

Local Government Act 1972

Borough of North Tyneside

22 January 2015

At the meeting of the Council of the Borough of North Tyneside duly convened and held on Thursday 22 January 2015 in The Chamber at Quadrant at which a quorum of Members were present, that is to say:

Present

Councillor T Mulvenna (In the Chair)
N Redfearn (Elected Mayor)

Councillor J M Allan	Councillor M J Huscroft
Councillor A Arkle	Councillor N J Huscroft
Councillor Mrs A Austin	Councillor C Johnson
Councillor K Barrie	Councillor D Lilly
Councillor G Bell	Councillor F Lott
Councillor L Bell	Councillor W Lott
Councillor B Burdis	Councillor G Madden
Councillor C Burdis	Councillor M Madden
Councillor W Caithness	Councillor P Mason
Councillor J Cassidy	Councillor D McGarr
Councillor K A Conroy	Councillor P McIntyre
Councillor D Corkey	Councillor J McLaughlin
Councillor S L Cox	Councillor L J Miller
Councillor EN Darke	Councillor Mrs S E Mortimer
Councillor L Darke	Councillor P Oliver
Councillor C Davis	Councillor K Osborne
Councillor S Day	Councillor J O'Shea
Councillor P Earley	Councillor C B Pickard
Councillor R Glindon	Councillor J Pickard
Councillor S Graham	Councillor M Rankin
Councillor I Grayson	Councillor D Sarin
Councillor M A Green	Councillor L A Spillard
Councillor M Hall	Councillor J Stirling
Councillor J L L Harrison	Councillor A Waggott-Fairley
Councillor E Hodson	Councillor J I Walker
Councillor John Hunter	Councillor Mrs J A Wallace
Councillor M Huscroft	Councillor G C Westwater

In attendance via Skype in a non-voting capacity: Councillor J Munby

C67/01/15 Presentation of Whitley Bay Town Cup

The Chair announced that the Whitley Bay Town Cup for 2014 had been awarded to The BAY Foodbank, in recognition of the outstanding work carried out in providing emergency food parcels and help to local residents in need, and for the hard work and commitment demonstrated by the volunteers.

The Reverend Alan Dickinson accepted the award on behalf of the volunteers and all who had contributed, and responded appropriately by thanking the Council for the award and also for its support.

C68/01/15 Moment's Silence

The Chair informed Council that Sylvia Murray and Maureen Robson, former Councillors of North Tyneside, had died recently. Members and officers stood in silence as a mark of respect.

C69/01/15 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Ord, Janet Hunter, A McMullen and M Reynolds.

C70/01/15 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

The following declarations of interest were made:

Item 7 – Council Tax Discounts from April 2015 (Minute C75/01/15 refers)

Councillor B Burdis – registerable personal interest – he paid council tax on an empty property in the Borough.

Councillor C Burdis – registerable personal interest – she had a second property in the Borough.

Councillor S Cox – registerable personal interest – he had a second property in the Borough which was not his main home.

Councillor D McGarr – registerable personal interest – he had a second property in the Borough which was not his main home.

Councillor P McIntyre – registerable personal interest – she had a beneficial interest in property in the Borough.

Councillor D Sarin – registerable personal interest – he was a Landlord of a property in the Borough.

Councillor J Stirling – registerable personal interest – he had a beneficial interest in property in the Borough.

Councillor J Wallace – registerable personal interest – she had a beneficial interest in property in the Borough

There were no dispensations in relation to registerable personal interests reported.

C71/01/15 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the Council meeting held on 27 November 2014 be taken as read and confirmed and signed by the Chair.

It was noted that a written response to a supplementary question asked by Councillor J Wallace at the last Council meeting would be provided to all Members at the earliest opportunity.

C72/01/15 Motions

No Motions were received for consideration at this meeting.

C73/01/15 2013/14 Annual Audit Letter

The Council received the 2013/14 Annual Audit Letter from the Authority's appointed auditors, Mazars. The full Letter, covering the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014, was attached as Appendix A to the report.

Councillor R Glindon welcomed Mr Gareth Davies, Mazars, to the meeting and invited him to present the Annual Audit Letter. The Letter covered:

- The overall conclusion in respect of the Authority's Financial Statements which includes the annual governance statement; and,
- The assessment of arrangements to achieve value for money in the Authority's use of resources.

The District Auditor had issued an unqualified opinion on the Authority's accounts for 2013/14. In this context unqualified meant that the Auditor was satisfied with the quality of the Authority's accounts which was a positive outcome for the Authority.

