

## **Cabinet**

**Monday, 22 February 2021**

**Present:** N Redfearn (Elected Mayor) (in the Chair)  
Councillors B Pickard, G Bell, C Burdis, S Cox, S Day,  
P Earley, R Glindon, C Johnson and M Hall

**In Attendance:** Councillor M Thirlaway  
S McKenzie (Young Mayor)  
T Bridges (Business Representative)  
R Fry (Voluntary and Community Sector Representative)  
R Layton (North Tyneside Joint Trades Union Committee)  
D McNally (Age UK)

### **CAB205/21 Introduction**

Mrs Norma Redfearn, Elected Mayor, welcomed everyone to this virtual meeting of North Tyneside Council's Cabinet.

### **CAB206/21 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations**

No declarations of interest or dispensations were reported.

### **CAB207/21 Minutes**

**Resolved** that the Minutes of the previous meetings held on 25 January (Ordinary Meeting), 1 and 8 February 2021 (Extraordinary Meetings) be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

### **CAB208/21 Report of the Young Mayor**

The Young Mayor reported on the following activities in which she and Young Cabinet Members and/or Youth Councillors had been involved:

- Youth Councillors had made a good start on the new ways of working with the committees and collaborating with adult decision makers.
- The Environment Committee had met with the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport, senior officers and environmental sustainability team, sharing common ground on figuring out how they could support each other moving forward, in focusing on the plastic free coast campaign, general behavioural change in communities and the development of the Eco Schools Green Flag scheme.
- The Emotional Wellbeing & Mental Health Committee had met with the Cabinet Member for Public Health & Wellbeing and the Director of Public Health, to hear first-hand what the Authority and Barnardo's partnership had planned for young people returning to school. They had identified that young people needed to know where and how to get help. They had recommended that this was done through a consistent

and regular promotion of services as they wanted to develop and promote exercise and sporting opportunities for young people in the borough as it was known this could make people feel so much better.

- The Improved opportunities committee had been researching the access to and availability of period products in schools and wanted to make this better for young people. They were creating packs with guidance for each high school, middle schools and colleges on how to improve the availability and to remove the embarrassment from what was a natural health need for young women and girls.
- The BAME committee had begun working on a film about young asylum seekers and refugees who were living in the borough. The film would be used to educate students about the facts around these experiences. Group members had also been involved in developing the BAME task force logo, strapline, and hashtag.
- The Enterprise and Education committee had worked hard on their children's illustrated book project which aimed to explain to young children in an engaging way about the important issues which were affecting them, and thanked members of North Tyneside Business forum for all their practical help and support.
- The Equalities Committee had looked at sexism in schools and were continuing their research into any differences offered by schools in terms of activities for boys and girls. The committee had also looked at the feedback that they had that in some schools, girls were brought out of lessons to have a uniform inspection and were interested to explore any impact on their education and whether this happened to the male students too.
- Youth Councillors had taken part in a consultation about Mouth of the Tyne Festival which had been carried out by Helix Arts, on why some people were not attending and to find out what the barriers were to preventing people from participating, and were interested to hear more about the outcome of the consultation.
- Youth Councillors had been taking an active role in a Voice consultation around how Covid 19 was affecting young people, facilitated by Children North East.
- Member of UK Youth Parliament, Abi, had met with Sir Alan Campbell MP to discuss climate change and the environment, financial education in the curriculum. Young People and their mental health after covid. They also talked about the economy, unemployment, job prospects, and the impacts on young people.

The Elected Mayor thanked the Young Mayor for the report.

### **CAB209/21    Report of the Children's Readiness for School Sub-Group**

Cabinet received a report detailing the recommendations of the Children, Education and Skills Sub Committee's study, on behalf of the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee, into children's readiness for school in North Tyneside.

Councillor M Thirlaway presented the report on behalf of the Children's Readiness for School Sub-group.

In September 2019, the Children, Education and Skills Sub-Committee had agreed to review the early intervention support available for parents in North Tyneside to enable children to be ready for school and identify if any improvements could be made to the support available to ensure the outcomes were improved for families and children. At this meeting it had been decided that a Sub-Group be established to carry out a review.

