

CABINET MEETING – 22 MARCH 2022
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY SHEET – PART I

Title of Report:

MINUTES, PART I

Author(s):

Assistant Director of Law and Governance

Purpose of Report:

Presents the minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 8 February 2022, Part I.

Action Required:

To confirm the minutes as a correct record.

At a Meeting of the **CABINET** held in **CITY HALL (COUNCIL CHAMBER)** on **TUESDAY 8 FEBRUARY 2022** at **10.00 a.m.**

Present:-

Councillor G. Miller in the Chair

Councillors Chequer, Farthing, K. Johnston, Stewart and Williams

Also present:-

Councillor F. Miller, Deputy Cabinet Member
Councillor O'Brien

Part I

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 11 January 2022, Part I (copy circulated) were submitted.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 11 January 2022, Part I, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

The following declarations of interest were made:-

Agenda Item 5: Revenue
Budget and Proposed
Council Tax for 2022/2023
and Medium-Term Financial
Plan 2022/2023 to
2025/2026

Councillor K. Johnston declared an interest as an employee of Everyone Active and Councillor Chequer declared an interest as his partner. As a dispensation had been granted to all Councillors in respect of the setting of the council tax and budget, the Councillors remained in the meeting during consideration of the report.

Agenda Item 14: Siglion
Business Plan

Councillor G. Miller and Patrick Melia, the Chief Executive declared interests as members of the Siglion Board and withdrew from the meeting during consideration of the report.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Rowntree and P. Walker.

Capital Programme 2022/2023 to 2025/2026 and Treasury Management Policy and Strategy 2022/2023, including Prudential Indicators for 2022/2023 to 2025/2026

The Executive Director of Corporate Services submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide an update on the level of capital resources and commitments for the forthcoming financial year and to seek a recommendation to Council to the overall Capital Programme 2022/2023 to 2025/2026 and the Treasury Management Policy and Strategy (including both borrowing and investment strategies) for 2022/2023, to approve the Prudential Indicators for 2022/2023 to 2025/2026 and the Minimum Revenue Provision Statement for 2022/2023.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Stewart highlighted that the Council had strong ambitions for the city, which were reflected in the City Plan. He reported that the investments that were being proposed to Council next month put the finances in place to deliver these – and to do so in a financially sustainable way.

Councillor Stewart drew attention to section 4 of the report, which advised that a Capital Programme for 2022/2023 to 2025/2026 of £627 million was proposed made up of £134 million investment in new schemes in addition to £493 million of existing capital scheme commitments already approved by the Council. He confirmed that £295 million was planned to be spent in 2022/2023.

Cabinet Members were advised that the Capital Programme supported the city's priorities set out in the City Plan, providing for a dynamic smart city with investment in the City's infrastructure continuing to drive economic regeneration and growth through the development of strategic assets; providing for a healthy smart city with investment in education and skills; and maintaining and improving transport connectivity; and providing for a vibrant smart city with investment in neighbourhoods and cultural assets.

Councillor Stewart reported that the key priority continued to be investing in the strategic regeneration of the city to drive economic regeneration and job growth. He explained that this would be achieved by developing strategic assets, improving the city wide and area infrastructure, and encouraging inward investment to create the conditions for growth.

Councillor Stewart highlighted that the new starts proposals included planned investment into a new 10,000 capacity arena and food hall complemented by restaurants, shops, a hotel and new public realm, which would support regeneration in a key location in the city centre. He reported that the proposals included investment across the City including further improvements to parks and open spaces city-wide, and cultural, leisure and other assets in all areas of the city.

In addition, Cabinet Members were advised that the proposals included further support to the delivery of front-line services to residents across the city including environmental services, social care and other operational assets.

The attention of Cabinet Members was drawn to assurance in the report that the Council continued to ensure that grants allocated to Education were earmarked for priorities within that service. The approach would enable programmes such as school asset management to progress. Disabled Facilities Grant allocations to support Adults' Services were yet to be confirmed.

Turning to the more technical aspects of the report, Councillor Stewart advised that the Prudential Indicators, set out in Section 5 and Appendix 4 of the report, were in full compliance of the CIPFA Prudential Code of Practice. He commented that these were set annually and monitored regularly to ensure that the Council's capital plans were affordable, sustainable and prudent. He reported that it was proposed that the Council would continue the prudent Minimum Revenue Provision policy used in 2021/2022, which was detailed in Appendix 5, releasing previous overpayments to support the debt charges element of the budget over 20 years.

