

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Northumberland County Council** held at County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday, 7 December 2016 at 3.00 pm.

PRESENT

Councillor S.J. Dickinson
(Business Chair, in the Chair)

MEMBERS

Arckless, G.R.	Jones, V.
Armstrong, E.	Kelly, P.
Bawn, D.	Lang, J.A.
Bridgett, S.C.	Ledger, D.
Burt, E.	Lindley, I.P.
Campbell, D.	Murray, A.H.
Cartie, E.	Nisbet, K.
Castle, G.	Parry, K.
Dale, P.A.M.	Pidcock, B.
Daley, W.	Pidcock, L.
Davey, J.G.	Purvis, M.A.
Davey, S.	Reid, A.W.
Dodd, R.R.	Reid, J.
Dungworth, S.	Richards, M.E.
Fearon, J.B.	Rickerby, L.J.
Flux, B.	Riddle, J.R.
Foster, J.D.	Robson, T.
Gallacher, B.	Sambrook, A.G.
Gibson, R.	Sanderson, H.G.H.
Gobin, J.J.	Sharp, A.
Graham, K.O.	Simpson, E.
Grimshaw, L.	Smith, J.E.
Hepple, A.	Swithenbank, I.C.F.
Homer, C.	Thorne, T.N.
Horncastle, C.W.	Tyler, V.
Hunter, E.I.	Wallace, A.
Hutchinson, J.I.	Watson, J.G.
Jackson, P.A.	Webb, G.
Johnstone, T.	Wilson, T.S.
Jones, G.W.	Woodman, J.

OFFICERS

Bainbridge, V.	Director of Adult and Community Care Services
Hadfield, K.	Committee Services Manager
Henry, L.	Legal Services Manager
Johnson, A.	Director of Education and Skills
Mason, S.	Chief Executive
Roll, J.	Democratic Services Manager

57. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors H. Cairns, K.Cairns, Douglas and Tebbutt.

58. MINUTES

Councillor Homer congratulated the Council for the very successful freedom of Northumberland event held in Hexham on 12 November 2016 and asked that her thanks be passed onto 3 RHA, staff and members who had been involved.

With regard to Minute No.50 (Question 1),she expressed disappointment that she had not received a response to her question from the portfolio holder as expected, and added that the minutes did not accurately reflect her question as she had worded it. Her question had been “how many memberships had been cancelled in the last ten days, **and how did the price changes and the impact of these fit with the county's leisure and sport strategy?**”

Councillor Dickinson responded that the response would be pursued with Active Northumberland.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on Wednesday, 2 November 2016 be signed by the Chair and sealed with the Common Seal of the Council, subject to the above amendment.

59. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Councillors Gallacher, Gobin, Lang, Purvis, Sambrook, Swithenbank and Wilson disclosed personal interest in item 10 on the agenda (Motion No.1) as ex-mineworkers.

60. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Business Chair reported that Councillor Dave Ledger and Jackie Roll had been jointly awarded the Evening Chronicle Champion Award for support to the Armed Forces, and that Councillor Tony Reid had won the Elected Member of the Year award at the LGC Investment Awards 2016

He also reported that the Civic Head's carol service would take place at Bothal Church on Thursday 15 December at 6.30 pm.

61. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

The Business Chair reminded members that the questions and answers had now been circulated to all members, and asked that members ask any supplementary questions in light of the responses they had in front of them.

Question 1 from Councillor G. Sanderson to Councillor R. Arckless

Given the repeated assurances during the planning process for the Barratts Stobhill development that Morpeth schools had, and would continue to have, more than sufficient places for children of families moving into new homes in Morpeth, can we be reassured that those guarantees still hold true?

Response

Northumberland local authority uses a nationally recognised calculation which assumes three pupils will be generated in each year group per 100 houses built for primary age pupils and two pupils per year group for secondary/high. In Northumberland we have recently tested these calculations against the number of pupils generated through a development in the south of the county, and found these calculations to be correct.

Admission arrangements are set by the Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme for schools and academies which are available on the Local authority website. Schools are organised into partnerships, in Morpeth this is made up of First, Middle and High Schools. The school leaders and teachers in each partnership work closely together and share information about pupils' progress and needs. The catchment area is the defined geographical area from which a school will expect to take children. Parents should check if they live in a particular school's catchment area before applying for a place. A catchment area map is available at <http://map.northumberland.gov.uk/schools/>.

Lack of school places in Morpeth is a perception that many parents have – but in reality this is driven by the popularity of the schools rather than a shortage of places. Building additional housing in the Morpeth area will help to fill the spare capacity in Morpeth schools with local children and enable children who attend their local school to have a transition route to the local Middle and High schools.

Each school has a planned admission number (PAN) and schools to which pupils are expected to transfer to and from. Some children are given priority – for example those in the care of the local authority. But for most a simple preference system applies. King Edward VI school has a PAN of 320 in each year group 9-11, Newminster Middle has a PAN of 128 in each year 5-8 and Chantry Middle has 128 in each year 5-8. They are very popular schools and fill each year group quickly from their feeder first schools. If children live in the Morpeth catchment area and have attended a feeder schools for two or more years they are guaranteed a place.

Last year in Northumberland – 98% of parents gained their first choice preference of school. In Morpeth this figure was 96%. Parents can apply for places if their children have not attended feeder schools or if they do not live in catchment areas but if a school is particularly popular they are not guaranteed to get a place. They may also have to contribute to transport costs if they live outside a catchment area. Twenty-two percent of pupils travel from outside the catchment area of Morpeth to attend schools in Morpeth.

