

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

At a meeting of the **Cabinet** held at County Hall, Morpeth on Tuesday 7 September 2021 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

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

CABINET MEMBERS

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

OTHER MEMBERS

Dunbar, C.	Seymour, C.
Flux, B.	

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Bradley, N.	Service Director: Strategic Commissioning and Finance
Hadfield, K.	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Lally, D.	Chief Executive
Lancaster, H.	Deputy Monitoring Officer
McEvoy-Carr, C.	Executive Director of Children's Services and Adult Social Care
Mitchell, A.	Head of Corporate Governance
O'Farrell, R.	Interim Executive Director of Local Services and Regeneration
Sanderson, J.	Strategic Services Manager
Stewart, J.	Strategic Housing Manager
Taylor, M.	Director of Business Development and Communities
Willis, J.	Interim Executive Director of Finance and S151 Officer

One member of the press was present

Ch.'s Initials.....

29. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Ploszaj.

30. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the following minutes be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair:-

(a) Tuesday 17 August 2021.

(b) Wednesday 25 August 2021

31. REPORT OF THE INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF LOCAL SERVICES AND REGENERATION

The Northumberland Line

The report provided Cabinet with an update on progress on the Northumberland Line project in the last 12 months including the achievement of several significant milestones and an overview of the next stages of the project and their funding implications (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix A, along with the report of the CSEG OSC circulated at the meeting).

Mr O'Farrell introduced the report and explained the rationale for proposing free parking at the stations for two years, which would encourage modal shift and prevent displacement of parking into local streets. He also updated members on progress with the project, which had been significant.

Councillor Watson queried why there were to be no parking charges when charges were levied at other rail stations including Berwick and Morpeth. Mr O'Farrell advised that some stations belonged to Network Rail who did charge, but historically the County Council had charged at its stations. This was a new initiative to encourage a shift away from cars. Usage would be monitored for two years.

Councillor Wearmouth agreed on the need for free parking and felt that demand for parking would need to be managed carefully across all of the stations in Northumberland.

Councillor Scott welcomed the report and congratulated officers for their work on it. He agreed on the need for car parking to be monitored to ensure that local streets were not affected.

Councillor Watson commented that if the recommendation on car parking charges was changed to "free of charge for an initial period" then he would

support it because his experience was that people would park their cars where it was free and leave them for extended periods.

Councillor Seymour commented on the reference to infrastructure links in the Scrutiny report and hoped this would be taken on board. Mr O'Farrell advised that a report would be coming to Cabinet on consultation on the local cycling and walking improvement plans, which would reflect the location of the new stations. The Authority was also working with partners in the region on the new bus partnerships and as part of that, the NE Joint Transport Committee had recently published the NE Travel Plan which placed emphasis on integrated public transport systems so these points would be picked up.

The Leader summarised the points which had been made and proposed a change to the recommendation to say that the "proposed station car parks will be free of charge subject to a review" with a review to come back to Cabinet within 12 months from the start of the operation which would look at all station car parks, and at progress made on public transport to and from the stations, the cycling and walking network and building an infrastructure to those stations. This was supported by members.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Cabinet notes progress on the project since February 2020 including the achievement of a number of significant milestones;
- (b) Cabinet confirms receipt of £17.1m Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline (RNEP) funding for the next stage of project;
- (c) Cabinet approves an allocation of £21.15m from the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) to support project development, including £4.05m from the Council's contribution;
- (d) Cabinet approves the reprofiling to the budget within the Council's MTFP for 2021-22 of £19.0m to 2022-23 to reflect the anticipated expenditure levels of £15.52m in 2021-22;
- (e) Cabinet confirms that proposed station car parks will be free of charge subject to a review, with a review to come back to Cabinet within 12 months from the start of the operation looking at all station car parks, and at progress made on public transport to and from the stations, the cycling and walking network and infrastructure to those stations;
- (f) approvals be delegated to the Head of Paid Service or nominated Executive Director to execute all contracts relating to the Northumberland Line project, through to entry into service, subject to confirmation of associated funding being in place and the appropriate procurement processes being followed;

- (g) Cabinet approves, subject to confirmation of funding, the commencement of two procurement activities that exceed £2m - The integrated Programme Management forecast at £6.6m and the Network Rail Asset Protection Agreement forecast at £3m. Both figures are inclusive of VAT; and
- (h) the report of the CSEG OSC be noted.

32. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Private Sector Housing Strategy 2021 – 2023

The report presented Cabinet with the draft **Private Sector Housing Strategy 2021-2023**, providing details of the proposed strategic objectives for the Council's Private Sector Housing Service for the following three years (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix B, along with the report of the Communities and Place OSC).

The report was introduced by Councillor Horncastle and he reminded members that one of the Administration's priorities was quality affordable housing. He referred to the points made in the Scrutiny report regarding problem areas and confirmed that the Authority would be doing what it could in this area. Also, regarding the impact of the Government's green agenda, members needed to be aware that this would cause issues for older houses in terms of the investment needed to bring them up to scratch.

Mrs Stewart then gave members an overview of the main points of the report.

- Councillor Riddle queried whether there was a team to tackle rogue or irresponsible landlords. Mrs Stewart advised that there was a dedicated private sector housing team who worked closely with the fraud team in council tax and revenue and benefits. They also worked closely with Environmental Health colleagues so a co-ordinated approach was taken, but there were additional opportunities to develop this further.
- Councillor Wearmouth commented that there were sometimes difficult tenants to deal with and that required work with landlords and difficult decisions to ensure that there was a cohesive community. This did not seem to be covered much in the report but was a fundamental issue. Also, he felt there was a need for a wider strategy to deal with the number of void properties. Finally, regarding management of the private rented sector, he noted that other local authorities had adopted a particular model for this and he queried whether this was something Northumberland would consider. Mrs Stewart replied that the first point was covered under Priority 3 which ensured both tenants and landlords were aware of their responsibilities. Regarding point two, there were some ideas coming forward to deal with the areas which needed a more focussed approach, and work had already started on

this. The last point was about a neighbourhood management scheme and if it was felt that this was the appropriate model to follow, then it would be considered further at that point.

