

## **NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a meeting of the **Northumberland County Council** held on Wednesday 1 September 2021 at County Hall, Morpeth at 3.00 pm.

### **PRESENT**

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

### **MEMBERS**

Ball, C.	Murphy, M.
Beynon, J.	Nisbet, K.
Bowman, L.	Parry, K.
Carr, D.J.	Pattison, W.
Cartie, E.	Ploszaj, W.
Castle, G.	Purvis, M.
Clark, T.	Reid, J.
Dale, P.A.M.	Renner-Thompson, G.
Daley, W.	Richardson, M.
Darwin, L.	Riddle, J.R.
Dickinson, S.	Robinson, M.
Dodd, R.R.	Sanderson, H.G.H.
Dunbar, C.	Scott, A.
Dunn, L.	Scott, P.
Ezhilchelvan, P.D.	Seymour, C.
Ferguson, D.	Sharp, A.
Foster, J.	Simpson, E.
Grimshaw, L.	Stewart, G.
Hardy, C.R.	Swinbank, M.
Hill, G.	Swinburn, M.
Horncastle, C.W.	Taylor, C.
Humphrey, C.	Thorne, T.N.
Hunter, I.E.	Towns, D.
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.
Morphet, N.	

### **OFFICERS**

Hadfield, K.	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Hunter, P.	Service Director, Policy
Lally, D.	Chief Executive
Masson, N.	Deputy Monitoring Officer
McEvoy-Carr, C.	Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services

Morgan, L.  
O'Farrell, R.

Mitchell, A.  
Roll, J.

Taylor, M.

Director of Public Health  
Interim Executive Director Place  
and Regeneration  
Head of Corporate Governance  
Head of Democratic and Electoral  
Services  
Director, Business Development

One member of the press was present

### **32. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors Bawn, Bridgett, Cessford, Gallacher, Homer, Jackson and Oliver.

### **33. MINUTES**

Councillor Foster commented that she was still waiting for tech support from IT. The Business Chair suggested that she needed to make an appointment to get this sorted.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of County Council held on Wednesday 7 July 2021 as circulated, be confirmed as a true record, signed by the Business Chair and sealed with the Common Seal of the Council.

### **34. DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

Councillor Grimshaw declared an interest as an Advance Board member and advised she would not participate in any discussion.

### **35. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Business Chair was sad to report the death of former county councillor John Smith who had passed away on Saturday 28 August 2021. He had been elected to the Council in November 1999 for the Wansbeck Hirst Electoral Division and served until May 2008. He had also been a Portfolio Holder.

The Leader advised that he had nothing further to report on the plans for increasing the combined authority area though officers were talking to Government. He also wanted to make clear that the County was open to those seeking refuge from Afghanistan and the Authority was currently looking at three schemes. He hoped all members would be supportive.

### **36. MEMBER QUESTIONS**

**Question 1 from Councillor Ezhilchelvan to Councillor Riddle**

Sycamore trees are uniquely susceptible to attacks from tree Aphids or tree lice. When such an attack happens, the tree gives out a sticky sap or honeydew throughout the season which can fall on parts of properties as far as 7-9 meters away from the tree. This sticky stuff brings in dirt and covers roof-tops and walls; Expensive conservatories closer to affected trees can be seen in many parts of Cramlington to lose their appearances and being rendered less effective. Research also shows that aphids can stay on a single tree for years.

These are not a few isolated cases but many wards, such as Cramlington South East, have too many houses affected by these problems. NCC, from what I enquired, does not treat aphids nor respond by thinning affected trees with an urgent priority. Would the council formulate a policy that protects residents' properties and also preserves the green environments? Given that sycamores are widely recognised as not suitable for being in residential areas, can the Woodlands Team officers be permitted to replace the aphids-affected ones with trees more suited to residential areas? Isn't it time to consider formulating residents-friendly change of policies on this front and allot additional funds to carry through these policies?

Councillor Riddle advised that the Authority was aware of the problems associated with aphid infestations in trees, and officers did occasionally receive complaints. Aphid infestations were variable and were present only in a few species of tree. Consequences of an infestation would usually be mild, but on rare occasions could be significant.

All requests for tree work were assessed in line with Northumberland County Council's Trees and Woodland Strategy 2015-2020 (Growing Together) and all required tree work was prioritised and carried out according to the identified hazards and risks. Any tree work identified as non-urgent was categorised as either medium or low priority and works programmed accordingly. Problems relating to aphid infestations were generally either categorised as not requiring any action, or deemed a low priority and, as such, any remedial works could only be undertaken when resources allowed. In exceptional circumstances where infestations and their effects were severe and recurrent, remedial works would be considered. Sometimes it was possible to treat the aphids themselves rather than prune or remove the tree; removal of the tree would only be considered only as an action of last resort.

