

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

At a meeting of the **Cabinet** held at County Hall, Morpeth on Tuesday 12 October 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.
Ploszaj, W.	Wearmouth, R.
Renner Thompson, G.	

OTHER MEMBERS

Dunbar, C.	P. Scott
Flux, B.	

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Aviston, S.	Head of School Organisation and Resources
Bradley, N.	Service Director: Strategic Commissioning and Finance
Hadfield, K.	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Lally, D.	Chief Executive
Masson, N.	Deputy Monitoring Officer
McEvoy-Carr, C.	Executive Director of Children's Services and Adult Social Care
Murfin, R.	Interim Executive Director of Local Services and Regeneration
O'Farrell, R.	Head of Democratic and Electoral Services
Roll, J.	
Taylor, M.	Director of Business Development and Communities
Willis, J.	Interim Executive Director of

Ch.'s Initials.....

One member of the press was present

39. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Seymour.

40. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of Cabinet held on 7 September 2021 as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

41. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Councillors Dunbar and Scott declared an interest in item 8 on the agenda (East Cramlington Nature Reserve Car Park) having made contributions from their small schemes funding to this project.

42. REPORTS OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE

(1) Proposal to Amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle School and Whytrig Middle School

The report set out the request of the Governing Body of the Seaton Valley Federation to the Council to carry out informal consultation on a proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle School and Whytrig Middle School on the current Whytrig and Astley Community High School site in Seaton Delaval or alternative site, should one be identified as part of the site option appraisal. This proposal had arisen in the light of the capital project to reprovide new buildings for Astley and Whytrig Middle School on their current site, these two schools already being co-located on the high school's site in Seaton Delaval. Although the initial project was limited to the reprovision of new buildings for Astley and Whytrig, in the course of planning this project the federated Governing Body had identified a number of significant educational and financial benefits for all students within the Seaton Valley Federation to be co-located on one site in new buildings, and these were included in the report.

Furthermore, the proposal would require the expansion of the capacity of the planned new buildings for Whytrig in order to accommodate students relocated from Seaton Sluice and this would be included within the informal consultation. Therefore, the report also noted that Cabinet may be requested to permit the publication of a statutory proposal in line with the requirements of *The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013* and *The School Organisation*

(Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013 following the outcomes of informal consultation at a future date (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix A, along with the report of the FACS OSC circulated at the meeting).

The report was introduced by Councillor Renner Thompson. This was the first stage in the large investment programme into schools in this part of the County and he encouraged all parents and stakeholders to get involved in the consultation process.

Mrs Sue Aviston highlighted the key parts of the report for members.

Councillor Stewart presented the report from FACS OSC in place of Councillor Daley who had another meeting. The Committee had supported the report.

Comments from members included:-

- Councillor Scott supported the report. This was a significant development for the area and the request from the Governing Body was very much in line with the Administration's established plans. He encouraged residents and stakeholders to get involved in the consultation. There were many positives, but also one or two challenges, particularly on school closures, where residents' views would be welcomed. A merged middle school in Seaton Delaval would also need careful thought as regards sufficient infrastructure to support it.
- Councillor Wearmouth referred to the amount of work being done to support economic growth and opportunity in the County. Securing educational facilities which were geared up to the demands of the 21st century was key to this. Schools needed the ability to access the jobs that were being created.

In response to a question from the Leader, Mrs Aviston advised members that in the last 24 months, the overall spend on schools and academies in Northumberland had been just over £103m to grow capacity and improve school buildings. The Leader commented that this showed the Council's commitment to improving schools in the County and he thanked all those involved.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the proposal outlined in Key Issues be noted;
- (b) Cabinet approve informal consultation on the proposal to amalgamate Seaton Sluice Middle School with Whytrig Middle School in planned new buildings shared with Astley High School;
- (c) Cabinet agree to delegate the power to extend the informal consultation period if necessary to the Cabinet Member

for Children's Services and the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services, should it be necessary;

- (d) Cabinet note that a further report following informal consultation will be submitted to a meeting of the Cabinet at which a decision on whether to progress to the issue of a Statutory Proposal may be requested;
- (e) it be noted that should Cabinet agree to the publication of a Statutory Proposal, Cabinet would be required to determine the proposal on behalf of the County Council at a later date; and
- (f) the report of the FACS OSC be noted.

