

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Cabinet** held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Wednesday 9 February 2022 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor A Hopgood, Leader of the Council, in the Chair

Cabinet Members:

Councillors R Bell, T Henderson, S McDonnell, J Rowlandson, E Scott, P Sexton, J Shuttleworth and M Wilkes

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A Shield

Also Present:

Councillors J Blakey, S Deinali, G Hood, G Hutchinson, P Jopling and M Stead

1 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations.

4 Medium Term Financial Plan 2022/23 to 2025/26 and Revenue and Capital Budget 2022/23 (Key Decision: CORP/R/21/02)

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided comprehensive financial information to enable Cabinet to agree the 2022/23 balanced revenue budget, details of significant

investments in key front-line services, an outline Medium Term Financial Plan MTFP(12) 2022/23 to 2025/26 and a fully funded capital programme to be recommended to Full Council on 23 February 2022 (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Councillor Bell thanked the Corporate Director of Resources and officers for the comprehensive report which represented the culmination of many months of work. It was the fifth and final report on the 2022/23 budget proposals and mtfp 12 forecasts in advance of the budget setting process at full council on 23 February 2022. He explained that it brings together the revenue and capital budget proposals for next year and is a set of budget proposals which he believed would be the envy of many councils. They have been able to balance the budget while making investments in key front-line services, with no increase in the core council tax, and no reliance on the use of reserves to balance the core budget next year. He explained there would be a proposal to increase the adult social care precept by 3% next year.

The budget included an ambitious capital programme with a £113m new investment, bringing the total capital programme of £602m over the next four years. He advised that there were significant investments which would produce visible and noticeable improvements to service delivery. He advised of the additional funding provided by government next year, and by having a thorough review of the council's earmarked reserves they have been able to release and re-prioritise £15m.

He explained that the cost pressures in adult and social care were enormous and even with the maximum increase in adult social care precept being applied this still fell short of the budget pressures faced.

It was disappointing that the settlement from government was only for one year, and with that and then not knowing the fair funding formula there was clearly significant uncertainty beyond 2022/23. He advised that this made financial planning difficult and depending on the outcome of the review and government funding it may require difficult choices to be made, however financial planning for next year would commence.

Councillor Hopgood thanked the Corporate Director and his team, and all officers for their work in producing the comprehensive report. She explained that this was the first set of budget proposals that they would be taking to full council as the joint administration, and that they demonstrate the scale of the ambition they had for the council and the county. She explained the scale of the budget pressures and of the significant investments they were making. She advised that the proposals were prudent and affordable which have been informed by community conversation, and consultation.

The one-year funding settlement from government was disappointing which along with the planned fair funding review was casting a shadow over developing plans beyond next year. She pointed out that next year the budget was balanced and had been done so without the need to raise the core council tax or use reserves to balance it and advised that this would be a position that many other councils would be envious of.

The joint administration had undertaken a review of all of the council's earmarked reserves and other reserves, following which they had been able to re-prioritise and redirect some towards meeting the county's and the communities' priorities, which would make a huge difference to people's lives.

She explained that applying an increase in the adult social care precept had not been taken lightly, it had been borne out of financial necessity to help fund the significant budget pressures in those areas, and to meet needs of vulnerable people. She emphasised the importance of protection for those on low incomes and was pleased full council had supported the continuation of the council tax scheme, and the extension of the top up scheme into next year. She explained the difficult challenges ahead for the budgets from 2023 onwards which they would start to plan for immediately after the budget had been set.

Councillor Shuttleworth thanked the Corporate Director of Resources and his team for the report, and referenced the significant input required in producing it which is undertaken across the whole authority. He explained his support for the budget proposals and referenced those in particular in his portfolio area with the significant investment in highways services which would also help support investment into rural communities. The proposals would also address the maintenance of the unclassified road issues which had been highlighted in the TAMP report at the previous cabinet meeting. He agreed that making the decisions on the budget setting were not easy however believed the right balance had been struck, and would support the proposals to go to full council.

Councillor Wilkes advised of his support for the investment in front-line services and on tackling climate change. He thanked the officers involved in developing the report, and in particular thanked the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change, and his team for their advice and support. He referenced the pressures in neighbourhood budgets, and welcomed investments in clean and green service, neighbourhood warden service, public rights of way and countryside management, pest control service, waste disposal, which would be a welcome investment in front line services and would make a noticeable difference. He also advised of the range of measures in the budget to tackle climate change which included investment to start to decarbonise the council's buildings and replace gas

boilers, and in the low carbon team. He advised that the council was serious about making the council one of the greenest in the country. He was pleased to support the proposals and recommend them to full council.

Councillor Sexton re-iterated thanks to Corporate Director of Resources and all of the Corporate Management Team for their working in producing the report. He referred to the size of social care service budgets for vulnerable adults and children, and that it was right to prioritise investment in these key statutory services. He welcomed the thorough review of the earmarked reserves and the re-prioritisation of these budgets. He explained that these decisions were difficult to make however there was no other option than to increase the adult social care precept to help to offset the significant cost pressures faced in social care.

Councillor Henderson thanked the Corporate Director of Resources for the work undertaken by him and his team. He welcomed the additional budget provision for looked after children and home to school transport. The areas have had significant budget uplifts in recent years but continue to be under increasing pressures. He welcomed the additional funding for schools, and special educational needs, and advised of the significant capital investment in schools.

Councillor Rowlandson in advising of his thanks to the Corporate Director of Resources and his team advised of his support for the budget proposals. He welcomed investments in allotments, countryside estate, the community protection service, and provision to address the current skills and enterprise gap. He also referenced the investments in playing pitches, and parks. He noted the matched funding for the councils ambitious levelling up bids which would enable the submission of bids for the investments in the other five constituency areas. The budget would improve lives and opportunities of local communities and businesses.

Councillor McDonnell thanked the Corporate Director of Resources and the team for the detailed report. She explained that over many years the council had supported to protect vulnerable people, and that this would continue by retaining the local council tax reduction scheme, and extending the top up scheme into next year. She advised of the support to the welfare assistance scheme, and through a range of interventions with the council's partners support people in crisis and also help address the underlying issues. She advised of her support for the proposals.

Resolved:

Upon a recorded vote being taken Cabinet unanimously agreed to recommend to full Council, approval of the recommendations set out in the report.

5 School Admission Arrangements Academic Year 2023/24 (Key Decision: CYPS/02/2022)

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services which sought approval of the proposed admission arrangements and oversubscription criteria for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools for the 2023/24 academic year (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

6 Tenancy Strategy 2022-2027

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which sought approval to update the Tenancy Strategy 2022-27; elect to adopt an Introductory Tenancy Scheme for the Council's housing stock and approve the Council's Secure and Introductory Tenancy Agreement (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.