The Audit Completion Report presented to Council on 25 September 2014 and to the Audit Committee on 24 September 2014 included more detailed information in respect of the findings of the audit of the 2013/14 Annual Financial Report.

The District Auditor had issued an unqualified Value for Money conclusion, confirming that the Authority had adequate arrangements in place for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. No specific recommendations relating to Value for Money were made in the Letter.

During the presentation, Mr Davies referred to recent publicity and to a number of queries the auditors had previously received in relation to the crane at the Swans site. However, the auditors were satisfied that there were no issues that needed to be reported and so there was no reference to this in the report under consideration.

Members were given the opportunity to ask questions of Mr Davies.

It was moved by Councillor R Glindon and seconded by Councillor B Pickard that:

“Council notes the 2013/14 Annual Audit Letter.”

The motion, on being put to the meeting, was agreed.

C74/01/15 Council Tax Support Scheme 2015-16

The Council received a report which detailed the options for having a Local Council Tax Support Scheme in place for North Tyneside for the financial year 2015-16. The report also set out the results of a consultation exercise that had been undertaken on Cabinet’s proposal to maintain the current scheme for 2015-16.

It was moved by Councillor R Glindon and seconded by Councillor B Pickard that:

“Council:

- (1) notes the recommended scheme set out in paragraph 1.6.2 of the report which is being proposed to Council by the Cabinet following its meeting on 8 December 2014; and
- (2) agrees this scheme as the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for North Tyneside with effect from 1 April 2015.”

The motion, on being put to the meeting, was agreed.

C75/01/15 Council Tax Discounts from April 2015

[Councillors B Burdis, C Burdis, S Cox, D McGarr, P McIntyre, D Sarin, J Stirling and J Wallace withdrew from the meeting for the duration of the discussion and voting on this item.]

The Council received a report which detailed the options that had been considered by Cabinet regarding Council Tax Discounts for empty homes effective from April 2015. The report also set out the results of a consultation exercise that had been undertaken on the proposal that had been agreed by Cabinet.

It was moved by Councillor R Glindon and seconded by Councillor B Pickard that:

“Council:

- (1) notes the recommended discounts set out in paragraph 1.6.1 of the report which are being proposed to Council by the Cabinet following its meeting on 8 December 2014; and
- (2) approves those discounts as the empty property discounts effective from 1 April 2015.”

The motion, on being put to the meeting, was agreed by 36 votes to 9 votes, with 1 abstention.

C76/01/15 Programme of Meetings 2015/16

The Council received a report which presented the proposed programme of meetings for the 2015/16 municipal year.

It was moved by N Redfearn, Elected Mayor and seconded by Councillor J O'Shea that:

“Council:

- (1) agrees the programme of meetings for 2015/16, as set out in Appendix A to the report; and
- (2) agrees that the meetings of the full Council proposed for 23 July 2015, 19 November 2015 and 17 March 2016 be those at which questions will be taken from members of the public.”

The motion, on being put to the meeting, was agreed.

C77/01/15 Motion to Council – Review of Scaffold Hill Application and Appeal

In accordance with the terms of a Motion that had been approved by Council at its meeting held on 14 March 2013, a report of the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee following a review undertaken by its Local Plan Sub-group in relation to the Scaffold Hill planning application was submitted for Members' consideration. The report of Cabinet on 8 December 2014, which set out Cabinet's response to the Overview and Scrutiny recommendations was also submitted.

It was moved by Councillor J Harrison and seconded by Councillor J Allan that:

“Council notes the report of the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee and subsequent response by Cabinet.”

The motion, on being put to the meeting, was agreed.

C78/01/15 Common Seal

Resolved that the Common Seal be affixed to all deeds and documents required for carrying into effect the various decisions of the Council made since its last meeting.

C79/01/15 Chair's Announcements

The Chair expressed thanks to the Deputy Chair for his assistance and to Councillors and Staff for their concerns and best wishes during his recent illness.

The Chair made reference to two young residents of the Borough:

- Rebecca Moore, member of the Youth Parliament who had received a young voice award for her work in the Youth Parliament.
- Declan Pang who had won the Lord Glenamara Memorial Prize, which rewards academic performance, citizenship and interest in history, politics or public service in the North East.

The Chair also noted that both Rebecca and Declan had been candidates for Young Mayor of North Tyneside in recent years. He also extended thanks on behalf of the Council to the current Young Mayor, Allen Oghene, as his term of office was about to come to an end.

