

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Northumberland County Council** held on Wednesday 3 November 2021 at County Hall, Morpeth at 3.00 pm.

PRESENT

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

MEMBERS

Ball, C.	Mather, M.
Bawn, D.	Morphet, N
Beynon, J.	Murphy, M.
Bowman, L.	Nisbet, K.
Carr, D.J.	Oliver, N.
Cartie, E.	Parry, K.
Castle, G.	Pattison, W.
Cessford, T.	Ploszaj, W.
Dale, P.A.M.	Purvis, M.
Daley, W.	Reid, J.
Darwin, L.	Renner-Thompson, G.
Dickinson, S.	Richardson, M.
Dodd, R.R.	Riddle, J.R.
Dunbar, C.	Robinson, M.
Dunn, L.	Sanderson, H.G.H.
Ezhilchelvan, P.D.	Scott, P.
Ferguson, D.	Seymour, C.
Foster, J.	Sharp, A.
Gallacher, B.	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.	Waddell, H.
Hutchinson, J.I.	Wallace, A.
Jones, V.	Watson, A.
Kennedy, D.	Watson, J.G.
Lang, J.A.	Wearmouth, R.W.
Lee, S.	Wilczek, R.

OFFICERS

Hadfield, K.	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Hunter, P.	Service Director, Policy
Lally, D.	Chief Executive

Masson, N. McEvoy-Carr, C.	Deputy Monitoring Officer Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services
Murfin, R.	Interim Executive Director of Planning and Local Services
O'Farrell, R.	Interim Executive Director Place and Regeneration
Roll, J.	Head of Democratic and Electoral Services
Taylor, M.	Director, Business Development

One member of the press was present

46. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Bridgett, Clark, A.Scott and Towns.

47. MINUTES

With regard to Minute No. 29 (Motion), Councillor Reid queried whether notification had been made to the LGA Labour Group as per Council's decision. This would be checked.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of County Council held on Wednesday 1 September 2021 as circulated, be confirmed as a true record, signed by the Business Chair and sealed with the Common Seal of the Council.

48. DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

With regard to Minute No. 23 of the CSEG OSC minutes, Councillor Grimshaw declared an interest as an Advance Board member and advised she would not participate in any discussion.

With regard to item 9 on the agenda (Motion), Councillor Wearmouth advised that he did not believe he had a conflict of interest but he would not take part in the discussion.

The Leader declared an interest as a farmer with regard to member question No. 11 on farming.

49. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Business Chair was sad to report the death of former County Councillor Terry Robson on 9 October at the age of 78. Terry represented the Hexham Central with Acomb Ward from 1984-1989 and 2008-2017. He had also been a member of Hexham Town Council where he became Mayor twice, and of Tynedale District Council.

The Business Chair also reminded members of all former councillor and honorary aldermen colleagues who had passed away during the pandemic. These had previously been reported to Council but members were now able to stand for a minute's silence in their memory.

Members were then reminded about the remembrance service being held at St. Mary's Church, Morpeth on Thursday 11 November from around 10:30 am Covid precautions would be in place. The event would also be live streamed.

The Leader updated members on the discussions regarding the wider combined authority area. The provisional offer was that if agreement was reached on an LA7 area with a mayor, then the authority might be eligible to get extra transport funding. He was happy with the existing arrangements and did not see the need to commit to a larger authority unless Northumberland would benefit from it. Discussions were continuing and he would report back to members on it in due course.

He had had a meeting this morning with MPs and the rail operators regarding the east coast main line. He had acknowledged the work done by Northern on the Northumberland Line but had stressed that the next time there was consultation on potential reductions to rail services, that all the operators should do it at the same time, and that they take note of what the Council said regarding the reduction of services for commuters.

50. MEMBER QUESTIONS

Question 1 from Councillor Hardy to Councillor Pattison

In 2019/20, the council had a budget of £2,086,884 for Disabled Facilities Grants.

Only 85% of the council's DFG budget was spent. While people living with life limiting illnesses like MND struggled to get the Home Adaptations they needed.

Will you work with me and support MNDA "Act to Adapt Campaign" to ensure that any Northumberland resident diagnosed with a terminal illness such as Motor Neurone Disease will be given priority access to DFG and Home Adaptations.

Councillor Pattison thanked Councillor Hardy for all his work to support the MND Association, which played a vital role in supporting people who suffered from it. MND was a terrible disease and was the focus of the Civic Head's charity this year.

She did agree that supporting people with MND was one of the most essential responsibilities of the Council. The financial information in Councillor Hardy's question, while technically correct, gave a rather misleading picture. The figure described as the "DFG budget" represented the amount which the Council received from the Government for DFGs and related purposes. The Government changed the rules a number of years ago to make it clear that this funding could be used flexibly to support any capital

expenditure which enabled disabled people to live in their own homes. While the largest element of spending was grants paid out under the statutory Disabled Facilities Grant scheme, the level of the funding received from the Government had in recent years been higher than was required to meet all eligible applications under that scheme, and the surplus funding had been used to support other capital expenditure outside the DFG scheme, such as providing adapted accommodation to enable people with a learning disability and associated physical disabilities to live in independent supported accommodation. Because the timing of such schemes might not align neatly with local authority financial years, funding was carried forward as necessary to ensure that it remained available to support disabled people, so underspends in one year did not mean that the money was lost.

