

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a Meeting of **Cabinet** held remotely via Microsoft Teams on **Wednesday 17 March 2021 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 and A Surtees

**Apologies:**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Brian Stephens

**Also Present:**

Councillors J Clare, J Shuttleworth, T Tucker and M Wilkes

### **1 Public questions**

There were no public questions.

### **2 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 February 2021 were agreed as a correct record to be signed by the Chair.

### **3 Declarations of interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

### **4 Leisure Transformation & New Build Site Selection Update [Key Decision: REG/02/21]**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which provided an update on the leisure transformation programme approved by Cabinet in January 2020. The report set out progress to date including the next steps for the full development of the programme, and, sought approval for three preferred sites for new build leisure centres for Seaham, Chester-le-Street and Bishop Auckland (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Tucker, local member for Woodhouse Close division referred to the concerns raised in the report regarding the Tindale Crescent site. She commented that to move a leisure centre out of a deprived area would make it more difficult for people to access it, and, in an area where the infrastructure is not in place, this was not a cost effective, viable option for Bishop Auckland. She requested Cabinet to reconsider the proposal in the interests of the health and wellbeing of the residents of Woodhouse Close and the people of Bishop Auckland in general.

Councillor Marshall, Portfolio Holder for Economic Regeneration thanked Councillor Tucker for the question. He confirmed that detailed site evaluations had been completed, the matters raised had been considered, and there was provision for further feasibility, and a range of detailed assessments. Whilst site contamination, including mine shafts and conserving habitats had been considered to the appropriate level at this stage, it is accepted these are extremely important matters that are subject to further detailed work. In addressing the issue of accessibility, Councillor Marshall highlighted that the public consultation exercise identified that only 4% of customers use public transport and the majority arrive by car. In recommending the site, an equality impact assessment had been completed and further work was undertaken to explore public transport provision. This established that the site was served by an hourly direct bus service, and, by a number of indirect bus services. Further work will be explored to improve the pedestrian and public transport infrastructure and Stronger Towns funding and other initiatives will help to address this. The programme will work closely with other schemes towards the best joint outcomes for the new leisure site and the wider town as a whole.

Councillor Marshall explained that no services such as gas, electricity or sewers run through the site, however, there are services running close to the perimeter and the site design will consider this in more detail. During the site appraisal stage, it is standard practice to include risk items within the cost plan for the project. These risks will be addressed as the project develops and the cost plan will be amended as with any large construction project. Early site investigations have provided sufficient assurances that the risks that have been identified can be mitigated. It is unlikely that benefit will arise from co-locating a library at Tindale Crescent. The planned leisure facility, operating alongside the retail provision within the Tindale area makes for the best mix of services. A library will often lend itself more naturally to a community-focussed co-location and more naturally lends itself to a community hub type facility in Woodhouse Close. Councillor Marshall concluded his response by saying that taking this approach, the Council is able to generate a better overall mix of service provision for the town and surrounding areas, whilst at the same time maximising regeneration opportunities.

Councillor Wilkes, local member for Framwellgate and Newton Hall division thanked Cabinet for improving the environmental sustainability of the leisure proposals and requested that Cabinet advise on the £14 million increase in the original budget from January, as there appeared to be no breakdown as to where this additional funding will be spent, and, on what. Given the lack of detail and the concerns raised by himself and residents, Councillor Wilkes asked the Portfolio Holder for Economic Regeneration to confirm whether Abbey Leisure Centre will retain a steam/sauna provision, whether the increase in refurbishment costs includes the renewal of the changing room areas and showers, and, whether the increase in refurbishment costs includes any additional works which were unfunded in the original report of over two years ago. Councillor Wilkes also asked if the Portfolio Holder could confirm whether the intention remains for Abbey Leisure Centre to open on a full-time basis, and, that the extended opening hours will continue. He pointed out that residents had waited over two years for the start of works and requested assurance that work will begin at Abbey Leisure Centre in this calendar year.