The Council has its own admissions criteria for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools, Academies, such as the Three Rivers Trust create their own policies, they take pupils who live in the catchment area and/or have attended their feeder schools for two years or more as a priority.

The establishment of new schools is no longer a function that the authority can fulfil. Under national legislation all new schools must be established as free school academies. An existing multi-academy trust or private organisation can establish a new free school, the authority cannot. This should not be confused with building a new school building for an existing school or extending a school building which the Council can do. The academy schools in Morpeth may be considering the Free School agenda.

Supplementary

Councillor Sanderson commented that the current situation could result in the end of the availability of places in Morpeth for children outside of the area. He referred to the guarantee of a place for children in the catchment area who had attended feeder schools for two or more years, and queried whether this could be guaranteed for the next five years. This was a serious concern and he asked that a written response be provided.

Councillor Arckless reminded members that the Three Rivers Trust was an academy which set its own admissions criteria and the Authority could not therefore guarantee anything on its behalf, though it did work closely with the Trust.

Councillor Dickinson responded that the issue of the admissions criteria would be raised with the Trust and a written response provided to Councillor Sanderson.

Question 2 from Councillor G. Sanderson to Councillor I. Swithenbank

Why does the NSRI Camera Van continue to be deployed at Pottery Bank, Morpeth, and how many notices of intended prosecution have been issued for offences at that site, at Clifton, near Morpeth, and at all deployments at locations on the A697 for the three months August 1st to November 1st 2016?

Response

The NSRI camera vans continue to visit Pottery Bank in Morpeth because it is identified as a site of speed concern. Sites of speed concern are where the local community have raised concerns of excessive speeds and surveys have confirmed this to be the case. Sites of speed concern are not necessarily locations where there have been traffic accidents. Speeds on Pottery Bank have continued to be of local concern and have also been raised by the local councillor, Councillor Bawn.

On average, over the period of a year sites of speed concern are visited once every four weeks for level 1 sites and seven times per year for level 2 sites. Specific dates of deployment are determined by the Northumbria Safer Roads Initiative within this overall framework.

For the specific sites mentioned the number of times speeding vehicles triggered the camera are set out below:

Camera Site	Number of times visited	Total time at camera site	Number of camera activations
A192 Pottery Bank, Morpeth Speed Concern Site Level 1	4	8 hours 40 minutes	225 total, or 26 per hour
A197 Great North Road, Clifton Speed Concern Site Level 1	2	4 hours	96 total, or 24 per hour
A697 Milfield Speed Concern Site Level 2	1	2 hours 30 minutes	34 total, or 14 per hour
A697 South Road, Longhorsley	Fixed site	77 days	171 total, or 2 per day

Fixed Camera Site			
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Supplementary

Councillor Sanderson expressed his concern about the management of the contribution made by the Council and why the camera van seemed to be parked at Pottery Bank so frequently. Councillor Swithenbank responded that the Authority had no control over when the camera van was parked. However, new Partnership arrangements should strengthen the direction of the Police and the Authority's ability to direct policy. When more information was available about the new arrangements then decisions could be made about representation and targets. With regard to Pottery Bank, the van was located there in response to valid concerns from the local councillor about safety issues given the frequency of offences.

Councillor Sanderson commented that many local councillors had asked for support in dealing with traffic safety issues. In this case, the camera was actually needed at a location further down. He hoped that more information would be available on the new arrangements by the next time Council met.

Question 3 from Councillor I. Hunter to Councillor S. Dungworth

When Berwick Maternity Unit was downgraded to a day only operation a few years ago, the new mothers in the Berwick area were assured that if they were unable to return home on the same day as giving birth, they could stay in Alnwick Maternity Unit as this meant a round trip of approx. 60 miles from the Berwick area for a brother or sister to meet his/her new member of the family. This was grudgingly accepted as Alnwick was not too far from Berwick compared with other Units. Now these young children are being asked to travel up to 120 miles round trip to meet their new brother or sister. This is not acceptable, what other areas in this country would receive this second rate NHS service?

Will the Northumberland County Council administration continue to bring pressure to bear on the NHS to ensure that Alnwick Maternity Unit will open 24/7 at the end of January 2017? There may be low birthing numbers at the Unit, however, it is a valuable overnight service which is VITAL for new mothers from right across North Northumberland not just Alnwick.

Response

It was due to staffing shortages at Alnwick's midwifery-led maternity unit that Northumbria Healthcare made a decision on the grounds of safety decision to introduce in Alnwick on an interim basis the same overnight on call system which is currently in place in Berwick.

The Trust's assessment is that that the overnight on call model has worked well in Berwick since 2013. In Alnwick it is a temporary arrangement which

has been put in place as the trust continues recruitment efforts aimed at reaching a full staffing complement in Alnwick.

The interim changes came into effect on Friday 4 November and have allowed the trust to continue fully staffing Hillcrest during the day, seven days a week and continue with all local community midwifery services to support local women throughout their pregnancies.

As the unit is not staffed 24/7, there can be no inpatient postnatal care available at Hillcrest for women who have chosen to deliver at The Northumbria hospital. However, extra support with infant care and community breastfeeding services is available to support local women at home.

Separately from this immediate issue, the Clinical Commissioning Group has asked the Northern England Clinical Senate to review the best model for maternity services in Northumberland, prompted by concerns about the safety and sustainability of services where comparatively very low numbers of births take place. This review will take account of the recommendations of the recently published National Maternity Review. The Clinical Senate will be examining the issues in early 2017. The Council will then have the opportunity to consider its clinical recommendations and any changes proposed as a result of them.