It was acknowledged that historical planting of street trees in residential areas had on occasions resulted in species of trees being planted which would not now be considered appropriate. It was policy now to carefully consider the species, location and position of trees to be planted and to take into consideration possible after effects such as honeydew from aphids, as well as damage to footways and impacts on adjoining properties. However, the Council was not supportive of the proposal for a large scale programme of removal for poorly selected species of urban trees, as this would require significant additional resources and the large scale removal of established healthy trees would have a significant adverse environmental impact on the local amenity, street scene and habitat within the affected communities.

Councillor Ezhilchelvan commented that “as resources allow” meant things would never happen and additional priority needed to be given. Some residents were taking councils to court over damage to their properties and he felt the Authority needed to look at the priority allocated to this issue to make sure it was legally covered. Councillor Riddle replied that any recurring cases causing significant damage would be investigated.

### **Question 2 from Councillor Robinson to Councillor Horncastle**

The last Administration had the ambition of ‘building’ 1000 new social housing units. How many were actually delivered and if possible, what were they, new builds, affordable homes, conversions etc?

Councillor Horncastle replied that the Council remained committed to the delivery of affordable homes and one of his priorities was to bring forward a plan for delivering, in partnership with all sectors, new, affordable homes across the County. The covid pandemic and the associated ongoing challenges within the construction industry and supply chain had impacted the ability to bring forward new homes at the rate he would have wished. At the current time, there was a pipeline of 629 units, with approval for the delivery of 194 units, made up of new build homes, the acquisition of S.106 units. A further 25 homes had been acquired or were planned to acquire by exercising the right of first refusal when people wished to sell their home they had bought through the right to buy scheme.

Officers were working on a number of schemes to deliver 145 units and a number of other sites had been identified which could deliver a further 290 affordable homes. £900k of grant funding had been secured from Homes England.

The Authority had also facilitated the delivery of community led housing and had provided just over £300k of capital funding to support community organisations to develop their own housing with plans to help further.

Councillor Robinson asked whether there was a commitment from the Administration to do the same again. Councillor Horncastle replied that he would like to fulfil the 1050 commitment from the previous Administration and exceed that but he could not give a definitive number. The Leader advised that a ringfenced fund for affordable housing would be created this financial year.

### **Question 3 from Councillor Robinson to the Leader**

We have seen a veritable plethora of investigations started over the last few years, the last one I was personally questioned about. We seem to offer up righteous indignation at the time and insist they are independent and autonomous and they will do this and that but we never seem to hear the outcomes? I was interviewed about the probe into the recent leaks of confidential information, so have we at least got an update on what’s happened and if the source has been identified?

The Leader agreed that there had been a lot of concern about the leaks which had taken place and it had been bad for morale, reputation and teamworking. Those in leadership had been very disappointed at the breaches which had

been designed to cause damage. A full investigation had taken place and the Police were involved so he couldn't say anything further at the moment, but he urged all members to think about the wider implications of leaking documents for political gain, which also had a detrimental effect on staff and reputation.

Councillor Robinson asked for the Leader's commitment to make public the findings of the internal investigation and/or the Police investigation. The Leader could not give that commitment at this time but acknowledged it was a reasonable request. If he could do that in future, he would.

#### **Question 4 from Councillor Hill to Councillor Riddle**

Despite the good efforts of individuals within the Local Services team, there is still a huge gulf between public expectation and the reality of the tidiness and maintenance of our streets, green spaces, estates, cemeteries and public toilets in the Berwick area and elsewhere in Northumberland. Do you agree that this points to fundamental issues with resourcing and service delivery models ?

Councillor Riddle advised that the Council's public open spaces were maintained by a dedicated team who ensured that the local environmental quality in Berwick and Northumberland was kept to a good standard. The core resource for delivering these services was sufficient to maintain a good standard of local environmental quality, the service delivery model was effective and consisted of area-based multi skilled teams supported by an integrated management model structured around Local Area Council boundaries, with all staff having clear responsibilities and accountabilities for the standards of service being achieved in their area.

There had been a significant increase in demand on a range of Neighbourhood Services during the last 18 months as a result of the Covid pandemic, with more people staying at home and accessing their local open spaces more, and a significant increase in visitors and tourists in the county due to 'staycation' holidays. However, the Council had proactively responded to these challenges and deployed additional resources to meet increased demand, such as significantly increasing the frequency for daily cleansing of public conveniences (now being undertaken three times per day) and increasing the frequency of litter picking/emptying of litter bins particularly at busy locations such as town centres, parks/country parks and along the Northumberland coast.

In addition to normal supervisory spot checks, the environmental standards being achieved by the teams was regularly monitored through well established and documented performance management arrangements with supervisory staff undertaking inspections and recording their findings via 'Local Environmental Quality' (LEQ) surveys. These surveys are undertaken across the County following nationally recognised Keep Britain Tidy standards and measured the presence of factors such as detritus, litter and dog fouling. Since January 2021, 510 surveys had been undertaken countywide. 96% of these sites were predominantly free of detritus, 98% were predominantly free of litter and 100% were predominantly free of dog fouling. These were all on or better than the performance targets set in the service plan, (92% target for detritus, 95% for litter and

99% for dog fouling), indicating that the service was meeting its LEQ targets and delivering a good standard of service.