The Sub-Group had felt that it was important to consult directly with schools and a questionnaire had been circulated to all First and Primary Schools in North Tyneside. From January until March 2020, before the national lockdown, the Sub-Group had met with officers in the Early Help Services Team and the Health Visiting and School Nurse Service to gather information on the role that the Authority had in relation to children's readiness for school. The Sub-Group had also met with staff in private nurseries in North Tyneside.

The sub-group had made six recommendations. The full report, which outlined the key findings, conclusions and recommendations of the review, was attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

Cabinet was asked to consider the recommendations and was required to provide a response to the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee within two months.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning thanked Councillor Thirlaway and the sub-group for the well-researched report. He also commented on the lack of engagement by schools and nurseries raised by the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee, and acknowledged the full engagement of council officers and proposed alternative approach to schools to achieve greater engagement through Head Teacher briefings.

The Elected Mayor thanked the sub-group and everyone who had contributed to the report.

**Resolved** that the report of the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee on the Children's Readiness for School Sub-Group be noted, and a detailed response to the recommendations be provided to Cabinet within two months.

(Reason for decision: Cabinet has a statutory duty to respond to the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee recommendations within two months of receiving them).

### **CAB210/21    Determination of School Admission Arrangements September 2022**

Cabinet considered a report detailing the proposed admission arrangements for all Community Schools in North Tyneside for the 2022/2023 academic year including the-coordinated admissions schemes.

All Local Authorities were required to formulate and consult on a scheme for each academic year for co-ordinating admission arrangements for all maintained schools within their area. Co-ordinated schemes were intended to simplify the admission process for parents whilst reducing the likelihood of any child being left without a school place. Co-ordination established a mechanism that ensured that, as far as was practicable, every child living in a Local Authority (LA) area who had applied in the normal admissions round received one, and only one, offer of a school place on the same day. While it was for each LA to decide the scheme that best suited its residents and its schools, authorities must ensure that they:

- a) complied with law and regulations, including all the process requirements; and
- b) did not disadvantage applications to their schools from families resident in other local authorities.

The Scheme applied to applications received from September 2021 for entry into maintained schools in September 2022. The School Admissions (Admission Arrangements and Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements) (England) Regulations 2012 required the LA to exchange specified information on applications with neighbouring Authorities. The Regulations also placed a duty on all local authorities to make arrangements within their Scheme for cross-Authority border co-ordination of admissions. The Co-ordinated Admissions Schemes were attached as Appendices 1 and 2 to the report.

All schools had to have an admission number for each 'relevant age group'. Admission Authorities of maintained schools must set admission numbers with regard to the capacity assessment for the school under the Regulations. The Planned Admission Numbers were detailed in Appendix 3 to the report.

Pupils would be able to go to their preferred school unless there were more applications to that school than there were places available. If there were more applications than places available at a school, oversubscription criteria would be used to allocate places after any children with a Statement of Special Educational Needs or an Education, Health and Care Plan had been provided for where the Statement or the Education, Health and Care Plan named a specific school. Admissions Policies for admission to North Tyneside Community Schools and Nurseries for which the Local Authority was the Admissions Authority; and the oversubscription criteria used by the LA where there were more applications than places available were set out in Appendices 4 and 5 to the report.

Where a secondary school operated a sixth form and admitted pupils from other schools at age 16, for instance, an admission number would be required for Year 12 as well as for the main year or years. Admission numbers must refer to pupils being admitted to the school for the first time and not transferring from earlier age groups. The entry requirements for sixth form were largely dependent on the course of study that a student wished to access. Details of specific requirements and courses available may be obtained for individual schools. All schools published information about their post 16 provision.

The local authority was responsible for consultation and determining the admission arrangements for community schools in the North Tyneside areas in accordance with the School Admissions Code 2014.

The North Tyneside Learning Trust had been established in September 2010 and currently comprised 44 schools. The governing bodies of these schools were responsible for determining their own admission arrangements. Five of the schools in the Learning Trust were Special Schools and these arrangements did not apply to them.

The governing bodies of Voluntary Aided Schools and of the four Academies were also responsible for consultation and determining their own admission arrangements.

Any school which subsequently changed status would be responsible for determining their own admission arrangements following such change.