Officers were not aware of people living with life limiting illnesses like MND who had struggled to get the Home Adaptations they needed. As the Council told the MND Association in response to the Freedom of Information request that the question was based on, there was a process already in place for ensuring that urgent applications, such as those from people with rapidly deteriorating progressive conditions, were prioritised. If Councillor Hardy, or any other members, knew of cases in which the Council had not responded as urgently as it should have done, she urged them to contact her to make sure they were looked into.

She had a few reservations about the MND Association's campaign, which asked specifically for a fast-track process for people with MND, and more favourable financial rules for people with the condition. Priorities needed to be based on the urgency of people's need rather than on their specific diagnosis, and MND was not the only condition which could create very urgent needs. In his question, Councillor Hardy had taken a broader approach, and asked for priority to be given to anyone with a terminal illness. She was assured by officers that current arrangements were designed to ensure that this happened, but was happy to take up any specific issues raised with her.

Councillor Hardy asked that anyone who was diagnosed with a terminal illness and issued with a DS1500 be given a fast track to disabled facility grants and home adaptations.

Question 2 from Councillor Hill to Councillor Wearmouth

How many complaints have Northumberland County Council had, over the last ten years or indeed ever, from residents and visitors who have taken grave offence and have had to reach for the smelling salts over the names of our streets?

Councillor Wearmouth replied that he was not aware of any.

Councillor Hill commented that there was an important point in the report to Cabinet the following week on this regarding the need for clear street signs both for directions and safety. She had an estate in her area where the street numbering was very confusing so she asked for a commitment that places like this would be picked up on. Councillor Wearmouth responded that she would need to contact Local Services about this.

Question 3 from Councillor Hill to the Leader

Whistleblowing paramedics in Cornwall, an area with some similar characteristics and demographics to Northumberland, have said that there is an ambulance crisis. They say that people are needlessly dying because ambulances cannot get to patients in time and because of ambulances having to queue outside hospitals. Furthermore, they say the public, generally, do not realise the scale of this problem and they fear this situation will get even worse as Winter approaches. How confident are you that we are not facing the same crisis here ?

The Leader noted that the question was not about a County Council service. He acknowledged that the ambulance service was a very important one and in Northumberland, the figures were approximately on average with neighbouring areas. If there were to be questions asked about the ambulance service then he suggested that they be directed to them as he did not have sufficient detail to respond.

Councillor Hill replied that she had received a detailed response from an officer accepting that there was a problem and was disappointed that the Leader had not chosen to deliver it. The Leader replied that he did not focus on being negative. He had been advised by officers that the County had a first class ambulance service. If it didn't always meet its targets, it was up to them to address that.

Question 4 from Councillor Daley to Councillor Horncastle

Horton Burn watercourse in Cramlington is an environmentally significant watercourse running through the Northburn residential area in Cramlington. It is also a recognised environmental corridor with designated healthy walking routes alongside the burn.

We have herons, ducks, fish, water voles and occasional reports of Otters. We also have significant species of plants along the waterway.

In recent years there has been an increasing number of pollution incidents including oil spillages, detergent dumping and in 2019 thousands of fish and eels killed in a major dumping incident from one of the industrial estates.

I have worked with local residents, set up a Friends Group, engaged with Northumbrian Water, the Environment Agency and others to get action. Hundreds of local residents are working with me to look after this watercourse including reporting incidents as they occur.

Will the County Council also work with me to get the Environment Agency and Northumbrian Water to fine and hold to account those responsible for dumping waste into the burn and get the clear message out that this is a living waterway and not a sewer?

Councillor Horncastle confirmed that officers in Public Protection were currently taking this important matter up with the Environment Agency, to ensure that the case was given priority.

Councillor Daley welcomed this and added that he'd been working with officers on issues such as dumped shopping trolleys in waterways and been told that riparian rights now sat with the County Council instead of Northumbrian Water or the Environment Agency. This transfer of responsibility was of concern and he asked if officers could meet with him, Northumbrian Water and the Environment Agency.

Councillor Horncastle advised that he would raise this with the Head of Public Protection at his meeting with him to find out who was responsible for what and was happy to visit the location with Councillor Daley.

Question 5 from Councillor Daley to Councillor Horncastle

As part of the St Nicholas Manor 400 + home planning application in Cramlington, where almost all homes are now completed, a series of road safety measures are planned including a new roundabout on the A1171 to improve road safety, new pedestrian crossing points plus improvements to Station Road with cycle path links as part of a section 278 agreement.

This area has been the subject of road closures due to serious road traffic accidents, complaints from pedestrians and cyclists plus massive concern from residents of Northburn, St Nicholas Manor and Nelson Village.

Why were we told in 2019 that these works would start immediately following the construction of Westmorland Way roundabout, which was completed 2019, and why is it that more than 2 years later with excuses such as delays being related to tendering processes and more recently a stone built bus shelter, which has been there for over 15 years, preventing this scheme from starting. Given that Northumberland County Council has done everything legally on our side to give the green light to this safety scheme, why is it that this urgent work shows no sign of being started?

