

Minutes

Sunderland City Council

At a meeting of SUNDERLAND CITY COUNCIL held in the COUNCIL CHAMBER, CITY HALL, SUNDERLAND on WEDNESDAY 23 MARCH 2022 at 4.00pm

Present: The Mayor (Councillor H Trueman) in the Chair
The Deputy Mayor (Councillor A Smith)

Councillors	Ali	Fletcher	Mason-Gage	Smith, G
	Bewick	Foster	McClennan	Smith, P
	Blackburn	Gibson, E	McDonough	Snowdon, D
	Blackett	Gibson, P	McKeith	Snowdon, D E
	Burnicle	Gibson, P W L	Miller, F	Speding
	Butler	Greener	Miller, G	Stewart
	Chequer	Hartnack	Mullen	Thornton
	Crosby	Haswell	Nicholson	Trueman, D
	Dixon	Heron	Noble	Tye
	Dodds	Hodson	Peacock	Usher
	Donaghy	Johnston, K	Potts	Walker, M
	Doyle	Johnston, S	Price	Walker, P
	Dunn	Lauchlan	Reed	Warne
	Edgeworth	Laws	Rowntree	Williams
	Essl	Leadbitter	Samuels	Wood, A
	Fagan	MacKnight, N	Scott	Wood, P
	Farthing	Mann		

The notice convening the meeting was read.

Apologies

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Howe, D. MacKnight, Morrissey, O'Brien, Scanlan and Taylor together with Aldermen Forbes, Tate and Greenfield.

Minutes

53. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 2 March 2022 be confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the following amendment:

Item 4 – Receipt of Declarations of Interest – to read “Councillor Fletcher – Member of GMB” and not UNISON as previously recorded.

Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

Announcements

(i) Honorary Alderman Arnott

It was with great sadness that the Mayor informed Council of the death of Honorary Alderman and former Councillor Arnott.

The Mayor invited Council to join him in observing a minute's silence as a mark of respect for their former colleague.

(ii) Marie Curie's Day of Reflection

The Mayor advised that today was the anniversary of the first Covid-19 Lockdown and that across the Council, Members and Officers had supported Marie Curie's Day of Reflection. The Mayor had lit a candle in memory of former Councillor Margaret Beck.

(iii) Retiring Councillors

The Mayor advised that Councillors Blackett, Essl, E. Gibson, Howe, Leadbitter, D. MacKnight, N. MacKnight, McClennan and Taylor would be retiring from office and not standing in the municipal elections in May. As this would be their last Council meeting, he expressed his gratitude for their past service and wished them well for the future.

The Mayor having thanked all those retiring from the Council for their contribution, individual speeches and tributes were paid by Members.

Covid-19 – Verbal Update by the Leader of the Council

The Mayor invited the Leader to provide a verbal update on the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Leader began by paying tribute to the phenomenal efforts by residents, volunteers, businesses, public sector organisations and service providers to keep the city running and recovering strongly from the pandemic and the effects of lockdown.

After the surge in infection rates in January due to the Omicron variant, the City had seen figures going in the right direction and infection rates reducing week on week.

However now, with the lifting of all legal restrictions by the government and the advent of the new BA.2 subvariant, the pressure was persisting on hospitals across the North East and the numbers of patients admitted was beginning to creep back up.

The Leader explained that there were far fewer people in hospital with Covid-19 at the moment than in January, but that the city needed to be mindful of recent developments and cases being on the rise. In the week up to the 11 March, rates for Sunderland, the North East and England were increasing, whereas they had been coming down steadily before then. At the current point in time, there were 350 cases per 100,000 in Sunderland, 375 per 100,000 in the North East and 580 per 100,000 in England.

The Leader commented that based on previous experience of how infection rates rose and at times surged, that unfortunately the Sunderland and North East rates were set to rise further, and potentially significantly further if the England rate was taken as a measure, as throughout the pandemic the region had been a couple of weeks behind London and the south of the country once infections were going up.