Cabinet considered the following decision options: either to agree the recommendations as set out in section 1.2 of the report, or alternatively to disagree with the proposals and request officers undertake further work to change the proposed admission arrangements.

**Resolved** that (1) the proposed 2022 admission arrangements and limits for Community Schools, as outlined in Appendices 1 to 5 to the report, be approved, subject to the appropriate publication of Statutory Notices;  
(2) the Head of Commissioning and Asset Management be authorised to proceed in administering admission arrangements for the 2022/2023 academic year, subject to the publication of Statutory Notices and compliance with obligations required by the Secretary of State in accordance with the timescales set; and  
(3) the Head of Commissioning and Asset Management, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning, be authorised to formally seek approval, as necessary, from the Schools Adjudicator in accordance with the School Admissions Code 2014 for any necessary variations to the determined arrangements for the 2022/2023 academic year should these arise.

(Reason for decision: to secure compliance with statutory requirements as outlined in the report).

## **CAB211/21    Equality and Diversity**

Cabinet received a report seeking approval to the Authority's updated Equality and Diversity Policy and Corporate Equality Objectives for the period April 2021 to March 2022.

The Authority's Equality and Diversity Policy set out its commitment to achieving the main aim of the Equality Act 2010 and how it would seek to demonstrate due regard to these aims in the way the Authority exercised its functions.

The Policy had originally been agreed in 2017 and in line with good practice was reviewed every two years in consultation with internal and external groups and individuals. As a review of the Policy had been due, the opportunity had also been taken to review the Corporate Equality Objectives. These objectives enabled the Authority to identify and publish the priority issues (in terms of policy making, service delivery and employment) it needed to address in order to better achieve the aims of the Act.

The report set out the findings from the equality policy consultation and the review of the Authority's Corporate Equality Objectives and actions.

The feedback received had been positive and informed the proposed amendments made to the Policy, or, to the new actions underpinning the Authority's Corporate Equality Objectives. Many respondents had stated their approval of the Policy and emphasised the importance of ensuring it was put into practice. The respondents had recognised the need to demonstrate due regard to all protected characteristics and a desire to continuing developing a better community for all. In light of the feedback received, Cabinet was asked to approve the amendments (highlighted in yellow) in Appendix 1 to the report.

The Authority's current Corporate Equality Objectives had been agreed by Cabinet in January 2019, and as the Equality Objectives were reviewed every two years, it was timely

to undertake that review alongside the review of the Policy.

The Authority's current Equality Objectives, including key actions from 2019/20, progress to date in achieving those actions, together with a refreshed set of actions for 2021/22 were set out in the report alongside a new additional Equality Objective - Improve engagement with North Tyneside's diverse communities.

Robin Fry referred to various connections the voluntary sector had with diverse communities and offered to assist the Authority in its engagement activities.

Cabinet considered the following decision options:

The following decision options are available for consideration by Cabinet:

Option 1: To approve the proposed amendments to the Equality and Diversity Policy, and to the Corporate Equality Objectives and actions.

Option 2: To approve the proposed amendments to the Equality and Diversity Policy, but not to the Corporate Equality Objectives and actions.

Option 3: To approve the amendments to Corporate Equality Objectives and actions, but not to the Equality and Diversity Policy.

Option 4: Not to approve the amendments to the Equality and Diversity Policy or Corporate Equality Objectives and actions.

Option 5: To request changes to the Equality and Diversity Policy or Corporate Equality Objectives and actions, prior to further consideration by Cabinet.

**Resolved** that approval be given to (1) the Equality and Diversity Policy for the Authority; and (2) the Corporate Equality Objectives for the Authority for the period April 2021 to March 2022.

(Reasons for decision: The Authority's approach to equality and diversity underpins all of its decision-making including key plans and policies. Approval of the recommended option will ensure that the Authority has a current Equality and Diversity Policy that reflects both current legislation and the context within which the Authority is operating.

The proposed Corporate Equality Objectives and actions will enable implementation of the Equality and Diversity Policy and ensure compliance with the public sector equality duty.)

## **CAB212/21 Procurement of Care Home Provision**

Cabinet received a report seeking approval to proceed with procurement exercises for the award of contracts for care homes provision for all client groups (older people, learning disability, mental health and physical disability).