Thanking Councillor Wilkes for the question, Councillor Marshall replied that the focus on this phase of work had been on site selection for new build leisure centres. The facility mix for each venue is still to be finalised and will involve the careful balancing of wellbeing, sustainability and accessibility. He added the Council will work through the details over next round of engagement in the summer, including working with young people, disabled people and other groups in the community. He confirmed the showers and changing facilities had been included as part of the proposals at this stage and their inclusion will be subject to the final refinement of the project scope. The costs presented in the report include a broader range of considerations which reflect further refinement of the planning for the new leisure centres which takes account of more detailed on-site surveys and investigations. With regard to opening times, this level of detail will be developed with the business plan and facility mix and operating proposals will need to take account of changes resulting from the global pandemic, and it will not be possible to confirm final dates until the facility mix is finalised and the further stage of engagement is complete. Councillor Marshall assured Councillor Wilkes that a final report, providing full details of the finalised proposals including costs, benefits and the delivery timeline, will be brought to Cabinet in the autumn.

The Chair then invited Councillor Wilkes to ask a question on behalf of Councillor Huntington, local member for Shildon and Dene Valley division. In his question Councillor Huntington expressed concern that Shildon and Dean Valley division has some of the lowest health outcomes in the county and he commented that the report did not provide clarity on the future for Shildon.

He asked Cabinet to guarantee that Shildon will either be provided with a new leisure centre, or, that the existing centre will be fully refurbished.

Councillor Marshall confirmed the clear commitment to the continued provision of leisure facilities in Shildon, pointing out that recently £264,000 had been spent on refurbishing the athletics track, athletics equipment and associated changing facilities and grandstand. This element of work had been taken forward first, to take advantage of £100,000 of external funding provided by Sport England. Now that this work had been completed to a very high standard, the project team are turning their attention to plans for the leisure centre and wider site, and local members will be kept informed as discussions progress.

Moving the report, Councillor Marshall emphasised the importance of supporting health and wellbeing as the county emerges from the pandemic. He commented that the report presents innovative plans which will see all the existing sites remain open during the build period and this will ensure the Council continues to support the community to access health and wellbeing activities. Seconding the report, Councillor Shaw, Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Assets said the plans contribute to the commitment to develop an overarching health strategy and this aligns with the key strategic priorities for the Council.

Councillor Allen, Portfolio Holder for Transformation, Culture and Tourism welcomed the new centres for Seaham, Chester le Street and Bishop Auckland, pointing out they will also benefit the surrounding towns and villages. She added the community hub development at Woodhouse Close which will be co-designed with local people and organisations, will incorporate library provision, which is particularly important as the library at Woodhouse Close is one of the most used libraries in the county. The new proposal will do more to meet the needs of the local community and Councillor Allen said she is looking forward to meeting residents to discuss their ideas as to what they would like to see in the community hub.

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services and Rural Issues, Councillor Patterson, said the report presents one component of a broad network of facilities adding that she was pleased to see it includes the important contribution of community leisure organisations. She thanked all residents who had participated and welcomed further public engagement in the summer with updates on the Council's Leisure Strategy to follow later in the year.

**Resolved:**

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

## **5 Forecast of Revenue and Capital Outturn 2020/21 - Period to 31 December 2020 and Update on Progress towards achieving MTFP(10) savings**

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

- (a) updated forecast revenue and capital outturn for 2020/21, based on the position to 31 December 2020;
- (b) updated forecast for the council tax and business rates collection fund position at 31 March 2021, based on the position to 31 December 2020;
- (c) updated forecast use of and contributions to earmarked, cash limit and general reserves in 2020/21 and the estimated balances to be held at 31 March 2021.

The report also sought approval of the revised capital programme, other budget adjustments, proposed sums treated as outside of the cash limit in year, and, write off deficit schools balances as a result of academy conversions. Cabinet was also provided with an update on progress towards achieving MTFP(10) savings in 2020/21 (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Shuttleworth referred to the impact of COVID-19 on Council finances and asked what amount of government grant is expected to cover the additional cost impact of £3.771 million, and if this is not fully funded, from which reserve/service area will the monies be found?

Councillor Napier, Portfolio Holder for Finance, thanked Councillor Shuttleworth for his question and clarified the £3.771 million figure referred to was the Resources Service Grouping net COVID-19 related costs incurred, not the overall Council position, which was outlined in sections 54 to 59 of the report. The latest forecasts are that the Council will incur COVID-19 costs and loss of income of around £65 million this year, offset by COVID-19 underspending of around £16 million. The net position is broadly in line with the grant funding received but factoring in the Council Tax losses, falls short of the funding needed to offset the impacts of COVID-19 on the Council. If funding is insufficient to meet these net costs and loss of income either this year or next, this would be a call on the general reserve.