Supplementary

Councillor Hunter asked whether the Authority would put pressure on the Trust to reopen Alnwick Maternity Unit 24/7 in 2017.

Councillor Dungworth responded that she understood the concerns but this was an operational decision by the Trust based on safe staffing levels. The Authority would continue to strive for the best services for Northumberland, as it always did.

Question 4 from Councillor I Hunter to Councillor V. Tyler

Please can the Portfolio Holder for Arts Leisure and Culture tell me how many memberships have been cancelled since the price increase on 1st November on a centre by centre basis? Also why, if the annual membership was paid pre 1st November i.e. in August, is this not being honoured until the renewal date?

Response

Membership of Active Northumberland has increased from 9,635 in December 2015 to 10,672 on November 20 2016. Active does not retain data per centre showing if memberships are ended because of the price changes - which, I should point out again, reduced some charges and extended children's concessions up to age 18. There are many reasons why a customer might stop a membership.

Memberships paid for in full before the price changes came in will continue unchanged until renewal, as part of the new fair and transparent county-wide structure. This is based on users' ability to pay and the need to operate on a more commercial basis after central government funding cuts heavily reduced Active's subsidy.

Supplementary

Councillor Hunter commented that there was no data provided on cancellations since September and asked for the true figure. Councillor Tyler agreed to seek this from Active Northumberland.

Question 5 from Councillor J. Reid to the Leader

When and how has the burden of debt that our fire service inherited, through misplaced building programmes of the past, been addressed?

Response

The Fire Service has always been part of the County Council and therefore there is no inherited debt.

The Council entered into a PFI arrangement in 2010 for 25 years in relation to West Hartford and Pegswood Fire Stations as part of a NEFRA agreement with Tyne & Wear and Durham and Darlington Fire Authorities.

We are currently investigating refinancing options in collaboration with the provider and NEFRA partners but no decisions have yet been made. The option to 'buy out' the remaining term of the PFI has been looked at, however when taking into account the loss of grant the Council receives from central government this is not a viable option.

Supplementary

In light of the response given, Councillor Reid queried why a commitment to rid the fire service of its inherited debt had been included in Labour's 2013 manifesto.

The Leader responded that the fire service had been mismanaged by the Liberal Democrat Administration for five years. A break clause in the PFI arrangement was about to be agreed and then action could be taken.

Question 6 from Councillor J. Reid to the Leader

Where can my residents find a telephone book where they can make contact with those who can resolve their problems?

Response

We do not want customers to go directly to officers with questions, rather to use our customer service centres (face to face) and call centres (phone) for these enquiries.

Our customer service staff will answer the vast majority of questions instantly, or seek answers from officers on the customer's behalf.

For those people that wish to do this online we have hundreds of online forms to allow customers to report problems, pay for services and FAQ's to answer common questions.

Supplementary

Councillor Reid queried why a commitment to producing a phone book for residents had been included in Labour's 2013 manifesto.

The Leader responded that an app had been developed for public use and an e-phone book was available. Also, local numbers were now available to contact the Council.

Question 7 from Councillor J. Reid to the Leader

Why can't I find 'Fix My Street' contacts on the web site?

Response

Fix My Street is a commercial operation not connected to NCC and is a forwarding service only. Residents will find it far simpler to report and solve issues with street lighting, potholes, problem trees and many other matters by going straight to the Top Tasks section on the council website Home page www.northumberland.gov.uk or by using the MyStreet Northumberland app on their mobile devices.

Supplementary

Councillor Reid commented that the Council's IT system did accept Fix My Street contacts so it could be added to the website.

Question 8 from Councillor J. Reid to the Leader

Could I have a copy of the 'Community Contracts' this council has entered into and a list of those that are in force?

Response

Attached is the list of all the regular contract or partnership works carried out for or with town and parish councils.

Supplementary

Councillor Reid commented that the list did not include details of community contracts as defined in Labour's 2013 manifesto but would be happy to receive a copy of that to consider later.

Question 9 from Councillor Bridgett to the Leader

Forgive me for my scepticism regarding the Chancellor Philip Hammond's promises within the Autumn Statement to give local authorities the opportunity to bid into a £740 million fund that will allow councils the chance to trial and rollout 5G across parts of the country.

I remember George Osborne making a similar commitment in the 2011 Autumn Statement to offer rural areas (many in the division I represent) the chance to have telecoms masts installed that would provide the very basic 2G signal (allowing people to make calls and text) in what would become known as the Mobile Infrastructure Project.

That project came to an end on the 31st of March this year, having delivered less than a dozen of the proposed 600 masts across England, Scotland and Wales and NONE of the 18 proposed masts in rural Northumberland.

One of the fundamental failures of that project was the fact that it was Whitehall driving the process in a top down exercise. This resulted in little to no engagement with us as the local authority, the Northumberland National Park, local parish councils and, crucially, the farmers and landowners. Hence, why the project disastrously failed in my view.

If the Government is, however, genuinely going to allow local councils the opportunity to bid into this £740 million fund and allow councils to work in partnership with the key stakeholders that I have mentioned above, then this is not an opportunity we can afford to miss. We must be at the forefront of this proposal.

I would request that the leadership of this council begins an immediate process that would put Northumberland in the best position possible for when this fund goes live. This may well involve utilising some of the staff currently within the iNorthumberland team but could result in the council giving serious consideration to bringing in someone from the private sector who is well versed in telecoms and has the connections with many of the key players who will be involved in moving this process forward.

