

CABINET MEETING – 9 FEBRUARY 2021

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 12 January 2021, Part I.

Action Required:

To confirm the minutes as a correct record.

At a Meeting of the **CABINET** held remotely using **Microsoft Teams** and **livestreamed on YouTube** on **TUESDAY 12 JANUARY 2021** at **10.00 a.m.**

Present:-

Councillor G. Miller in the Chair

Councillors Atkinson, Farthing, Stewart, G. Walker and Williams

Also present:-

Councillors Chequer, Johnston, Rowntree and P. Walker

Part I

Covid-19 Update

Prior to commencing the business on the agenda, the Chair invited the Council's Executive Director of Public Health and Integrated Commissioning to provide an update on the impact of Covid-19 in the city.

The Executive Director of Public Health and Integrated Commissioning reported that in the previous week, there had been a significant increase in the number of people in the city that were testing positive for Covid-19. She advised that there were around 570 cases per 100,000 population for the week ending 4 January 2021 which was the highest rate of infection recorded for the city and on 29 and 30 December 2020 the highest daily rates were recorded.

Cabinet Members were advised that the rates had reduced to around 470 cases per 100,000 for the week ending 7 January 2021 which was a slightly better picture. However, there was increased pressure in health and social care services. The data suggested that there had been a marked increase in the number of in-patients at the hospital with Covid-19. It was noted that the daily numbers in the hospital fluctuated and there were approximately 115+ people with Covid-19 and of them, 15 were in intensive care. The usual number of patients in intensive care was 7 to 8 patients.

The Executive Director of Public Health and Integrated Commissioning reminded Members that the Government had instituted further restrictions from 4 January 2021. She advised that residents had been doing an excellent job in terms of following the Government guidance and she echoed the comments made by the Chief Medical Officer, Chris Whitty, that the UK was at a vital and important time and it could become really difficult over the next few weeks. She reiterated that it was important for residents to follow the guidance to stay at home and only go out when necessary (examples of exceptional reasons being to go to work where they were unable to work from home, medical appointments, once a day daily exercise). She reinforced the national guidance for the benefit of the city's communities that when residents needed to go to the supermarket to ensure they wore face coverings, stayed two metres apart from others not in their households and regularly washed hands.

The Chair thanked the Executive Director of Public Health and Integrated Commissioning for that very important update. He commented that the Government's relaxation of the guidance over Christmas had no doubt lead to this spike in the rate of infections. He hoped that the rate of infections would continue to decrease as the next couple of weeks could see real pressure on health and social care services and sadly further deaths.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 8 December 2020, Part I (copy circulated) were submitted.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 8 December 2020, Part I, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor G. Miller and P. Stewart together with the Chief Executive, Patrick Melia, declared interests in item 13, "Siglion Business Plan 2021," as Directors of Siglion LLP and advised that they would leave the remote meeting during consideration of the report.

Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

Capital Programme Third Review 2020/2021 (including Treasury Management)

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

- (a) the outcome of the Third Capital Review for 2020/2021; and
- (b) progress in implementing the Treasury Management Borrowing and Investment Strategy for 2020/2021.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Stewart highlighted that the report set out the outcome of the third review of the Capital Programme 2020/2021, sought approval to make a match funding grant contribution to the Fans Museum and advised on progress on implementing the Treasury Management Strategy 2020/2021.

Councillor Stewart reported that the anticipated spend in this financial year had reduced by £40.8 million since the second capital review was reported, as the Covid-19 pandemic continued to have an impact on some of the Council's capital projects. He advised that the capital programme would still result in investment of approximately £125.9 million during 2020/21 whilst the overall reduction included:

- the reprofiling of expenditure of £42.1 million into future years primarily because of external influences outside of the Council's control, most significantly from Covid-19, or due to the realignment of projects to ensure best value was achieved; and
- the addition of new schemes or variations to the value of schemes of £1.3 million within the Capital Programme.

Turning to the Treasury Management aspects of the report, Cabinet Members were advised that Covid-19 continued to have a major impact on the economy. In the November 2020 Spending Review, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a reduction in Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) borrowing rates by 1%, reversing the increase made by the Government in October 2019, whilst also announcing that local authorities would no longer be able to borrow from the PWLB in order to buy investment assets primarily for making a financial return. He stressed that when the Government had initially increased that rate in October, it was universally condemned by all local government due to the major impact on council finances. He was pleased to see that as a result of increased lobbying on Government, they had reversed of their original decision.