Councillor Stewart reported that the Council was required to adopt a Treasury Management Policy Statement and to set out its Treasury Management Strategy comprising a borrowing strategy and an investment strategy each year. He advised that these were set out in detail in Appendix 6 and Appendix 7. He added that the Council was not proposing any major changes to the overall Treasury Management Strategy in 2022/2023 and would continue the careful and prudent low risk approach adopted by the Council in previous years. The Strategy complied with the Treasury Management Code and observes best practice.

Councillor Farthing commended the amount of investment into improvements to schools particularly during a period of restricted spending. She commented that the development of the Housing Innovation Construction and Skills Academy working with Sunderland College was also a fantastic development for the city and would provide fantastic opportunities for re-skilling on new housing projects.

The Chair referred to the scale of the Capital Programme of £134 million which demonstrated the Council's aspirations for its residents and the determination to work with partners to deliver £600 million of investment schemes over the next four years to improve the infrastructure of the city. He commented that the delivery of this programme would be a staggering achievement.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that it be recommended to Council to approve:-
- (i) the proposed Capital Programme for 2022/2023;
 - (ii) the Treasury Management Policy and Strategy for 2022/2023 (including specifically the Annual Borrowing and Investment Strategies);
 - (iii) the Prudential Indicators for 2022/2023 to 2025/2026; and
 - (iv) the Minimum Revenue Provision Statement for 2022/2023.

Revenue Budget and Proposed Council Tax for 2022/2023 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2022/2023 to 2025/2026

The Executive Director of Corporate Services submitted a report (copy circulated) on:-

- (a) the overall revenue budget position for 2022/2023;
- (b) the projected reserves position as at 31st March 2022 and 31st March 2023 and advice on their sufficiency;
- (c) a risk analysis of the Revenue Budget 2022/2023;
- (d) a summary of the emerging medium-term financial position facing the Council from 2022/2023 to 2025/2026, and associated Council Efficiency strategy; and
- (e) any views received from residents, the local Business Sector, Trade Unions, Schools Forum, Change Council and Scrutiny Coordinating Committee on the proposed budget.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Stewart highlighted that the report set out the proposed Revenue Budget for 2022/2023 together with the proposed Council Tax for next year and the Medium-Term Financial Plan through to 2025/2026. He reported that the final local government finance settlement was still awaited for 2022/2023. He added that however no substantive changes were anticipated from the provisional settlement and as such, the Council's funding position remained unchanged from that reported to Cabinet in January.

Cabinet Members were advised that as set out in the reports to Cabinet during the budget process, additional, 'significant' investment in both adults and children's social care to support the rising demand and cost pressures in this area had been provided. Jointly these areas required budget increases of over £14.7 million in 2022/23 to meet these pressures.

Councillor Stewart reported that the proposed budget also enabled investment in key services to support communities. He explained that these proposals included, amongst other priorities:

- the provision of ongoing additional funding to support environmental services delivery; and
- investment in waste collection and recycling through reviewing the arrangements for replacement bins and bulky waste

He added that further funding was also provided to support the Council's ambitious and exciting capital investment proposals to support the delivery of the City Plan.

Councillor Stewart also commented that the budget allowed for the continuation of free pest control services to the city's residents into next year; an initiative which was introduced in October 2021 for a 12-month period and had been widely welcomed by residents.

Councillor Stewart highlighted that the Council had asked residents what they wanted and needed, and the Council was responding to what they had said. He assured that the Council would continue to listen through undertaking a residents' survey during 2022/23.

Cabinet Members were advised that the Council had continued its approach to addressing the remaining budget gap by identifying savings which sought to minimise the impact on front line services wherever possible. For 2022/23, £5.8 million of savings were proposed and were set out in Appendix A to the report. Savings included a comprehensive review of back-office support functions and maximisation of income generation where possible thereby protecting front line services for the city's residents and businesses.

Councillor Stewart reported that it was proposed to use some of the prudently accrued medium-term planning reserves next year to support the financial position. He explained that this would help to limit the reductions next year as the Council continued its journey out of the pandemic. The budget proposals assumed £5.4 million of reserves would be used next year to balance the budget.

Councillor Stewart then drew attention to Appendix F which set out the proposal to raise council tax. He explained that the Council had done its best to protect residents from the impact of the Government's austerity measures since 2010. He advised that the compound impact of the Government's significant and disproportionate funding reductions in previous years, combined with unavoidable unfunded cost pressures, meant that the Council was once again faced with very difficult decisions.