90 of those inspections were in Berwick and surrounding areas, 96% of these sites were predominantly free of detritus, 100% were predominantly free of litter and 100% were predominantly free of dog fouling. Since January 2021 the Council's customer relationship management system 'Lagan' had also recorded 396 customer enquiries / complaints, which had included the following topics:- weeds, litter, detritus, rubbish, waste, mess, bins, sweep, dog mess and glass. Only 6 of the enquiries had been from residents in the Berwick area.

The service performance information and customer feedback being received would therefore suggest that there was not a significant gulf between public expectations over the quality of their local environment and the maintenance standards being achieved by the Council. However, the importance of maintaining a high quality local environment across the whole County for both residents and visitors alike was recognised and the Council remained committed to working with local communities and other key stakeholder organisations to seek continuous improvements in the physical appearance and quality of life. A good example of this was the Neighbourhood Services Partnerships with Town & Parish Councils, including Berwick Town Council who worked with the Council to enhance environmental quality in the town.

Councillor Hill queried whether he accepted that members were contacted every day or saw comments on social media about the state of the cemeteries, toilets, green spaces etc. She acknowledged that the team were very responsive to reports but the service wasn't good enough. She suggested it would be more effective for there to be discrete areas of responsibility.

Councillor Riddle agreed that the staff did a first class job. When he had visited Berwick recently looking at cemeteries he had also looked at the public toilets and he had not seen anything that caused him concern. He pointed out that only 6 enquiries had come from Berwick.

#### **Question 5 from Councillor Hill to Councillor Horncastle**

A number of Local Authorities, across the Country, have committed to taking refugees from Afghanistan. Has NCC discussed, agreed or communicated any position on this?

Councillor Horncastle responded that Northumberland had a long history of supporting those in need from other countries and had to date helped forty-four families settle in Northumberland from Syria. Prior to the current situation in Afghanistan, in response to a request from Government to support resettlement of locally employed staff (LES) through the Afghanistan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP), the Council had agreed to support six families. The first three families had already been received and a further three families would follow shortly. At this time, the Council had not been formally asked to increase or accelerate this offer.

The Council was currently awaiting further information from Government about the new resettlement scheme recently announced, known as the Afghan Citizen's Resettlement Scheme. In its first year the scheme would welcome

5,000 Afghans with up to 20,000 over a five-year period. Priority would be given to women and girls, and religious and other minorities who were most at risk of human rights abuses. This scheme was in addition to the current scheme launched in April. There would therefore be two schemes in operation and the response within the region was being coordinated by the North East Migration Partnership.

In recognition of the current crisis, and that many Afghan citizens had already been transported to this country, discussions had been held with internal and external partners, and in advance of a formal request, an “offer” of support was being developed which would be discussed with the North East Migration Partnership.

Councillor Hill commented that the Authority struggled with social housing in certain areas, including in Berwick and particularly larger houses, and asked whether Councillor Horncastle agreed this was another reason that this needed to be addressed. Councillor Horncastle agreed that there was a shortage of affordable housing in the County but as much accommodation would be provided as possible for the Afghan refugees. He referred to a third scheme which had been mentioned that morning but the Authority did have time to find suitable accommodation whilst necessary checks and quarantine was undertaken on those arriving in to the country. Not every part of the County was suitable but the Authority would not turn its back.

**Question 6 from Councillor Taylor to the Leader**

Work seems to have stopped on Bedlington's Town Centre redevelopment are there any problems or issues holding this up?

The Leader replied that the works were progressing as planned on the Aldi store development and associated seller works including Advance Northumberland car park, footpath and highway works. There was a delay with the demolition due to resolving a party wall matter and suspected contamination in the floor slab. A revised programme was being developed, and it was expected that the demolition works would continue into October. The new build was on target to start later this year.

Councillor Taylor asked for a copy of the plans so that these could be displayed in the community centre and the Leader agreed this could be done.

**Question 7 from Councillor Grimshaw to the Leader**

Does the Leader think the Scrutiny meeting of Corporate Scrutiny on the 9th of August was a good way for this Council to conduct its business, and has he reviewed the footage following members' complaints?

The Leader replied that he believed Scrutiny could work well at times. He had not managed to look at all of the footage from the meeting though he understood there were some serious issues there which were being dealt with.

Councillor Grimshaw understood that her Group Leader had raised the matter with the Leader and was disappointed if the Leader had not seen all of the footage. She thanked the Leader for his response and did believe that he was addressing the behaviour of his members towards officers. However, some Conservative members did not seem to feel that their Leader's instructions

applied to them, whilst at the same time holding senior positions within the Group. She asked if the Leader agreed that such councillors should be held to account and what action he would be taking as Leader to ensure that such behaviour ceased, as it was continuing.

The Leader advised that the members' Code of Conduct should be observed by members. It placed a duty on members to treat all officers with respect and dignity and vice versa. His Group had been requested to observe the Code by himself, the Business Chair and the Deputy Leader.