Councillor Stewart reported that the reduction in PWLB rates would benefit the Council through reduced debt charges when borrowing was taken out to support the funding of the capital programme. He advised that there continued to be positive performance on investments with returns above the benchmark rate, whilst still adhering to the prudent policy agreed by the Council, in what remained a very challenging market.

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

2. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) in respect of the Third capital review for 2020/2021 approval be given to:-
 - (a) the inclusion of additional schemes or variations to existing schemes for 2020/2021 detailed at Appendix A, as a variation to the Capital Programme; and
 - (b) authorise the Executive Director of Corporate Services in consultation with the Deputy Leader to award a grant of up to £60,000 to Sunderland Fans Museum as detailed in paragraph 4.3; and

- (ii) in relation to the Treasury Management Strategy, the progress in implementing the 2020/2021 Treasury Management Strategy and Prudential Indicators be noted.

Third Revenue Budget Review 2020/2021

The Executive Director of Corporate Services submitted a report (Copy circulated) to advise of the overall Revenue Budget position following the third review for 2020/2021 including proposed contingency transfers.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Stewart highlighted that the report set out the revenue budget position following the third review for 2020/21 and sought approval for £250,000 to fund projects to support vulnerable residents as part of the Council's Covid-19 response.

Councillor Stewart reported that Cabinet Members would recognise that the financial position presented in the third review continued to be dominated by the consequences arising from the ongoing Covid-19 situation. He advised that in overall terms a £1.775 million overspend was forecast and this was fundamentally due to the additional costs and lost income arising from the Council's response to the crisis. He explained that the Council had to date received £26 million from Government in general support grant and was anticipating receiving £3.5 million as compensation for lost income. He commented that whilst the overall forecast position had improved since the second review this had been mainly through non-Covid-19 related underspends. He assured Cabinet members that the Council therefore continued alongside regional and national colleagues to make the case for additional Covid-19 related expenditure to be fully funded by Government.

Councillor Stewart drew the attention of Cabinet Members to Covid-19 related support activity at Section 3.10 of the report which detailed the key figures on the most recent return to Government showing a shortfall in support by the Government of around £12.5 million to the Council. He commented that had the Council accepted the Majority Opposition Group in only accepting the first tranche of Government support, the Council would be facing a further £16 million shortfall. He was pleased to report that following further lobbying of Government by the LA7 authorities, they had worked together to secure additional funding. He reported that however, the effort from Government still left a shortfall and the Council would continue to lobby for the additional funding for the Covid-19 related support activity provided by the Council.

Councillor Stewart reported that Section 3 of the report outlined the Covid-19 related support activity currently being managed through the Council. Officers were working hard to ensure that the city's residents and businesses were supported throughout these difficult times including an allocation of £250,000 to provide additional support to vulnerable residents to fund further projects as part of the Council's Covid-19 response. As the Council moved through the final quarter of the financial year, where support activity was ongoing in to 2021/2022, any remaining funding would be earmarked and carried forward as required.

In addition to savings targets, and the cost pressures arising from Covid-19, Councillor Stewart highlighted that there remained significant pressures in both Adults and Children's social care. He advised that the position was under constant scrutiny to identify options to address the situation. These pressures were being mitigated by savings elsewhere, including through debt management savings. He referred to the full details included within Appendix A of the report.

Councillor Stewart reported that it was worth raising with colleagues that given the constant changing position with regard to the Covid-19 pandemic and its impacts on the Council, its functions and services and how best these needed to be delivered to support the city and its residents, that the financial position continued to remain uncertain for the remainder of the year.

On a more positive note, Councillor Stewart was pleased to report that 83% of the savings approved by Council in March had now either been delivered in full or were well on the way to being delivered in full. He outlined that progress continued to be made on the remaining savings to ensure full delivery of the savings requirement and at this stage only 5% of savings were considered undeliverable as planned.

Cabinet Members were advised that in summary, the Council would continue to seek to mitigate the overspend where possible, whilst ensuring it continued to play its full part in supporting residents and businesses through the current crisis.