With regard to the level of council tax increase for the coming year, Councillor Stewart reported that the finance settlement published by Government assumed that all councils would raise council tax by the maximum permitted level. In Sunderland's case, it was a total of 2.99% to deliver the services that residents and businesses required.

Councillor Stewart reported that raising council tax was one of those difficult decisions. He explained that if the Council did not raise council tax, it would need to cut services and reduce investment into key priority areas. That would mean cuts in services to those most vulnerable residents and to the services which they tell the Council were a high priority.

Councillor Stewart therefore advised that the Council had taken the difficult decision to raise the core council tax element next year by 1.99%. He added that it was also proposed that the Government's Social Care Precept would be increased by 1% in 2022/2023 to support the demand and cost pressures in adult social care. He explained that this meant that the proposal was to raise council tax by a total of 2.99% for next year. The proposed increase was below the 3% referendum limit set by the Government, and therefore a referendum was not required.

Cabinet Members were advised that the 2.99% increase represented an increase of 59p a week for a Band A property. The Council would continue to support its residents through its local council tax support scheme, significantly protecting those with the lowest incomes from this rise.

Cabinet Members were informed that despite the proposed increase, based on understanding from neighbouring authorities and their council tax plans, Sunderland's Band D council tax would remain the lowest in the region.

Councillor Stewart reported that whilst the Police and Crime Commissioner had confirmed final details of their precept, confirmation of the final precept proposal from Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority was awaited, and this might require an amendment to the final budget proposal to Council in due course.

Councillor Stewart then referred to the Medium-Term Plan set out at Appendix G of the report. He reminded Cabinet Members that the outlook remained very uncertain. There were continued unfunded cost pressures, combined with the significant uncertainty around the impact of Social Care Reform, the Government's fair funding review and changes to the retained business rates, all of which were planned for the short to medium-term. He advised that based on the best information at this time, and after considering proposed savings plans and assumed future council tax increases, there remained a budget gap of circa £32.4 million over the three years 2023/24 to 2025/26.

Cabinet Members were assured that work would continue to identify a further suite of proposals to address the remaining budget gap into future years and the Council would continue to lobby the Government for a true fair funding agreement for Local Government.

Councillor Stewart concluded that subject to any comments from his Cabinet colleagues in relation to their own specific areas, he believed that these proposals represented the most appropriate balance taking all factors into account. He therefore moved the recommendations as set out at paragraph 2 of the report and advised that the report would then be taken to full Council on 2 March for consideration.

Councillor Farthing drew attention to paragraph 4.5 of the report and emphasised that the proposed increase in the council tax was down to the Government's assumption that the Council would increase the council tax by 3% (2% core and 1% Adult Social Care Precept). She advised that if the Council did not implement this increase, it would miss out on specific grants. She expressed concern in relation to the continued uncertainty of funding.

Councillor Williams referred to the reduction in the events budget and recognised that whilst such savings were necessary, it was important to retain some element of the events for the wellbeing of residents. She congratulated the team for still being able to deliver several events which would be aligned to the key objectives of the City Plan. Turning to the leisure joint venture savings, she commended the work of the Council and its partner, Sports and Leisure Management Ltd., in the recovery plans to achieve a funding saving following the easing of national restrictions from the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Executive Director of Corporate Services updated Cabinet Members and advised that the final settlement from the Government had been released on the previous evening, at 7.30 p.m. He reported that although the settlements were still subject to government debate on 9 February, the settlement was unlikely to change. He advised that the amount was some £80,000 less than anticipated however it did not materially affect the figures presented in the Cabinet report.

Councillor Stewart commented that the nature of needing to use reserves to balance the budget, was once they were gone, they were gone. He reported that an appropriate budget had been proposed and to protect struggling families as far as possible by continuing with free pest control services as well as a review of the charging policy for replacement bins and bulky waste collections to keep services as affordable as possible.