**Question 8 from Councillor Nisbet to the Leader**

Can the Leader confirm the cost of the Call-In Meeting at the Holiday Inn, inclusive of officer time at the event and preparation, room booking, members and officer travel, and IT equipment?

The Leader advised that the cost of the call-in meeting held at the Holiday Inn on 18 August was as follows:

Room Hire for meeting : £500 - another meeting was held after the call-in meeting to take advantage of the booking.

Hire of room for set up on previous day: £200

Audio visual costs £750

Officer time was difficult to estimate as officers would have been working anyway and travel costs have not yet been determined as claims may not have been submitted as yet. The Holiday Inn had been booked as there was no suitable room at County Hall large enough to accommodate the numbers socially distanced. A room was now available within County Hall for larger meetings.

**Question 9 from Councillor Dickinson to the Leader**

Does the Leader anticipate any further challenges from his own members on any items he has recently made a decision on, and could any such internal disputes be dealt with internally to avoid the great cost and stop the diminishing value of the call-in procedures?

The Leader advised that he did anticipate and welcome challenge on his decisions. It was important for Scrutiny to be able to challenge the leadership, and if that was from the same party, that should not stop that happening.

Councillor Dickinson asked if the Leader could clarify that there was no imminent leadership change within the Conservative Group. The Leader advised he wasn't aware of any.

**Question 10 from Councillor Dale to the Leader**

Work will be commencing on the County Council's budget proposals for 2022/23. Please could you inform this new Council of the programme for the development of these proposals over the coming months.

The Leader detailed some of the key dates and advised that he could provide Councillor Dale with the full response. He referred to the online public consultation which had been undertaken the previous year and which had received a good response. That would be followed again this coming year.



Councillor Dale commented that many new members would not have an idea what was involved in budget setting and suggested that a briefing be set up for that. The Leader agreed to take this on board.

**Question 11 from Councillor Dale to Councillor Wearmouth**

Please could you give this Council an update on the County Hall refurbishment programme and when will the work be completed.

Councillor Wearmouth advised that the following elements had been completed:

- External fabric refurbishment of Blocks 1, 2, 3 and 4.
- Internal refurbishment of Blocks 2, 3 and 4.
- Formation of a new coroner's court

Works were continuing on Phase 1 of the Front-of-House (kitchen, restaurant, council chamber), Phase 2 (reception area) and Block 1 with anticipated completion dates as follows:

- Phase 1 (kitchen, restaurant, council chamber): end September 21
- Block 1 Top Floor : end September 21
- Block 1 First Floor : end September 21
- Block 1 Ground Floor (conference suite): end October 21
- Phase 2 (reception area): end November 21

The external fabric works to Blocks 5 and 6, and the basement refurbishment of Block 3 (changing rooms and shower area) would follow on from January 22 and all works were expected to be complete by September 22. Consideration was still being giving to the internal refurbishment of blocks 5 and 6.

Councillor Dale commented that the overall costs were of concern. The original plan to move to Ashington would have had social and economic impact on local residents and would have contributed to the levelling up the Government was promoting. She asked what social and economic impact the refurbishment of County Hall would have on the residents and businesses of Morpeth and whether Councillor Wearmouth thought this would be good value for money.

Councillor Wearmouth replied that the forecast outturn for the project was around £14m which was significantly less than any figure placed on the alternative project for Ashington. He did not have the information asked for on the socio economic benefits to Morpeth but he would try to get it. Regarding Ashington, the Administration had a really exciting agenda for the town with much added value in evidence.

**37. CABINET MINUTES**

Councillor Reid declared an interest as a Director of Advance and would not vote on any matters relating to that.

**RESOLVED** that:-

- (a) the following minutes be received;

- (1) Tuesday 13 July 2021**
- (2) Tuesday 3 August 2021**
- (3) Tuesday 17 August 2021 and**

(b) the following resolution be approved as it involved budget and policy framework matters requiring Council approval:-

**(1) Minute No.14 of the 13 July 2021 meeting relating to the Blyth Welding & Fabrication Training Centre**

**38. COMMITTEE MINUTES**

**(1) Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC**

These were presented by Councillor Dunn, who highlighted that the minutes of 2 August did not include her in the attendance. This was not correct. She also looked forward to seeing the minutes from 9 August 2021 on the next Council agenda which she had a number of concerns about.

With regard to Minute No. 6 and the briefings for ward councillors on Borderlands, Councillor Robinson asked if there was a firmer time frame than that identified in the report as he would hate to see any slippage. The Leader replied that any slippage was not due to the County Council. It was a complex procedure but he assured members the programme would be delivered.

With regard to Minute No. 7 and the review of the whistleblowing policy, Councillor Dickinson asked if there had been any progress on this. The Chief Executive advised that the policy at the Scrutiny Committee had been in relation to staff issues and was considered as part of the workforce report. There had been some confusion at the meeting where the Chair had asked for a report back on issues in relation to members and complaints that members wished to make. Those issues were considered at the Member Services Working Group.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the CSEG OSC be received.