I think everyone here today recognises the importance of ensuring that Northumberland is at the forefront of this process and if that means having to climb over the top of other local councils to get there, then in my view, so be it! We already have proposals that were created by the old Mobile Infrastructure Project to deliver 18 masts across some of the most rural parts of Northumberland. Let us bid for these funds to make those masts 5G and expand this process out across other areas of our county.

Could we have a commitment here today that this council will actively pursue drawing down money from this fund and do everything within its power to ensure Northumberland is one of the first councils on this rollout list?

Response

Northumberland County Council is fully committed to improving mobile and broadband infrastructure across the County.

We share your concerns and disappointment about the outcome of the Mobile Infrastructure Programme (MIP) and the Deputy Leader expressed our views in correspondence with the Government Department, Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK). We are keen that lessons are learnt from the MIP, our understanding is so are Government.

The North East Combined Authority has a sub group who meet monthly to discuss Digital Connectivity across the North East. Northumberland County Council is represented on this group by Fay Cooper and Neil Arnold. For a number of months now this group has been discussing 5G and how we can harness the opportunity this offers across the North East.

One of the key projects being explored is the use of the unused Dark Fibre running around the Metro Line, to create a testbed for 5G Technologies. This is an innovative opportunity and we believe that the unique mix of urban and rural locations across the North East, added to the fibre availability, gives us a unique offering to the commercial market.

5G in Northumberland

We shared your enthusiasm about the recent announcement by Government of the £740m Fund to support 5G rollout. The iNorthumberland Team will be actively pursuing this opportunity. We believe that by working in Partnership with other Local Authorities we will have a greater opportunity to access some of this funding. However we will continue to also explore opportunities to work as a standalone authority and ensure that Northumberland is being proactive and in a position to readily access these funds when they are made available.

Question 10 from Councillor G. Jones to the Business Chair

Rural Northumberland is being targeted by ideologically driven Government under-funding of NHS Services. We have seen raids on our communities from the closure of a Rothbury Hospital Ward to the reduction of hours in the Alnwick Maternity Unit and the Urgent Care Centres in Hexham, North Tyneside and Wansbeck.

In addition, the Northumberland Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) has failed to hold the Ambulance service to National Operational Targets, having agreed a substandard performance target of 73% for Urgent Red calls. This target is not even being met, very probably because the Ambulance Service is prioritising financial targets over operational targets, leaving our residents at

risk when they are most in need.

Given the distances, Berwick, Alnwick, Hexham and the surrounding remote rural communities are very dependent on access to, and the timely arrival of, medical excellence - be it paramedics, nursing staff or GPs; my question is what will this Council do to encourage the CCG and our local MPs to:

1. Put our residents first; and
2. Demand an adequate level of NHS funding; and
3. Deliver on the promised new hospital in Berwick; and
4. Cease from discriminating against our residents by signing up to substandard performance targets.

Response

This question raises two different issues, which it is important to keep separate. One is about the national level of funding for the NHS, and the other is about specific decisions which local NHS organisations are making about services.

On the first issue, the Administration agrees with the questioner.

To meet the needs of growing numbers of people with long-term health conditions, and to keep up with improvements in health technologies, it is widely accepted that the NHS needs real-terms growth of 3%-4% in its funding every year. On current spending plans, the King's Fund has calculated that the increase over this decade will be less than 1% a year -- the longest sustained period of austerity in the NHS's history. As a result, waiting times are going up, services are more and more stretched, and NHS organisations across the country are in financial difficulties.

The situation is being made worse by cuts to local authority funding, which have forced social care to focus more and more tightly on people with the greatest needs. Nationally, for instance, numbers of people stuck in hospital because there is no social care available to support them at home are at record levels -- though in Northumberland our partnerships with the NHS have so far helped to prevent that from happening.

The other issue raised by the question is about specific service decisions being taken locally. It is easy to criticise any decision which reduces the services available in a hospital, whether temporarily or permanently. But it is important to look carefully at the reasons for each decision. The decisions listed in the question fall into three groups.

Firstly, there are operational decisions to suspend some services temporarily because of pressure on staffing resources. This includes the suspension of night-time operation of urgent care centres and the temporary changes to the operation of maternity services at Alnwick. There is a national shortage of nurses and midwives, and Northumbria Healthcare have made decisions about how they can best ensure safe services to meet needs in the face of continuing difficulties with recruitment.

Secondly, there is a review in progress of the balance between hospital care and support for people in their own homes. Hospitals are often not the best place for people to be. Older people typically lose muscle strength every day that they remain in hospital, and may also lose confidence about their ability to return to independent living. Hospitals are also often not the best place for rehabilitation, since it is hard to assess what people are capable of doing or what they will need to be able to do when they are in an unfamiliar setting away from home.

When resources are tight, there are choices that need to be made about whether to spend NHS money on hospitals or on community services outside hospital. It may be better for the health of people with complex long-term conditions to invest in improving support for them at home so that their health doesn't deteriorate to the point where they need hospital care.

District nurses and care at home aren't visible in the way that hospitals are, and communities understandably see hospitals as evidence of the local presence of the NHS. But for an older person with a chronic illness, it may be more important to have regular visits from a nurse who can spot early the signs of deteriorating health, and respond to them before they get worse.