The Cabinet Members, namely Councillors Chequer, Farthing, K. Johnston, G. Miller, Stewart and Williams having unanimously voted in favour of the recommendations contained in the report, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) it be recommended to Council to approve the proposals set out in the report including the proposed Revenue Budget for 2022/2023 set out at Appendix J;
- (ii) it be recommended to Council to approve the Medium-Term Financial Plan 2022/2023 to 2025/2026 including Efficiency Strategy as set out in Appendix G and the potential use of Capital Receipts Flexibility set out at section 9 of the report;
- (iii) the finalisation of the Council tax supplementary information, that will be published on the Council website, be delegated to the Executive Director of Corporate Services in consultation with the Leader of the Council;

- (iv) recommend to Council that the proposed Council Tax Requirement for the Council for 2022/2023 for its own purposes is £114,706,404 (excluding Parish precepts) and represents a 2.99% increase in council tax for 2022/2023. It should be noted that this includes the additional ringfenced social care precept of 1%;
- (v) recommend to Council that it be noted that at its meeting on 26 January 2022 the Council approved the following amounts for the year 2022/2023 in accordance with the amended regulations made under Section 31B(3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (the 'Act'):
 - a) 72,161 being the amount calculated by the Council, in accordance with the above regulation of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992 as amended by Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, as its Council Tax Base for the year (Item T).
 - b) 4,052 being the amount calculated by the Council, in accordance with the Regulations, as the amount of its Council Tax Base for the year for dwellings in the area of the Parish of Hetton Town Council.
- (vi) recommend to Council that the following amounts be calculated by the Council for the year 2022/2023 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as amended:
 - a) £764,880,417 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (2) of the Act taking into account all precepts issued to it by Parish Councils.
 - b) £650,115,421 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (3) of the Act.
 - c) £114,764,996 being the amount by which the aggregate at (vi) (a) above exceeds the aggregate at (vi) (b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31A (4) of the Act, as its Council Tax Requirement for the year including Parish precepts (Item R in the formula in Section 31A(4) of the Act).

- d) £1,590.4020 being the amount at (vi) (c) above (Item R) all divided by Item T ((v) (a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B (1) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (including Parish precepts).
- e) £58,592 being the precept notified by Hetton Town Council as a special item under Section 34 (1) of the Act.
- f) £1,589.5900 being the amount at (vi) (d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at (vi) (e) above by the Item T ((v) (a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34 (2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no Parish precept relates.
- g) £1,604.0500 being the amount given by adding to the amount at (vi) (f) above the amount (vi) (e) divided by the amount at (v) (b) above, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 34 (3) of the Act as the basic amounts of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in the area of the Parish of Hetton Town Council.
- h) Charges relating to the Council:

Valuation Band	Hetton Town Council	All other parts of the Council's area
	£	£
A	1,069.37	1,059.73
B	1,247.59	1,236.34
C	1,425.82	1,412.96
D	1,604.05	1,589.59
E	1,960.51	1,942.84
F	2,316.96	2,296.07
G	2,673.42	2,649.32
H	3,208.10	3,179.18

being the amounts given by multiplying the amounts at (vi) (f) and (vi) (g) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5 (1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation band D,

calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 36 (1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands.

- (vii) it be noted that for 2022/2023, both the Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria and the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority have supplied their best estimate of their proposed precepts, which have yet to be formally notified.

Consequently, the following amount for the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority represents the provisional precept for 2022/2023, which may be issued to the Council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992:

Precepting Authority

Valuation Band	Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria £	Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority (proposed) £
A	102.56	58.23
B	119.65	67.94
C	136.75	77.64
D	153.84	87.35
E	188.03	106.76
F	222.21	126.17
G	256.40	145.58
H	307.68	174.70

- (viii) in accordance with Section 30 (2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the Council has calculated the aggregate of the amounts at (vi) (h) and the estimated precepts at (vii) and estimates the total level of council tax for 2021/2022 to be:

Valuation Band	Hetton Town Council £	All other parts of the Council's area £
A	1,230.16	1,220.52
B	1,435.18	1,423.93
C	1,640.21	1,627.35
D	1,845.24	1,830.78
E	2,255.30	2,237.63
F	2,665.34	2,644.45
G	3,075.40	3,051.30
H	3,690.48	3,661.56

- (ix) it be noted that under Section 52ZB of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the Authority's relevant basic amount of Council Tax for 2021/2022 is not excessive in accordance with the principles determined under Section 52ZC(1) of the Act.

(i.e., the proposed council tax increase for 2022/2023 means that the Council does not need to hold a referendum on its proposed council tax. The provisions set out in Section 52ZC of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 require all billing authorities (councils and precept authorities (i.e., Fire and Police authorities)) to hold a referendum on their proposed level of basic council tax each year if they exceed the Government's guidelines which are set out annually.)

- (x) the views expressed by residents, the local Business Sector, Trade Unions, Schools Forum, Change Council and Scrutiny Coordinating Committee be noted.