**(2) Family and Children's Services OSC**

These were presented by Councillor Daley.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the FACS OSC be received.

**(3) Communities and Place OSC**

These were presented by Councillor Mather.

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

**(4) Health and Wellbeing OSC**

These were presented by Councillor Reid.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the H&W OSC be received.

#### **(5) Health and Wellbeing Board**

These were presented by Councillor Flux.

Councillor Dale commended the work done by staff during the pandemic. This was echoed by both the Business Chair and the Leader and agreed that it should be acknowledged and recorded.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the H&W Board be received.

#### **(6) Audit Committee**

These had been circulated to members the day before the meeting. At Councillor Dickinson's request, it was agreed that they should be deferred to the next meeting to allow for proper consideration.

#### **(7) Member Services Working Group**

These were presented by Councillor Sharp who drew members' attention to the recommendations detailed at Minute No. 4(a). Mr Masson advised that the changes specified at the Working Group had not been attended to as yet as the recommendation was that Council adopt the policy, subject to the four bullet points revising the policy, which would also be subject to the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel. It was at that point that those amendments would be made.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Member Services Working Group be received and the recommendation detailed at Minute No. 4(a) be approved.

### **39. MOTIONS**

#### **Motion No.1**

In accordance with Council Rules of Procedure No.10, Councillor S. Dickinson moved the following motion, received by the Democratic Services Manager on 7 July 2021, with an amendment to the final paragraph at the bottom of page 3 so that it read as set out in bold below:-

*To bring Northumberland County Council into the 21st century and provide equality to Councillors as well as staff, it notes the following research findings:*

*That analysis of the 2019 Local Election results by the Fawcett Society found that only 35% of councillors in England are women, up 1% since 2018. Of the seats that were up for election in 2018, 38% went to women, up just 3 percentage points on 2014 when these seats were last contested;*

*That the role of a councillor should be open to all, regardless of their background, and that introducing a parental leave policy is a step towards encouraging a wider range of people to become councillors, and is also a step to encourage existing councillors who may want to start a family to remain as councillors;*

*That parental leave must apply to parents regardless of their gender, and that it should also cover adoption leave to support those parents who choose to adopt.*

*Northumberland County Council resolves:*

***To adopt the parental leave policy drafted by the Member Services Working Group.***

*To ensure that councillors with children and other caring commitments are supported as appropriate;*

*To notify the LGA Labour Group that this Council has passed a motion at full Council to adopt the parental leave policy .*

Councillor Dickinson commented that this motion was about diversity, about ensuring that becoming a parent did not prevent a person from being a councillor and making it equally possible for any councillor of working age to represent their community through the implementation of a policy which 40 other councils had adopted, giving them the same rights as other employees.

Councillor Wilczek commented that since the creation of the Council in 2009, she was only the second pregnant member. She seconded the motion which was first drawn up by the LGA Labour Group's Women's Taskforce, and modified by the Member Services Working Group to ensure that women came forward to stand for Council positions. 32 Councils had adopted the motion, including Newcastle City Council and 7 other councils had adopted their parental leave policy and she hoped that Northumberland County Council would lead the way for business to do the same in Northumberland. A woman councillor was not entitled to any maternity leave or support after having a baby and councillors needed to encourage and empower women parents and carers to become local councillors and take on leadership positions. She urged members to support it.

A number of comments were made by members including:

- Councillor Reid commented that a lack of parental leave policy had never been raised with him in 30 years of recruiting people to stand in local elections. Councillors were not employees and did not have employee rights under the terms and conditions of employment. Any member could not attend a meeting for six months and there would be no come back about that. He queried who would grant parental leave, what evidence would need to be provided and did not feel that it was necessary. Also, extensions beyond six months' absence could be granted by Council.
- Councillor Dale commented that this was an attempt to get more women into politics which was fair. Of 34 Conservative places, only 9

were women. Labour had 21 and 13 were women. She would have liked to have become a councillor earlier than she had done, but this had not been possible due to her family commitments. If this helped to bring more women into politics then it had her support.