C80/01/15 Mayor's Announcements

The Elected Mayor reminded Members that access to Officers was available to every Member of the Council. This was an open and transparent Council and Members should not make statements claiming they were unaware of what was happening within the Authority.

C81/01/15 Questions by Members of the Council

1. Question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor D Lilly:

Recent road resurfacing in Whitley Bay town centre has been considered substandard by residents, in particular Victoria Terrace, with many making complaints. Can the Mayor explain why the work carried out was to such a poor standard and what steps will be taken to rectify this problem?

Councillor J Harrison replied on behalf of the Elected Mayor as follows:

Victoria Terrace has been resurfaced using a material called micro-asphalt which has been used extensively across the borough and proven to be an effective product.

One issue with the micro-asphalt treatment is that the material does not give the appearance of a newly surfaced road immediately. It is only after a few weeks when the material beds in after being driven on that it looks like a new road surface.

I understand that this process has taken a little longer than usual at Victoria Terrace as there are a lot of parked cars.

As soon as our Highways Team were made aware of concerns raised by residents at Victoria Terrace they met with ward councillors to confirm that the work had been done to the correct standard and to explain the nature of the material used. They also agreed to undertake some additional resurfacing work.

I have been informed that this matter is now resolved but if residents or Members have any further concerns our Highways Team will be happy to assist.

Councillor Lilly asked the following supplementary question:

The complaints in Whitley Bay follow the unacceptable quality of the resurfacing of pavements in Hartington Road, Cullercoats. What is there to stop residents thinking that sub-standard repairs will be the norm?

Councillor Harrison replied as follows:

If we take a balance over the whole of North Tyneside, it seems to be from one specific area we receive this number of complaints. I will ask the officers to look at and analyse these complaints. I myself have not received complaints about that work, but I acknowledge there have been some difficulties, but not to the proportion suggested.

I will ask the officers to report back to me and I will write to all Members of the Council

2. Question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor E Hodson:

Since the Combined Authority replaced the Integrated Transport Authority, the performance of the Metro system has collapsed - as set out on station reports. Could the Mayor and her Transport Cabinet Member explain what has gone wrong and inform us how she plans to regain control of the Metro's operation and in what time span?

Councillor F Lott replied on behalf of the Elected Mayor as follows:

In the first instance it has to be said that the question is as misleading as it is dramatic. Station posters do not indicate that performance on the Metro system has "collapsed".

That having been said, customer satisfaction has dipped during autumn and Nexus acknowledges that this is because day-to-day performance is not of the high standard expected. The main problem has been trains developing faults while in service. This has been added to by the annual impact of low rail adhesion, caused when train wheels crush fallen leaves to a slippery pulp that makes starting and stopping harder, as well as individual incidents outside Metro's control, such as trespass and ambulances being called when passengers are taken ill on board trains.

Metro services are provided for Nexus by a concessionaire, DB Regio Tyne and Wear, which is part of the Arriva group. Nexus is not happy with the current level of performance and has held meetings with Arriva's Head of Rail Services nationally to discuss what should be done. This led to a restructure of the management team at DB Regio Tyne and Wear in December and the provision of additional resource and staff at the Gosforth depot to improve train maintenance and reliability.

DB Regio also recognises that on some occasions it has been short of available drivers, due to sickness absence. A recent recruitment drive has been successful and there are eight drivers in training at present with eight more to start next month. While it takes time to train drivers DB Regio is reviewing its employee relations strategy and has in place measures to reduce sickness absence including occupational health services and flexible working.

Nexus is also responsible for aspects of Metro performance, through maintenance of the infrastructure. The current £389m Metro: All Change modernisation programme, approved by the Labour Government, has seen tens of millions invested in replacing track and cable networks and this has led to a fall in infrastructure faults. It has invested separately in a

programme to reduce the impact of low rail adhesion, which has now reduced reported incidences by 30% compared to 2013.

Metro suffered two high-profile power failures in January which were outwith the control of Nexus and which affected almost the whole system. Nexus directors have met with Northern Power Grid to raise concern about the resilience of Metro's power supply, while also completing an urgent engineering review that has seen key circuits checked, strengthened and backed-up to ensure the fastest possible recovery should there be a further power failure.

Nexus, as a public body, continues to provide councillors with regular reports covering corporate performance. These are discussed at the Transport North East (Tyne and Wear Sub-Committee) of the Combined Authority, which replaced the now disbanded Integrated Transport Authority. At my invitation, members of the committee also attended a policy seminar with Nexus and its concessionaire in December to discuss, among other things, customer satisfaction levels on Metro and steps that needed to be taken to improve performance.