The Care Act 2014 gave local authorities, the NHS and the CQC (Care Quality Commission) clear legal responsibilities for managing different elements of the adult social care market. These included developing the quality and range of services that local people wanted and

needed and integrating commissioning of services from the care market with key partners, including the NHS and housing, and ensuring a diverse range of services, so people had choice.

The Authority currently commissioned a range of adult social care services from the independent sector to meet the needs of individuals deemed to be eligible in accordance with the Care Act 2014 following a Care Act assessment.

The Authority did not deliver these services internally and needed to have robust and proper arrangements in place for services to be procured and available. There were arrangements in place at present for these services and these had come to an end. There was, therefore, a need to put new arrangements in place and the report set out proposals for new contracts to be put in place to ensure there was sufficiency and continuity of supply to ensure the needs of eligible individuals and the wider population could be met.

New contracts would put in place a range of services and providers to support individuals and ensure there was sustainability of supply and provision over the period the contracts were in place. The contracts would also need to ensure value for money was achieved, and also that client outcomes were deliverable and that this was a key focus of the service to be commissioned.

All contracts would be in line with the strategic objectives and the commercial context in which the services operated, these were set out in the Cabinet report on 29 June 2020. For Adult Social Care, these stemmed from the Our North Tyneside Plan which set the Authority's priorities for supporting vulnerable people to be healthy and well and also that they were cared for, protected and supported.

There were currently 31 homes in the borough for older people, with 1482 beds. There were currently 14 homes in the borough for those with a learning disability, working age mental health and physical disability, with 182 beds. The Authority did not fund all of the beds in these care homes; placements in these homes included private funded placements, placements funded by other Local Authority areas and placements funded by the Clinical Commissioning Group.

The proposed procurement process would allow the Authority to contract with any care home provider in the borough that accepted the fee structure proposed by the Authority and which met the standards set out in the contract and service specification for personal care, funded nursing care and NHS continuing healthcare.

All care homes were required to be registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and would be subject to the CQC regulatory process and this included undertaking inspection visits and publishing inspection reports. The Authority would work closely with the CQC on all matters relating to service quality and delivery.

Whilst Adult Social Care must seek to ensure Best Value in terms of the procurement of residential and nursing care, the structure of the existing market in the Borough, the use of a pre-agreed pricing mechanism and the choice of placements afforded by the Choice of Accommodation Direction meant that it had not been previously possible to competitively procure this service. The current contract had ended in 2015 and had been extended as a waiver since then due to ongoing fee negotiations. In accordance with the Public

Procurement Regulations 2015, a procurement exercise must be undertaken. Extensive engagement was currently being undertaken to ensure providers were ready to contract with the Authority. Engagement was being undertaken in relation to pricing, placement strategy and contract duration. Arrangements would be put in place to ensure that the Authority complied with its duties contained within the Care Act and provided a commercially robust approach for the Authority. If approved, the final terms of the contract and offer to the market would be determined in accordance with the recommendations as set out at paragraph 1.2 of the report.

The Authority was seeking to procure and operate a new contract and framework agreement for care homes provision in the borough from 2021, for a term of four years to 2025. The procurement arrangements would allow for new providers to the market to be added during the contract's lifetime. All individual services would be commissioned on a spot purchase basis.

The report sought authority to procure a care home service and to award contracts to providers that met the required criteria.

Cabinet considered the following decision options: to accept the recommendations as set out in paragraph 1.2 of the report, or alternatively, to not approve the recommendations and propose that officers consider other options for delivering this provision.

**Resolved** that the Head of Health, Education, Care and Safeguarding, in consultation with the Head of Commissioning and Asset Management, Head of Law and Governance, Head of Resources, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, be authorised to:

- (i) finalise the commercial arrangements to secure the delivery of residential and nursing care home services from providers operating across North Tyneside (including the procurement of nursing and continuing health care services on behalf of North Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group);
- (ii) undertake a procurement exercise to procure a range of providers to deliver the identified services, as outlined in section 1.5.2 of the report; and
- (iii) proceed with the award of contracts to the preferred bidders following the procurement exercise carried out in accordance with (i) and (ii) above.