Collection Fund (Council Tax) 2021/2022

The Executive Director of Corporate Services submitted a report (copy circulated) to advise of the estimated balance on the Collection Fund for 2021/2022 in respect of Council Tax and the surplus attributable to the Council and its major precepting authorities for use in setting Council Tax levels for 2022/2023.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Stewart highlighted that this report advised of the estimated balance on the Collection Fund in relation to Council Tax at the end of this financial year. He reported that where a surplus or deficit was projected on the Collection Fund, the Council had a legal requirement to inform its precepting bodies so that they could consider it in calculating their basic amounts of council tax for the following year.

Cabinet Members were reminded that the collection fund regulations were amended in 2021 in response to the financial pressures arising on the collection fund from the pandemic. As such the deficit arising in 2020/21 only was recovered equally over the 3 years 2021/22 through to 2023/24, the amount for each of the three years was shown at paragraph 5.1.

Councillor Stewart reported that the actual deficit in relation to the collection fund at 31 March 2021 was slightly less than that estimated, providing a small benefit as noted at paragraph 5.3. He drew attention to Section 6 of the report which stated that the in-year 2021/22 position of which a surplus was estimated at 31 March 2022 of £2,734,996. He advised that this was shared with the precepting bodies as set out in paragraph 6.2.

The attention of Cabinet Members was then drawn to Section 7 of the report which set out the overall position, which the precepting bodies had been advised of. The impact on the Council had been reflected in the Council's proposed budget for 2022/2023 and Medium-Term Financial Plan.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the overall position in relation to the Collection Fund (Council Tax) for 2021/2022 and the Council's share of the surplus be noted.

Consideration of the Draft Bus Enhancement Partnership and Scheme Author(s):

The Executive Director of City Development submitted a report (copy circulated) on an update on the development of an Enhanced Partnership (EP) proposal in relation to the submission of a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) to government by the North East Joint Transport Committee (JTC).

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chair reported that since the Cabinet agenda was published, the Joint Transport Committee, had agreed, after direction from the Department for Transport, to pause the consultation on the Bus Service Improvement Plan and Enhanced Partnership for the time being. He advised that the outcome of the regional settlement for the programme was also awaited and it was expected before the end of February.

Therefore, he proposed that the report be deferred to a future Cabinet meeting to reflect the new information as it soon as it becomes available.

5. RESOLVED that consideration of the report be deferred to a future Cabinet meeting to reflect the new information as it soon as it becomes available.

Extension of the e-scooter trial

The Executive Director of City Development submitted a report (copy circulated) to approval for an extension to the e-scooter trial in line with the Department for Transport's (DfT) revised end date.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chair reminded Cabinet Members that the Council had been part of the Department for Transport's e-scooter trial since 31st March 2021, with Neuron as the appointed delivery partner. He reported that the original trial period was expected to last 8 months and then the Department for Transport extended the trial, to allow for further evidence and data collection, partially owing to the impact of Covid-19. He advised that the Cabinet approved extension of the Sunderland/Neuron e-scooter trial back in September, to align with the revised DfT end date of March 2022.

Cabinet Members were advised that a further trial extension until November 2022, had now been proposed by the DfT for the same reasons, and to align end dates with those that commenced later.

The Chair reported that authorisation for the time extension was sought, as well as delegation of authority for any future amendments to the Executive Director of City Development. In addition, discussions were also ongoing with the DfT regarding expansion of the trial into new areas. He assured that subject to Cabinet approval, the trial would continue under the same restrictions and arrangements currently in place subject to any amendments or extensions approved by the DfT. He added that Council Leadership, relevant Ward Councillors and partner organisations would be consulted should any subsequent amendments be proposed.

Councillor Farthing reported that feedback on the pilot scheme from Ward Councillors at a recent workshop had been very positive, with very few complaints being received. She added that Ward Councillors from areas where the scheme was not in operation were keen to see the trial extended to their Wards.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

6. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the extension of the e-scooter trial to align with the DfT's revised end date, currently 30 November 2022, be approved;
- (ii) the Executive Director of City Development, in consultation with the Deputy Leader of the Council and relevant Ward Councillors, be authorised to approve any subsequent amendment and/or extension of the e-scooter trial as required and/or permitted by the DfT; and
- (iii) the Executive Director of City Development, in consultation with the Executive Director of Corporate Services and the Deputy Leader of the Council, be authorised to take all steps necessary to give effect to the continuation of the e-scooter trial.