It is worth noting that the number of passengers using Metro has risen by more than 2 million (7%) in the last year and revenue is healthy. Good management by Nexus means Metro currently operates without any subsidy from local councils, while the North East Combined Authority has at the same time kept average fare rises below the rate of inflation and frozen the price of travel for children, older people and disabled passengers. The modernisation programme is on-track and on budget, with Government recently confirming the maximum possible investment for 2015-16 following a review of the programme so far.

The most recent performance data shows a continual improvement over two periods. Metro is a system we should be proud of rather than talk of performance collapsing following two monthly dips.

Councillor Hodson asked the following supplementary question:

The Mayor will know that the Metro is operated by a private company Deutsche Bahn under contract to Nexus and it is not working well at all. With the new Combined Authority, the Mayor and her Labour colleagues plan to introduce bus contracts, whereby bus companies will operate private bus services under contract to Nexus and local authority specification, just like the Metro arrangement. Shall we therefore look forward to declining bus services in future in addition to declining Metro services, and if not, why not?

The Chair did not allow the supplementary question as he considered it did not arise directly from the original question or the reply.

3. Question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor J Wallace

Recently, the Government has provided over £11m in extra funding to repair potholes in North Tyneside. Can the Mayor tell us how this will be divided amongst the wards and supply members with a schedule detailing the work to be done?

Councillor J Harrison replied on behalf of the Elected Mayor as follows:

In order to put this question into context, can I firstly explain that the Government has not provided this Council with an extra £11m funding to repair pot holes. The Government has in fact changed the way in which it allocates Local Transport Plan highway maintenance funding. This means that instead of providing funding annually, a 6 year allocation is now being made.

This funding now covers all aspects of highway maintenance including road resurfacing, footway repairs and bridge repair schemes, but has also removed our street lighting allocation. North Tyneside's allocation for the six years is £11million, starting with over £2million in 2015/16. This funding has been allocated on a formula basis and in subsequent years the money allocated will be reduced and Councils will have to bid into a Challenge fund.

As we have just updated our HAMP, the Highways Team is in the process of planning work for the coming 2015/16 year. Work will be prioritised in accordance with the principles set out in the Highway Asset Management Plan and Members will be supplied with a schedule of work for their wards.

Details of bridge and other infrastructure schemes will be included in the Local Transport Plan report to Cabinet on 9 March 2015.

Following this meeting, a detailed list of road resurfacing schemes will be made available to all Members of the Council and residents shortly after.

4. Question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor D Sarin

Can the Elected Mayor tell me how much the Council is paying for carbon emission credits whilst Tynemouth Crematorium is out of commission and was this budgeted for in 2014-15 budget setting?

Councillor J Stirling replied on behalf of the Elected Mayor as follows:

I'm pleased to tell you that it will be in the region of £753 for the 2014/15 allocation. This compares to £2,244 in 2013/14.

The impact of the works at Tynemouth Crematorium during 2014/15 means that the Council needs to buy less carbon allowances under the Carbon Reduction Commitment Scheme. This was budgeted for within the 2014/15 purchase of allowances.

The Council has achieved a reduction in its carbon footprint by 15% at the end of 2013/14 and the projection of a 19% reduction by the end of 2014/15. The Council's carbon reduction has been achieved by reducing our energy consumption, and I will give you some facts as follows:

- Electricity is 9% down against baseline year
- Gas is 15% down against baseline year
- Fleet diesel is 21% down against baseline year
- Staff business miles are 23% down against baseline year

I also think it's important to highlight that once the works are complete, the carbon impact of the crematorium will reduce by around 50%.

Councillor Sarin asked the following supplementary question:

As this project is considerably overdue, will we still have to buy credits from Newcastle?

Councillor Stirling replied as follows:

I told you before the credits were £753. I think you are getting mixed up because the only credits we buy from Newcastle are in relation to mercury abatement, not carbon reduction.

5. Question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor D Sarin

Can the Elected Mayor confirm there will be no change in hours of use for the general public at Tynemouth Swimming Pool?

Councillor E Darke replied on behalf of the Elected Mayor as follows:

The swimming programme at Tynemouth pool was changed on 5 January 2015 following a full review of the swimming programme. This took into consideration the increased demand for swimming lessons and swimming club use in addition to the very low attendances at some public sessions at Tynemouth pool.