In this context, it is understandable that the local NHS is asking whether the under-used inpatient ward at Rothbury is really the best way to meet the needs of that area of rural Northumberland, and is reviewing the balance between hospital and community services in the Berwick area. The Council will have the opportunity to look carefully at the proposals for Rothbury, and at any revised plans for Berwick. The Administration will not automatically support all changes that may be proposed, despite our close partnerships with the local NHS. But we won't blame local organisations for national decisions about NHS funding, and we won't assume that every change is for the worse.

Targets for response times for the ambulance service in Northumberland have been set at a level below the national target for a number of years, because of the practical inevitability of longer journey times in rural areas. The Northumberland target for the percentage of the most urgent calls met within eight minutes has been set at an increasingly high level over the past five years, while the national target has remained at 75%. In 2011/12 the Northumberland target was set at 67%; in the following year it was set at 71%, and it is now set at 73%.

Performance against this target has been disappointing in the recent past, nationally, regionally and in Northumberland, for reasons including increasing demand and resource pressures in the NHS. In 2015/16, only 72.5% nationally of the most urgent calls were responded to within eight minutes; in the North East the figure was 68.1% and in Northumberland it was 63.3%.

Supplementary

Councillor Jones asked that the Council write to the local MPs setting out the four points of concern detailed in his question. The Business Chair agreed this could be done.

62. CABINET MINUTES

The Leader moved, duly seconded, the minutes of Cabinet held on Wednesday 2 November 2016.

RESOLVED that the minutes be received

63. COMMITTEE MINUTES

(a) Economic Growth and Strategic Transport OSC

These were presented by Councillor Sambrook.

With regard to Minute No. 21 (Northumberland Local Plan Core Strategy - Proposed Further Major Modifications), Councillor Dale felt there was a need to establish to status of Neighbourhood Plans once and for all.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Economic Growth and Strategic Transport OSC be received.

(b) Family and Children's Services OSC

These were presented by Councillor Gallacher.

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

(c) Communities and Local Services OSC

These were presented by Councillor B. Pidcock.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Communities and Local Services OSC be received.

(d) Corporate Performance OSC

These were presented by Councillor G. Jones.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Corporate Performance OSC be received.

(e) Audit Committee

These were presented by Councillor Dale.

Councillor Dale reported that a presentation for all members would be organised on Council finances, including treasury management.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Audit Committee be received.

64. DELEGATED DECISIONS

RESOLVED that the decisions taken by Directors following consultation with Portfolio Holders be received.

65. NOTICES OF MOTION

Councillor J. Reid asked for a ruling on the acceptability of motion no.1 in accordance with the Council's constitution as he did not feel it came within the scope of what should be discussed. Mr Henry advised that it was common practice for motions of national significance to be considered by individual councils. He could see no reason to deny members the opportunity to discuss it.

Motion No.1

In accordance with Council Rules of Procedure No.10, Councillor A. Hepple moved the following motion, received by the Democratic Services Manager on 15 November 2016:-

“Northumberland County Council views with concern the injustice whereby the Treasury receives 50% of surpluses from the Mineworkers Pension Scheme, accumulating so far over £3 billion, a sum taken from people and communities that are least able to afford it and one that is out of all proportion to the risk covered, and calls for independent scrutiny by the Public Accounts Committee to address this unfair arrangement”.

Councillor Hepple presented the motion on behalf of his father and all retired mineworkers adding that the motion had been formulated by the Industrial Communities Alliance, which worked on behalf of the former industrial areas of the country.

His father had died at the age of 54 from the miner's disease pneumoconiosis and never received his miner's pension or any compensation. Many retired miners suffered terrible health conditions and painful deaths because of exposure to coal dust without any compensation. Successive governments continued to take huge amounts from the fund set up with miners' money to help miners - since 1994 £3.3bn had been paid into the Treasury from surpluses in the miners pension fund.

In 1994 the miners' pension scheme had become a stand alone trust and was closed to new members. The government guaranteed that the pension entitlements would rise in line with inflation and in return the government would receive 50% of any surpluses, with the other 50% used by trustees to improve benefits. The Coal Industry Act 1994 stipulated that the government was entitled to no more than half of the surpluses; they could have taken less but never had.

Since then spectacular surpluses had been made with no further money paid in by the taxpayer and the scheme had recently been extended to 2029. The total gross payments to the government were expected to be £8bn within this period with no contribution from the government. This benefit was out of proportion to the insurance cover it provided.

The motion called for independent scrutiny by the Public Accounts Committee to address this injustice. There were four questions to be asked:-

- The scheme had covered its own liabilities every year without call on the taxpayer. Was the financial risk underpinning this agreement much lower than expected?
- Given the Treasury had received a large windfall from the mineworkers pension scheme, should not more be returned to the coalfield communities which suffered from deprivation?
- There were no new members who would claim so if retired miners weren't to get full benefit, who would?
- Was the mineworkers' pension scheme paying too much to the government given the very small risk?

The motion was seconded by Councillor Ledger who reminded members that the Council was a member of the Industrial Communities Alliance, which had cross party support, and which had initiated the motion.

Councillor J. Reid understood the feeling behind the motion but queried how members could be deprived of bonuses they weren't expecting, assuming the fund delivered as it should. He also queried exactly what action was being proposed and felt that urging MPs to make representations, or representations from the Council itself, would be better.

The Leader responded that the motion was in the ownership of the Industrial Communities Alliance who would collate responses from all Councils which had considered it and deliver it in the way they saw fit.

Members spoke in support of the motion and it was noted that the mineworkers pension scheme was not a defined benefits system. Pensions were built up from bonuses and if these were withdrawn then ex-mineworkers would suffer real hardship.

