

## **NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

At a meeting of the **Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday, 24 January 2018 at 2.00 p.m.

#### **PRESENT**

Councillor J. Reid  
(Chairman, in the Chair)

#### **COUNCILLORS**

Armstrong, E.  
Beynon, J.  
Cartie, E.  
Dunbar, C.

Dunn, E.  
Gallacher, B.  
Gibson, R.  
Pattinson, W.

#### **PORTFOLIO HOLDER**

Riddle, J. Planning, Housing and Resilience

#### **MEMBERS ALSO IN ATTENDANCE**

Hill, G.  
Seymour, C.

Wearmouth, R.

#### **OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE**

L. Henry  
S. Lawson  
J. Rose  
P. Johnston  
G. Gavin  
D. Laux  
D. Rumney  
D. Feige  
S. Nicholson

Legal Services Manager  
Project Officer  
Economic and Inclusion Policy Manager  
Interim Executive Director: Place  
Head of Neighbourhood Services  
Head of Technical Services  
Principal Programme Officer  
Principal Ecologist and AONB Officer  
Scrutiny Co-ordinator

## **28. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor I.C.F. Swithenbank.

## **29. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Communities and Place OSC, held on 22 November 2018, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

## **30. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS**

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator presented the latest Forward Plan of key decisions (February - May 2018). (Forward Plan enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix A).

**RESOLVED** that the Forward Plan be noted.

## **31. CABINET REPORTS PREVIOUSLY CONSIDERED BY THE COMMITTEE**

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator advised members of Cabinet decisions regarding issues previously commented on and been subject of report by this Committee. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix B).

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

## **32. POLICING AND CRIME ACT 2017: REQUEST FROM POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR NORTHUMBRIA**

Council, at its meeting on 1 November 2018, referred a request from the Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria to be co-opted as a member of the authority for the purposes stated in the report under statutory amendments brought into effect last year by the provisions of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, to this Committee for consideration. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix C).

Mr Henry, Legal Services Manager presented the report to the Committee and advised members that, in addition to seeking co-option to the Council, the Commissioner had further expressed her wish to be a member of all decision making bodies that Northumberland Council have in relation to Fire and Rescue Service issues, including the Cabinet, the Firefighters' Pension Scheme (FPS) Local Pension Board, and the Disputes Panel - Fire and Rescue Service.

Mr Henry confirmed to members that co-option onto the Council and other committees would include voting rights. Although a member expressed the view that any contribution the Commissioner could make to the decision-making process should be welcomed, the Committee felt that the collaborative working that already

existed between the Council's Chief Fire Officer and the Chief Constable already provided the high level partnership working that was required.

Following a vote of:

For - 6

Against - 2

Abstention - 1

the Committee **RESOLVED** to agree the following recommendations:

*"The Committee agrees to recommend*

- (a) *to Cabinet, in respect of the Police and Crime Commissioner ("the Commissioner") for Northumbria's request to attend, speak and vote at meetings of Cabinet in relation to business which relates to the functions of the Council as a fire and rescue authority, should be refused for the reasons set out in (i) - (ii) below, and*
  
- (b) *to Council, in respect of the Police and Crime Commissioner ("the Commissioner") for Northumbria's request to attend, speak and vote at meetings of Council and all decision making bodies that Northumberland County Council have in relation to Fire and Rescue Service issues, including the Firefighters' Pension Scheme (FPS) Local Pension Board, and the Disputes Panel - Fire and Rescue Service, in relation to business which relates to the functions of the Council as a fire and rescue authority should be refused for the reasons set out in (i) - (ii) below:*
  - (i) *the Council have not received from the Commissioner a satisfactory explanation as to how she believes her ability to attend, speak and vote at meetings of the Council will achieve the objectives of the provisions of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 in relation to greater collaborative working between the emergency services and the enhancement of the democratic accountability of Northumbria Police and Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service and, that, in any event*
  
  - (ii) *the Council considers that greater collaborative working between Northumbria Police and Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service can be achieved by more effective and meaningful strategic and operational partnership working between the two services without the need for the Commissioner's formal involvement as a co-opted member of the authority which would add little or nothing, it is felt, to the democratic accountability of either service"*

### **33. SCRUTINY OF CABINET REPORTS**

The Committee were advised that the following reports would be considered by the Cabinet on 13 February 2018. The Committee were asked to comment on the proposals contained in the reports.