The Leader went on to say that he had recently had Covid himself and was hugely thankful that he had had all of the doses of the Covid-19 vaccine he was eligible for, because he was in no doubt that it protected him from being far more poorly than he was. He emphasised again how important it was to people themselves, and to those around them that everyone took up all the doses of the vaccine they were eligible for. The creation of the vaccines had been the big game changer in the country's battle against Covid-19 and the Leader stated that it was no exaggeration to say that it was a life-changer and indeed lifesaver too. People owed it to themselves and their loved ones and the NHS and the Care Sector to get vaccinated.

The Leader referred to the fact that the NHS and care sector had worked tirelessly, to a superhuman degree, for two full years throughout this pandemic now, being faced with unprecedented levels of demand, but with much reduced resources as absence rates due to sickness and self-isolation had had a serious impact on their own workforces.

The Leader believed that the root cause of the acute difficulties and challenges faced, with demand far outstripping capacity, was the Government's underfunding of these sectors that were the heart and backbone of the country, and the Government's complete failure to plan for this or any other type of national crisis.

The Leader went on to stress the importance of making sure that Sunderland was doing everything it could to support NHS and care workers by getting all available vaccinations. Latest figures showed that Sunderland had 85.2% of eligible people with their first dose, 80.4% with their second, and 62.7% with their third dose or booster. The Leader urged everyone to book an appointment if they still had jabs to get.

Sunderland was a resilient and determined city and while infection rates were on the rise, and it would impact all organisations in some way, incredible efforts continued to go into ensuring that particularly vital frontline services were kept going across the city and the most vulnerable residents were supported, protected, and had everything they needed.

The Leader said that there was so much positivity about continuing to recover strongly from the pandemic, and a real buzz around the city as the ambitious and transformational regeneration plans took shape more and more with each passing week. On Thursday 17 March 2022, the Mayor had presided over the official opening of the wonderful City Hall, one of many significant developments on Riverside Sunderland which has been described as the UK's most exciting regeneration site.

With two more office buildings under construction, taking the Council towards its target of 10,000 more high quality jobs in the city centre for residents; construction set to start on the new Eye Hospital; the Culture House about to be created across the road; work to begin on the new pedestrian footbridge, connecting communities across the river; then on the other side the construction of the Housing, Innovation and Construction Skills Academy and the new e-sports centre, the Leader did not think there was any city that could demonstrate a stronger recovery from Covid-19 and a bigger determination to create a bright and successful future for everyone, in a dynamic, healthy, vibrant and smart city.

The Leader knew and understood that everyone welcomed the return towards normality and freedom from the legal restrictions which people had lived with for a long time now, but he could not emphasise strongly enough, how important it was for everyone to keep acting responsibly, and to continue to be aware of the real danger Covid posed if efforts were allowed to fall by the wayside. It was crucial for people to be mindful of whatever situation they were in and to think about how they could prevent the virus from spreading; this meant following the latest guidance on testing and isolation, continuing to maintain social distance and wearing a face covering in enclosed spaces, especially around vulnerable people.

The Leader concluded by saying that there were many more fantastic things to come in Sunderland, creating lots of opportunities of all kinds for residents, and encouraged everyone to keep up the good work.

54. RESOLVED that the update from the Leader be noted.

Citywide approach to carbon reduction – Verbal update by the Deputy Leader of the Council

The Deputy Leader provided an update regarding ongoing progress being made in relation to carbon neutral goals. Work had continued to progress in each of the strategic priority areas set out in the Low Carbon Framework in recent months which included:-

- The City Council had been awarded Warm Homes Funding of £628,000 to support the installation of 135 Air Source Heat Pumps in private rented or owner occupier properties (with Energy Performance Certificate ratings of E, F, or G) as well as a further £252,000 funding to deliver a valuable complementary energy efficiency advice and support programme, in partnership with Groundwork Green Doctors and Citizens Advice Bureau.