Councillor Hepple thanked members for their support for his motion which was simply about seeking justice for retired mineworkers.

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

FOR: 43 as follows:-

G.R. Arckless	I.P. Lindley
E. Armstrong	K. Nisbet
S.C. Bridgett	K. Parry
E. Burt	B. Pidcock

D. Campbell	L. Pidcock
E. Cartie	M. Purvis
P.A.M. Dale	A.W. Reid
J.G. Davey	J. Reid
S. Davey	M.E. Richards
S. Dickinson	L.J. Rickerby
S. Dungworth	T. Robson
J. Foster	A. Sambrook
B. Gallacher	A. Sharp
J.J. Gobin	E. Simpson
K.O. Graham	J.E. Smith
L. Grimshaw	I.C.F. Swithenbank
A. Hepple	V. Tyler
E.I. Hunter	A. Wallace
T. Johnstone	G. Webb
P. Kelly	T.S. Wilson
J.A. Lang	J. Woodman
D. Ledger	

AGAINST: 0

ABSTENTIONS: 17 as follows:-

D. Bawn	J.I. Hutchinson
G. Castle	P.A. Jackson
W. Daley	V. Jones
R.R. Dodd	A.H. Murray
J.B. Fearon	J.R. Riddle
B. Flux	H.G.H. Sanderson
R. Gibson	T.N. Thorne
C. Homer	J.G. Watson
C.W. Horncastle	

RESOLVED that the County Council view with concern the injustice whereby the Treasury receives 50% of surpluses from the Mineworkers Pension Scheme, accumulating so far over £3 billion, a sum taken from people and communities that are least able to afford it and one that is out of all proportion to the risk covered. It calls for independent scrutiny by the Public Accounts Committee to address this unfair arrangement.

Motion No.2

In accordance with Council Rules of Procedure No.10, Councillor P.A. Jackson to move the following motion, received by the Democratic Services Manager on 20 November 2016:-

“Given the large long-term financial commitments that Council Taxpayers will have to bear, this Council calls upon the Cabinet to delay the signing of

contracts for the construction of a new County Hall and the disposal of the current site in Morpeth until after the elections in May 2017”.

In introducing the motion, Councillor Jackson made a number of points including the following:-

- He referred to the various reported plans by the Administration for the use of the capital asset from the sale of the county hall site including a new playhouse in Alnwick, developments in Hexham and Prudhoe town centre, development of the Tesco site in Bedlington, leisure centre developments and £80m for the development of county hall in Ashington. This totalled £250m and there was no real justification for the county hall move; nor had it been in the Administration’s manifesto.
- Full details from the business case were now emerging; it was claimed that county hall was too big. If so, then the additional space should be rented out; the report from Fenkle and Gould stated that only £8m worth of repairs and refurbishment were needed on county hall and this report should have been shared with all councillors.
- The cost of the project in Ashington was £80m and was far larger than had been shared with members, including costs for site preparation, utilities, new road access and structure and a ground source heat pump system. Nor would there be enough parking which would lead to congestion. The design was extravagant and it would cost ten times more to move than to stay. The decision had been made for political reasons and the facts did not bear out what members had been told. He reminded members of their personal liability as councillors and urged them to delay the decision.

In view of the comments which had been made, the Business Chair asked the Chief Executive to respond. Mr Mason advised members that the reports produced and considered by Council had been signed off by both himself as the S151 officer and Mr Henry as the monitoring officer, and he reminded members that they both were held to account by their professional bodies. He was satisfied that the proposal would provide value for money and revenue savings over the length of the scheme.

The £80m figure being quoted in the press was categorically incorrect; the capital cost of the scheme was in the order of £32m and the projected capital receipt was far in excess of the original estimate following the marketing exercise. He assured members that officers had done the analysis professionally, correctly and in accordance with guidelines.

Councillor Jackson responded that the Ernst and Young report to Audit Committee had been clear on the governance process but had not looked at the detail of the business case. He felt it was right to delay the signing of the contracts to the new Administration in May, and commented again that the project had been advertised as an £80m project when the additional details he had referred to were included. He added that a survey of 10,000 people in the County had been done and 98% had responded that they did not support the move.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Sanderson who expressed disappointment at the response Councillor Jackson had received to his comments. He felt that it was the role of the opposition to oppose, question and challenge and Councillor Jackson's points should be answered so everyone could have a better understanding of the position.

The Business Chair sought clarification from Mr Mason of the £80m figure being referred to as it did not relate to the overall cost of the HQ. Mr Mason advised that the scheme to regenerate Ashington had been inherited from the previous Administration, but the current Administration had accepted the need for redevelopment by Arch of the whole area, which included commercial development and a new college. The entire scope of the works had gone through the EU procurement route so everything could be dealt with at the same time. The Administration had chosen to relocate HQ to Ashington as a catalyst for the whole scheme, but he reiterated that the HQ cost was £32m.

As Chair of the Audit Committee, Councillor Dale commented that Councillor Jackson had had every opportunity to ask the external auditors questions, which had all been answered.

The Leader made a number of points in response to the comments made, including:-

- Any delays to the project would have a detrimental effect on long term savings.
- The proposals were better for the Council's workforce
- Decentralisation proposals had been included in the Labour manifesto. Sir John Hall supported the proposals for Ashington, and liberal democrats in Ashington also supported it.
- Morpeth was a boom town and the Administration were committed to making other Northumberland market towns the same.
- The new arrangements would enable better engagement between staff and public and allow the delivery of services in the places people actually lived.
- A far greater capital receipt for the site could now be expected than was originally envisaged which could be used for services and borrowing.
- The Labour Administration was doing all it could to deliver for the people of Northumberland and he was disappointed that opposition members only seemed concerned about Morpeth and not the rest of the County.

