

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

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

PRESENT

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

CABINET MEMBERS

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

OTHER MEMBERS

Flux, B.	Stewart, G.
Scott, P.	

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Binjal, S.	Monitoring Officer
Dorward, N.	Senior Manager - Education Development & Collaborative Projects
Hadfield, K.	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Lally, D.	Chief Executive
Murfin, R.	Interim Executive Director Planning and Local Services
Roll, J.	Head of Democratic and Electoral Services
Taylor, M.	Director of Business Development and Communities
Walsh, N.	Head of Cultural Services
Willis, J.	Interim Executive Director of Finance and S151 Officer

61. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Horncastle and Seymour.

Ch.'s Initials.....

62. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the following meetings of Cabinet, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair:-

- (a) Tuesday 9 November 2021
- (b) Thursday 18 November 2021

63. DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillors Ploszaj, Watson, Riddle and Renner Thompson declared interests as Directors of Advance in item 11 on the agenda (Trading Companies' Financial Performance 2021-22 - Position at the end of September 2021) and advised that they would leave the room whilst the matter was discussed.

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

(1) Setting the Council Tax Base 2022-23

The report advised Cabinet of the tax base calculation for 2022-23 for all domestic properties liable to pay council tax. The tax base must be set by the statutory deadline of 31 January 2022 (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix A).

RESOLVED that the council tax base for 2022-23 be approved as detailed within Appendix A, equating to 108,605.49 Band D equivalent dwellings. This was an increase of 1,670.56 Band D equivalents from 2021-22.

(2) Financial Performance 2021-22 - Position at the end of September 2021

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

The S151 Officer highlighted the key points for members.

In response to a question from the Leader regarding the mobile libraries, the Director of Business Development and Communities advised that the current units were due for renewal but the opportunity was being taken to look at an integrated model of arrangements which would cover Communities Together as well. These should be ready for the Spring.

RESOLVED that:-

- a. the report be noted;
- b. the projected underspend of £3.185 million and the assumptions outlined in the report be noted;
- c. the pressures currently identified, including the impact of Covid-19, be noted;
- d. it be noted that it is anticipated that the Council will receive further funding of £0.270 million in relation to the income that the Council has “lost” as a result of Covid-19 for April to June 2021;
- e. Cabinet approve re-profiling to the capital programme of £59.305 million from 2021-22 to 2022-23 to reflect estimated expenditure levels in the current financial year;
- f. Cabinet approve the new grants and amendments to existing grants at Appendix A and the required changes to the budgets;
- g. Cabinet note the progress on the delivery of the approved savings at Appendix B;
- h. Cabinet note the use of the contingency shown at Appendix Q;
- i. Cabinet note the use of reserves shown at Appendix R;
- j. Cabinet note the virements requested by services shown at Appendix S;
- k. Cabinet approve the creation of a reserve from the underspend in the Communities and Business Development Unit of £0.222 million to fund the purchase and first year running costs of three mobile units which will support the delivery of a preventative approach to health and wellbeing activities through localised and responsive engagement;
- l. Cabinet note that the purchase (and funding) of the three mobile units will be included in the 2022-23 Capital Plan; and the revenue impact of the ongoing running costs will be included in the 2022-23 Budget and medium-term financial plan which will be considered by Full Council in February 2022;
- m. Cabinet agree that the Interim Executive Director for Communities and Business Development can place the order for the three mobile units with immediate effect as the funding if agreed (above) will be in place and there is a long lead in time before the vehicles can be delivered;
- n. Cabinet approve the receipt of the £0.120 million grant funding from the Department for Education to support the acceleration in the opening of the Family Hubs across Northumberland. Funding can be spent on both revenue and capital;

- o. Cabinet approve the creation of the £0.112 million capital budget for inclusion in the Council's 2021-22 capital programme and £0.008 million revenue budget in 2021-22. Spend will be funded from the £0.120 million grant funding from the Department for Education to support the acceleration in the opening of the Family Hubs across Northumberland; and
- p. Cabinet approve the procurement of a delivery partner and subsequent spend of the grant funding prior to the deadline of 31 March 2022, after which any unspent grant must be returned.

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

(1) Opportunity for expansion of Northumberland HEE Project Choice

The report advised members about the opportunity to develop a wider scope of delivery for Health Education England's Project choice within Northumberland in order to more rapidly deliver on Northumberland County Council's education priorities and SEND priorities (Copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix C).