- Councillor Wearmouth commented that there was a need to ensure that any future iterations of the Local Plan would tackle the issue of affordable housing in small communities. Mrs Sanderson replied that in planning, the Authority was limited to new homes coming forward. In the emerging Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plans already made there were policies to protect new houses in perpetuity as permanent residences and affordable homes where possible. However, there was nothing in planning legislation to protect existing properties. The emerging Local Plan also contained policies on affordable housing.

RESOLVED that Cabinet approve the content of the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy and agree its adoption.

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

Financial Performance 2021-22 - Position at the end of June 2021

The report informed Cabinet of the current financial position for the Council against the Budget for 2021-22 (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix C).

Mrs Willis highlighted the main points of the report for members including the projected underspend, covid funding and the reprofiling of the capital programme. There was still some way to go on delivering the budget savings detailed on page 15 of the report, and this would be looked at in closer detail as the budget setting time for 2022-23 approached. Further updates would be made to Cabinet on that.

The Leader thanked officers for their work in very difficult circumstances.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the report be noted;
- (b) Cabinet note the projected underspend of £1.950 million and the assumptions outlined in the report;
- (c) Cabinet note the pressures currently identified, including the impact of Covid-19;
- (d) Cabinet note that it is anticipated that the Council will receive further funding in relation to the income that the Council has “lost” as a result of Covid-19. Further guidance is expected to be issued in the near future;

- (e) Cabinet approve the adjustments to the capital programme of £2.527 million (net) reduction to reflect the confirmation of grant allocations for the Local Transport Plan and Disabled Facilities grants;
- (f) Cabinet approve a net re-profiling of £40.024 million to the capital programme; £46.034 million from 2021-22 to 2022-23; and £6.010 million from 2022- 23 to 2021-22 to reflect estimated expenditure levels in the current financial year;
- (g) Cabinet approve the new grants and amendments to existing grants at Appendix A and the required changes to the budgets;
- (h) Cabinet note the progress on the delivery of the approved savings at Appendix B;
- (i) Cabinet note the use of the contingency shown at Appendix P;
- (j) Cabinet note the use of reserves shown at Appendix Q; and
- (k) Cabinet note the virements requested by services shown at Appendix R.

34 . REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Seaton Valley Neighbourhood Plan

The report sought approval to formally ‘make’ the Seaton Valley Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan passed independent examination in May 2021. A local referendum held in the Parish of Seaton Valley on 29 July 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 D).

The report was introduced by Councillor Horncastle and Mrs Sanderson detailed the main points for members.

Councillor Scott welcomed the protection of green space in the Seaton Valley area. He asked that progress with Neighbourhood Plans in the County be featured in the County magazine so that the process could be promoted to the public and they could see what it actually entailed. Mrs Sanderson agreed to take this back.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Cabinet notes the referendum outcome of 29 July 2021;

- (b) Cabinet agrees to formally 'make' the Seaton Valley Neighbourhood Plan in accordance with section 38A(4)(a) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004;
- (c) Cabinet approves the decision statement (attached at Appendix 1) required under Regulation 19 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, as amended, and
- (d) Cabinet agrees that both the Seaton Valley 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.

35. REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, STRATEGIC COMMISSIONING AND FINANCE

The report summarised proposed amendments to the Capital Programme considered by the officer Capital Strategy Group via email on 6 August 2021 (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix E).

35.1 Kielder Observatory Radio Astronomy Equipment

Councillor Riddle spoke in support of this. The Leader asked that acknowledgement be sought from the Observatory of the Council's contribution, and that feedback be sought on the educational benefits of the project. Mr Bradley confirmed this would be done.

RESOLVED that Cabinet approve a capital contribution of £24,596 towards the installation of radio astronomy equipment at Kielder Observatory to be met from the Strategic Regeneration Reserve within the 2021-24 Medium Term Financial Plan.

35.2 Horton Grange LED Lighting (Salix Loan)

RESOLVED that Cabinet approve a project to upgrade all of the school's lighting to more energy efficient LED technologies at a cost of £40,960 funded by the school through a Salix Loan, and this project be included in the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan for 2021-24.

36. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED 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 items on the Agenda as they involve 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

11 3
Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

AND The public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure public interest in disclosure because of the commercially sensitive nature of the content.

12 3
Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

AND The public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure public interest in disclosure because of the importance of ensuring that the Council is able to make use of commercially sensitive information shared by care providers, and because of the need to ensure that the fairness of the forthcoming procurement process is not compromised.

37. MINUTES

RESOLVED that's the confidential minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on Tuesday 17 August 2021, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

38. REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, STRATEGIC COMMISSIONING AND FINANCE

Tender Approval for Statutory Maintenance Contracts

Property Services currently engages a number of maintenance contractors to provide statutory maintenance services for the Council's property portfolio. These contracts were last tendered in April 2016 for a period of 4 years with a 2 year extension and therefore are due to expire on 31st March 2022. The report sought authorisation to re-tender these contracts in readiness for 1st April 2022 (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix F, coloured pink and marked Not for Publication).

RESOLVED that the three recommendations in the report be approved.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....