Councillor Williams was pleased that the Council had been able to support residents effectively throughout this pandemic with a vast amount of support services. She added that sadly the Council was being hindered by Central Government not giving the Council the funding as required. She thanked Council staff together with the local Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations which had worked tirelessly throughout to support residents.

Councillor Farthing echoed the comments and added that without the VCS, there would be a huge number of residents in the city in dire need. She reported that she had undertaken research on the use of food banks and if they had not been there, there would be a great number of problems in the city. She highlighted the particular pressure on children's services as poverty drove dysfunctionality in families and adding stresses to families and provision would need to be made for the care and protection of children. She reported that this was a result of the Government's failure to recognise how it should have been spending public funds and no recognition of extreme poverty in metropolitan areas of the country. She requested that the Council continue to lobby through the Local Government Association and the Members of Parliament feed that information back to Government to fulfil its promised funding.

Councillor Dr. Walker reported that given the protracted nature of the pandemic, it was essential that the Government reviewed its position on its relationships with local authorities. He advised that the Council should impress that position through the collective identity of the LA7 authorities to make sure that the Government was made aware. He said that he wished the Government would give the same commitment to local authorities and their communities as they did with their relationships with the private sector.

The Chair reiterated the point made at previous meetings that the Government had originally stated that, whatever it took, they would provide funding to councils to deliver support as a response to the Covid-19 crisis to look after its residents and local businesses. He advised that if the Council had not persisted in lobbying for the additional funding, the Council would have faced an even bigger financial deficit. He added that even with that additional funding, the Council still faced a shortfall of £12.5 million from the assistance given to support families and local businesses. He assured that the Council would continue to work hard for its residents and businesses, and through the other authorities in the LA7 and the LGA to provide more leverage, to continue to place pressure on the Government to recognise the position being faced by northern authorities and to deliver on its promised funding for the Covid-19 response.

The Chair thanked Councillor Stewart for the report and commended the work of the Executive Director of Corporate Services and his team for continuing to deliver an exceptional financial performance during this difficult time.

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

3. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the contents of the report be noted;
- (ii) an allocation of £250,000 to fund further projects to support vulnerable residents as part of the Council's Covid-19 response be approved; and
- (iii) the contingency transfers proposed at section 3.5 of the report be approved.

Council Tax Base 2021/2022

The Executive Director of Corporate Services submitted a report (copy circulated) to detail the calculation of the Council Tax Base for 2021/2022 and to seek approval to recommend to Council the Council Tax Base for 2021/2022 in accordance with the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as amended by the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012.

(for copy report- see original minutes).

Councillor Stewart highlighted that the report advises of the Council Tax Base to be used in calculating the 2021/22 Council Tax for the Council which was to be set at 70,045. He reported that this was a decrease of 1,291 Band D equivalents from the 2020/2021 base. He explained that this decrease was largely due to taking into account the additional cost of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme resulting from an increased number of claimants arising from the economic consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Cabinet Members were advised that the Council must also calculate the Tax Base for Hetton Town Council which was to be set at 3,803 for 2021/22.

Councillor Stewart reported that the calculations detailed in the report followed strict government regulation which specified the factors and formula to be applied and that the calculations must be based on all information available to the Council at 30 November of each year.

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

4. RESOLVED that it be recommended to Council that:-

- (i) the report for the calculation of the Tax Bases for the City Council and Hetton Town Council for 2021/2022 be approved; and
- (ii) pursuant to the report and in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) Regulations 1992, as amended by Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012 the amount calculated by Sunderland City Council as its Council Tax Base for the year 2021/2022, shall be 70,045 and for the area of Hetton Town Council shall be 3,803.

Revenue Budget 2021/2022 to 2024/2025 – Update and Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2021/2022

The Executive Director of Corporate Services submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide an update on the budget position for 2021/2022 to 2024/2025 including the impact of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement, prior to the receipt of the Final Local Government Finance Settlement 2021/2022.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Stewart highlighted that the content of the settlement was largely in keeping with details that emerged from the Government's November Spending Review. He reported that using the Government's Core Spending Power calculation, the Council would see a 4.55% increase in available funding for 2021/2022 compared to a 4.5% increase nationally. He advised that although an increase in spending power was welcome, to be clear this was not all government funding. He explained that the Government's Core Spending Power calculation assumed that local authorities would increase Council Tax by the maximum allowable within the referendum limit, which for 2021/2022 was set at a 5% increase. This included 3% in relation to the Adult Social care precept.