- The Council had also been successful in securing a grant from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, working closely with Gentoo, and had been granted over £1.2m funding to deliver a joint project which together with investment from Gentoo would deliver a total improvement programme of £2.6m. The project aimed to improve the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of 604 properties across the city and bring properties with EPC D, E and F ratings up to EPC C or D standard.
- The end of the ECO and ECO FLEX delivery process in Sunderland was now approaching, through which since January 2021, the Council had assisted 312 properties with heating and insulation measures and had attracted nearly £737,000 of utility funding to support energy efficiency improvements to homes across the city.
- More than 15,000 tree and hedge plants were currently being planted at Elemore Park, together with new wildflower meadow, across an area of over five hectares. On the 22 March 2022, the Mayor helped to plant a ceremonial tree to commemorate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and Queen's Green Canopy, as well as the launch of the North East Community Forest. Through this new Forest, the City Council had already been able to access £145,000 of external funding for the Elemore Park works.
- The NE Community Forest had also provided external funding for two new orchards in the city, one had recently been planted at Hetton Park and the other one was due to be planted next week at Silksworth Welfare Park. These were both community orchards, which would help local residents access healthier food in their respective localities, as well as reducing the carbon footprint of a small part of the city's food consumption.
- In terms of grant funding for small and medium sized businesses (SMEs), through the regional BEST project, Sunderland City Council led the regional performance table, with 21 approvals, 14 grants claimed to date, and a total project value of £130,000 invested in energy efficiency improvements.
- Through the city-wide ERDF-funded BREEZ project, more than 30 businesses had now been supported with lighting, heating, insulation and solar PV improvements.
- The Council had commenced formal market engagement with drilling contractors relating to the pilot boreholes proposed at Riverside Sunderland and would then seek to procure a contractor with a view to being on site later this year.
- In relation to the City Centre Mobility Hub – 10 Nissan Leaf cars had now arrived and were being made available first to a small test group, before then being rolled-out shortly to all staff.
- The Council had also secured an extension of the current e-scooter trial area to include integration of Sunderland Strategic Transport Corridor phase 3 (SSTC 3), and the surrounding areas, which would now allow for improved connectivity between employment, residential and retail zones as part of the trial.

- Work was now underway on the development of a 'Social Prescribing Pilot' project, with the Council having received funding from the Department for Transport to develop a proposal. Focusing on the Redhill and Southwick wards in the first instance, the pilot project would seek to improve people's health through increased levels of physical activity and active travel and provide clear links between infrastructure development and the social prescribing schemes. Working closely with Public Health colleagues, a proposal would be developed for submission to the Department of Transport by the end of April.
- In February, the new state-of-the-art Household Waste and Recycling Facility at Pallion opened, which was five times the size of the former Beach Street facility and was capable of handling more than a million visits annually as encouragement of high levels of recycling across the city continued.
- The Council had also continued two pilot projects bringing together Smart City and low carbon ambitions, working with the Digital Catapult from its regional base in Sunderland to develop and trial digital innovations in improving energy efficiency in two of the operational buildings, as well as in helping to understand travel patterns and choices as the Council sought to encourage adoption of low carbon and active transport wherever appropriate.
- The Council had supported young people from Sunderland College and a High School in Essen to participate in a Digital Exchange meeting to share thoughts on climate change and carbon reduction. The Digital Exchange session was part of a partnership project, with Essen and its wider region, called the 'CLIMATE' initiative and a series of follow-up sessions were being planned to enable Sunderland and Essen students to learn more about their city's approaches.
- As the Council continued to encourage leadership on this important agenda from our young people, the Environmental, Green and Sustainable (EGS) young people's group had their third meeting on Monday 14 March in City Hall. The group had a short tour of City Hall and took part in discussions, sharing thoughts and ideas on topics including local growing and sustainable transport. Two EGS representatives would be attending the March 2030 Shadow Board later in the week to continue to discuss the low carbon agenda with the partnership.

The Deputy Leader explained that the Council had also continued to progress work on the detail of its monitoring and reporting, including the Council's quarterly operational emissions data, and learning from engagement with the World Wildlife Fund One Planet City Challenge.

The Deputy Leader stated that she hoped that she had provided a useful and positive update on work that was ongoing and would continue to provide updates to Council as appropriate going forward.