(Reasons for decision: Current contracts and contracting arrangements have expired and are subject to annual carry forward and could be leaving the Authority subject to financial risk, new arrangements will need to be in place to ensure continuity of service for individuals accessing those services; need to ensure compliance with procurement regulations, undertake competitive procurement exercises; and to ensure commissioning arrangements are current, effective and ensure value for money is in place with those contracts and framework agreements.)

## **CAB213/21 Children and Young People's Plan 2021 - 2025**

Cabinet received a report seeking approval to the Children and Young People's Plan for the period 2021–2025 at Appendix 1 of the report.

The Children and Young People's Plan was one of the Authority's key plans that formed part of the Authority's Policy Framework and it was a key mechanism by which the Authority



delivered the objectives linked to Our People, set out within the Our North Tyneside Plan. It focused on delivering improved outcomes for all children and young people up to the age of 19 years, and those young people aged up to 25 years who were care leavers, had special educational needs or a disability and lived in the borough.

The 2021-2025 Plan had been developed and owned by the Children and Young People's Partnership. The partnership brought together public, voluntary and community sector organisations to improve the lives of the borough's children and young people.

The Plan was the third Children and Young People's Plan produced by the partnership. The previous Children and Young People's Plan 2014-2018 had underpinned the delivery of key success and significant service developments and improvements, as outlined in the report.

Despite the many significant achievements that the Authority had delivered in recent years, there remained many challenges that the Authority continued to be focused on. Alongside the changing need and demand that the partnership expected as a result of the impact of Covid-19, the Authority's understanding of its challenges and what was important to children and young people had informed the priorities and actions set out in the Plan.

The priorities and deliverables set out in the Plan were aligned to the strategic outcomes the Authority and partners wanted to see for children and young people, which were:

Outcome 1: I am safe

Priority 1.1: Ensure children and young people were living safely

Outcome 2: I am Healthy

Priority 2.1: Supporting children to have a healthy early childhood

Outcome 3: I have Opportunities

Priority 3.1: Narrow the gap in educational outcomes

Priority 3.2: Ensure the right support for children and young people with disabilities and additional needs

Outcome 4: I have a Voice

Priority 4.1: Support children to be active citizens

Outcome 5: I am Happy

Priority 5.1: Develop resilience, confidence and independence in children and young people

These priorities and the related actions had been developed through engagement with a range of stakeholders across the Children and Young People's Partnership, as well as drawing upon ongoing engagement with children and young people which was a central component of the Authority's approach. This included recommendations from the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee to strengthen the Plan in relation to services to support young people who might be, or at risk of, being Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).

Cabinet considered the following decision options: to accept the recommendations as set out in paragraph 1.2 of the report, or alternatively, to not approve the recommendations and request officers to consider relevant issue(s) identified by Cabinet.

The Young Mayor stated that Youth Councillors welcomed the Plan which they felt covered all aspect of young people achieving their aspirations in a safe and healthy environment.

**Resolved** that the Children and Young People's Plan 2021–2025 at Appendix 1 to the report, be approved for submission to Full Council in accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules contained in the Authority's Constitution.

(Reason for decision: The Children and Young People's Plan is a key plan to deliver the priorities linked to Our People, as set out within the Our North Tyneside Plan.

### **CAB214/21 Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2021 - 2023**

Cabinet received a report seeking approval to the Children in Care Leavers Strategy for the period 2021–2023 at Appendix 1 to the report.

The Strategy set out the Authority's responsibilities to children in the Authority's care and those cared for in their childhoods. It made clear the Authority's ambitions for them and the things the Authority would do to provide them with support to thrive into adulthood.

The role that the Authority played in caring for children was one of the most important things it did. In this context, the Authority was referred to as being the 'corporate parent' of these children and young people, and the critical question that should be asked in adopting the presented strategy was: 'would this be good enough for my child?'.

The ethos of corporate parenting was that everyone in the Authority and partner services took responsibility for promoting and delivering the vision for the children in the Authority's care and care leavers. It was recognised those children had the same needs as every child – to be loved, cared for and to feel safe. It was also acknowledged that children might have unique challenges due to the abuse or neglect they had suffered.