Councillor Stewart reported that the Government had provided some new grant funding, primarily into Social Care, but the majority of this funding was a simple reallocation of funding previously provided to local government through the New Homes Bonus, with little 'new' money. He advised that the Council was still awaiting funding announcements around the Public Health grant amongst others. He assured Cabinet Members that the updated funding position would be included within the Budget report brought to Cabinet in February.

Cabinet Members were advised that the Government had also confirmed the allocations of funding for schools which was based on October 2020 data. The Sunderland Schools' Forum had met and developed a set of principles to be implemented for the 2021/2022 Sunderland local funding formula which were set out in paragraph 5.7 of the report, alongside also agreeing to transfer funding from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block in line with the permitted flexibility.

The attention of Cabinet Members was drawn to section 7 of the report which detailed additional one-off grant funding in 2021/2022 that had been confirmed by Government to meet pressures arising from the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Prudently this funding would be held to meet unforeseen costs which were likely to continue or arise into the new financial year as a consequence of the pandemic.

Councillor Stewart reported that in the absence of any further funding being made available by Government, and in order to avoid further budget cuts in 2021/2022 beyond those already proposed, the budget planning and consultation assumed a planned total increase in council tax and social care precept of 4.99%. He explained that this was within the limit allowed by Government and aligned to Government's own planning assumptions. He added that the final proposal on council tax however would be made at the February Cabinet meeting.

In respect of the overall budget position, Councillor Stewart advised that after taking account of the provisional settlement, an improvement in the Council tax base assumptions from previous reports and an assumed 4.99% total council tax increase, this would reduce the reliance on reserves to balance the budget in 2021/2022. He cautioned however that this position might change as further expenditure pressures emerged over the coming months and / or resources and grants were confirmed by Government.

Cabinet Members were advised that there remained a significant forecast budget shortfall in the medium term and without additional funding being made available by Government more cuts and changes to services would be required in the coming years.

Councillor Stewart concluded that the assumption of the Government regarding the increases of council tax was disgraceful as once again, local government was being under funded and at a time of great need during a pandemic. He referred to the ongoing pressures on Adult Social Care funding which was a national issue, however the Government was placing the burden on the local council tax payers. He called upon the Government to provide full funding for local government.

Councillor Dr. Walker drew attention to the outstanding public health grant. He reported that in the light of the changes that were brought into the Department of Health and Social Care and the unclear position of public health within that, he felt that it was essential that pressure was applied to obtain some clarity of the status of public health and its funding particularly in light of the protracted pandemic.

Councillor Farthing hoped that in the future, the public health funding would take into account factors of deprivation. She echoed colleagues' comments on the inequity of raising the amount the Council could collect in council tax and assuming that councils would increase council tax by the maximum allowable. She commented that the public already felt that services had been cut and now, they were being asked to pay more for reduced levels of service due to having to implement cuts as the government funding was inadequate. She advised that since 2010, the total cumulative loss to this Council in Government funding was over £2 billion. She added that the levels of service provided had been impacted due to the significant reduction in staffing levels as a consequence of funding cuts and if there was any sickness or anyone shielding during Covid-19, the Council could only produce a reduced service. She highlighted an example of some waste bin collections not being able to take place due to reduced numbers of operatives. She expressed concern that the Council now found itself in a very challenging position with less funding, less staff and now the impact of a global pandemic whilst billions of funding had been wasted on an inadequate national track and trace service which was now having to be picked up locally. She believed that the Government should be held to account for the underfunding of local government rather than individual councils.

Councillor Atkinson reported that since she became a Councillor in 2010, councils across the country had suffered from constant cuts in government funding. She added that councils were the backbone of the country's response to the ongoing pandemic and were being severely underfunded. She was dismayed that the burden would be transferred to local council taxpayers and she hoped that residents realised that the Council had no other choice.