Moving the report, Councillor Napier commended Finance Officers for their comprehensive report. He commented on the constantly changing landscape which had made financial forecasting particularly challenging over the past year. He highlighted that the Council had kept within budget, whilst investing huge sums of money to support communities and businesses and the prudent financial management will continue to be tested in the future due to the uncertainty regarding the comprehensive spending review.

In this, his final budget report to Cabinet, Councillor Napier spoke of how proud he had been to work with such a strong financial team and he expressed his gratitude to officers and members for their support throughout the years. The Chair, seconding the recommendations, echoed Councillor Napier's thanks to officers for their efforts during this unprecedented time. The Chair extended his personal thanks to Councillor Napier for his work as finance Portfolio Holder.

**Resolved:**

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

**6 Quarter Three, 2020/21 Performance Management Report**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Interim Corporate Director of Resources which presented progress towards achieving the key outcomes of the council's corporate performance framework (for copy see file of minutes).

**Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

**7 Annual Review of the Constitution**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer which presented proposals for the revision of the Council's

Constitution (for copy see file of minutes).

**Resolved:**

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

**8 County Durham Health and Social Care Integration update**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Adult and Health Services which provided an update on the integration of health and social care in County Durham and sought support for the proposed next steps to further embed integrated arrangements within the County (for copy see file of minutes).

Speaking in support of the proposal, Councillor Hovvels, Portfolio Holder for Adult and Health Services commented on the benefits of the County Durham Care Partnership which had proved invaluable during the COVID-19

pandemic, adding that the strong partnership working will stand the Council in good stead ahead of the long-awaited government reforms.

Endorsing these comments, Councillor Gunn, Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People's Services agreed that partnership working will be even more important in the future in order to deal with high levels of demand and to make the best use of the resources available.

**Resolved:**

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

## **9 Climate Change Emergency Response Plan - Year 1 Update**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change which provided an annual update on progress of the Climate Emergency Response Plan, including an assessment of the impact COVID-19 has had on Council and countywide carbon emissions (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Marshall placed on record Cabinet's thanks to staff for the work done to progress the climate emergency plan, he also thanked Councillor Clare, the Council's Climate Change Champion, for the enormous amount of work he had personally undertaken, and he also thanked those partners, residents, schools and businesses who had contributed to the delivery of the plan. He highlighted that the Council had been named as having the best climate action initiative in the country by the Association of Public Sector Excellence and he said the accolade was testament to all those involved.

Durham County Council's Climate Change Champion, Councillor Clare expressed his gratitude to Councillor Stuart Dunn for bringing about the original climate change emergency motion. He also thanked Alan Patrickson, Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change, Oliver Sherratt, Head of Environment, and Cabinet for their commitment to the cause.

He spoke with great respect for the Council's Low Carbon Team who had made it their mission not only to maintain, but expand the momentum of the programme during the pandemic. He added that work will continue to embed climate action into the everyday working of Durham County Council.

Councillor Marshall complimented the work which shows the Council's commitment to tackling climate change, and which had gained both national and international recognition. Councillor Patterson as Rural Champion expressed her pleasure at the progress, particularly in light of the challenge of the pandemic and thanked Councillor Clare for his work, adding that she is looking forward to further updates in the future.

**Resolved:**

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

**10 Woodland Management Overview and Tree Planting Opportunities with Young People**

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services which outlined the range of measures underway in managing the County Council's woodlands and expanding tree cover across the county. The report also sought approval of a scheme designed to maximise young people's involvement with tree planting activities (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Gunn paid tribute to the good work of the Durham Youth Council which had encouraged schools to include environmental issues as part of everyday school life by asking schools to consider how green they are, and she welcomed this opportunity for further environmental engagement with young people. Seconding the report, Councillor Hovvels highlighted that the county's woodland is a unique asset, the benefits of which had become increasingly important to the community during the pandemic, to improve health and wellbeing.