The ambition of the strategy was to promote a strong corporate parenting ethos recognising that the care system was not just about keeping children safe, but also to promote recovery, resilience and well-being. This strong corporate parenting vision meant that everyone was concerned about children and care leavers as if they were their own. This was evidenced by a culture where officers did all that was reasonably possible to ensure the Authority was the best 'parent' it could be to the child or young person. In order to evidence the strongest corporate parenting practice, it was vital that all parts of the Authority, beyond those directly responsible for care and pathway planning, recognised they also had a key role.

North Tyneside Council had not experienced the increase in Children in Care that regional partners and statistical neighbours had during the Covid 19 pandemic. There were 285 children in care and 157 young people supported by care leaving services on the date of writing this report.

These children and young people were cared for in a variety of settings including wherever safe to do so, within their own families or networks, supported by the Authority's specialist fostering team. The Authority had responsibility for children who lived in foster care with mainstream foster carers and others who lived in children's homes. As the young people matured, the Authority as corporate parent encouraged them to remain living in their stable foster homes as long as each young person wanted under the 'staying put' scheme. When

young people were ready to move on, the Authority had a dedicated accommodation service which offered an excellent range of options to young people.

Children and young people in the Authority's care received health assessments and support and advice from dedicated staff. This helped young people to be as healthy as possible and to develop the skills and confidence to manage their own health needs as they matured.

Children in the Authority's care were supported to maintain stable education and were assisted by dedicated staff who worked alongside schools and colleges to promote the best outcomes for the children. Despite this young people who had experienced care often struggled to gain and sustain employment and the global pandemic had further impacted negatively on this outcome. The Authority recognised that significantly more focus was required to aid them with this.

The strategy sought to provide the culture and circumstances in which each child and young person could be supported with a stable home, a family and professional network that was mutually supportive of the child, the best health and educational opportunities and high expectations of their ability to follow their dreams. The Authority wanted children in its care to experience genuine affection, acceptance of who they were and belief in them.

The strategy had identified a range of key priorities. The overarching priorities for the Authority were to:

- only bring children into care when it could not be made safe for them to stay at home.
- work with each child's network to try and keep every child within their network.
- support all adults who cared for children to do so safely.
- all children to live in safe homely and comfortable homes.
- all children to be able to build enduring relationships with consistent adults.
- to work with children in care to stop them having to tell their story over and over.
- all children to achieve their best in education, and to work with them and their school, college or workplace to support this.
- all children in care, and those who have left care to help the Authority to get better at caring for children.

There were then a range of further actions under the following themes: -

- Our Children and Young People
- Relationships
- Virtual School and Health (Health, Information & Advice, Virtual School and Emotional Wellbeing)
- Learning from Care Experienced Young People
- Model of Practice
- Care Leavers
- Children in Care Council

The implementation of the plan would be overseen by the Children in Care Council and the Corporate Parenting Forum. The Multi-Agency Looked After Panel was the key delivery mechanism. On an annual basis, progress against the strategic priorities would be reported to the Children and Young People's Partnership Board.

Cabinet considered the following decision options: to accept the recommendations as set

out in paragraph 1.2 of the report, or alternatively, to not approve the recommendations and request officers to consider relevant issue(s) raised by Cabinet.

**Resolved** that the Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy for the period 2021–2023 at Appendix 1 to the report be approved.

(Reason for decision: adoption of the Strategy demonstrates the Authority's commitment to its corporate parenting responsibilities and best aids the continued development of service improvements for children in its care and those who have experienced care.)

### **CAB215/21 Unified ICT System for Housing, and interim system**

Cabinet received a report on the review of the Housing, Asset and Repairs ICT systems with a view to developing a joint business requirement and procuring a single system solution. It also sought approval to the modification of the current contract for the Northgate Housing system to March 2023.

The Authority currently operated several ICT systems to deliver its Housing, Housing Property and Construction, Asset, and Strategic Investment and Property services. These services had limited interfaces to ensure the transfer of important information and data between them.

A move to a unified solution could improve service delivery through more 'joined up' systems, processes and data, and had the potential to provide cost efficiencies. Potential benefits included improved data quality; streamlined services; reduced interfaces between systems; and improved customer and user experience.