The changes made mean that we will have more people swimming at the pool, more children learning to swim and Tynemouth Swimming Club will no longer need to travel out of North Tyneside for their training sessions. It is fantastic news to hear that the Tynemouth Swimming Club has grown from 150 members to nearly 300 in recent years and that it has been successful with swimmers competing at County, National and World Championships.

In December the Club also set a new World Record when 100 of its swimmers swam a 50m relay in under 1 hour.

There will actually be an increase in the number of swims at Tynemouth Pool resulting from the programme changes.

Councillor Sarin asked the following supplementary question:

How have the hours open to the general public been reduced at Tynemouth Pool and at other swimming pools in comparison?

Councillor Darke replied as follows:

There are no changes at any of our other pools and there will still be 60 hours of public swimming time at Tynemouth. The Contours and exercise class programme remains unchanged.

6. Question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor K Barrie

Would the Elected Mayor confirm that there will be no Sure Start closures?

Councillor I Grayson replied on behalf of the Elected Mayor as follows:

There are no plans to close Sure Start Centres. We continue to work hard to target our efforts at those who need them most and have had some real successes working in partnership with our head teachers.

7. Question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor K Barrie

Does the Elected Mayor or the Council pay for the Mayor's column in the local News Guardian and who writes the articles?

The Elected Mayor replied as follows:

No, the News Guardian does not charge for the column and I do write the column.

8. Question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor K Barrie

Could the Elected Mayor tell me how much unsupported borrowing has been used to buy the High Point Hotel, the private property adjacent to the High Point, Whiskey Bends and The Avenue Public House. Could she tell me the demolition costs for each property and could she give a time line for the development?

Councillor R Glindon replied on behalf of the Elected Mayor as follows:

After years of neglect the Elected Mayor has taken the decision to develop these eye sore properties that have blighted our coastline for many years.

The total cost to buy the High Point Hotel, the private property adjacent to the High Point, Whiskey Bends and The Avenue Public House, including stamp duty was just over £2.03m, which has been financed from temporary unsupported borrowing and which will be repaid once the properties are developed.

All demolition costs, which currently total £220,000 are included in the £2.03m financial package, these are:

Whiskey Bends - £0

High Point Hotel and associated properties - £106,000

The Avenue - £114,000

In relation to the timescales involved in the development, the former Avenue Public House is due to be demolished with work starting on site next week.

It is expected that work will start on the residential redevelopment of the High Point site this summer. The refurbishment of the former Whisky Bends will follow shortly thereafter, hopefully by late summer.

A decision has been taken to retain the former Whisky Bends Public House; therefore this will not be demolished. This is because the main fabric of the building is structurally sound and it provides a better residential refurbishment opportunity.

The Council has only just sought agreement for the demolition of The Avenue and Brook Street, therefore officers are currently exploring the options for these sites. Members will

of course be kept informed of progress once these options have been considered and there is more information to share. In the meantime local residents have also been kept up to date in relation to the proposed demolition of the buildings.

Councillor Barrie asked the following supplementary question:

Can the Mayor tell me how long it will take to recover the money that has been spent?

Councillor Glindon replied on behalf of the Elected Mayor as follows:

As soon as the sites have been sold, we will recover the money.

9. Question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor D Sarin

Many residents have told me that they are appalled at the recent 24% increase in Councillors' allowances whilst making redundancies and cuts to Council services. Will the Elected Mayor withdraw any funding which has been allocated in her budget for 2015-16 for this purpose, thus getting rid of this odious proposal and gaining back the respect of the council tax payer?

Councillor B Pickard replied on behalf of the Elected Mayor as follows:

Thank you for the question. I think it is worth clarifying the basis of the decision and the facts in relation to the proposed increase in Members' allowances. There are two elements to the increase. The first element is that it is Council policy, agreed before Mayor Redfearn became Mayor, to increase allowances in line with the national pay award. This was agreed by all parties and no-one suggested any changes to that policy. The award this year was weighted towards larger increases for lower grades and has had a significant effect on the increase.

The second part is that it is a legal requirement to have an independent review of allowances. On 27 November 2014, full Council considered and agreed a report setting out the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel which recommended an increase in Members' allowances. In order to reach its conclusion, the Independent Remuneration Panel had previously carried out detailed research on Members' allowances. This research demonstrated that the Authority's allowances are the lowest in the Combined Authority area and are currently significantly out of line with national and regional allowances. Also that the current North Tyneside Members' Allowance Scheme does not recognise the commitment required to fulfil the various roles of a being councillor, nor does it provide sufficient recompense for undertaking those roles.

The Panel recommended that the level of the basic allowance paid to all Members of the authority should be increased to the mean average of the LA7 authorities (Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland, South Tyneside and Sunderland).