**Resolved:**

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

**11 Durham County Council Chargepoint Delivery Plan**

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth and Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change which sought agreement to adopt the Durham County Council Chargepoint Delivery Plan. The report set out five key actions which will facilitate the uptake of electric vehicles across County Durham for residents, business and the Council's own fleet and complement the Council's Climate Emergency Response Plan (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Shaw said the plan will promote equal opportunities to access charging infrastructure in safe and convenient locations, increasing public confidence in switching to electric vehicles. Adding her support, Councillor Patterson commented that one of the important aspects of the plan is that it recognises rural communities through providing new charging points in rural

areas which will encourage take up and help to address the challenges of rural isolation.

**Resolved:**

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

**12 County Durham Housing Strategy Targeted Delivery Plans**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which sought Cabinet approval for the first phase of the Housing Strategy Targeted Delivery Plans including the programme to deliver future phases (for copy see file of minutes).

Moving the report, Councillor Shaw highlighted the benefits of Targeted Delivery Plans including addressing the issue of long-term empty homes, identifying opportunities for the future provision of older persons housing, and complementing the selective licensing proposals.

**Resolved:**

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

**13 Agnes Street, Stanley - Proposed Compulsory Purchase Order**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which sought authority from Cabinet to make a compulsory purchase order pursuant to section 226(1)(a) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 in relation to a site known as Agnes Street in Stanley (for copy see file of minutes).

Members noted the development of Agnes Street, Stanley as a site requiring improvement is consistent with the Towns and Villages Strategy and that the report outlined evidence of demand for the completed units. Councillor Marshall thanked the Corporate Land and Property team for their hard work.

**Resolved:**

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

**14 Towns and Villages Place Shaping - Approach to Regeneration of Buildings and Land**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which provided details of the integrated approach to place-based regeneration (for copy see file of minutes).

Members welcomed the proactive approach, working with the community and key partners to ensure improvements in locations where land and buildings have a detrimental impact, with the report outlining that compulsory purchase order powers should be used only where there is a clear justification to do so.

**Resolved:**

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

**15 Council Homes Delivery - Purchase of Affordable Housing units at Gilesgate**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which sought authorisation from Cabinet for the purchase of six bungalows for rent at Gilesgate, Durham from Chapter Homes for the purpose of providing council homes. This purchase will complement the construction of new council housing as previously agreed by Cabinet (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Shaw spoke of his support for the Council to work with Chapter Homes on this provision of high-quality council homes, and, seconding the report, Councillor Marshall commented that this is an important step in addressing unmet housing demand and he added he was looking forward to similar proposals in the future.

**Resolved:**

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

**16 Covid Recovery and Town Centre Parking Charges**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which sought to review the provision of subsidised or free parking for centres across County Durham for both on-street and off-street parking as a stimulus to support the economic recovery from the global pandemic (for copy see file of minutes).

Moving the report, Councillor Marshall referred to the many measures which will be required to support the response to the pandemic to ensure town centres are sustainable and accessible, and said the approach to free town centre parking to all town centre car parks after 2.00 pm will support access.

Seconding the report, Councillor Patterson referred to the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee's review into town centre retail which identified town centre parking as one of a wide range of issues impacting on the success of town centres, and, she added she was pleased

to see that the report recognises the challenges of town centre parking and proposes a sensible approach.

**Resolved:**

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

**17 Economic Recovery and Prosperity: Levelling up and Investment for County Durham**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which provided an overview of the County Durham economy, considering the baseline conditions prior to March 2020, and the additional challenges faced by the Covid pandemic and Brexit (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Marshall commented that the report proposed a long term, evidence-based, economic strategy and identified a number of national funding streams which the Council will pursue, as it is clear that the impact of the pandemic will take years to realise. He highlighted key priority areas including the growth of the rural economy and the importance of education, training and skills, and spoke of his hope that the government will work with the Council to deliver the programme.

Councillor Shaw pointed out that Durham has much to offer new businesses and he provided assurance that the Council will continue to ensure the right infrastructure is in place to support new jobs, including the availability of housing. He raised concerns that the government's new methodology in respect of the levelling-up fund will not target areas of deprivation. Cabinet members provided views that the government funding requested is fair, in order to attract more jobs and improve aspirations, and, called upon the government to provide the necessary investment required to level-up the county.

**Resolved:**

That the recommendations in the report be approved.