These benefits and others would need to be explored in more detail, agreed, documented and monitored through the proposed project. This was a significant project which would take 2-3 years from the initial system review through to full implementation.

The proposal was for a 3-stage process: Review, Procurement and Implementation, to be completed by 2023. It was anticipated that the Review stage would be completed by Spring 2021. A further report would be brought to Cabinet after this stage was completed, and when there were clear proposals for next steps.

In the interim, there was an opportunity to reduce the cost of the current Northgate Housing system through a modification of the current contract up until March 2023. This would allow the service to cease maintaining elements of the software that were no longer used and, introduce some improvements to functionality, at a lower overall cost than maintaining the status quo while the longer-term unified system project was delivered. The key factors affecting a decision on the modified contract were set out in the report.

Cabinet considered the following decision options, which were based on the contract options available from the supplier.

There was no option to cease support and maintenance for the system. The Northgate system supported approximately £65m in rent payments per year, and no alternative system would be available until the strategic procurement for the unified system was completed.

Option 1: Maintain the status quo:

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This assumed the current configuration of the software was retained, with no additional functionality, and the contract continued to be renewed on an annual basis.

### Benefits:

- No change in process, so no additional effort and no governance requirements
- System continued to be supported by the supplier
- Core system functionality (e.g. rents) continued to be available.

### Disadvantages / risks:

- Fails to take advantage of discount – cost was at least £11,000 more than the modified contract .
- Maintained modules the Authority no longer used
- Missed opportunity to obtain functionality that would improve customer service
- Missed opportunity to 'do more for less'

### Option 2: Approve the modification of the contract (recommended):

Cabinet could authorise the modification of the contract to include improved functionality at a lower cost than maintaining the status quo. This would provide ongoing system support and improve value for money in the interim, while a longer-term solution was procured

This option involved cancellation of unused elements of the software and introduced the improvements described in the report. The maintenance cost over 3 years was lower than maintaining the status quo.

### Benefits:

- Cost saving compared to maintaining the status quo.
- Opportunity to include functionality that better met the needs of the business, at lower cost than the current contract.
- Opportunity to improve the service to customers
- Matches long term strategic aims and aligned well to a future move to a unified system
- Included the new APIs for connection to Alteryx
- System continued to be supported by the supplier
- Core system functionality (e.g. rents) continued to be available.

### Disadvantages / risks:

- Possible internal resource costs relating to implementation of new functionality and business process change.

**Resolved** that (1) the update on the Housing, Asset and Repairs ICT systems review, be noted; and  
(2) the terms of the modification of the current contract for the Housing system be approved.

(Reasons for decision: This allows the functionality of the current system to be improved to better meet service objectives, at a lower cost than the current annual maintenance.

It also aligns well with the strategic project to move to a unified system:

- It allows the system to be maintained and supported by the supplier until the unified system project concludes in 2023.

- It reduces some of the existing fragmentation of systems, which will reduce the complexity of the unified system project.
- It supports the customer-focused business process change that will be more fully delivered through the unified project.)

## **CAB216/21 North Tyneside Council Customer Service Programme**

Cabinet received a report on the progress of the Authority's Customer Service Programme to date and sought approval to the proposed second phase priorities for the Programme.

Feedback from the Authority's Covid-19 Recovery Programme was directly informing the Customer Service Programme priorities and approach. Both of these programmes were in turn, driving the prioritisation of digital services for the Authority's customers, first set out in the Digital Strategy for North Tyneside, agreed by Cabinet in January 2020. The interdependency of these three programmes, for the Authority's customers, had been carefully assessed and the next stage of priorities reflected this approach.

The pandemic had changed how many of the Authority's services were delivered and in turn, customer expectation had also shifted. An assessment of these shifts, understanding how services had changed; the impact of change on the Authority's customers and which, if any, should continue beyond the restrictions of the pandemic, would be made. This would continue to direct the priorities of the Customer Service Programme.

Having reviewed the progress made since the start of the Customer Service Programme as set out in the report, the priorities for the next phase of the Programme's delivery had been refreshed and were set out below against each of the four Programme's themes.