(2) Proposals for Atkinson House

The report set out proposals for Atkinson House Special School in Seghill, a secondary provision for boys with Social, Emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs in Northumberland, to relocate the school to a new site at the former Richard Coates CE Primary School building in Ponteland and at the same time to change the designation of the school from single sex provision to co-educational provision in light of the growing number of girls who are being assessed as having SEMH needs in Northumberland. The proposals would be with effect from 1 September 2022.

The nature of these proposals required a statutory process to be undertaken prior to any final decision being made by Cabinet. Cabinet was therefore also asked to permit the initiation of the statutory process, beginning with approval for a six week informal public consultation process. Cabinet may be requested to permit the publication of a Statutory Proposal in relation to these proposals at a future date following the outcome of consultation (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix B, along with the report of the FACS OSC circulated at the meeting).

The report was introduced by Councillor Renner Thompson. SEND was a huge priority for the Council and the proposals would meet the increasing demand in this area. Mrs Aviston detailed the key points of the report for members.

Member comments included:-

- Councillor Watson referred to the issue in the OSC report relating to travelling distances and queried how long it would take to get a child from Berwick or Haltwhistle to this school. Mrs Aviston replied that children from Berwick would not necessarily be placed in Ponteland as provision closer to home to meet their needs would be found. Only in exceptional circumstances would they have travelled to Seghill. Individual transport arrangements would be reported back following consultation with parents. Having a school in Ponteland would also bring provision closer to families in the west of the County.

- Mrs McEvoy Carr added that there were clear requirements on maximum travel times which the Authority had to abide by. In addition, officers were looking at the availability and capacity of places across Northumberland to prevent long travel times.
- Councillor Stewart reported that FACS OSC had welcomed the continued investment by the Administration.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the proposals outlined in Key Issues be noted;
- (b) Cabinet approve consultation on;
 - a. The relocation of Atkinson House School to the former site of Richard Coates CE Primary School with effect from 1 September 2022;
 - b. The change of designation of Atkinson House School from a single sex provision to a co-educational provision with effect from 1 September 2022;
- (c) Cabinet agree to delegate, if necessary, the power to extend the consultation period to the Member for Children's Services and the Executive Director of Adults and Children's Services, as outlined in para. 10 of the report;
- (d) Cabinet note that a further report following consultation (if approved) would be submitted to a meeting of Cabinet, at which a decision on whether or not to publish a statutory proposal in relation to the proposals set out in this report would be made; and
- (e) the report of the FACS OSC be noted.

(3) School Organisation Plan 2021-2024

The report asked Cabinet and FACS to note the second iteration of the School Organisation Plan 2021-2024 for Northumberland, the first iteration being for 2018-2021. The report also asked Cabinet to approve the circulation of the plan to schools and academies for information and feedback prior to its subsequent publication.

This latest version of the plan covered the period 2021 to 2024, but would be subject to annual update in order to capture changing information or circumstances relating to schools and academies as appropriate (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix C, along with the report of the FACS OSC circulated at the meeting).

The report was introduced by Councillor Renner Thompson. This was a very important and valuable document. There was no longer a statutory need to produce it but the Authority had chosen to do this as it fed into other Council services and provided valuable information on surplus places, which then informed the school investment programme.

Mrs Aviston detailed the key points for members, including the changes introduced in the latest version.

Councillor Stewart advised that OSC had been pleased to receive the report and the focussed and innovative ideas it contained for schools and education.

