

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND LOCAL AREA COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **North Northumberland Local Area Council** held in the meeting space, County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF on Monday, 24 January 2022 at 1 pm.

PRESENT

Cllr G. Castle
Chair

MEMBERS

C. Hardy
G. Hill
I. Hunter
M. Mather

G. Renner- Thompson
C. Seymour
M. Swinbank

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

G. Bucknall	Lead Highways Delivery Manager
B. Hodgson	Neighbourhood Services Manager
R. Little	Assistant Democratic Services Officer
P. Soderquest	Service Director - Housing and Public Protection
G. Gavin	Head of Neighbourhood Services
S. Daniel	Community Safety Department Team Leader
P. Hedley	Chief Fire Officer
G. Binning	Deputy Chief Fire Officer
D. Brown	Strategic Policy, Risk and Performance Officer

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Cllr G.Sanderson

81. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

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Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Bridgett, Clark, Thorne, Pattinson, and Watson.

84. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No questions had been received.

85. PETITIONS

(a) No new petitions had been received.

(b)

i. Housing Delivery for Permanent Residents

Rachel Douglass – lead petitioner, addressed the committee and spoke around the reasons for starting the petition. Her comments included:

- The last shared ownership property scheme in Seahouses was 12 years ago.
- The last social housing scheme in Beadnell was launched 10 years ago, where tenants were unable to purchase their homes.
- Increasingly escalating house prices in the area, with a typical 2 bed semi-detached house in Beadnell, selling for £220,000 as opposed to four years previously when those houses were £120,000.
- There were only two, four-bedroom social homes across the Beadnell, North Sunderland and Bamburgh area.
- Average wages were lower, long term due to seasonal jobs roles, which were needed in the area.
- Northumberland County Council owned land which could be used for investment in affordable homes.

P. Soderquest – Service Director - Housing and Public Protection, introduced the report to the committee, stating that he recognised that there was an issue with affordable homes in the Beadnell area and the struggle needed to get the balance right between tourism and homeownership for locals, in addition to the emerging pressures in coastal towns and a shift from affordable accommodation, into holiday lets. The report addressed years of challenge and with the Planning Policy and the emerging local plan, NCC would be able to work with social providers to ensure new affordable homes.

Following questions from members, the following information was provided:

- The process of compulsory purchasing is a difficult legal process where there would need to be sufficient evidence for grounds of compulsory purchase and would need to be addressed on a scheme-by-scheme basis.
- The new budget would see a significant capital investment in affordable housing along with a significant sum which had been ring-fenced to support affordable housing, renting, and working with partners and housing providers.

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Members thanked both the petitioner and officers for their comments expressed that they were fully in support of the report provided.

ii. Badgers in Tweedmouth Cemetery

G. Gavin – Head of Neighbourhood Services, introduced the petition to the committee explaining that there were Badgers in Tweedmouth cemetery, and the petition was asking to protect loved ones by removing badgers safely, and gave the following updates:

- A comment on the draft report had been received on Friday 21 January 2022, from the named ecologist and stated that “Northumberland County Council do not apply for a licence to relocate the badgers, in regards to recommendation C in the petition report, another course of action will be suggested instead of submitting an application to relocate the badgers.”
- The named ecologist did not believe that a licence would be possible to obtain from Natural England, due to the level of damage on site, location of the sets and the level of activity, nor would a licence resolve the issues which were experienced.
- In addition to measures taken, it had been suggested to erect badger proof fencing between where the sets were located and the new section of the cemetery.
- A licence may still be required to erect the fencing, which would be sought from Natural England.
- There had been a ground penetrating radar survey, to investigate whether badgers had been disturbing remains on a sub-terranean level, concluding that badgers had not been tunnelling in the area surveyed.

Councillor Hunter, the ward member for Tweedmouth, thanked the team for their work on the report and at the cemetery, and supported the proposal for a fence but stated if that did not work, then alternatives should be looked at.

Councillor Hill raised concerns that Northumberland Council had given assurances that a licence application would be submitted and supported the progression of a licence application to be submitted to relocate the badgers.

Councillor Sanderson suggested that a licence application to move the badgers should still be submitted.

G. Gavin thanked members for their contribution.

(c) No updates on previous petitions.

9. BUDGET 2022-23 AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

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Councillor Sanderson, Leader of the Council provided a PowerPoint presentation and explained that this was the final Local Area Council meeting to receive this information and that an online consultation had also been completed. It was highlighted that there would be no cuts to frontline services, frontline staff were thanked for their continued hard work though the Covid pandemic.

It was stated that the pandemic should have been a huge economic shock, however due to the Government funding with furlough and business support grants this had not been the case within Northumberland, with no increase in unemployment which was better than the national and regional averages. There was a strong economy with the increase in staycations and the ability of businesses to keep going, along with major investors coming into the County. The Corporate Plan's vision and aims were outlined with the overarching priorities of driving economic recovery, through growth, investment, and jobs; and, tackling health inequalities in our communities through addressing the wider determinants, including income, education, housing, and environment highlighted.

The overall funding context for the 2022/23 budget was provided with it being highlighted that any increase in Council Tax precept remained at 2% without holding a referendum with an additional 1% for Adult Social Care for the next three years. Details were also provided on how the Council would continue to invest in the future of the County including British Volt, the Port of Blyth, Northumberland Line, and rural areas such as Wooler.

In line with previous practice the Budget for the next year and the MTFP model had been reviewed. A savings requirement of £9.704 million had been identified as required to balance the budget for 2022-23. A provisional savings requirement of £28 million had been calculated as necessary for the following two financial years. The approach to identifying spend and savings within the budget were outlined and details provided on proposed savings by Portfolio Holder.