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the proposal for Health Education England to deliver supported internship provision for young people with Special Educational Needs and /or Disabilities within Northumberland County Council departments be noted;
- (b) HR&OD be authorised to commence discussions with NCC departments, using the Communications Team to promote, to establish where capacity and aspiration to accept placements exists for:
 - a. Short placements in 2021-22 academic year, and
 - b. Full academic year rotational placements for an NCC specific cohort in academic year 2022-23; and
- (c) the report of the FACS OSC be noted.

(2) Northumberland Strategic Skills Plan 2021-25 (March 2021, updated October 2021)

The report shared the *Northumberland Strategic Skills Plan 2021-25*, a document designed to guide skills planning and the approach in designing impactful vocational skills provision within the county to

yield greatest impact for residents and the local economy (Copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix D).

The report was presented by Councillor Renner Thompson who stressed the importance of the subject matter to the Council's priorities.

Councillor Wearmouth agreed this was a key piece of work, particularly when many jobs were coming into the County and the skills would be needed to match those jobs. This was linked to driving down inequality, child poverty and workless households which had already been referenced and education was the gateway to this. There was a lot of work still to do, but this was a great start.

The Leader noted that this had been supported by FACS OSC and asked officers to ensure that the Plan was made publicly available soon.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the *Northumberland Strategic Skills Plan 2021-25*, its content and general approach be noted;
- (b) the document be used with internal and external stakeholder groups; and
- (c) the report of the FACS OSC be noted.

66. REPORT OF THE INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR COMMUNITIES AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Household Support Fund

The report provided an overview of Northumberland County Council's proposed response and delivery of the Household Support Fund (HSF) for the period 06th October 2021 to 31st March 2022 (Copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix E).

Councillor Pattison introduced the report and welcomed the funding to help those communities most in need. The Director of Business Development and Communities referred to the well established arrangements with trusted partners and community groups and was confident that the most vulnerable could be reached. A high proportion of the fund would cover the free school meal allowance. It was also aimed at those not in receipt of benefits, so it gave officers the discretion to provide support where it was needed.

Councillor Riddle asked how those families under the radar were being reached. The Director advised that good communication was key. The message that went out from the CT Team was that if anyone needed support

they should come forward, and strong networks had been established with social prescribing in primary care as well as the existing services within the Council to bring forward referrals for those who may be vulnerable. The communications message going out was not about meeting criteria, but about encouraging people to come forward if they were in difficulty.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Cabinet note the content of the report and the actions to deliver the programme;
- (b) it be agreed that Northumberland Communities Together continue to manage the administration and delivery of the HSF through to 31st March 2022;
- (c) the Household Support Fund Assistance Policy 2021 be approved to support delivery of the scheme;
- (d) any additional targeted client groups which may be identified be included in the delivery plan;
- (e) Cabinet note that NCT will work with staff across the Council directorates and services, town and parish councils to identify potential client groups who may be targeted for specific support; and
- (f) the report of the CSEG OSC be noted.

67. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Wooler Neighbourhood Plan

The report sought approval to formally 'make' the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan passed independent examination in May 2020. A local referendum held in the Parish of Wooler on 10 June 2021 returned a majority vote in favour of using the Plan to make decisions on planning applications. The Council was obliged by statute to make the Neighbourhood Plan unless it considered that doing so would breach retained European Union obligations (Copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix F).

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Cabinet agrees to formally 'make' the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan in accordance with section 38A(4)(a) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 for the reasons set in the appendix 4 attached to this report;

- (b) Cabinet approves the decision statement (attached at Appendix 1) required under Regulation 19 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, as amended, and
- (c) Cabinet agrees that both the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan and the decision statement are published on the Council's website and publicised elsewhere in order to bring it to the attention of people who live, work or carry out business in the neighbourhood area; and for the decision statement to be sent to the qualifying body and anyone else who asked to be notified of the decision.

68. 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 5 November 2021 (Copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix G).

RESOLVED that:-

68.1 Energising Blyth Programme - Culture Centre & Market Place

Cabinet approve the commencement of design works for this project which is grant funded through the Future High Street Fund at a value of £7,253,198 included within the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan 2021-24. Cabinet note that a further report will be brought forward once the project develops to Outline Business Case stage and has been independently appraised.