Councillor Horncastle advised that the Council had been endeavouring to resolve a number of issues linked to site, but the development had been subject to numerous delays from the developer's legal teams. The final required legal agreement was circulated to all parties in August. Unfortunately, one of the surety providers 'National Housing Building Council' advised that the agreement was not sufficient for them to guarantee the properties. Subsequently, the Council had been working to support the developers and their solicitors to agree a wording which secured the appropriate matters. A revised agreement was circulated recently and officers were waiting feedback. Officers were pressing for a commitment towards starting these essential works. Future highways agreements would be structured in such a way that developers would be required to demonstrate compliance prior to occupation of any units.

Councillor Daley welcomed this but there were multi million pound developers across the county who were abusing the planning system and residents and the County Council was being blamed for the failures. Developers had to be held to account. He urged Councillor Horncastle and officers to come to St Nicholas Manor and see how important it was for this scheme to be progressed.

Question 6 from Councillor Ezhilchelvan to Councillor Riddle

Irresponsible parking around schools is something which affects almost every councillor in our county. Some other councils have taken a very proactive stance by using mobile number plate recognition systems on modified cars which drive around schools and capture the number plates of poorly parked cars. Acknowledging any work already done, can you please tell us what proactive measures that the Northumberland County Council is using and/or planning to use to end the blight of bad parking around our schools?

Councillor Riddle advised that the County Council had a vehicle with automatic number plate recognition system and it was used around schools where there were particular highway safety issues caused by poor parking behaviours. On a more proactive basis, the Council worked closely with schools to help them develop and implement "School Travel Plans". These used a range of approaches, including encouraging children to use non-car means of travelling to school. The Travel Plan also set out how the school worked with parents to tackle inconsiderate parking and the escalating steps that could be taken.

If anyone was aware of particular problems at a specific school he urged them to get in touch with Rob Murfin.

Councillor Ezhilchelvan was glad that this was acknowledged as a problem and was surprised that there was a vehicle going around as he had never seen it. He asked why this had not been seen and commented that those residents who had residents parking schemes, for which they paid a permit fee, were never surveyed.

Councillor Riddle responded that he would have to get information from officers on the vehicle's routes. Parking violations were the responsibility of the enforcement team. If there were concerns these should be reported.

Question 7 from Councillor Lee to Councillor Horncastle

Since my election in May I have recovered over 200 abandoned shopping trolleys in Cramlington East. Retailers have failed to attend meetings to discuss this issue. Existing legislation permits the local authority to adopt Schedule 4 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 as amended by the Clean Neighbourhoods Act 2005 which allows them to issue penalties to retailers for each abandoned trolley. Will Northumberland County Council give consideration to adopting this legislation?

Councillor Horncastle replied that the Council's Public Protection and Neighbourhood Services teams would explore the technical and practical implications of this by investigating the enforcement, collection and storage requirements. Following this, an update would be provided at the next full Council Meeting.

Councillor welcomed this but in the meantime, this was an ongoing issue and he suggested that a working group be formed to identify a speedy solution to the problem. Councillor Horncastle acknowledged that there was a problem. Officers would investigate the possibility of a working group and would also look at the conditions attached to the original planning permission.

Question 8 from Councillor Swinburn to the Leader

Northumberland County Council has rightly received significant praise for our work to tackle climate change and ultimately be Britain's environmentally greenest County. As part of the move to improve air quality, many residents in the County are now switching to electric vehicles.

Cramlington has seen a significant increase in electric car ownership and many taxi firms are looking to switch away from petrol and diesel to use an electric fleet.

Given that Cramlington is the second biggest town in Northumberland, and the recognised gateway to and from the County, how can we support the residents and growing number of people who visit the town for work and leisure, with more off street and communal charging points so that in conjunction with increased public transport and improvements to the train station, we can make Cramlington the "Green Town of Northumberland" ?

The Leader responded that the target for Cramlington in terms of carbon emissions was the same as for the rest of the County. However, given the layout of the town, he felt there was a good case to be made for rolling out some of the funding available from the capital programme for additional and improved cycleways. A feasibility study could be done on this.

Councillor Swinburn commented that in 2015 only 1.1% of new vehicles registered had a plug, compared to 3.2% in 2019 and 10.7% by the end of 2019. The pandemic had had a significant impact on vehicle sales, most noticeably this year with a massive increase in electric vehicle sales. However, there had been only two additional EVCPs in Cramlington. There was a need for action now and he asked if the Leader would meet with him and his fellow Cramlington councillors and the Town Council to develop some plans to progress the easier use of EVs in the town.

The Leader advised that there was a lot of work going on in the rollout of EVCPs and he was very keen to ensure that the County Council met its climate change targets by 2030. He was sure members could work together on this.

Question 9 from Councillor Dale to the Leader

Does this Council support the use of Smart Meters as an effective aid in the rollout of renewable energy?

The Leader confirmed that was the case. Councillor Dale welcomed this and advised that she had written to Guy Opperman MP asking when the Government expected the rollout of smart meters and asking the Government to make this a priority. She asked if the Council would write to Mr Opperman and other local MPs to support residents on this.

The Leader asked Councillor Dale to forward him a copy of that letter but added that all local MPs were supportive of the Council's work on climate change.