Unauthorised Encampment Policy

The Executive Director of Neighbourhoods submitted a report (copy circulated) to seek approval for the Unauthorised Encampment Policy

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Johnston highlighted that the Unauthorised Encampment Policy outlined how the Council manages encampments and deliver the appropriate welfare arrangements for travellers. He reported that the Policy was last reviewed and updated in January 2020 and therefore, it was due to be reviewed and updated. He explained that for this review he had asked that a Councillor Sub-Group be established to support the Policy review process. This was to ensure the views of Members were considered.

Councillor Johnston advised that this process and approach had been very positive. He assured that a comprehensive review of the current Policy and associated best practice, legal and equality had been undertaken, and the views of the Sub-Group had been included into the revised Policy.

Cabinet Members having considered that the revised Policy reflected Best Practice and appropriate Welfare considerations, it was:-

7. RESOLVED that the Unauthorised Encampment Policy be approved.

Grant Funding for Specialist Domestic Abuse Provision

The Executive Director Neighbourhoods submitted a report (copy circulated) to seek approval to the award of grant funding for specialist domestic abuse provision.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Chequer highlighted that the report sought approval to the award of grant funding for specialist domestic abuse provision for a period of 2 years. She reported that these arrangements had been in place since 2016, however grant funding from the former MHCLG ended with the implementation of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 when local authorities were provided with additional burdens funding instead to meet the requirements of the Act.

Cabinet Members were advised that despite the cessation of the MHCLG funding, the Consortium collectively agreed to continue to provide grant funding to the delivery partners to provide the services that continued to support the original aims of the grant funding.

Councillor Chequer reported that the total value of the grant funding for the specialist domestic abuse provision would be £142,998 in Year 2021- 2022 and £142,998 in Year 2022 – 2023. The total grant funding would be £285,996 for the 2-year term. She therefore requested that Cabinet approve the grant funding which would ensure continued provision of and access to specialist accommodation and support for domestic violence and abuse victims with complex needs across the six Northumbria local authority areas in line with the statutory requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

Councillor Farthing stressed how important it was to continue funding this provision as an adverse effect of the pandemic had seen an increase in the number of cases of domestic violence in Sunderland. Councillor Williams concurred and welcomed the provision by a consortium of different services to be able to offer a bespoke service to the victims.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was;-

8. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the award of grant funding for specialist domestic abuse provision for a period of 2 years be approved; and
- (ii) the Executive Director of Neighbourhoods, in consultation with the Executive Director of Corporate Services and the Healthy City Portfolio Holder, be authorised to subsequently award grant funding to the local delivery partners.

Council Housing Rent Increase 2022/23

The Executive Director of Neighbourhoods submitted a report (copy circulated) to seek approval to increase housing rents for Sunderland City Council tenants with effect from 4 April 2022.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Johnston reminded Cabinet Members that the Council became a Registered Provider of Social Housing on 26 November 2019 and that Cabinet had approved the Housing Delivery and Investment Plan on 11 February 2020.

Councillor Johnston highlighted that the Council had welcomed its first tenant in September 2020 and had seen a steady increase in the number of Council homes and tenants since. He reported that all Council homes were set at Affordable Rent levels in accordance with Government guidance.

Cabinet Members were advised that the Government's Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing 2019 provided its guidance on rent increases across the social housing sector and informed the Regulator of Social Housing and its published Rent Standard 2020. The policy position was that the rent of an existing affordable rent tenant could not be increased by more than Consumer Prices Index (CPI) plus 1% in any year.

Councillor Johnston reported that the options for rent increases had been considered for 2022/23 and due to wider service pressures and their financial implications, including things such as repairs and maintenance, the capital programme sinking fund provision and housing operations and customer service needs, it was proposed to increase rents by CPI plus 1%. He assured that this rent increase was in line with Government Policy.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

9. RESOLVED that

Cabinet is requested to approve the increase in housing rents to be applied for Sunderland City Council tenants with effect from 4 April 2022 in accordance with the Government's Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing 2019.

Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006

At the instance of the Chairman, it was: -

10. RESOLVED that in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 the public be excluded during consideration of the remaining business as it was considered to involve a likely disclosure of exempt information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Part 1, Paragraph 3). The public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

(Signed) G. MILLER,
Chair.

Note:-

The above minutes comprise only those relating to items during which the meeting was open to the public.

Additional minutes in respect of other items are included in Part II.