- Councillor Foster commented that for a long time in the workplace it was very hard for women to get into senior positions in case they became pregnant. Things had moved on since then and she felt the Council needed to do the same. Having a policy in place brought certainty for those who were adopting and would encourage more women into politics. She also hoped it would encourage more younger people into politics, people who would be more in need of such a policy. This was a positive move and she fully supported it.
- Councillor Ezhilchelvan commented that members were spinning the motion into some kind of instrument to bring more women into politics, which was not correct. He was the first minority group councillor and this was not because of some special provisions from the Conservative party, this had happened for organic reasons. There were many factors involved in bringing more women into politics and this motion may or may not help. He urged members to look at the merits of the motion as a tool for bringing councillors into line with staff, as that was all it could reasonably do.
- Councillor Murphy commented that her job was to assess adopters and part of that assessment involved how supportive employers were. The private sector was very supportive in this regard and local government was not the same. She urged members to be trailblazers on this, and not dismiss it as some members had done.
- Councillor Dodd commented that a lot had changed in local government since he had been elected a councillor and maybe the time was a right for a change to the six month rule.
- Councillor Reid reiterated his earlier comments that councillors were not employees and had no contract of employment. They could not take leave, let alone parental leave. He was fully supportive of achieving a diverse council and felt being a councillor was workable around family life. He was against the motion because it was unnecessary. A member could not attend a meeting for six months without recourse. If an extension to this was required, then the whole Council had to decide on that request, which he felt was intrusive.
- Councillor Dickinson responded that being a councillor was seen as employment in life whether members liked it or not. Just not turning up to meetings was not an option for his Group. This motion was about equality across the Council and he was disappointed at some members' reactions. His Group had been very co-operative in amending the motion to make it acceptable to all members, it had been reviewed from HR and Legal point of view and he was disappointed at the response it had received. He asked for a named vote on the motion, which was supported by the required number of members.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer sought clarification that the amended motion adopted the recommendations of the Member Services Working Group. Councillor Dickinson confirmed this was the case.

On the motion, as amended, being put to the vote the votes were cast as follows:-

**FOR: 57**

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

**AGAINST: 2**

Lee, S.	Reid, J.
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**ABSTENTIONS: 1**

Hunter, E.I.	
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It was therefore **RESOLVED** that:-

- (a) the County Council adopt the parental leave policy drafted by the Member Services Working Group;
- (b) councillors with children and other caring commitments will be supported as appropriate; and

- (c) the LGA Labour Group be notified that the Council had passed a motion at full Council to adopt the parental leave policy.

## **Motion No.2**

In accordance with Council Rules of Procedure No.10, Councillor I. Hutchinson moved the following motion, received by the Democratic Services Manager on 31 July 2021, noting that the platinum jubilee was actually 70 years, not 75

*“The Queen's Platinum Jubilee, marking 75 years of being our reigning monarch, is to be celebrated on the weekend of 3rd to 6th June next year. Many of the County's residents and communities will wish to celebrate this remarkable achievement, and to help them do this, Northumberland County Council **Resolves** to waive road closure fees for one day events on one occasion organised by Town and Parish Councils held during that weekend”.*

This was seconded by Councillor Castle who commented that the Town and Police Clauses Act allowed processions to take place without charge, and some of these events would be processions.

Member comments included:-

- Councillor Dale suggested that member small schemes funding could be used to help out town and parish councils who wanted to host such events. She also asked if the motion could be amended to extend the fee waiver to community organisations in areas where town or parish councils were not doing anything. However, Councillor Hutchinson felt it was safer to restrict it to town and parish council applications so things could be kept controlled.
- Councillor Hill suggested that organisations approved by town or parish councils could be a way forward and she supported the motion. Councillor Hutchinson replied that organisations would have to go through the town or parish council to apply to benefit from the exemption.
- Councillor Reid quoted from the Town and Police Clauses Act which permitted processions for free. If the event was being held under the Road Traffic Act 1984 then the cost was £550 which covered the cost of advertising. He would have preferred a motion which urged the press to carry the adverts for free. He was also concerned about the cost to the Council, depending on take up, and felt it would have been better allocated to the LACS.
- Councillor Dickinson queried where the funding would come from if many town or parish councils applied. He asked whether community organisations could apply for the waiver and he asked the Deputy Monitoring Officer to confirm whether the types of events which were being envisaged here would be caught by the Town and Police Clauses Act or the Road Traffic Regulation Act.
- Mr Masson advised that the circumstances of the event would determine which category it fell into.
- The Leader commented that this was a proposal to help celebrate the jubilee. He felt it would be appropriate to get some definitive legal

advice and some idea of the potential costs and bring the motion back to Council.

Councillor Hutchinson agreed to withdraw his motion to allow these matters to be considered in more detail by officers and the portfolio holder, and be brought back to the next meeting.

**RESOLVED** that the motion be withdrawn to allow this additional work to be done, and brought back to the November Council meeting.

**40. REPORT OF THE INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF LOCAL SERVICES AND REGENERATION**

**Northumberland Line Project: Transport and Works Act Order Resolution**

The report sought confirmation from the Council under section 239 of the Local Government Act 1972 for the continuation of the formal process associated with the Transport and Works Act Order (TWAO) application (the Application) submitted to the Secretary of State on 26 May 2021 in connection with the Northumberland Line project.

Councillor Ball sought clarification of the position regarding planning permissions being sought for each of the 22 bridges involved, or for any where there were public concerns. Councillor Ploszaj confirmed that all planning applications would go through the normal process.

**RESOLVED** that for the purposes of section 239 of the Local Government Act 1972 (as applied by section 20 of the Transport and Works Act 1992), the resolution of the Council that was passed at a meeting of the Council held on 24 February 2021 which approved the submission of the Application on 26 May 2021, be confirmed by this resolution.