Councillor Williams concurred with the comments and added that the Council was still to receive the precepts from the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority. She anticipated that these precepts would also be at increased rates. She reported that the core spending element of Government funding needed to be explained for residents; that it was not government funding but an assumption that all councils would plan the maximum increases in council tax and social care precepts. She added that the Council wanted to be able to provide high quality services but to do that, the government should provide adequate funding and not pass the burden onto residents. She referred to the example quoted by Councillor Farthing in relation to the waste management service and explained that the service had been also been impacted as those operatives were required to drive the snow ploughs and gritters.

Councillor Stewart supported all the comments and expressed concern that the government did not trust local government to deliver its services, yet they have proven that they could deliver, even during a pandemic. He reported that even with the proposed council tax increase imposed by the government, the Council would need to draw on reserves in order to balance the budget to support residents during the pandemic. He advised that the missing £12.5 million covid-19 support funding from the government would make all the difference to council services.

The Chair commented that the Council was moving into the eleventh year of austerity imposed by the government where the costs continued to be passed on to residents, impacting on those who had the least, the most. He explained the council tax only provided 13% of the funding required to deliver the council services, the rest coming from government grants, business rates and some fees and charges. He assured that the Council would continue to do what it could to deliver services within its available resources. He was disappointed that the Council had been put into this position by government, that it had no other choice than to increase the council tax, otherwise services would have to be cut further. He stressed that the Council could not cut vital services during the pandemic. He advised that there was a council tax support scheme safety net. In Sunderland, there were 12,500 households which did not pay council tax and over 22,000 low income households received discounted rates. Welfare support was available to residents to enable them to feed their families. He was pleased that the Leader of the Opposition in government, Sir Keir Starmer MP, had highlighted this issue and was urging the government to make good on its promise to fund councils to deal with the pandemic.

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

5. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the update to the Government funding position, including the outcome of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement set out at section 4 of the report, be noted;
- (ii) the update on the 2021/2022 to 2024/2025 budget planning as set out at sections 5 to 7 of the report be noted; and
- (iii) in relation to the Sunderland Schools' local funding formula, the Sunderland Schools' Forum, approval be given to the following principles to be implemented for the 2021/2022 Sunderland local funding formula:

The National Funding Formula (NFF), made up of fifteen different funding elements, to be implemented with the following local adjustments, which were modelled in detail so as to give the most equitable settlement possible to all Sunderland schools whilst moving towards the NFF:-

- (a) The Minimum Funding Guarantee applied at 2.0% in line with the NFF value;
- (b) The Free School Meal proxy indicator set at a rate of £319.52 per pupil (NFF £460); (NB: alongside the Minimum Funding Guarantee, this proxy indicator does not reduce the funds available to schools for meals),
- (c) A transfer of 0.5% (£890,842) to the High Needs Block in recognition of ongoing pressures.

Local Council Tax Support Scheme

The Executive Director of Corporate Services submitted a report (copy circulated) to consider, for the purposes of paragraph 5 of Schedule 1A to the Local Government Finance Act (LGFA) 1992, whether the Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTSS), which is the Council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme under section 13A(2) LGFA 1992, should be revised or replaced with another scheme for the financial year 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Stewart highlighted that the proposed scheme for 2021/22 remained unaltered from the scheme currently in place. He reported that under the scheme, working age claimants would continue to have their council tax support entitlement calculated and reduced by 8.5%, while pensioners, as legislation requires, would remain protected and could still qualify for 100% support in relation to their annual charge.

Cabinet Members were advised that the scheme had been implemented without any major issues and was widely understood by residents who needed to make a claim. The scheme looked to balance the financial position of the Council, with the ability of the individual to pay, while everyone of working age would pay something.

Councillor Farthing appreciated that when the scheme was first adopted by the Council, it was designed to protect pensioners. She added that however, given the concerns for the pressures facing families, the scheme should be further reviewed to ensure that it met the needs in Sunderland. She reported that she had particular concerns about the two-child limit in the scheme which followed benefit guidance. She felt that it was detrimental to families to follow that guidance considering how circumstances had changed recently beyond the control of families. She looked forward to the further consultation on this scheme being launched from July.

Councillor Stewart reassured that he was mindful of this issue of the two-child limit and this would be examined in the next few months.