Question 10 from Councillor Dale to Councillor Horncastle

When does this Council expect the Council's Local Plan to be signed off by Government?

Councillor Horncastle advised that, following the Local Plan Examination Hearing Sessions, the Schedule of Main Modifications to the Northumberland Local Plan had been subject to consultation from 9 June to 4 August 2021. The representations received to the Main Modifications consultation together with the Council's response had been sent to the Inspector for consideration, prior to the report on the 'soundness' of the Local Plan being issued by the Inspector. The timescale for the receipt of the Inspector's report was outwith the control of the Council, but it was anticipated that the Inspector's report would be received before the end of 2021 and subject to the Local Plan being found 'sound', it was anticipated that the Local Plan would be adopted in early 2022.

Councillor Dale commented that all members should have a briefing on the Local Plan as many were new to the process. This could update members on the current position and explain the process. The Leader responded that he would ask the Director to arrange this. He thanked the Director and all of his staff for their work in getting to the current position.

Question 11 from Councillor Mather to the Leader

The need to address climate change is important but I'm worried about the knock on impacts to farmers and the rural community, in particular tenant farmers and their workers, many of whom have contacted me to say that they at risk of or already have been served notice to vacate land to make way for "re-wilding", tree planting etc.

Would the Leader set in motion a review by NCC of the subject by NCC officers and join me in discussions with local farmers so that we can ensure we understand the issues being encountered, and identify positive ways to address them and support our vital industry?

The Leader replied that efforts were being made nationally to find more forestry to offset carbon, and also looking for a whole new range of environmental options for farmland. Northumberland was a beautiful county because of its farmers. There needed to be balance in how the County was taken forward, and tenant farmers were vulnerable and needed to be protected. He would set a working group up of officers along with representatives of the NFU, CLA and the TFA. The County's MPs would be involved also. He would report back on this to the next Council meeting on progress.

51. CABINET MINUTES

- (1) Wednesday 25 August 2021**
- (2) Tuesday 7 September 2021**
- (3) Tuesday 12 October 2021**

With regard to Minute No. 43 of the 12 October meeting, Council Tax had the power to put increasing numbers of families into debt and she asked if the delivery plan for the household support fund include earmarking any funding as top up support for the hardship fund or other mechanisms aimed specifically for council tax support. Scrutiny Committee had raised several concerns and she needed to be assured that they had been addressed in the Cabinet meeting. The hardship fund was a discretionary scheme and there would always be people who slipped through the net.

Councillor Wearmouth asked if this could be dealt with under the substantive matter on the agenda.

Councillor Robinson asked for an update on Minute No. 48(2) which Councillor Wearmouth agreed would be provided.

RESOLVED that the minutes of Cabinet detailed above be received.

52. COMMITTEE MINUTES

(1) Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC

These were presented by Councillor Bawn.

RESOLVED that the minutes of Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC be received.

(2) Family and Children's Services OSC

These were presented by Councillor Daley who thanked Councillor Stewart for this work as Vice Chair of FACS.

With regard to Minute No. 25, Councillor Wallace asked whether a response had yet been received from the Chancellor and Education Secretary regarding heating and fuel costs for schools and he referred to Cambois Primary School where the electricity budget for the year had been set at £12,000. By September, £11,000 of this budget had been spent. This would directly impact teaching and learning. He urged the Leader to get an answer to the question being asked, as the situation was very worrying and could end in schools being closed.

The Leader replied that he had written to the Schools Minister and the Chancellor and he understood that a reply was on its way. He was confident that the issue would be taken on board but was not sure how much help they could provide. The Council felt as strongly about this issue as the local MPs.

RESOLVED that the minutes of Family and Children's Services OSC be received.

(3) Communities and Place OSC

These were presented by Councillor Oliver.

With regard to Minute No. 16, Councillor Morphet wished to make it clear that he had raised the point at the meeting so he could understand the pros and cons of alternative fuel sources and he strongly supported the idea of an HVO trial.

With regard to the resolution to acquire more gulley wagons, Councillor Gallacher supported this. This was a major problem in the south east and he asked that Ashington take priority. He also felt that staff should be trained in advance of the vehicles being delivered.

In response to some comments from members about the gulley wagons and blocked drains, Councillor Riddle advised that there were now 4 wagons which were all equipped with jettors. However, the waste water had to be disposed of at a waste transfer station. He acknowledged that there were some problems in Ashington and these were being addressed.

Councillor Ball asked when the vehicles were going to get to North Seaton Road in Ashington as this had been promised in July. The Leader advised that he and Councillor Riddle would visit to see the issue first hand. Councillor Gallacher referred to the visit with Cabinet Members and officers to Ashington in the summer. A report back from the Cabinet Member on that was still awaited and nothing had been heard from officers either. He asked that Ashington Councillors be kept updated.

(4) Health and Wellbeing OSC

These were presented by Councillor Reid.

Councillor Flux thanked him for his work as Chair of this Committee.

RESOLVED that the minutes of Health and Wellbeing OSC be received.

(5) Health and Wellbeing Board

These were presented by Councillor Flux.

RESOLVED that the minutes of Health and Wellbeing Board be received.

(6) Audit Committee

These were presented by Councillor Oliver.