**41. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC AND ELECTORAL SERVICES AND DEPUTY MONITORING OFFICER**

**Protocols for the appointment of Honorary Aldermen and Alderwomen and for Freeman/Freewomen of Northumberland County Council**

The purpose of the report was to:

(i) reinstate the practice of appointing Honorary Aldermen/Alderwomen, and to discuss and agree a protocol for conferring the title on past Councillors from the 2021 elections onwards, subject to specific criteria. No appointments will be made at this meeting as by law, a special Council is required to be convened should this be agreed.

(ii) to consider and approve a protocol for conferring the title of Freeman and Freewomen of Northumberland.



The Leader introduced the report and thanked the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager for her work on this report. Group Leaders had contributed to its content and it would be taken forward on a cross party basis.

Councillor Reid agreed that there had been good joint working on this. He suggested that a commemorative medal should be cast to mark the occasion which could be funded from the underspend in member expenses.

Councillor Kennedy agreed this had been a good piece of work and thanked the Leader for involving Opposition Group Leaders. He agreed that something tangible should be presented to recipients.

Councillor Hill hoped that the criteria would recognise the significant and outstanding contributions of individuals and nothing less. She felt there was a danger that the awards could be seen as patronage by the public and that they might feel the Council had better things to discuss. She felt that the most rewarding thing about being a councillor was getting things done.

Councillor Morphet commented that the report was not clear about where nominations could come from for aldermen/alderwomen and that a sufficient degree of support was too vague. The Leader replied that there were two different schemes, the internal one to recognise the long service of councillors and the other to acknowledge the outstanding contributions of those to their communities, which should be recognised with the freedom of Northumberland award.

Councillor Dickinson commented that every member sacrificed a lot to be a councillor and it came at a cost. Those members who had held high office, where additional pressure was involved, should receive recognition. The criteria allowed for these circumstances and it should not be assumed that members who had simply been re-elected many times would get recognition.

**RESOLVED** that:-

- (a) the Council agree to the reinstatement of the practice of appointing Honorary Aldermen/Alderwomen from the 2021 election onwards;
- (b) a special Council be convened to confer the title of Honorary Aldermen/Alderwomen on those past councillors meeting the criteria;
- (c) a system to appoint Freeman and Freewomen of Northumberland be agreed; and
- (d) the Protocols attached to the report be approved.

## **42. REPORT OF THE SENIOR MANAGER AND DEPUTY MONITORING OFFICER**

### **Members' Allowances Scheme/Independent Remuneration Panel**

The Leader requested at the Annual Council Meeting a review of members' allowances, these having last been reviewed in 2015. The report set out;

- the legal background to the process,
- details of the last review within the Council,
- recommendations and suggested next steps

The report was presented by the Deputy Monitoring Officer.

Councillor Dickinson asked for further detail about the proposed £600 remuneration for Panel members, and whether the additional portfolio roles would be remunerated or not. The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that the £600 fee was per review to cover any future review needs. The Business Chair advised that the portfolio assistant roles would be remunerated.

Members raised other issues which they felt should be considered including a sickness policy, impact on the parental leave policy, remuneration for electric car use and remuneration for representing the Council at external meetings. Members were advised that these were all matters which the IRP could look at as part of its deliberations and any others should be raised with the Deputy Monitoring Officer.

**RESOLVED** that:-

- (a) Council note the steps taken so far within the process;
- (b) Council approve the re-establishment of an Independent Review Panel (IRP) of three members for a duration of four years;
- (c) Council endorse the appointment of John Anderson CBE as Chair of the Panel;
- (d) Council endorse the appointment of Allison Thompson as Panel Member;
- (e) authority be delegated to the Head of Democratic Services and the Monitoring Officer/Deputy Monitoring Officer in consultation with the political group leaders, to agree the process of and appointment of a third Panel Member;
- (f) Council approve the suggested Terms of Reference of the Panel namely;
  - a) To consider issues and representations relating to members' remuneration and expenses including a review of current Members' Allowances Scheme and a number of new matters not specifically provided for within the Scheme at present namely;
    - i) A proposed Parental Leave Policy
    - ii) The proposed payment of a special responsibility allowance to new deputy cabinet members
    - iii) The provision of payment of broadband allowances
  - b) To make recommendations and provide advice to the Council with regard to the above;

- (g) Council agree a remuneration rate of £600 per panel member, payable upon this review and any other reviews which are needed within the next four years of their appointment; and
- (h) Council receive and consider a report of the IRP after the Panel has met and prepared a report.

#### **43. REPORT OF THE DEPUTY MONITORING OFFICER**

##### **Proposed Constitutional Changes**

The purpose of the report was to review and update the Constitution and make related appointments. The report set out;

- the legal background to the process,
- details of the recent issues which needed consideration
- recommendations

The report was introduced by the Deputy Monitoring Officer.

The Leader welcomed the proposed appointment of Mr Hunter and paid tribute to Mrs Kelly Angus who had performed the role extremely well.