6. RESOLVED that it be recommended to Council that:

- (i) the current LCTSS for the City of Sunderland, the main features of which are set out at Appendix A, be amended from 1 April 2021 to incorporate any legislative changes to the prescribed requirements for the Scheme but that it be not otherwise revised or replaced; and
- (ii) the approved LCTSS for the financial year 2021/2022 be published on the Council's website and in any additional manner determined by the Executive Director of Corporate Services in consultation with the Deputy Leader.

Independent Remuneration Panel and Members' Allowances Scheme - 2021/2022

The Executive Director of Corporate Services and the Assistant Director of Law and Governance submitted a joint report (copy circulated) to present the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel on the level of members' allowances for the next financial year, in order for Cabinet to make appropriate recommendations to Council.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chair highlighted that the report presents the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel, in respect of the allowances scheme for 2021/2022. He reported in carrying out its review, the Panel had met with representatives of political groups on the Council and also had regard to the schemes of other authorities in the region.

Cabinet Members were advised that on this occasion, the Panel had recommended that the basic allowance be increased for 2021/2022, in line with the increases that had taken place with staff salaries, and that in addition, indexation be applied to the basic and special responsibility allowances for the year 2022/2023.

The Chair reported that the IRP had carried out its role. He advised that when he became Leader of the Council in May 2018, one of the first commitments he made was that the number of special responsibility allowances (SRAs) and the basic allowance for becoming a councillor would be reviewed. He explained that the basic allowance had not changed since 2012 whilst staff had continued to receive small increments of payrise during that period of austerity. He reminded Cabinet Members that the review of the number of SRAs had been undertaken in the previous year when fourteen allowances were removed from the scheme. He added that the second part of the consideration was that the IRP would look at the level of the basic allowance and what would be a sensible median rate of allowance if it was to change. He commented that the Panel had now completed this review. However it was noted that the Panel had commenced this review before the covid-19 pandemic and the massive financial impact that it had had on the city and its residents.

The Chair reported that whilst Cabinet should recommend to Council to agree to receive the report of the IRP, in light of the ongoing pandemic and pressures being faced by households in the City, it would not be appropriate to accept the recommendations contained in the report and therefore the scheme should remain unchanged.

Councillor Farthing stated that that she had previously commented on the inequity of the SRAs with colleagues. She reported that a few years ago, she had undertaken a councillors university course and when a comparison was undertaken, Sunderland was out of step with other authorities with the number of allowances. She therefore supported the comments of the Chair that that needed to be changed. She added that a comparison of basic allowances highlighted that Sunderland and South Tyneside Councils had the lowest in the region. She advised that Councillor colleagues had all agreed that it was inappropriate to consider increasing the basic allowance understanding how their residents were suffering at this time. She thanked the IRP for their report and agreed that the recommendations should be put on hold.

Councillor Atkinson shared the views of colleagues that this was not the time to consider increasing allowances.

The Chair highlighted that his concern, before the pandemic, had been that the level of basic allowance might be considered too low and a barrier to attracting people to the role of being a councillor which would be damaging to local democracy. He was pleased that Cabinet Members accepted the position that whilst they would recommend to note the report, that the allowances should remain unchanged.

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

7 RESOLVED that it be recommended to Council:-

- (i) to note the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel; and
- (ii) to approve that the scheme of allowances remains unchanged for the following financial year, as it was considered that there should not be any increase to members' allowances at this time, in view of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Low Carbon Framework and City Council Action Plan

The Executive Director of City Development submitted a report (copy circulated) to seek endorsement of the city-wide Sunderland Low Carbon Framework (Appendix 1) and approval of the City Council Low Carbon Action Plan (Appendix 2).

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chair reported that climate change represented a significant challenge for this generation. He advised that over the past 50 years, the average global temperature had increased at the fastest rate in recorded history and the trend was accelerating. He reminded Cabinet Members that in March 2019, Sunderland City Council acknowledged the scale of this challenge by declaring a Climate Emergency at its Council meeting, recognising the immediate action required. He added that since declaring a climate change emergency, the Council had been working in partnership to develop a city-wide approach to tackling climate change.