### **33.1 Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site: Future Funding and Governance**

This report advised members on the proposed governance and funding arrangements, and their implications, with regard to the future management of the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix D).

**RESOLVED** that the Cabinet be advised that the Committee supports the recommendations in the report.

### **33.2 Funding for the North Pennines and Northumberland Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

The Committee were advised that current funding arrangements for the Northumberland Coast AONB Staff Unit and the North Pennines AONB Staff Unit ceased at the end of the current financial year. Ongoing funding was available from Defra, but this was conditional on 25% match funding being secured from Local Authorities. The purpose of this report was to seek approval for funding from Northumberland County Council for the next three years. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix E).

The Committee noted that the Northumberland Coast AONB was designated in 1958 covering the area between Berwick-upon-Tweed and the Coquet Estuary and felt that it should be extended further south, perhaps as far as Blyth. Members suggested that this Committee should examine the case for gathering evidence to present to Natural England concerning the need for a boundary review of the Coastal AONB, with a view to making recommendations to Cabinet based on their findings.

**RESOLVED** that

- (a) the recommendation in the report be supported, and
- (b) the Scrutiny Co-ordinator examine with officers whether the Committee can assist in the process of realigning the Northumberland Coast AONB boundary.

## **34. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORTS**

### **34.1 Grounds Maintenance Review**

This report reviewed the performance of the grounds maintenance programme undertaken during 2017/18 and identified improvements to service delivery that would be delivered in 2018/19 to ensure that the Council achieved the best possible outcomes for our communities with the resources available to us. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix F).

There was some discussion regarding the service in Ashington, where members reported that the Town Council had engaged additional contractors to augment the

works undertaken by the Council team. They suggested that the Council work more closely with the Town Council to confirm the terms of the base levels of grounds maintenance and to outline the benefits of an enhanced service. The Committee were advised that there would be no reduction in grounds maintenance service levels in 2018/19.

However, members in other parts of the county welcomed the works the team undertook in their areas, particularly with regard to weed control and grass cutting.

Members also welcomed initiatives to support and engage with communities to achieve bloom awards.

**RESOLVED** that

- (a) members comments regarding the levels of service be noted;
- (b) the overall good performance of grounds maintenance activity this year, as demonstrated by the Northumbrian in Bloom results and Green Flag awards, be noted;
- (c) the significant improvement in verge cutting from 2016/17 to 17/18 and supports adopting this improvement as a new higher standard of baseline service, be noted, and
- (d) the implementation of the actions outlined in this report, which aim to improve the performance of weed control in 2018/19, be supported.

### **34.2 New Code of Practice for Maintaining Highways**

This report set out the background to highway infrastructure asset management and maintenance in Northumberland. It explained about the revised Code of Practice - Well Managed Highway Infrastructure, which highway authorities across England and Wales were expected to comply with by October 2018. The report also set out how this Committee could be involved in ensuring that the County met those requirements. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix G).

**RESOLVED** that

- (a) the report be noted, and
- (b) further reports be considered by this Committee over the coming months to help shape the review of the current Transport Asset Management Plan to demonstrate adoption of the revised Code, before approval by Cabinet in October 2018.

### **34.3 Performance Scorecards**

Members considered current performance for services within the Committee's terms of reference. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix H).

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

**35. REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATOR**

**Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme**

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator presented the Committee's Work Programme. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix D).

He noted the Committee's request to examine the possibility of amending the Coastal AONB boundary and confirmed that he would consult officers on progressing this issue.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

**36. INFORMATION REPORT - POLICY DIGEST**

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator advised the Committee that the Policy Digest gave details of the latest policy briefings, government announcements and ministerial speeches which may be of interest to members. The report could be accessed through the service finder element of County Council's web site at [www.northumberland.gov.uk](http://www.northumberland.gov.uk).

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

Chairman \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_