Member comments included:-

- Councillor Riddle recognised that Haydon Bridge Partnership had a number of surplus places but referred to the wording “with the exception of Bellingham Middle School”, The Authority had been ordered to keep the school open, but its catchment area had not been reinstated. This impacted on the climate change agenda and home to school transport. Journey times were very long and needed to be looked at. Children were being transported too great a distance, which was not necessary because the authority was trying to override parental choice by not providing the transport to Bellingham Middle School. He felt this was discriminatory because people were being denied parental choice because of their financial position. For this reason, he would be abstaining from the vote.
- Councillor Wearmouth felt this was a very important document which provided a lot of information about what was going on in the County. He referred to the increase in SEND need and asked whether this was expected to continue. Also, regarding new homes and demand, he asked what the Authority could do to address the resultant demand for additional school places in towns such as Morpeth. Finally, as regards numbers of pupils in years 8-11, he asked if things were moving to a point where schools were going to be significantly more full.
- Mrs Aviston replied that there were less children in schools currently than there had been for the last five years due to a declining birth rate nationally. This presented challenges for the rural areas in terms of sustainability and work was ongoing with partnerships about this. Regarding SEND, again the Authority was following the national trend. A strategy was being prepared for member approval about addressing the demand over the next five years. Regarding house building and developer contributions, the next report covered this in more detail but where new houses were being built a developer contribution was secured to grow capacity as well as grant from government to support that need.
- Councillor Renner Thompson commented that Haydon Bridge High School was no longer in special measures thanks to the hard work of the Improvement Board and staff, and the dedication of this and the previous Administration to the school through £5m of investment. There was still some work to do around Bellingham Middle School but overall, the Haydon Bridge Partnership was a good news story for the Council.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Cabinet note this is the second iteration of the School Organisation Plan and covers the period 2021-24;
- (b) Cabinet note the School Organisation Plan will be updated annually to take into account changes in schools' data and information over the previous 12 month period;
- (c) Cabinet approve the School Organisation Plan 2021-24, including its circulation to schools and other partners for comment followed by publication on the Council's website; and
- (d) the report of FACS OSC be noted, and the recommendation that the Plan be circulated to all members be endorsed with a covering note from the Portfolio Holder and the Head of School Organisation and Resources

(4) Update of the Education Infrastructure Contribution Policy

The Council's Education Infrastructure Contribution Policy was approved for implementation by Cabinet in December 2017. Cabinet was now asked to approve an update to the policy specifically in order to approve an increase in the requested contribution towards SEND provision in the county to reflect the increased number of young people in the County requiring specialist provision (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix D, along with the report of the FACS OSC circulated at the meeting).

Councillor Renner Thompson introduced the report on this policy which was part of the S106 arrangements with developers. This would provide a valuable contribution to the need for SEND support. Mrs Aviston detailed the key points for members. Cabinet were being asked to approve an update of the policy, specifically in order to approve an increase in the contribution for pupils with SEND, which was growing.

Councillor Stewart reported the FACS OSC view that this was an important policy which needed regular review. He had already discussed the need for training on this topic for members of Strategic Planning with the Head of Planning. Mr Murfin advised that S106 training was being picked up as part of the LAC review.

Member comments included:-

- Councillor Riddle queried whether there was a pipeline of projects to use the S106 funding already received to ensure that none of it was lost. Mrs Aviston confirmed that there were projects in train. These included increasing capacity across the Morpeth Partnership, some of which had already been implemented. She stressed that the funding had to be spent on growing capacity and couldn't be used for enhancement works.
- Councillor Wearmouth welcomed this continued work, adding that it

was vital that housebuilders contributed their share. This had been achieved through the hard work of officers and the Administration.

- Councillor Watson asked what the increase in pupil numbers with SEND from 3-4% was in actual figures. Mrs Aviston advised that in 2017 there had been 668 pupils with SEND, in 2020 it was 940.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Cabinet note the updated version of the Education Infrastructure Contribution Policy attached at Appendix 1 of the report;
- (b) the increase in the contribution requested for SEND educational infrastructure be approved, to reflect that the percentage of the school age population in Northumberland with complex Special Educational Needs has grown from 3% in 2017 to 4% in 2021;
- (c) the amendment to the pupil yield factor used to calculate the number of pupils arising from each house in a development from 0.02714 to 0.02516 for primary yield and from 0.02286 to 0.02384 for secondary yield be approved, to reflect the minor changes in the number of primary and secondary pupils in the county since 2017;
- (d) Cabinet note that the policy has had some general minor non-material amendments to wording for clarification purposes; and
- (e) the report of the FACS OSC be noted, and the recommendation that all members receive S106 training be supported.

(5) Integrated Domestic Abuse Services for Northumberland – Permission to Tender

The report sought permission to go to the market to commission a range of services to provide an Integrated Domestic Abuse Service for Northumberland which would allow the Council to meet its statutory duties. The length of contracts will be 2 years, with an option to extend for a further 2 years (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix E, along with the report of the Communities and Place OSC circulated at the meeting).