Cabinet Members were advised that the Council recognised that tackling Climate Change was too great a task for any one body or organisation. Partners needed to come together to address the challenges in Sunderland. On this basis a partnership board, known as the 2030 Shadow Board, had been set up bringing together representatives from across the city. The 2030 Shadow Board's purpose was to work collectively to drive forward Sunderland's ambitions and commitment to tackling climate change. The 2030 Shadow Board had shaped the development of the Sunderland Low Carbon Framework, attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

The Chair reported that the 2030 Shadow Board recognised that reducing carbon emissions could not be linear and required close co-operation across the city. He explained that was why the Low Carbon Framework provided a high-level strategic framework for how the Council would play its part in meeting the commitments.

Cabinet Members were advised that the Framework focused activity around seven strategic priorities, putting people at its heart; changing behaviours, changing organisational policies and practices, and setting out five thematic areas under which work would be taken forward. These focused on the built environment, green economy, low carbon energy generation and storage, consumption and waste, low carbon and active transport.

The Chair highlighted that the Low Carbon Framework also established a target for the City as a whole to be carbon neutral by 2040, with an ambition to bring this forward if additional Government funding and support could enable this. He explained that this target had been set based on the understanding that Sunderland would need to reduce its annual carbon emissions by 14.4% per annum to achieve this.

The Chair reported that the Low Carbon Framework had been developed through the 2030 Shadow Board and co-ordinated by the Council's Economic Regeneration service during 2020. He advised that at its meeting on 14 December 2020, the City Partnership Board, into which the 2030 Shadow Board reported, considered and endorsed the Low Carbon Framework. He added that rather than preparing a single document which sought to establish what must be done across the city to achieve the carbon reduction targets, each member of the 2030 Shadow Board partnership had committed to prepare an individual Action Plan for their organisation. The Action Plans would be live documents and would continue to be developed on an ongoing basis to enable partners to continue to adapt and respond to what was required recognising the dynamic nature of this work.

Turning to the City Council Low Carbon Action Plan at Appendix 2, the Chair explained that this set out where Sunderland City Council needed to go and focussed on the actions the Council could start to take now. It set out the target for the Council as an organisation to be carbon neutral by 2030, ahead of the city-wide 2040 target.

Cabinet Members were informed that the Action Plan was not intended to plot a fixed and definitive course to carbon neutrality as there would be further developments which could not be accurately predicted at this stage. It was essential that there was continuing involvement in the development and implementation of actions. To ensure the Action Plan remained valid it will be reviewed on an annual basis.

The Chair concluded that fundamental to achieving the carbon neutrality aspiration was taking people along with the Council to increase understanding, a sense of ownership, and the impact which they all could have. He explained that initial engagement work had begun and plans were being developed with partners across the city to ensure an active role for young people in partnership with Together for Children, the Youth Parliament, the College and the University. He added that a comprehensive engagement plan was being progressed to link with individuals, households, organisations, including the city's voluntary and community sector and businesses.

Councillor Farthing commented that the report highlighted an exciting start to a journey and she expressed her appreciation to the anchor institutions that were joining the Council to meet the carbon reduction targets. He explained that the only area of concern she had was in respect of the North East Transport Plan and what funding would be available to achieve those plans. She agreed that it vital to involve young people as it impacted on their future. She advised that in order to not let the young people down, the plans needed to be funded. Ultimately, that funding would need to come from the Government and it would be necessary to ensure that the Government was held to its commitments.

Councillor Stewart reported that this exciting plan allowed the Council to look forward to the vision of what could be achieved. He reported that even though this plan was just being presented today, already the Council had been driving the aims of carbon reduction through for example, the development of the new City Hall, the housing included in the Riverside Masterplan and even in the capital programme looking at more energy efficient and carbon neutral.

At this juncture, Councillor Stewart withdrew from the meeting to attend another meeting.

Councillor Williams welcomed the report and advised that the involvement of partners would help the Council impress upon government to provided adequate funding. She looked forward to achieving the targets by 2030.

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

8. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the Sunderland Low Carbon Framework (Appendix 1) be endorsed, and
- (ii) the City Council Low Carbon Action Plan (Appendix 2) be approved.

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

At the instance of the Chairman it was: -

9. 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.

Prior to moving to Part II of the agenda, it was confirmed that the livestream of the meeting had ended.

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.