In the ensuing debate a number of points were made by members including:-

- Councillor Castle commented that the motion was only about deferring a decision to allow public opinion to be heard. This did not mean that the decision was necessarily a wrong one but it was a political decision. He appreciated the work which had been done in his area but did not feel that a move to Ashington was necessary for the regeneration of the market towns.
- Councillor Sambrook supported the move as it would put jobs back into towns.

- Councillor B. Pidcock supported the Administration's proposals which were backed up by professional advice and experience from both officers and external experts. The Administration had turned the HQ move into something positive for every market town in the County and he questioned the opposition's motives in putting the motion on the agenda.
- Councillor J. Reid suggested that the Administration should delay the decision and include it in their manifesto for the election. The Labour voters he had spoken to in his ward told him they did not agree with what was happening and he did not feel it was fair to force the next Administration down a route it might not agree with. He referred to the disclosure of the expected receipt for the county hall site by the Leader and urged members to stop arguing.
- Councillor Bawn agreed that this was a political decision for political reasons but it was also a controversial decision which was being pushed through with indecent haste. It was not necessary to move county hall in order to decentralise jobs to the market towns, and he felt that other issues were being added into the argument in order to justify the move. The proposals for the site went against the Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan which the Authority had a duty to uphold, and he urged the Leader to put the decision on the move to the people of Northumberland.
- The Leader agreed on the value of the Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan but reminded members that it contained 25% flexibility. This flexibility would be used to support the Neighbourhood Plan by the inclusion of 200 houses on the site.
- Councillor Johnstone felt the motion was a delay tactic to allow opposition members to mislead the public and that there was an element of snobbery about a move to Ashington.
- Councillor Kelly referred to the LGA peer review report and its reference to the negatively critical approach adopted by the opposition leader instead of being constructively critical. He felt the motion was an attempt to undermine the Administration's policy of invest to save and because the reports on the issue were sound, that the proposals must be politically unacceptable to them. The people of Northumberland needed economic regeneration in every area and he would not support the motion as he wanted to be part of something positive.
- Councillor Dodd commented that the Administration had refused to have a debate on this issue before now, and refused a request for call in. A debate was now being held on whether to delay something which members had not debated, and no options had been given about an alternative location.
- The Leader responded that the previous administration had wanted to relocate to Cramlington which some Conservative members had supported. Councillor J. Reid could not recall that ever being discussed.
- Councillor Cartie urged members to get on and make progress with this issue. The building fell far short of its requirements under the Equality Act and the Authority had a duty of care to its staff and the public. People needed to be able to access Council services easily.
- Councillor A.W. Reid commented that he would personally be sad to see County Hall demolished because of the artistic works within the

fabric of the building. However, the current economic life of a building was 25 years and when this timespan passed it was more economic to build new than upgrade. Regarding relocation, his view was this should be where it was needed and the move to Ashington would invigorate the town and lead to more prosperity. It was time to make progress.

- Councillor Dale also referred to the LGA peer review and comments made regarding member behaviour and attitude which were not acceptable. Ashington was an area of high deprivation with 10,300 families living in poverty in the Ashington and Blyth Area. People in her ward understood the reasoning behind the proposed move and the only way the County's market towns would survive was with investment.
- Councillor Hutchinson reminded members the motion was only about a delay and he queried where staff would be located when surplus properties had been sold off. He asked when Ashington had been designated a market town; Haltwhistle was a market town but was dying from lack of investment. All efforts were being focussed on the south east to the detriment of other areas. Councillor Dickinson advised that detail would be provided to Councillor Hutchinson on the County's market towns and the investment which had been made.
- Councillor Lindley commented that the motion seemed a reasonable one but there was a lot of fear in the community arising from the misuse of information on social media being circulated by the Conservatives. He feared that any further delay would only allow this situation to worsen and that people would not behave honourably. However, his own constituents favoured a pause so this made the position difficult for him.
- Councillor Foster felt that a delay would only defer the savings to be accrued and she also referred to the Equality Act issues already mentioned. There was a poor bus service, not enough parking and the building was not fit for purpose; it would be impossible to rent out space within it.
- Councillor Tyler also referred to the poor working conditions some staff faced from the leaking roof and the duty of care owed to valuable employees.
- Councillor Riddle advised that it was his request through Scrutiny which had released the Faithful and Gould report. He referred to the poor condition of many schools, the cost to refurbish County Hall being only £8m, the increasing centralisation to the south east not less and the need for devolved budgets to the Area Committees which had never happened. There was nothing to be lost by a short delay.
- Councillor Smith commented that his constituents were very concerned about the issue and felt that employees could be moved back into the local areas without moving County Hall. A stay of execution would not hurt.
- Councillor Thorne supported the motion because Morpeth was a thriving town and he believed that was where the administrative centre should stay. It enjoyed good services and excellent communication links as a result of investment by a successful businessman. He agreed that Ashington needed investment and he was a great supporter of the Academy, but relocating HQ would not achieve that. It needed investment, jobs and businesses to change and grow.