Councillor Sarin, it is important to note that any Member of the Council can choose not to receive the increase if they so wish.

However, I am surprised at the description you use of the increase. You are only interested in criticising North Tyneside Councillors. There has been no increase in basic allowances to North Tyneside Councillors since April 2009. However, the Conservative

candidate in Tynemouth Constituency voted for an increase in his own Council of a massive 45% and in addition they pay £11,000 to Cabinet Members, which is £8,000 more than North Tyneside, yet it's only a borough council not a metropolitan borough council.

Councillor Sarin asked the following supplementary question:

As the Elected Mayor and leader of the Labour Group, I am asking you to withdraw any monies in your budget which allows for a 24% increase in allowances.

Councillor Pickard, on behalf of the Elected Mayor, replied as follows:

The question of Members' allowances is not a matter for the Mayor, it is reserved for full Council. Full Council has made a decision, therefore the Mayor would have to include it in her budget proposals. However, you are welcome to include this in your alternative budget proposals.

10. Question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor N J Huscroft

The Mayor's Listening events have been held since the Mayor was elected and we are assured that these form part of the Mayors consultation with residents. Will the Mayor inform us of the number of these events that have taken place, the average attendance (excluding Councillors and Council Officers) and the number of times each ward has had one of these events?

The Elected Mayor replied as follows:

I made a pledge to ensure this is a listening council and therefore we have significantly improved how we involve, engage and consult our residents.

The Mayor's Listening Events are just part of the Council wide approach and have received some very positive feedback, as well as increased the number of people who are able to shape our decision-making.

Twenty one Mayor's Listening events have taken place so far; the average attendance at these events is 31- this is taken from a total attendance of 641 residents at 21 events; to date 16 wards have had a Mayor's Listening Event and there have been three additional special events held in Whitley Bay and Wallsend for Carers, Deaf and Hard of Hearing, a Joint event with the Police and Crime Commissioner and a special Mayor's Task Force meeting for antisocial behaviour in Whitley Bay.

At all those events there is a list of all the residents' concerns that have been raised and they have all been answered where possible. Many of the comments we have had have been extremely positive and they are asking us to continue with these events. They have been very successful and are attended by me and Cabinet Members as well, so the public have access to the people who are making decisions about the Council.

11. Question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor M J Huscroft

The Council owned 'Salisbury House' appears to be in a state of disrepair, and has not been attended to, when will the Council be attending to this building?

Councillor J Harrison replied as follows:

Repairs to Salisbury House include internal and external redecoration, external flat roof repairs and clearance of guttering. Works have been procured and will start in April 2015.

The repairs will be completed within a few months which will result in substantial improvements to the appearance of Salisbury House.

Councillor Huscroft asked the following supplementary question:

It surprises me that it has taken so long for the Council to carry out this work. Would he not agree with me?

Councillor Harrison replied as follows:

We need to look at the details of the building. It is a Council owned building and we currently have 12 tenancies within it. We have a shared responsibility for repairs and maintenance of the building. Over recent years we have been trying to encourage people to move into the building. We have now done that and there is an opportunity to share the expense to upgrade the building to a better condition. Had it not been for the area recession, we would have had people in the building, the expense could have been shared and repairs could have been done sooner. We are doing the repairs now and hopefully this will encourage other people to use the building.

12. Question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor M Huscroft

Following planning approval for Bedford Avenue, residents have not been informed when they can expect work to start here. Can the Mayor/Cabinet Member inform Councillors when work will commence here to convert the empty shops into homes?

Councillor J Harrison replied on behalf of the Elected Mayor as follows:

Work to progress the conversion of the empty shops in Bedford Avenue is continuing. This involves the conversion of five retail units into three flats. Designs and costs for the work have been developed by Kier North Tyneside and are currently being evaluated by officers to ensure that the homes are converted to a high standard and provide value for money to the Council.

This conversion remains a priority as part of the ongoing work to provide 3,000 affordable homes across the borough. All residents were consulted at the beginning of the development process and will be kept up to date on progress.

Councillor Huscroft asked the following supplementary question:

Will residents and Councillors be informed and given an early indication as to when the work will start?

Councillor Harrison replied as follows:

We will ensure residents and ward councillors are informed. It is important we get this right and achieve value for money for the upgrade of the properties.

