same rate as has been paid to the elected member who has discharged this role over the last administrative term; and that the value of this allowance will be included in any review of Members' Allowances which may take place in future, and will be subject to any recommendations made about payment of such an allowance which may follow from any such review; and
- (h) Council agree the appointment of Mr Stephen Watson as Independent (Co-opted) Chair of Audit Committee for a period of two years from the date of the Council decision on this matter.

In accordance with Minute No.20, Councillor Grimshaw left the room whilst the following matter was discussed.

28. REPORT OF THE S151 OFFICER

Purchase of Shares in Northumberland Enterprise Holdings Limited

The report sought authority to the purchase of share capital in Northumberland Enterprise Holdings Ltd ("NEHL") and to effect the associated funding approvals.

The Interim S151 Officer summarised the report briefly for members. The funding had been set aside in a reserve created by applying surpluses which had already been generated on International Consultancy activity. There was a detailed cashflow forecast to support the figure and a further report would come to the next meeting of Cabinet to deal with the more detailed governance issues and approvals which were required to give effect to this.

Councillor Dale sought assurances that the governance arrangements were sound around the shareholder responsibilities, and that there would be no repeat of the losses suffered with Arch and Advance. All members needed a copy of the report. The Business Chair advised this would be discussed at Cabinet on 3 August.

Councillor Reid moved the report's recommendations and did not agree that Arch and Advance had cost the Council money. They had always paid the debt that they had owed. The Leader seconded this.

Councillor Hill advised that she would abstain from voting as she had not seen the report.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the report be noted;
- (b) Council approve the purchase by the Council of share capital in NEHL totalling £300,000; and
- (c) Council approve the addition of £300,000 to the Capital Programme to fund the share purchase, to be funded from the earmarked reserve created for this purpose.

29. HONORARY ALDERMEN

Council was asked to consider holding a special meeting of the County Council on Wednesday, 1 September 2021 (being the date of the next quarterly meeting of the Council) to consider the appointment of Honorary Aldermen.

(Note: Under the Local Government Act 1972, the Council may – by resolution passed by not less than two-thirds of the members voting hereon – and at a meeting specially convened for that purpose – confer the title of Honorary Alderman on persons who have rendered eminent service to the Council as past members thereof but who are not now members of the Council).

The Leader advised that this was about recognising members who had served for a long time. The criteria was being looked at and a report would come forward which would be shared with Group Leaders for their input. He also felt that those from the community who provided great service for the County should be considered.

Councillor Reid agreed that the Council should consider how it could honour people including members, public and officers. He reminded members that the Authority was only 12 years old, and some members had already been awarded for their service to the District and Borough Councils. He looked forward to seeing the report.

Councillor Dickinson agreed with the points made regarding all those who had provided service to the County and welcomed a discussion on how to create a framework that fitted.

RESOLVED that a report be submitted to the next meeting of the Council for member consideration.

30. 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
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15	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..
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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.

31. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE

Executive Structure

The report had been circulated to members (copy attached to the sealed minutes). The report set out information from the Head of Paid Service regarding proposals to undertake a review of the Authority's Executive Officer team.

The report was introduced by the Chief Executive who drew members' attention to the main points. It was the Head of the Paid Service's statutory responsibility to deliver the review and to report to Council on the staffing arrangements which she considered should be established.

Members raised questions around the independent support element of the review. It was noted that this would need to be procured in accordance with procurement law and Finance and Contract Rules. It was likely to require a competitive tendering process.

Members sought assurances about how the support element would be selected to ensure that it was fully independent. The Leader assured members that the Chief Executive would lead on the review and that Group Leaders would be kept informed of progress. He and the Chief Executive both recognised the need for this work to be done .

RESOLVED that recommendations (a) to (c) in the Report of the Head of Paid Service 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