55. RESOLVED that the information be noted.

Outstanding Motions from the last ordinary meeting of the Council

(i) Reform of Rent Charges

Councillor P.W.L. Gibson, duly seconded by Councillor Haswell, moved the following motion: -

This Council notes the unequal status of rent charge payers compared to that of other freeholders or leaseholders. It recognises the potential for their exploitation by unscrupulous rent charge holders.

The Council agrees to develop a strategy to ensure that: (i) any rent charges introduced, acquired or managed by this Council and/or any of its wholly owned companies, joint ventures or any other delivery vehicles or organisations treat residents fairly and proportionately; and (ii) wherever possible residents subject to rent charges are able to have assets and services adopted by and provided by the Council for which they pay Council Tax.

The Council also asks the Chief Executive to lobby the Government, and ask local Parliamentarians to do likewise, to request amendments to legislation in order to reform rent charges. These reforms should include:

- In all future developments any rent charges should be set by and paid to a company limited by guarantee and owned by the residents.
- In existing developments, following a ballot from residents in which a majority agree, a company limited by guarantee owned by the residents shall be formed. The company's purpose will be to purchase the rent charge holders interest and to be paid rent charges by the residents.
- Where residents of existing developments vote against forming a company limited by guarantee they shall be protected by amendments to section 120-122 Law of Property Act 1925, so that:
 - A defaulter must be informed in writing of the arrears at the time and before any legal action.
 - Any action must be through the courts, with the charge payer having the right to contest the level of the charge or the standard of the service provided by the charge holder.
 - All charge holders and their agents must be registered and bound by a Code of Conduct
 - Charge payers must be informed of the names and business address of the charge holder and his agents. If the charge holder is a company or trust then the names and business addresses of the Secretary, Directors or Trustees must be provided.

Councillor Stewart, duly seconded by Councillor K Johnston, moved the following amendment: -

Second Paragraph – Delete the following

“and (ii) wherever possible residents subject to rent charges are able to have assets and services adopted by and provided by the Council for which they pay Council Tax.”

So that the amended motion would read:

This Council notes the unequal status of rent charge payers compared to that of other freeholders or leaseholders. It recognises the potential for their exploitation by unscrupulous rent charge holders.

The Council agrees to develop a strategy to ensure that: (i) any rent charges introduced, acquired or managed by this Council and/or any of its wholly owned companies, joint ventures or any other delivery vehicles or organisations treat residents fairly and proportionately.

The Council also asks the Chief Executive to lobby the Government, and ask local Parliamentarians to do likewise, to request amendments to legislation in order to reform rent charges. These reforms should include:

- In all future developments any rent charges should be set by and paid to a company limited by guarantee and owned by the residents.
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 - All charge holders and their agents must be registered and bound by a Code of Conduct
 - Charge payers must be informed of the names and business address of the charge holder and his agents. If the charge holder is a company or trust then the names and business addresses of the Secretary, Directors or Trustees must be provided.

Upon being moved the amendment was declared to be carried unanimously.

The Mayor read the new Substantive Motion.

The Mayor then put the new substantive motion to the meeting and accordingly it was: -

56. RESOLVED that: -

This Council notes the unequal status of rent charge payers compared to that of other freeholders or leaseholders. It recognises the potential for their exploitation by unscrupulous rent charge holders.

The Council agrees to develop a strategy to ensure that: (i) any rent charges introduced, acquired or managed by this Council and/or any of its wholly owned companies, joint ventures or any other delivery vehicles or organisations treat residents fairly and proportionately.

The Council also asks the Chief Executive to lobby the Government, and ask local Parliamentarians to do likewise, to request amendments to legislation in order to reform rent charges. These reforms should include:

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- Where residents of existing developments vote against forming a company limited by guarantee they shall be protected by amendments to section 120-122 Law of Property Act 1925, so that:
 - A defaulter must be informed in writing of the arrears at the time and before any legal action.
 - Any action must be through the courts, with the charge payer having the right to contest the level of the charge or the standard of the service provided by the charge holder.
 - All charge holders and their agents must be registered and bound by a Code of Conduct
 - Charge payers must be informed of the names and business address of the charge holder and his agents. If the charge holder is a company or trust then the names and business addresses of the Secretary, Directors or Trustees must be provided.