The report was introduced by Councillor Pattison who urged all members to support it. She reminded members that it was domestic abuse white ribbon day on 25 November 2021. Mrs McEvoy Carr detailed the key points of the report. Scrutiny Committee had suggested that the length of the contracts should be three years. However, the funding was for two years and she recommended that this should be accepted.

Member comments included:-

- Councillor Dunbar supported Councillor Pattison on this. She had

recently been pleased to accept her offer to be ambassador for domestic abuse in Northumberland.

- In response to a question from the Leader regarding Scrutiny's recommendation, Mrs McEvoy Carr advised that what the report proposed was sensible in terms of the two plus two as the funding was there for two years and it would allow time to pause and look at what the needs actually were for the following two years. She understood the point being made, but the Authority was already committed to ongoing investment.
- Councillor Wearmouth asked if there would be any feedback to Scrutiny or Cabinet to measure the impact of the services being provided. Mrs McEvoy Carr confirmed that there were a number of committees interested in this who would be monitoring this including the Domestic Abuse Partnership, who reported to the Safeguarding Adults Board and the Safeguarding Children's Partnership, as well as the member related committees which would hold the service to account for its performance.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Cabinet note the information presented in this report regarding the procurement of a contract for an integrated domestic abuse service;
- (b) Cabinet note that the total value of the four-year contract is approximately £2,595,101;
- (c) the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services be authorised to undertake a procurement exercise and award of the contracts; and
- (d) the report of the Communities and Place OSC be noted.

43. REPORT OF THE INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND S151 OFFICER

Council Tax Support Scheme 2022-23

The report sought approval for the local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2022-23 to continue to provide support at a maximum level of 92% of council tax liability (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix F, along with the report of the CSEG OSC circulated at the meeting).

Councillor Wearmouth introduced the report detailing the main points that a 92% level of support was proposed again this year, which was again the second most generous level of support in the region after Durham County Council. Additional support had been provided in the last year for covid which had effectively covered the difference. He had provided reassurance at Scrutiny that the Authority would provide additional support wherever possible from hardship funding or other sources.

Mrs Willis confirmed this was the main scheme to provide support to low income households but there was also a hardship scheme which was used to provide additional discounts to households on a discretionary basis. Referrals for this support came from a number of organisations and this year there was a provisional grant allocation of £2.4m. The household support fund recently announced would provide support for households facing pressures as a result of increased food or fuel prices etc. A delivery plan had to be submitted to DWP by 29 October 2021 as to how the Authority planned to spend it and this could include earmarking some funding as top up support for the hardship fund if members so wished.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) County Council be recommended to approve the Council Tax Support Scheme attached as Appendix 1 to the report, to be adopted as the Council's local scheme for 2022-23; and
- (b) the report of the CSEG OSC be noted.

44. REPORT OF THE INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION

Establishing a Culture and Creative Zone

The report outlined the opportunity presented by the North of Tyne Culture and Creative Zone prospectus and agree the pilot approach to be adopted in Northumberland to maximise this opportunity (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix G, along with the report of the CSEG OSC circulated at the meeting).

The report was introduced by Councillor Ploszaj and Councillor Watson.

The report had been supported by Scrutiny.

Councillor Renner Thompson fully supported the report and the proposals for Berwick which he felt was a real achievement for the Administration and Government.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Cabinet welcome the North of Tyne Combined Authority's intent to co-develop a Culture and Creative Zone (CCZ) pilot within each of the constituent local authority areas;
- (b) Cabinet note the process and its implications of applying the approach to Northumberland as set out in the North of Tyne Culture and Creative Zone Prospectus;

- (c) Cabinet agree that initial pilot Zone for the county should focus on the town of Berwick-upon-Tweed; and
- (d) the report of the CSEG OSC be noted.

45. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Thirston Neighbourhood Plan

The report sought approval to formally 'make' the Thirston Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan passed independent examination in June 2021. A local referendum held in the Parish of Thirston on 16 September 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 considers that doing so would breach European Union obligations (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix H).

The report was presented by Councillor Horncastle. He was particularly pleased to see a policy included in the Plan to prevent large static caravans being occupied year round.