Councillor Grimshaw commented that she had resigned from the Committee but was noted as submitting apologies for the September meeting. She asked that her attendance record be corrected.

Councillor Dickinson sought clarification as to whether the independent chair was able to vote on matters. The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that the Independent chair did not have a vote. Councillor Dickinson then queried what would happen in the event of a tied vote if the Chair did not have a second or casting vote. The Business Chair suggested this was something for Constitution Working Group to consider. Councillor Oliver suggested that the Vice Chair could take over in those circumstances.

Councillor Swinburn expressed concern regarding references in the minutes to illegal activities, and other detailed matters which led him to question what the objectives were of the Audit Committee and whether this would be continuing.

Councillor Grimshaw reiterated Councillor Swinburn's concerns having watched the meeting online. Councillor Dickinson agreed and felt that the membership needed to be evaluated by the Leader. The Leader responded that he would take that decision in the appropriate way.

RESOLVED that the minutes of Audit Committee be received.

Councillor Wearmouth left at this point.

53. MOTIONS

Motion No. 1

In accordance with Council Rules of Procedure No.10, Councillor G. Sanderson moved the following motion, received by the Head of Democratic and Electoral Services on 27 September 2021:-

“That Northumberland County Council

(i) Acknowledges the efforts that this Council has made to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote renewable energy;

(ii) Further recognises

that very large financial setup and running costs involved in selling locally generated renewable electricity to local customers result in it being impossible for local renewable electricity generators to do so,

that making these financial costs proportionate to the scale of a renewable electricity supplier's operation would create significant opportunities for local companies and community groups to be providers of locally generated renewable electricity directly to local people, businesses and organisations, if they wished, and

that revenues received by such local companies or community groups that chose to become local renewable electricity providers could be used to help improve the local economy, local services and facilities and to reduce local greenhouse gas emissions;

(iii) Notes that the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, as a result of its 2021 Technological Innovations and Climate Change inquiry, recommended that a Right to Local Supply for local energy suppliers be established to address this;

(iv) Accordingly resolves to support the Local Electricity Bill, currently supported by a cross-party group of 266 MPs and which, if made law, would establish a Right to Local Supply which would promote local renewable electricity supply by making the setup and running costs of selling renewable electricity to local customers proportionate to the size of the supply company; and

(v) Further resolves to

inform the local media of this decision,

write to local MPs, asking them to support the Bill, and

write to the organisers of the campaign for the Bill, Power for People, (at Camden Collective, 5-7 Buck Street, London NW1 8NJ or info@powerforpeople.org.uk) expressing its support”.

In introducing the motion the Leader commented that it was essential to decarbonise the electricity supply if climate change targets were to be met and Northumberland was well placed to do that. If the Bill became law, it would be applicable to both commercial and community organisations, and was especially relevant for those communities who relied on alternative sources of power. The Council’s role would be to work with residents, businesses and communities. The capacity was already there to do that through the climate change team and an update on progress with the climate change agenda would be sent to all members.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Plozsaj, who felt this was a great opportunity to diversify the suppliers’ market and to support local economies and communities by keeping money in the local area. The Bill had been supported by 80 local authorities around the country.

The majority of members spoke in support of the motion. A number of additional points were made around:-

- Increasing the number of meetings held remotely where possible and paperless meetings introduced.
- Further investigation of hydro-electric and geo-thermal opportunities.
- The need for communities to see actual benefits from some of this work and for the Council to be an enabler in the provision of services rather than an actual provider itself.
- Local energy should be re-purposed to support schools in their struggle to deal with heating bills so that they could benefit from lower prices.
- All local MPs should be written to to see if a response came back from them.
- Recycling rates needed to be better.

- Neighbourhood Plans and the emerging Local Plan needed to be taken into consideration.
- Council actions should be subject to an environmental audit

The Leader responded to some of the points which had been made, and on the motion being put to the vote there voted FOR: a substantial majority; AGAINST: 0; ABSTENTIONS: 0.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that Northumberland County Council:-

(i) Acknowledges the efforts that this Council has made to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote renewable energy;

(ii) Further recognises

that very large financial setup and running costs involved in selling locally generated renewable electricity to local customers result in it being impossible for local renewable electricity generators to do so,

that making these financial costs proportionate to the scale of a renewable electricity supplier's operation would create significant opportunities for local companies and community groups to be providers of locally generated renewable electricity directly to local people, businesses and organisations, if they wished, and

that revenues received by such local companies or community groups that chose to become local renewable electricity providers could be used to help improve the local economy, local services and facilities and to reduce local greenhouse gas emissions;

(iii) Notes that the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, as a result of its 2021 Technological Innovations and Climate Change inquiry, recommended that a Right to Local Supply for local energy suppliers be established to address this;

(iv) Accordingly resolves to support the Local Electricity Bill, currently supported by a cross-party group of 266 MPs and which, if made law, would establish a Right to Local Supply which would promote local renewable electricity supply by making the setup and running costs of selling renewable electricity to local customers proportionate to the size of the supply company; and

(v) Further resolves to

inform the local media of this decision,

write to local MPs, asking them to support the Bill, and

write to the organisers of the campaign for the Bill, Power for People, (at Camden Collective, 5-7 Buck Street, London NW1 8NJ or info@powerforpeople.org.uk) expressing its support".