(ii) Working to achieve a greater policing outcome for Sunderland

Councillor G Miller, duly seconded by Councillor F Miller, moved the following motion
:-

This Council notes

- the Northumbria Police Force has seen its budget slashed by the Government in the name of Austerity by more than 31% between 2010/11 and 2018/19 and by March 2020 the annual cut in its budget amounted to over £144m pounds.

- the recent change of heart by government to fund additional police officers across the country but recognising Northumbria Police still continues to have a shortfall in officer numbers.
- the reduction in police numbers over this period have come at a time when expectations from local residents have increased, especially relating to police action to reduce Anti-Social Behaviour.

This Council recognises that Northumbria Police no longer have the resources to achieve all of the expectations demanded by local residents and that we can achieve much more by working in partnership with them and other stakeholders in this city, to reduce crime and the fear of crime.

We therefore call upon the Council to work jointly with Northumbria Police

- in supporting a permanent police presence in Washington, Coalfield and Sunderland City Centre that can be accessed by local residents
- to expand the successful SARA project based in Southwick to many other parts of the city
- to review how we can support the police through increased surveillance of anti-social behaviour hot spots via more CCTV, purchase and use of drone technology, together with a dedicated mobile traffic unit for our 20/30mph zones
- to produce an annual 'Respect Plan' for the City, detailing how the council and its partners will work collaboratively to tackle crime and the fear of crime.

Councillor Hartnack had given notice of his intention to move an amendment to the original motion. The Leader of the Council raised a point of order that the proposed amendment added to the original motion to an extent which changed the intent of the motion and made it too wide ranging. The Mayor upheld the point of order and the amendment was rejected.

Councillor Haswell, duly seconded by Councillor P W L Gibson, then moved the following amendment: -

Bullet point 4 – after “Washington, Coalfield and Sunderland” add “, including the” and then after “City Centre” add “, Southwick and Farringdon,”
Insert new bullet point 8:

“to encourage and foster links between the Police and schools/youth clubs to educate young people as to the detrimental effects of anti-social behaviour. This should include the provision of facilities on council premises and/or on council land for youth/community organisations.”

Insert new bullet point 9:

“to commit to liaise with the parents or guardians of children at risk of adopting criminal lifestyles through all appropriate agencies, as council is mindful of the impacts of a criminal record in adult life.”

Insert new bullet point 10:

“and extend an annual invite to the Police and Crime Commissioner to attend a meeting of full council and deliver an in person report on policing performance and crime prevention in Sunderland, Washington, Houghton and Hetton.”

So that the amended motion would read:

This Council notes

- the Northumbria Police Force has seen its budget slashed by the Government in the name of Austerity by more than 31% between 2010/11 and 2018/19 and by March 2020 the annual cut in its budget amounted to over £144m pounds.
- the recent change of heart by government to fund additional police officers across the country but recognising Northumbria Police still continues to have a shortfall in officer numbers.
- the reduction in police numbers over this period have come at a time when expectations from local residents have increased, especially relating to police action to reduce Anti-Social Behaviour.

This Council recognises that Northumbria Police no longer have the resources to achieve all of the expectations demanded by local residents and that we can achieve much more by working in partnership with them and other stakeholders in this city, to reduce crime and the fear of crime.

We therefore call upon the Council to work jointly with Northumbria Police:

- in supporting a permanent police presence in Washington, Coalfield and Sunderland, including the City Centre, Southwick and Farringdon, that can be accessed by local residents
- to expand the successful SARA project based in Southwick to many other parts of the city
- to review how we can support the police through increased surveillance of anti-social behaviour hot spots via more CCTV, purchase and use of drone technology, together with a dedicated mobile traffic unit for our 20/30mph zones
- to produce an annual ‘Respect Plan’ for the City, detailing how the council and its partners will work collaboratively to tackle crime and the fear of crime.
- to encourage and foster links between the Police and schools/youth clubs to educate young people as to the detrimental effects of anti-social behaviour. This should include the provision of facilities on council premises and/or on council land for youth/community organisations.
- to commit to liaise with the parents or guardians of children at risk of adopting criminal lifestyles through all appropriate agencies, as council is mindful of the impacts of a criminal record in adult life.
- and extend an annual invite to the Police and Crime Commissioner to attend a meeting of full council and deliver an in-person report on policing performance and crime prevention in Sunderland, Washington, Houghton and Hetton.

