

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

At a remote meeting of **Cabinet** which was held via Microsoft Teams on **Wednesday 8 July 2020 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor S Henig (Leader of the Council) in the Chair

Cabinet Members:

Councillors A Napier (Deputy Leader of the Council), J Allen, O Gunn, L Hovvels, C Marshall, A Patterson, K Shaw, B Stephens and A Surtees

Also in Attendance:

Councillor Councillors J Shuttleworth and Councillor H Smith

Prior to the commencement of the formal business, the Chair conveyed Cabinet's condolences to all those who had lost loved ones in recent weeks.

Cabinet welcomed the newly appointed Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change, Amy Harhoff, to her first Durham County Council Cabinet meeting.

The Chair paid tribute to the 8,000 men and boys massacred in the Bosnia Srebrenica genocide which took place in July 1995 and reported that the 25th anniversary was being commemorated by Durham County Council, Durham Cathedral and Durham University with flags being flown from County Hall, Durham Cathedral and Durham Castle, during the memorial week.

1 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 June 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chair.

3 Declarations of interest

Councillor L Hovvells declared a personal interest in relation to item 4, and would leave the meeting during the consideration of the item of business.

4 Proposal to Close the Trimdon Grange site of Bluebell Meadow Primary School on 31 August 2020 [Key Decision: CYPS/06/2020]

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services which sought approval to close the Trimdon Grange site of Bluebell Meadow Primary School on 31 August 2020 and to operate solely from the Trimdon Village site from 1 September 2020 (for copy see file of minutes).

Cabinet noted that all pupils, with the exception of nursery pupils, had been taught on the Trimdon Village site of Bluebell Meadow primary school since January 2020 and the arrangement was working well. The Chair thanked all those who had participated in the consultation.

Resolved:

That the recommendation in the report be approved.

Councillor L Hovvells re-joined the meeting.

5 St Bede's RC Comprehensive Peterlee [Key Decision: CYPS/08/2020]

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services and the Corporate Director of Resources which provided an overview of educational aims and plans for academisation and catholic education in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, alongside the priority schools in their conversion strategy. The report reviewed the financial impact of the academy conversion of the last maintained Roman Catholic secondary school, St Bede's Roman Catholic Comprehensive in Peterlee and its conversion to join the Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, and, considered the accumulated financial deficit of the school, at the point of conversion (for copy see file of minutes).

Cabinet noted the leadership support provided by the Academy Trust had had a positive impact, with the achievement of a good overall Ofsted inspection in 2017. The school had continued to prosper and pupil numbers were on the upward trajectory. The school was moving to a more sustainable footing and the proposed deficit write-off would enable the school to convert and continue to improve.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

6 Overview and Scrutiny Review of Elective Home Education in County Durham

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which presented the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee's review report focusing on elective home education in County Durham (for copy see file of minutes).

The Chair welcomed Councillor H Smith, Chair of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee who presented the report and recommendations. Councillor Smith thanked the review group members and representatives from the council, partner agencies, parents, carers and their children for their valuable contribution to the review.

Councillor Gunn, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People, on behalf of the Cabinet, thanked Councillor Smith and members of the review group for their work. Cabinet noted the review was timely in the current climate, with large numbers of children being educated at home. Councillor Gunn added that Cabinet will continue to lobby government to ensure the suitability of home education and the safeguarding of children and young people.

The Cabinet welcomed the recommendations for a common framework for oversight of the quality of education and safeguarding of those electively home educated; to continue to ensure a good level of understanding in relation to special educational needs and disabilities in all school settings, and, to develop a good practice reporting tool, including concerns around bullying.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

7 High Needs Block Funding for SEND and Inclusion Support

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services and Corporate Director of Resources which provided an update on spend and pressures on the High Needs Block (HNB) of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) which supports Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and inclusion support services for children and young people.

The report provided an update on key work areas and planned next steps alongside support to learning providers and families and recovery planning as a result of the coronavirus outbreak (for copy see file of minutes).