- Councillor Campbell greatly welcomed what the Administration had done for the County in the last few years and felt there was an element of snobbery at play.
- Councillor Swithenbank raised the issue of major decisions being taken at the end of an administration which were then inherited by the administration following. He had experienced this personally twice so it was wrong to say that it did not happen. He would be sorry to see the end of the building on a personal note, but he acknowledged that it had come to the end of its useful life. Morpeth would continue to be prosperous after the County Council departed, Hexham was doing well with the new bus station development and there was no reason why other towns should not also benefit making all of Northumberland prosperous. He felt that there was an underlying belief that the least well off communities in the County should continue to make do with what they were used to.
- Councillor Jackson made the final comments on his motion. He advised that the staff he had spoken to wanted to remain in Morpeth and he queried whether their opinions had been sought; there were regular bus services between Blyth, Ashington and Morpeth; Council jobs had drained away from the market towns but progress in that area was not linked to moving county hall - money saved by not moving could be used for jobs; regarding the report to the Audit Committee, the external auditors had not looked at the business case for the move which had been excluded from their terms of reference; a design life of 60 years was envisaged in the tender document for the new building; £80m was a public figure in the tender document and the Council had responsibility for funding the whole development in Ashington through Arch. Finally, it was wrong to do this before the election.

In view of the referral to the £80m figure again, the Business Chair asked the Chief Executive to provide further clarification to members.

The Chief Executive reiterated strongly that use of this £80m figure was misleading to both members and the public. The tender figure for the HQ development was £32m and the wider development was part of a separate business case not related to the Council. The total project could potentially cost up to £80m, but that could include a new college and commercial development. However, it was not linked to the Council building.

Furthermore, the business case for the development had actually improved due to the higher projected capital receipt for the current sites. This was an invest to save scheme, and he was happy to sign the figures off in his professional capacity.

On the required number of members calling for a named vote on this issue, the votes were cast as follows:-

FOR: 26 as follows:-

E. Armstrong	V. Jones
D. Bawn	I.P.Lindley
G. Castle	A.H. Murray
W. Daley	J. Reid
R.R. Dodd	L.J.Rickerby
J.B. Fearon	J.R. Riddle
B. Flux	T. Robson
R. Gibson	H.G.H. Sanderson
C. Homer	A. Sharp
C.W. Horncastle	J.E. Smith
E.I. Hunter	T.N. Thorne
J.I. Hutchinson	J.G. Watson
P.A. Jackson	J. Woodman

AGAINST: 34 as follows:-

G.R. Arckless	P. Kelly
S.C. Bridgett	J.A. Lang
E. Burt	D. Ledger
D. Campbell	K. Nisbet
E. Cartie	K. Parry
P.A.M. Dale	B. Pidcock
J.G. Davey	L. Pidcock
S. Davey	M. Purvis
S. Dickinson	A.W. Reid
S. Dungworth	M.E. Richards
J. Foster	A. Sambrook
B. Gallacher	E. Simpson
J.J. Gobin	I.C.F. Swithenbank
K.O. Graham	V. Tyler
L. Grimshaw	A. Wallace
A. Hepple	G. Webb
T. Johnstone	T.S. Wilson

ABSTENTIONS: 0

The motion therefore fell.

66. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Setting the Transport Levy for the North East Combined Authority Budget

Council was asked to approve the Council's budget for 2017/18 with regard to Supported Bus Services and Concessionary Travel to subsequently define the transport levy for Northumberland to be incorporated into the Combined Authority's budget for 2017/18.

RESOLVED that the Northumberland Transport Budget and levy be agreed, and it be incorporated into the Combined Authority's budget for 2017-18.

67. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

A1 in Northumberland

The report provided Council with:

- An overview of the A1 in Northumberland improvement proposals as presented for consultation by Highways England in November 2016;
- A suggested response to the consultation process based on review by council officers.

With regard to paragraph 16 of the report and the provision of overtaking lanes north of Ellingham, Councillor Smith moved, duly seconded, that the Council's preferred option should be for **two** overtaking lanes southbound.

Councillor Woodman commented that it was his understanding that the two overtaking lanes had been proposed as northbound for specific operational reasons and he felt this should be investigated further by officers, which members supported.

On Councillor Smith's amendment being put to the vote there voted **FOR: 39; AGAINST: 2; ABSTENTIONS: 4.**

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that:-

- (a) the continued progress of the A1 in Northumberland project be welcomed;
- (b) the suggested consultation response as prepared by council officers be agreed, subject to the Council's preferred option being for two overtaking lanes southbound north of Ellingham (as detailed above), and this subject to further discussion and clarification with Council officers; and
- (c) members make additional responses to the consultation exercise as appropriate.

68. REPORT OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES MANAGER

Community Governance Review - Newton on the Moor and Swarland

Council was asked to consider the outcome of a Community Governance Review in the County.

Councillor Ledger moved the report and the recommendation to maintain the status quo. Councillor Thorne, as one of the local members, supported this proposal.

RESOLVED that, in view of the responses received to the proposed boundary change, the administrative boundaries be maintained in their current position.

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 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	3 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) The public interest in seeking this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure because of the serious consequences for the Authority and others if the information should come into the public domain.

70. MINUTES

Members were asked to consider the confidential minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on Wednesday 2 November 2016.

Councillor Hunter commented that the details of the named vote taken as part of the confidential report detailed in the minutes had been referred to at a recent parish council meeting. However, it was pointed out to members that the details of this named vote had also been available in the public record of the meeting in the interests of transparency.

RESOLVED that the confidential minutes of the meeting of County Council held on 2 November 2016, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record, signed by the Business Chair and sealed with the Common Seal of the Council.

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

.....
Chair of the County Council

.....
Duly Authorised Officer