Upon being moved the amendment was declared to be carried unanimously.

The Mayor read the new Substantive Motion.

The Mayor then put the new substantive motion to the meeting and accordingly it was: -

57. RESOLVED that: -

This Council notes

- the Northumbria Police Force has seen its budget slashed by the Government in the name of Austerity by more than 31% between 2010/11 and 2018/19 and by March 2020 the annual cut in its budget amounted to over £144m pounds.
- the recent change of heart by government to fund additional police officers across the country but recognising Northumbria Police still continues to have a shortfall in officer numbers.
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- to encourage and foster links between the Police and schools/youth clubs to educate young people as to the detrimental effects of anti-social behaviour. This should include the provision of facilities on council premises and/or on council land for youth/community organisations.
- to commit to liaise with the parents or guardians of children at risk of adopting criminal lifestyles through all appropriate agencies, as council is mindful of the impacts of a criminal record in adult life.
- and extend an annual invite to the Police and Crime Commissioner to attend a meeting of full council and deliver an in-person report on policing performance and crime prevention in Sunderland, Washington, Houghton and Hetton.

Reception of Petitions

- 58. RESOLVED** that the petitions listed below submitted by the Councillors named be received and referred to the appropriate Chief Officer for consideration in accordance with the Council's Petitions Scheme: -

Councillor Tye – Petition asking the Council to give consideration to a traffic signal pedestrian crossing being installed between St Christopher's Road and Nursery Road on Silksworth Lane.

Councillor F Miller - Petition asking the Council to give consideration to a Traffic Regulation Order being put in place at Barmston Village Centre.

Councillor Mann - Petition asking the Council to act upon issues of parking, damage to the highway and pavement and increased litter at Broadstairs Court and Broadway properties.

Councillor Hartnack - Petition raising objections to the proposed road closure at Princess Avenue, Seaburn.

Councillor Mullen - Petition opposing the application to construct a drive thru restaurant on the site of the Barnes service station.

Councillor Mullen – Petition asking the Council to reimburse residents of Vicarage Close for damage caused to their properties by the Persimmon development.

Councillor S Johnston - Petition asking the Council to install CCTV on Tyzacks field.

Councillor S Johnston - Petition asking the Council to remove the shrubs on the bank outside Bloomfield Court.

Written Questions by Members of the Public under Rule 10

Pursuant to Rule 10 of the Council Rules of Procedure, the Leader and Members of the Cabinet were asked questions which had been submitted by members of the public.

Written Questions by Members of the Council under Rule 11

Pursuant to Rule 11 of the Council Rules of Procedure, the Leader and Members of the Cabinet were to be asked questions which had been submitted by Members of the Council.

- 59. RESOLVED** that written responses be issued for all questions by Members.

Report of the Human Resources Committee

The Human Resources Committee reported and recommended as follows: -

1. Pay Policy Statement 2022-2023

That at its meeting on 17 March 2022 the Human Resources Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Corporate Services (copy attached) which sought approval for publication, subject to Council approval on 23 March 2022, of the Pay Policy Statement for 2022-23.

Accordingly, the Human Resources Committee having considered the information set out in the report, recommended Council to approve the Pay Policy Statement for 2022-23 and its publication on the Council website by 31 March 2022.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor G Miller, duly seconded by the Deputy Leader, Councillor Rowntree, moved the report of the Human Resources Committee.

The recommendation was put to the meeting and with all Members present being in agreement it was: -

- 60. RESOLVED** that the report the report of the Human Resources Committee be approved and adopted.

The meeting adjourned at this point, having reached three hours' duration.

(Signed) **H TRUEMAN,**
 Mayor.