The meeting was adjourned at 16.58 and reconvened at 17.10.

54. APPOINTMENTS TO POSITIONS, COMMITTEE PLACES AND OUTSIDE BODIES

Council was asked to approve the changes to committee places and outside bodies detailed at pages 181- 186 of the agenda, and to elect the Deputy Business Chair and Chairs/Vice Chairs to the Committees as indicated therein. An updated document had been circulated to members.

It was noted that Councillor Seymour was to remain as Deputy Cabinet member for Corporate Services, not as detailed in the agenda, which was a typo. It was also noted that Councillor Robinson would remain on CSEG OSC as a minority place.

Councillor Daley asked for clarification of the position regarding the age restriction on the Governing Body of Netherton Park. The Business Chair and Councillor Pattison agreed this would be investigated.

The Leader nominated Councillor Paul Scott for the position of Deputy Business Chair, this was seconded by the Business Chair.

Councillor Dickinson asked why a Deputy Business Chair was being elected now and expressed disappointment that Councillor Dunbar had left the Cabinet. He also asked for a named vote on the election of Deputy Business Chair, which was supported by the required number of members.

In response to a question from Councillor Purvis regarding the composition of the JCC, Councillor Reid advised that it was about the Administration dealing with the trade unions regarding the management of the workforce and how this was dealt with. This had been the position prior to local government reorganisation. The Leader agreed that this could be looked at and had no issue with the body being cross party.

Councillor Hill thanked Councillor Reid for his chairmanship of the Health and Wellbeing OSC.

On the nomination of Councillor P. Scott being put to a named voted, the votes were cast as follows:-

FOR: 36

Bawn, D.	Morphet, N.
Beynon, J.	Oliver, N.
Carr, D.	Pattison, W.
Castle, G.	Ploszaj, W.
Cessford, T.	Reid, J.
Daley, W.	Renner Thompson, G.
Darwin, L.	Riddle, J.
Dodd, R.	Robinson, M.
Dunbar, C.	Sanderson, H.G.H.
Ezhilchelvan, P.	Scott, P.
Ferguson, D.	Seymour, C.
Flux, B.	Sharp, A.
Hardy, C.	Stewart, G.
Horncastle, C.	Swinbank, M.
Humphrey, C.	Swinburn, M.
Hutchinson, J.I.	Thorne, T.N.
Jones, V.	Watson, J.
Mather, M.	Wearmouth, R.

AGAINST: 25

Ball, C.	Lee, S.
Bowman, L.	Murphy, M.
Cartie, E.	Nisbet, K.
Dale, P.A.M.	Parry, K.
Dickinson, S.	Purvis, M.
Dunn, L.	Richardson, M.
Foster, J.	Simpson, E.
Gallacher, B.	Taylor, C.
Grimshaw, L.	Waddell, H.
Hill, G.	Wallace, A.
Hunter, E.I.	Watson, A.
Kennedy, D.	Wilczek, R.
Lang, J.	

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that:-

- (a) Councillor P. Scott be elected Deputy Business Chair for the remainder of the Council year;
- (b) Council note the appointment of Councillor G. Stewart as Deputy Cabinet Member for Community Services and the appointment of Councillor C. Seymour as Deputy Cabinet Member for Corporate Services. The Deputy Cabinet Member for Wellbeing position remains vacant; and

- (c) Council agree the amendments to Committee places as detailed in the document circulated at the Council meeting, and the election of Chair or Vice Chair as detailed therein.

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

(1) Council Tax Support Scheme for 2022-23

The report sought approval for the local Council Tax (CT) Support Scheme for 2022-23 to continue to provide support at a maximum level of 92% of council tax liability.

The report was introduced by Councillor Wearmouth. The S151 Officer advised that in addition to the CT support scheme, for the last two years the Council had offered discounts which had been funded by Government grants. In the 2020-21 financial year this had been £300, and £150 in the previous year. In the current year, this funding had been used to reduce CT bills for 13,353 claimants, and 13,040 had had no CT liability at all. Officers were looking at whether a similar scheme could be offered for the next financial year using unspent grant funding, probably at around £200-£300.

£2.4m was also available from the household support fund and it was proposed to continue the winter support programme from this which included food and fuel vouchers, food assistance during school holidays and cold weather payments. With the support which was available, it was likely that a similar number of claimants would be taken out of CT liability altogether again this year. Therefore there would be three schemes running alongside each other; the main CT support scheme, a discount scheme and the continuation of the winter assistance programme.

There were a number of member comments on this which included:-

- Councillor Grimshaw did not support the report. She asked why the different sources of support could not be combined to enable the support scheme to be dismissed. The table of illustration comparing local authorities in the region did not impress her Group and she felt that Northumberland should be one of the two authorities who chose to provide 100% support. She provided some figures for members about the effects of Government policies on working age adults and urged the Administration to scrap the proposal.
- Councillor Bawn referred members to the concise and detailed explanation which had been provided by the S151 Officer. The vast majority of claimants were not paying any council tax and the books had to be balanced. He understood that people were upset by the table contained in the report but the two most generous local authorities listed were not Labour run. This was a very sensible scheme with real additional support and he urged members to support it.