13. Question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor N J Huscroft

The Secretary of State (and Planning Inspector) recently allowed the appeal against the Council decision to refuse planning permission for the field on the East side of Station Road in Wallsend. The matter of the plan being out of date in 2006 was again used as a reason to overturn the original decision. Will the Mayor investigate if it is possible to bring forward the necessary work to enable an earlier adoption of the plan. (currently timetabled to be adopted in July/August 2016)?

Councillor J Harrison replied on behalf of the Elected Mayor as follows:

By losing this appeal it makes the case even more relevant as to why we need a local plan at the earliest opportunity. This will ensure that the Council, and not the developers, are in control of delivering development, in the right places at the right time, to meet the needs of the Borough's residents and to protect its unique character and attractiveness.

Having said that, plan preparation has to meet legislative requirements and the adopted timetable builds in the statutory stages the Plan must go through which includes public consultation as well as the formal Council decision making processes.

It also reflects the fact that from the point at which the Council submits the Plan to the Secretary of State this November, the timetable is largely in the hands of the Planning Inspectorate, as to the length of the Plan's examination and the speed of reporting. We have applied the Planning Inspectorate's standard timescales.

Crucially it also reflects the need to have in place robust and up to date evidence to inform the Plan. A wealth of information has been considered by Officers and Members in the last two months.

We have set a challenging timetable for the production of the Plan, but I believe it is realistic in terms of delivering a robust plan without cutting corners either in terms of compliance with legislation or compromising the quality of the evidence needed to get the Plan safely through the examination. Cutting corners would lay the Council open to risk, and potential criticism from residents, stakeholders and the Planning Inspector.

What we don't want is to get to the examination stage for an Inspector to tell us to start again - which has happened elsewhere – leaving this Council further behind in adopting an up-to-date plan and open to continued challenge by developers.

I'm pleased to say that the first milestone in the timetable has been met with Cabinet approving the 2015 Consultation Draft on 12 January 2015. Public consultation is programmed to take place in early February 2015.

Cabinet will continue to manage the process in accordance with the published timetable and we will not look to accelerate the process because we are confident that what we have in place is fit for purpose.

14. Question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor M J Huscroft

Is the elected Mayor aware that on some occasions it is taking between 21 and 28 days to arrange a cremation. Will the Elected Mayor agree with me that waiting time(s) for

funerals and cremations is currently too long, and what is she planning to do to reduce this unacceptable delay and additional stress to families at this most distressing time?

Councillor J Harrison replied on behalf of the Elected Mayor as follows:

The demand for our cremation service has been higher over the past few months, compared to the same period last year. However, it is important to recognise this issue is not unique to North Tyneside and is unfortunately not uncommon at this time of year. This Council's sympathies go out to families who are enduring this wait.

We know through listening to our residents, how important this service is and that is why I am delighted that even in these difficult financial times, we have provided substantial investment to improve this service.

Last year, improvements were made to Whitley Bay Crematorium which included the redecoration of the chapel, the reinstatement of historical features and an overhaul of the cremators.

All of this work was completed prior to the commencement of a £2.77 million upgrade and refurbishment to Tynemouth Crematorium, which I am pleased to announce is a decision made by this Mayor and Cabinet to ensure we did start this upgrade. It was a bold, courageous decision at that time which was not taken by the previous administration. I am also pleased to announce the Crematorium is due to open to the public next month, within the timescale agreed and with no extra cost to the local tax payer and fulfilling a promise made to the residents of North Tyneside, contrary to the bilious information given out in a recent political newsletter.

The upgrade to Tynemouth Crematorium includes:

- an extension to the chapel which is in keeping with the original sandstone build
- additional seating will be accommodated
- new public toilet facilities
- a new user friendly and enclosed, entrance lobby and waiting area
- a new multi media system will be installed in the waiting area
- brand new seating in both the chapel and waiting area
- a new Book of Remembrance room
- new cremators
- and mercury abatement equipment will be fitted.

Importantly, the upgrade ensures that we will be fully compliant with mercury abatement legislation and will provide a more fit for purpose facility.

This will provide a very important service to residents of North Tyneside and others who wish to use the service at a very trying time for families. It will be a fantastic service and I think we do ourselves a disservice by spreading malicious misinformation about what we have been doing in North Tyneside and by producing scurrilous newsletters to residents. We need to stop that.

Councillor Huscroft asked the following supplementary question:

The Crematorium should have been ready in October. Does he agree that he didn't take action to increase hours at Whitley Bay and to standardise the Saturday rate to ensure this type of delay didn't occur, and can he confirm the actual date in February? My understanding is that on the weekend of 10 January, crematorium bookings for Whitley Bay were going into February.