Cabinet welcomed the additional funding from government into the High Needs Block for 2020-2021 although challenges remain in the resources available for work to support children with special educational needs disabilities and those requiring alternative education arrangements. The Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People's Services, Councillor O Gunn, stated she would, with the support of the schools forum, request the Secretary of State to consider support for SEND services as a matter of urgency, to enable the growing needs of children and young people to be met.

Cabinet welcomed the progress outlined in the report and the plan to seek to reduce the deficit built up to date, which should be kept under regular review, particularly in light of the coronavirus outbreak and its impact on the most vulnerable children.

Councillor Napier, Deputy Leader, urged the government to consider a sustainable funding settlement as part of the upcoming spending round for local government.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

8 Inspection of SEND Services

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services which informed Cabinet of progress across County Durham with SEND services, highlighted in the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) SEND re-visit in January 2020 and the publication of their letter in March 2020. The report also notified Cabinet of key current issues and proposed next steps following publication of the SEND re-visit outcome letter (for copy see file of minutes).

Cabinet noted the inspection undertaken in December 2017 highlighted four key areas for further improvement. It was acknowledged that since the initial inspection, a lot of work had been done and Cabinet thanked all those involved in the work. The Cabinet also noted the significant progress made with SEND services which Cabinet will further support, working closely with CCGs.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

9 Discharge of Transport Functions by Durham County Council 2020

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which provided an update on the transport activity carried out by the Council under delegation originally from the North East Combined Authority (NECA) which has continued under the North East Joint Transport Committee (for copy see file of minutes).

Cabinet noted the high level of customer satisfaction which at 92% was one of the highest levels nationally, and, acknowledged all of the good work throughout the county.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

10 2019/20 Final Outturn for the General Fund and Collection Fund

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided information on the:

- (a) final revenue and capital outturn for the General Fund for 2019/20;
- (b) final outturn for the Council's Council Tax and Business Rates Collection Fund for 2019/20;
- (c) use of and contributions to earmarked, cash limit and general reserves in year and the closing position regarding balances held at 31 March 2020.

(for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor J Shuttleworth asked why there had been a necessity to draw down £0.612m from the winter maintenance reserve, to offset an in-year overspend, during one of the mildest winters for some years. Councillor Stephens, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Local Services, explained the provision of winter maintenance was a statutory obligation. The cost of the service was driven by the weather and delivered in accordance with the winter maintenance policy. Although the perception of the winter season was that it was mild, winter maintenance activity actually increased by approximately 25% over that of the previous winter - 2018/19 - operating under the same policy.

The revenue budget for winter maintenance was supported by earmarked reserves to balance out pressures across winter seasons of varying activity.

Councillor Napier, Deputy Leader, commented that the revenue outturn position for 2019-20 was showing a small overspend demonstrating that maintaining spending within budget was becoming increasingly more difficult, with pressure from ten years of austerity. Cabinet noted the capital programme had been well managed and the position for business rates and council tax was positive during 2019-20. This will be monitored closely during the current financial year, with the impact of Covid-19. Cabinet thanked all those staff who had worked hard to ensure a positive financial position. The Deputy Leader urged all members of the Council to join him in seeking a fair funding settlement, based on need.

The Chair extended his thanks to finance staff for the preparation of the annual accounts and to all staff across the council for their efforts to meet targets in increasingly challenging circumstances. He added it is likely that the 2020 budget will be even more challenging and this will be monitored closely in the months ahead.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

11 The Impact of Covid-19 on Local Bus Services in County Durham

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on local bus operators and the involvement of the County Council in maintaining an essential network across County Durham (for copy see file of minutes).

The Cabinet thanked all bus operators for continuing their operation throughout the lockdown, keeping key workers connected, including Go North East, Arriva and all the smaller operators. Close work had been undertaken with the North East Bus Partnership and Joint Transport Committee to lobby government and lobbying will continue, for more sustained funding, to ensure support going forward.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

12 Exclusion of the Public

Resolved:

That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

13 Residual Waste Treatment: Energy Recovery Facility project update

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and the Corporate Director of Resources which updated on progress to participate in a joint procurement for a residual waste treatment solution (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.