Councillor Pattison congratulated the Parish Council and the community who had worked together to produce a Plan which she felt had been quite difficult to put together.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the referendum outcome of 16 September 2021 be noted;
- (b) Cabinet agree to formally 'make' the Thirston Neighbourhood Plan in accordance with section 38A(4)(a) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004;
- (c) the decision statement (attached at Appendix 1) required under Regulation 19 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, as amended, be approved and
- (d) both the Thirston Neighbourhood Plan and the decision statement be 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.

46. REPORT OF THE INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND S151 OFFICER

Summary of New Capital Proposals considered by Officer Capital Strategy Group

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

RESOLVED that:-

46.1 East Cramlington Nature Reserve Car Park

Cabinet approve a capital investment of £18,000 to relocate and expand the car park with £10,000 jointly funded by Councillor Scott, Councillor Dunbar and Councillor Lee through their Local Member Contributions and £8,000 funded from the Parks Enhancement Capital Programme in the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan for 2021-24.

46.2 Flood and Coastal Erosion Works

Cabinet approve the amended budget allocations for Environment Agency funded schemes within the Council's 2021-24 Medium Term Financial Plan for Otterburn Surface Water Flood Alleviation Scheme, Wark Surface Water Scheme and Red Row Surface Water Flood Alleviation Scheme and approve the delivery of these schemes for Autumn 2021; and approve the addition and delivery of Bingfield/A68 Surface Water Flood Alleviation Scheme in Autumn 2021.

46.3 Sustainable Warmth Grant

Cabinet support a grant application to upgrade energy inefficient homes of low-income households in Northumberland from two centrally funded schemes and, if successful, deliver the appropriate works:

- Local Authority Delivery Phase 3 (LAD3) with a refined scope to support low-income households heated by mains gas. Grant requested: £2,116,541
- Home Upgrade Grant Phase 1 (HUG1) for low-income households with homes off-gas. Grant requested: £3,509,866.

47. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED that:

(a) 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:-

11 (1-3) 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 because for item 11(1), disclosure would adversely affect commercial confidentiality requirements and hence the Authority's ability to conduct its affairs, and for items 11(2-3), the information can be considered to be commercially sensitive.

12 (1-2) 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 because for 12(1) disclosure would prejudice the partners' in the Energy Central Campus's (as set out in the report) ability to negotiate with partners and give its competitors a commercial advantage, and for 12(2) disclosure would prejudice Advance Northumberland's ability to negotiate with partners and give its competitors a commercial advantage.

48. REPORTS OF THE INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND S151 OFFICER

(1) Newcastle Airport – Shareholder Loan Guarantee

The report asked members to consider the provision of a loan facility to Newcastle International Airport Limited (NIAL) (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix J and coloured pink, along with the report of the CSEG OSC circulated at the meeting).

This had been considered in detail by the Risk Appraisal Panel and Scrutiny and both had supported the proposals.

RESOLVED that recommendations (a) to (c) in the report be agreed.

(2) Disposal of Land, West of Choppington Road, Bedlington

The report sought approval to terms for the disposal of development land, west of Choppington Road in Bedlington (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix K and coloured pink).

RESOLVED that the recommendation in the report be agreed.

(3) Summary of New Capital Proposals considered by Officer Capital Strategy Group

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

RESOLVED that the recommendation in the report be agreed.

49. REPORTS OF THE INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION

(1) Energising Blyth Programme - Energy Central Campus Update

The report updated Cabinet regarding the development of the Energy Central Campus, one of the flagship projects in the Energising Blyth Programme supported by the Governments Towns Fund including the Future High Streets Fund and Town Deal (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix M and coloured pink, along with the report of the CSEG OSC circulated at the meeting).

Members very much welcomed and supported the report. Officers were to be commended for their hard work on this.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) recommendations 1-6 as detailed in the report be agreed; and
- (b) the report of the CSEG OSC be noted.

(2) Shareholder agreement for disposal of Northumberland Energy Park 1 (NEP1) at East Sleekburn

The report sought Cabinet's agreement to allow Advance Northumberland to lease a site at Northumberland Energy Park (NEP1). It also sought agreement to allow Advance Northumberland to sell the site to the company,

and to grant them a “call option” which would enable them to acquire an extension to the site subject to certain conditions being met (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix N and coloured pink).

Members very much welcomed the report.

RESOLVED that recommendations 1-6 as detailed in the report be agreed.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....