- Councillor Ball urged the Administration to take the stress off people to apply for support if the funding was already there.
- Councillor Robinson felt that the number of working age claimants was likely to greatly increase and asked if members could be provided with details of the three support schemes available so these could be passed on to constituents, or details included with council tax bills. Councillor Wearmouth agreed this could be done.
- Councillor Dickinson asked members to note that this had gone from affecting 12,000 people when first introduced to nearly 17,000 and he agreed this was the tip of the iceberg. The barriers to accessing these support schemes meant that, for many, they were out of reach. The Administration needed to focus on its own area and the needs of the people it represented, and consider whether the three support schemes should be combined to cancel the 8%, or whether it wanted more people to be pushed into the same bracket and spend council funding chasing people for payments they could not make.
- Councillor Hill paid credit to officers in the Communities Together team who had supported people through the pandemic and associated hardship and felt that 100% council tax support was the only option.
- Councillor Reid asked if members could be informed about the number of people who actually paid anything and what they were asked to pay on average.
- Councillor Dunn welcomed the questions being raised on the report by members and reiterated her concerns that the support schemes available were discretionary. However good referral partners were, there would always be some who fell through the net. She agreed with other speakers that the three funding streams should be amalgamated.

Councillor Wearmouth responded that the three funding streams from Government had to be administered separately. The S151 officer advised that the 8% for Band A equated to £97, for Band D it was £131, with most working age claimants in Bands A-C. The number paying anything in the current year was 3,313. The proposal was that equivalent support would be provided next financial year. If members agreed the report, no-one would have to apply for the discount, it would be automatically deducted from council tax bills as normal.

The report's recommendations were proposed by Councillor Wearmouth and seconded by Councillor Sanderson. The required number of members supported a named vote on the matter, and on being put to the vote, the votes were cast as follows:-

FOR: 35

Bawn, D.	Lee, S.
Beynon, J.	Mather, M.
Carr, D.	Oliver, N.
Castle, G.	Pattison, W.
Cessford, T.	Ploszaj, W.
Daley, W.	Reid, J.
Darwin, L.	Renner Thompson, G.

Dodd, R.	Riddle, J.
Dunbar, C.	Sanderson, H.G.H.
Ezhilchelvan, P.	Scott, P.
Ferguson, D.	Seymour, C.
Flux, B.	Sharp, A.
Hardy, C.	Stewart, G.
Horncastle, C.	Swinburn, M.
Humphrey, C.	Thorne, T.N.
Hunter, E.I.	Watson, J.
Hutchinson, J.I.	Wearmouth, R.
Jones, V.	

AGAINST: 26

Ball, C.	Murphy, M.
Bowman, L.	Nisbet, K.
Cartie, E.	Parry, K.
Dale, P.A.M.	Purvis, M.
Dickinson, S.	Richardson, M.
Dunn, L.	Robinson, M.
Foster, J.	Simpson, E.
Gallacher, B.	Swinbank, M.
Grimshaw, L.	Taylor, C.
Hill, G.	Waddell, H.
Kennedy, D.	Wallace, A.
Lang, J.	Watson, A.
Morphet, N.	Wilczek, R.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that County Council 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.

(2) Treasury Management Annual Report for the Financial Year 2020-21

The report provided details of performance against the Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) 2020-21, approved by the County Council on 19 February 2020. The report provided a review of borrowing and investment performance for 2020-21, set in the context of the general economic conditions prevailing during the year. It also reviewed specific Treasury Management prudential indicators defined by the (CIPFA) Treasury Management Code of Practice and CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities, (the Prudential Code), and approved by the Authority in the TMSS.

Councillor J. Watson commented on the excellent performance in the preceding year.

Councillor Oliver asked whether there were any plans to smooth out the spike in the maturity profile identified in the report in future years. The S151 Officer

confirmed that as debt fell due, officers did look at the maturity profile in order to spread it out. The Council was significantly under borrowed at the present time so the markets would be monitored and when the time was right to replace internal borrowing with external, then it would be done in such a way as to smooth the maturity profile. The Strategy was being refreshed in readiness for the forthcoming year and this was one of the things which would be looked at.

Councillor Dickinson asked if a breakdown could be provided of the debts over 50-60 years old. Councillor Wearmouth responded that the detail was about when debts were going to be mature in around 50 years' time.

Councillor Dale felt a briefing for all members on the treasury management function would be beneficial. Councillor Wearmouth agreed this could be done.

Councillor Kennedy referred to previous financial decisions made by the Authority, some of which he felt were nonsensical and reminded members that the Council should not be acting this way. The Council was supposed to deliver services and act with caution, not invest in private enterprise.

RESOLVED that the report be received and the performance of the Treasury Management function for 2020-21 be noted.

56. CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION

Council was asked to consider two reports recently agreed for recommendation to Council by the Constitution Working Group:-

(1) Report of the Senior Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer

Proposed Constitutional Changes

Council was asked to review and update the Constitution and make related appointments.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer proposed that, with regard to recommendation 4, the words "and the constitution amended accordingly" be deleted and insert "for information" instead.