68.2 Energising Blyth Programme - Energy Central Campus (Phase 1)

Cabinet approve the acceleration of expenditure of £400,000 in 2021-22 for this project budgeted at £9,000,000, including a contribution of £2,500,000 from the Council which is included in the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan 2021-24. Cabinet note that a further report will be brought forward once the project develops to Outline Business Case stage and has been independently appraised.

68.3 Energising Blyth Programme - NEP1 & Battleship Wharf

Cabinet approve a Capital Grant of £500,000 to the NEP1 and Battleship Wharf project externally funded through the Blyth Town Deal, and agree that the project progresses to formal submission to DLUHC, noting that Northumberland Council is the accountable body for all the Energising Blyth Programme funds allocated by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) which includes Town Deal funding.

68.4 England Coast Path, Infrastructure Grant Funded Works

Cabinet accept the grant award from Natural England of £145,649 for the construction of a section of the English Coastal Path route between Bamburgh and the Scottish Border, and approve the project into the 2021-24 Medium Term Financial Plan with construction to commence later this financial year and complete in 2022/23.

68.5. Noise Monitoring Equipment

Cabinet approve the proposal to purchase new noise monitoring equipment at a cost of £65,000 to be met by a revenue contribution to capital outlay (RCCO) from underspends within the 2021-22 Public Protection revenue budget.

68.6 Off-street Parking provision in Boulmer

Cabinet approve an allocation of £10,000 from the overall capital provision for parking improvements included in the 2021-24 Medium Term Financial Plan, to enable detailed design work to proceed, including preparation of an application for planning approval, for a new 24 space off-street car park.

68.7 Sustainable Warmth Grant (LAD 2)

Cabinet accept a Local Authority Delivery Phase 2 (LAD2) grant award of £2,214,042 to deliver energy efficiency measures to 220 private owner-occupied homes in Northumberland.

68.8 Wylam Wagonway Improvements

Cabinet accept a funding contribution of £518,343 from Sustrans for highway improvements to be added to the Council's capital programme in 2021-22 and agree to its expenditure on the works identified to the NCN 72 from Stephenson's Cottage, 0.7km west of Wylam, to the County boundary adjacent to Blaney Row, Newburn.

69. 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 items on the Agenda as they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A of the 1972 Act, and
- (b) That the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure for the following reasons:-

Agenda Item Paragraph of Part I of Schedule 12A

10 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 disclosure would adversely affect confidentiality requirements with external partners.

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

AND The public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure because disclosure could adversely affect the business reputation or confidence in the person / organisation, and could adversely affect commercial revenue.

70. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF CULTURAL SERVICES

Destination Management - Structure and Future Funding Arrangements

The report provided an overview of the current and proposed management arrangements for the strategic management and marketing of tourism in Northumberland (Copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix H, coloured pink and marked Not for Publication).

Councillor Watson introduced the report and highlighted the key points. The Head of Cultural Services advised that the impact of tourism to the economy was considerable, with significant growth since 2012. The aim of the report was to formalise the integrated arrangements which had been in place since Spring 2020.

There were plans to repeat the coastal summit event as this had proved to be very popular.

In response to a question from the Leader, the Head of Cultural Services advised that there was a lot of data available on customer satisfaction levels which could be provided.

The Leader asked that an update on tourism be provided to members.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) recommendations 1-5 in the report be agreed; and
- (b) the report of the Communities and Place OSC be noted.

In accordance with Minute No. 63 above, Councillors Ploszaj, Watson, Riddle and Renner Thompson left the room at this point.

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

Trading Companies' Financial Performance 2021-22 - Position at the end of September 2021

The report informed Cabinet of the current financial positions of its trading companies for 2021-22 (Copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix I, coloured pink and marked Not for Publication).

The S151 Officer introduced the report and referred to the debate at CSEG OSC. She sought guidance from members about their preference to continue with backward looking performance reports, or whether they wished to broaden the content of the report out into future prospects.

The Chief Executive updated members on the current position and reminded members that much information had been provided to OSC members previously. Officers, as shareholders, needed to ensure that they were being effective in managing the arrangements. Going forward, Cabinet members needed to declare an interest only in those matters they were actually involved in and this should be discussed further.

The Leader advised that the Cabinet wanted to see thorough quarterly reports and members would discuss representation further.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) recommendations 1-4 in the report be agreed; and
- (b) the report of the CSEG OSC be noted.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....