A number of members spoke on this including:-

- Councillor Reid suggested that the Constitution should only refer to job titles, not individuals. Mr Masson confirmed this would be the case.
- Councillor Daley echoed the Leader's comments regarding Mrs Angus. He had found her excellent to work with and she would be a huge loss to the Authority.
- The Business Chair agreed that Mrs Angus had been of great support to himself and Councillor Dodd at an extremely difficult time. She was a first rate officer.
- Councillor Dickinson commented that it had been a pleasure to see Mrs Angus develop into her role and deliver an excellent election after the previous one in 2017. It had been one of the best organised counts in the middle of a pandemic and she would be very much missed not just for her skills in this area, but across the board.
- Councillor Cartie commented that Mrs Angus had always been available to members when needed. Her expertise would be a great loss to the Council and she hoped that the Council could retain the good staff that it had.
- Councillor Hill commented that she had always found Mrs Angus a brilliant and very helpful officer. She hoped that there had been an exit interview and that the reason why a good member of staff had left was taken on board in order to prevent the loss of other good officers, if it was something that was preventable.

**RESOLVED** that Part 4.2 of the Constitution - Proper and Authorised Officers be amended in the following manner:

- to appoint the Council's Senior Service Director, Philip Hunter, as Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer and Proper Officer in respect of the functions specified at para 6 below; and
- the Council's Constitution be amended to reflect this appointment in the list of Proper and Authorised Officers.

#### **44. 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:-

<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Paragraph of Part I of Schedule 12A</b>
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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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<b>AND</b>	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.
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The meeting adjourned at 17.40 and reconvened at 17.50

#### **45. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

##### **Interim Executive Management Arrangements and Progress with Review of Future Structure**

The report set out information from the County Council's Head of Paid Service regarding the interim executive management arrangements and an update on the review of the Authority's Executive Officer Team. The report set out arrangements that the Head of Paid Service had made to ensure that there was appropriate executive cover pending the completion of the ongoing formal review of the Authority's staffing structure.

The Chief Executive advised that Penna had been appointed to carry out the review and it was hoped to bring proposal forward to Council in November. The report set out some potential areas of responsibility but further discussions were needed at Executive Team. A revised interim structure would be issued following those discussions. A number of officers had identified themselves for further responsibility. The Leader advised members that he supported the proposed interim structure.

Members raised a number of questions around specific areas of responsibility. The Chief Executive advised that further information would be sent to all members to provide clarity on specific areas and Executive Director leads once ongoing work was completed.

With regard to paragraph 4.9.7 of the report, Councillor Kennedy queried whether this issue had now been resolved. Ms Mitchell advised members that external legal counsel had been received on this matter and members of the Committee involved would be informed of that counsel, but it would not be appropriate to discuss the matter at full Council. The information contained in the report was a statement of fact for members' information and could not be changed in light of the legal advice which had been received.

Clarity was sought by members on what they were being asked to do in the report. The responsibility for the organisation, appointment and management of the Authority's staff lay with the Head of Paid Service under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, but the report's recommendations asked Council to note and agree the content of the report. The Deputy Monitoring Officer confirmed that it was not a function of Council to agree the staffing arrangements. The report provided information for members only to note.

The Chief Executive advised that the interim arrangements in the report were to ensure that the Authority could function with appropriate officer support in place, which it was her responsibility to do. However, she had no issue with sharing it with members for comments.

The Leader added that he completely supported the report's proposals. These needed to be put in place as soon as possible.

Councillor Dickinson moved the report's recommendations which was seconded by Councillor Hill, who then moved that Council move to the vote on those recommendations.

On the required number of members supporting a named vote, the votes were cast as follows:-

**FOR: 54**

Bowman, L.	Morphet, N.
Carr, D.	Nisbet, K.
Cartie, E.	Parry, K.
Castle, G.	Pattison, W.
Clark, T.	Ploszaj, W.
Dale, P.A.M.	Purvis, M.

Daley, W.	Reid, J.
Darwin, L.	Renner Thompson, G.
Dickinson, S.	Richardson, M.
Dodd, R.	Riddle, J.
Dunbar, C.	Robinson, M.
Dunn, L.	Sanderson H.G.H.
Ezhilchelvan, P.	Scott, A.
Ferguson, D.	Seymour, C.
Flux, B.	Sharp, A.
Foster, J.	Simpson, E.
Grimshaw, L.	Stewart, G.
Hardy, C.	Swinbank, M.
Hill, G.	Swinburn, M.
Horncastle, C.	Taylor, C.
Humphrey, C.	Thorne, T.
Hunter, E.I.	Towns, D.
Hutchinson, J.I.	Waddell, H.
Jones, V.	Wallace, A.
Kennedy, D.	Watson, A.
Lee, S.	Watson, J.
Mather, M.	Wearmouth, R.

**AGAINST: 0**

**ABSTENTIONS: 0**

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that:-

- (a) Council note and agree the contents of the report, in particular the interim management arrangements set out at paragraph 4.9; and
- (b) Council note the progress on the formal review of the County Council's executive / management arrangements being led by the Head of Paid Service as set out in a report to Council in July 2021.

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

.....  
Chair of the County Council

.....  
Duly Authorised Officer