Councillor Dickinson supported the recommendations with the exception of the increased numbers on Committees to provide any Group with a better position.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Part 3 of the Constitution – Membership of Committees 2020/21 be amended in the following respect:

- Amendment of the table of committees on page 45 of the Constitution, to reflect the size of the Petitions Committee, Standards Committee and Staff and Appointments Committees is now 9 members, following the decision of full council on the 26th May 2021
 - Amendment of the year specified in the table of committees on page 45 of the Constitution from 2020/21 to 2021/22;
- (b) Council agree that references to the Chief Executive also being a Director of the NHS Foundation Trust and the Executive Director of HR/OD and Deputy CEO being seconded from the NHS Foundation Trust are removed from the relevant sections of the Constitution, as set out in paragraph 6 of the report;
- (c) Council note that the functions of the Executive Director of HR/OD and Deputy Chief Executive are currently being exercised by the Chief Executive as Head of Paid Service in accordance with Part 4.1 para 5.9 of the constitution, except in matters where there is a conflict of interest, whereby those matters will be delegated to the appropriate Executive Director; and
- (d) Council note that following the current Management Review, the revised structure will be reported to a future meeting of Constitution Working Group for information.
- (2) Report of the Interim Executive Director of Planning & Local Services**

Review of Planning Terms of Reference

The report reviewed the Strategic Planning Committee Terms of Reference and Powers as set out in the Councils Constitution. The change was proposed following a formal recommendation for clarification from the Local Government Ombudsman.

RESOLVED that the Strategic Planning Committee Terms of Reference be amended, as detailed below in bold and italics, to ensure clarity on whether an application is to be considered at Strategic Planning Committee, or at the Local Area Council Planning Committee:-

STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

Terms of Reference and Powers

(a) To exercise the powers and duties of the Council as Planning Authority in relation to development management under the Town and Country Planning Acts and other associated/related legislation and in particular, but not limited to, those functions listed in Schedule 1 to the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000, including the following matters which specifically require a decision by the Strategic Planning Committee:

- minerals and waste planning

- development concerning major energy and physical infrastructure proposals such as wind farms
- planning applications involving more than 100 houses and/or more than 1,000 sq metres of commercial floorspace
- planning applications involving less than 100 houses and/or less than 1,000 sq metres of commercial floorspace which raise significant strategic planning policy issues, and
- any other planning applications which represent a significant departure from the Development Plan

All applications are to be determined by the Chief Planning Officer in accordance with the powers set out in the internal scheme of delegation except for the following which fall to the **Local Area Council Planning Committee to be determined:**

- Applications submitted by or on behalf of elected members of the Council or by their spouses/partners
- Applications involving land and/or premises in the ownership or under the control of elected members of the Council or their spouses/partners
- Applications in which any senior officer* of the Council has a personal and prejudicial interest
- Determination of applications submitted by or on behalf of the Council (or by or on behalf of companies controlled by the Council); or of applications relating to land in which the Council (or company) has a significant interest (NB council to refuse such applications is delegated)
- Approval of applications where, in the opinion of the Relevant Officer, such an approval would constitute a departure from the approved Development Plan and would require a reference to the Secretary of State
- Any application which an elected member of the Council requests should be considered by the Committee, provided the request is in writing, is received within 21 days of the application appearing on the weekly list, and is supported by bona fide planning reasons (which will be reported to the Committee together with the Councillor's name)
- Any application which the Relevant Officer considers should be determined by the Committee because of special planning issues or considerations it raises including significant local interest, and
- Determination of applications where there are contrary comments received within the consultation period given raising bona fide planning issues from statutory consultees as defined in National Planning Practice Guidance.

*For the purposes of the Scheme of Delegation, Senior Officer is defined as Director or Head of Service (or equivalent title)

(b) Those functions prescribed by the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 as not being executive functions

and not elsewhere allocated by this Constitution

57. JANUARY 2022 COUNCIL MEETING

RESOLVED that the deadline for submission of motions, public questions and member questions for 5 January 2022 Council is **noon on Monday 20 December 2021**.

58. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

- (a) That under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item on the Agenda as it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A of the 1972 Act, and
- (b) That the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure for the following reasons:-

Agenda Item Paragraph of Part I of Schedule 12A

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.

AND The public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure because disclosure would adversely affect the Authority's ability to conduct its affairs.

16 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.

AND The public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure because disclosure would adversely affect the Authority's ability to conduct its affairs.

59. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Executive Management Structure Review

All officers with the exception of the Chief Executive, the Deputy Monitoring Officer and the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager left the meeting at this point.

The Chief Executive advised that this matter had been withdrawn from the agenda.

60. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Appointment of Interim Monitoring Officer

The report sought approval of the appointment of a Monitoring Officer on an interim basis, Suki Binjal, for Northumberland County Council due to the substantive post of Legal Services Manager and Monitoring Officer becoming vacant.

It was proposed that the interim appointment of Suki Binjal remained in place until a substantive appointment was made to the post of Monitoring Officer. At present the Legal Services Manager/Monitoring Officer and Director of Corporate Assurance posts were vacant and this interim post holder would cover the key required elements of those two roles.

A number of questions were raised by members which the Chief Executive answered. She thanked the three deputy monitoring officers for their work during a very difficult year.

RESOLVED that recommendations 1-3, as detailed in the report, be agreed.

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

.....
Chair of the County Council

.....
Duly Authorised Officer