### **a. Customer Promise**

- Embedding the promise; the customer promise was the Programme's commitment of what every customer of the Authority could expect. From April onwards, the Promise would be more widely publicised internally and externally. It would also be included into every team member's individual performance review from 2021 / 2022.
- The Elected Mayor's Spirit of North Tyneside initiative ; would be used to highlight and celebrate exceptional customer and community service all year round and would be the focus of the Authority's celebration of national customer service week, in October 2021.

### **b. Brilliant Basics**

- Corporate branding: remained a priority and all previous workstream activity would continue in line with any relevant Covid-19 guidance or restrictions.
- Correspondence, complaints, and customer feedback; the recently established correspondence unit would be used to assess different approaches to dealing with all of the Authority's correspondence, complaints and customer feedback, including those from Elected Members.
- Team communication; the Authority's staff pulse surveys highlighted how social

distancing measures had increased the gap between those who were office based and those working remotely. Digital and personal skill solutions for addressing this gap would be progressed, ensuring all staff were connected and had the information they needed to deliver the Promise, to every customer, every time.

c. Customer First

- Customer focused web services; throughout the pandemic, the ability and demands of the Authority's customers to access online information and carry out digital transactions with the council had grown significantly. The second phase of the Programme had a number of web based projects which would see notable improvements in the offer of the Authority website, including the look and feel of the site, as well as access to improved information services for children and families and vulnerable groups receiving social care support.
- Community hubs; the Authority had been growing community hubs for over 10 years, with investment in local health and wellbeing services, focused community and voluntary sector investment and customer first centres. A new community hub strategy would be developed, determining how best to further make use of these resources and to enhance the customer experience through COVID-19 recovery and beyond.
- Digital inclusion; Throughout the pandemic, the use of technology with the Authority's customers had grown exponentially. Nationally and locally this had further highlighted the digital skills and resource gap. Working with the community and voluntary sector and local NHS, a number of digital inclusion projects would be undertaken, as part of a digital inclusion strategy for the Borough.

d. Better Never Stops

- Staff as the Authority's eyes and ears; a new tool for staff living and working in the Borough would be developed, enabling them to report, in real time, issues that required action by Authority's services. Additionally, a new staff suggestion scheme, highlighting ways to improve the customer experience, would be established.
- Workforce; further workforce development would be undertaken to embed and evaluate the implementation of the organisation's values, most importantly, ensuring people understood and could live the customer promise. Work would begin to look at how trauma informed practice could be applied beyond social care, to other areas across the organisation.
- Service reviews; the methodology of internal service reviews would be refreshed, with a greater focus on technology and Covid-19 Recovery plans.
- Best in class work systems; a number of IT systems that supported the delivery of Authority services would be refreshed and replaced. This would improve the efficiency of how these services were delivered, as well as improving customer experience.

On behalf of the Business Forum, Toby Bridges thanked the Authority for the excellent

support provided in handling grants to local businesses during the pandemic.

Dawn McNally also thanked the Authority for listening to older people in its digital inclusion work.

The Elected Mayor thanked Cabinet members, Council staff and partners for working together for the benefit of residents during the pandemic.

Cabinet considered the following decision options:

Option 1: To agree the proposed priorities for the Customer Service Programme in North Tyneside as set out in section 1.5.3 of the report.

Option 2: To not agree to the proposed priorities and request officers to consider other options for Cabinet's consideration.

**Resolved** that (1) the progress and deliverables of the Customer Service Programme to date be noted;  
(2) the list of second phase priorities for the Programme be agreed; and  
(3) a further progress report be presented to Cabinet in 2022.

(Reason for decision: The priorities outlined have been developed following a formal review of the work of the Customer Service Programme to date. The priorities continue to present the ambition set out in the Programme and have taken careful consideration of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and work of the Authority's Covid-19 Recovery Programme.)

#### **CAB217/21    Date and Time of Next Meeting**

6.00pm on Tuesday 6 April 2021.

**Minutes published on Thursday 25 February 2021.**

**The decisions contained within these Minutes may be implemented (unless called in by 3 Non-Executive Members for consideration by the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee) immediately following the expiry of the call-in period; i.e. 5.00pm on Thursday 4 March 2021.**