Councillor Harrison replied as follows:

We knew there would be an impact of having only one crematorium working, but we were not aware of the increased demand. This is not just happening in North Tyneside, but is also happening in other areas and we have tried to manage that. The actual work in the Chapel and the various buildings will be completed in the timescale and we now need to test out the Crematorium itself. I thought it was important to get this right, and we have tried to deal with this in a sympathetic manner. To test whether it is working correctly, we need a cremation to go ahead. The Crematorium will reopen and the date I am looking at for this is 16 February.

15. Question to the Elected Mayor by Councillor M J Huscroft

Can the Mayor explain what progress has been made in developing the education and training facility on the Swans site for undergraduate, postgraduate and research students. Also, what infrastructure works have been completed in the Swans site. Further, what progress has been made with regard to the construction of a crane on the Swans site, and what has happened with regard to the European Grant and has this been affected by the timeline?

Councillor I Grayson replied on behalf of the Elected Mayor as follows:

As changes in availability of skills related funding have emerged external providers to the Council have developed, training offers related to the engineering and manufacturing sector it is anticipated that the training needs of prospective employers on the Swans site will be addressed via a hub and spoke model of delivery across the borough. This will incorporate:

- the local college offer from Tyne Metropolitan College;
- the ENRGI centre adjacent to the Swan Hunters site;
- the offer available from the new training provider in North Tyneside, TDR Training;
- the rapid expansion of Advanced Industrial Solutions;
- Chirton Engineering plans to develop further apprenticeship training and
- Tyne Metropolitan College and the Council's plans to implement a Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths hub funded by the Local Growth Fund on Embleton Avenue adjacent to the college's main campus.

These developments are linked to the School Review, that is incorporating a review of adult learning and the role of schools in increasing youth employment will develop a collective solution to address immediate and medium term skills needs in this sector. Further consideration of the need for capital led skills infrastructure will continue to be considered alongside this review.

Current business enquiries also include companies with a skills focus, which would add to the borough's training offer to local people.

In relation to infrastructure works:

- the installation of traffic signals at key off-site junctions has been completed and they are now operational;
- improvements to the Western site access from Benton Way are underway and the new bridge will be installed in the spring;
- improvements to the Carville Road access on the eastern boundary have commenced, as well as a new east to west access road through the site to facilitate the development of individual plots;
- new utility infrastructure is now being installed by Northumbria Water, with both water and sewerage works currently on site;
- refurbishment of the main north east office building, which will become the Swans Business and Innovation Centre, has commenced;
- work has commenced on the repair and improvement of the quay walls; and
- tenders for the dredging of the quay berths will be returned by the end of January with work anticipated by May 2015.

The erection of the crane cannot be undertaken until the quay edge repairs are completed in the early summer.

European Regional Development Fund grant of nearly £9m has been secured and is currently being used to fund the infrastructure works. There is no risk to this funding from the current programming of the works.

Councillor Huscroft asked the following supplementary question:

The Swans site is an important Enterprise Zone, and the importance of the Enterprise Zone is the capital allowances and rate free periods, therefore would he agree that he will go back to the Government to ask for an extension to the Enterprise Zone time limits because the present one runs out in 2018? If the crane is not up and running by the end of this year, there will only be two years in which the Enterprise Zone allowances will be of assistance to new industries in the area. Will he not also agree that we need to maximise this opportunity and if we have a full timetable we can present to the Government we may get an extension to this time period?

Councillor Grayson replied as follows:

With regard to the crane issue, the quay edge repairs should be completed in the early summer and we expect the crane to be up by September 2015. The Councillor is also correct about the current eligibility for the rate free period expiring on 31 March 2018. We also have Kier Property who were appointed as the preferred developer and they continue to respond to enquiries from new businesses interested in locating to the site. Negotiations with some of the businesses are at an advanced stage, but further information is restricted due to commercial confidentiality.

We have also successfully worked with W D Close to facilitate the expansion of their business on the eastern side of the site.

I am sure the Council and the preferred developer, Kier Property, will continue to monitor and assess the situation regarding the attraction of new businesses and if appropriate

would consider requesting the Government for an extension. At the moment that is the timescale and that is what we are working towards and hopefully we will be successful.

Clearly this is an important site, and the work, money and investment and everything that has been done on that site emphasises the importance this administration places on the site, and yes, we need to maximise the opportunity and I'm sure that Council officers working with Kier Property will do everything they can to maximise the site.

In closing the meeting, the Chair reminded Members of the time limits set out in the Constitution for asking and responding to questions.