Members thanked Councillor Sanderson for the presentation, praised officers for their input in the budget and stated that they looked forward to seeing the details which were due to be heard by full council on Wednesday, 23 February 2022.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

LOCAL SERVICES ISSUES

Highways

G Bucknall - Lead Highways Delivery Manager provided a verbal update on north area highways. The update and subsequent questions included information on the following:

- 29 out of 31 major resurfacing schemes completed. Swansfield Park Road footpaths and Sunnyside Scremeston to still complete.
- Fawdon Farm, Station Road – Embleton and A1 across to Lemmington Bank had been completed since the last meeting in November.

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- Day to Day operations had been running smoothly despite having had several officers isolating with positive covid tests and dealing with the fallout from Storm Arwen.
- Sandbag locations would be investigated as during Storm Arwen there were an insufficient amount in Berwick.
- Trees that had fallen from highway verges would be cleared by Northumberland Council but due to the substantial amount of wood, it was predicted that it would take months to fully complete the clear the debris.

Members thanked Graham and the team for their hard work responding to Storm Arwen.

Local Services

B. Hodgson - Neighbourhood Services Area Manager provided a verbal update on North area neighbourhood issues. The update and subsequent questions included the following information:

- Bin collections over the Christmas period had been successful with few complaints from residents regarding collection dates but communication worked well through the area.
- Priority following Storm Arwen was to clear roads, networks, cemeteries and places with high footfall.
- Leaf clearance was close to completion and cutting hedges, bushes and path edges had started.
- Planning for summer grass cutting and maintenance had begun.
- There was discussion around Berwick Town Council and the partnership between Northumberland County Council to collaborate local services.

Members thanked Bob and praised all frontline staff for their work over a difficult period.

A comfort break was announced for officers to change over.

NORTHUMBERLAND FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE: COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN 2022-26 CONSULTATION

The report provided information on the public consultation and details of the draft Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP). Paul Hedley, Chief Fire Officer provided a power point presentation, a copy of which would be attached to the signed minutes and made available with the papers for this meeting on the Council's website. It was explained that it was a statutory requirement under the Fire Service National Framework Document (NFD) for each Fire and Rescue Authority to have a CRMP. The NFD detailed how each authority should discharge it's functions, with the most relevant aspects to the CRMP

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highlighted as “identify and assess the full range of foreseeable fire and rescue related risks in their area” and “be accountable to communities for the service they provide”.

A wide-ranging public consultation exercise was now underway on the draft of the CRMP. Members were advised that each plan must reflect up to date risk analyses; demonstrate how prevention, protection and response activities would best be used wholistically to best prevent and mitigate the impact of identified risks on its communities. Separate strategies were in place for emergency response, protection and prevention which sat beneath the CRMP which all identified how strands of delivery complement and help risk reduction. The CRMP must also cover a minimum three-year time span, reflect effective consultation throughout its development and be easily accessible and publicly available.

Reassurance was provided that this was not a plan set in stone and would be flexible in order to respond not only to new and emerging risks but also unforeseen circumstances and impact. An annual update would take place where achievements and performance would be looked at along with what was needed for the forthcoming year, in order to assess if any changes to risk or service delivery models were required. If anything in this update required further public consultation, then this would be undertaken. A range of partners, including a specialist risk modelling company had also been involved in the production of the CRMP which had included providing simulation models to predict what the impact of potential changes on community risk and resilience would look like. This allowed greater confidence that these were defined and communicated across the area and how resources would be matched.

The purpose of the CRMP was to provide assurance that the right resources were in the right places to respond effectively to the risks within Northumberland. It was important that communities understood the process undertaken to analyse risk. It was explained that risk was a combination of the likelihood and consequence of a hazardous event and the NFRS had a duty to work with communities and partners to minimise or prevent the likelihood of these happening. In the last ten years there had been a 21% reduction in incidents attended, with 10 incident types identified as responsible for 90% of the events. It was explained that there was a correlation between outdoor fires and crime deprivation and good work was underway with Northumbria Police to work collaboratively with partners to reduce these risks.

Data was provided on incidents of dwelling fires and information was provided on what was currently done to reduce this risk and what was planned to further reduce incidents of this nature. Emerging risks were also identified and with the significant strain and challenge put on the service in responding to the pandemic and recent storms there was a need to ensure that the service would be able to meet future demands on the service. The Council’s corporate plan was also used to look at how future development might impact on the service or increase risk to ascertain if any changes would be required in order to provide assurance of a suitable response.

The consultation would be wide ranging with sessions previously provided at all Local Area Councils, North Northumberland being the last along with a significant media and social media campaign providing links to the consultation document.

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Following questions and comments from members, the following information was provided:

- Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service was the National lead in the UK for wildfires and were aware of the opinions of prescribed burning but advocated for the management of the fuel, through prescribed burning, grazing, or cutting to ensure small fires did not grow into larger fires and actively monitoring.
- Covid had impacted prevention activity regarding schools, but activity had started again in schools, young driver education and the fire Cadets.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their attendance and presentation, advising that their work was much appreciated.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

91. URGENT BUISNESS

Following emails from The River Tweed Commission, the North Northumberland Local Area Council needed to add an additional councillor to their outside bodies, Cllr Hunter volunteered.

River Tweed Outside Bodies:

- C. Hardy
- G. Hill
- I. Hunter
- C. Seymour

92. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED that this was noted.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....

Ch.'s Initials.....