

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At an **Ordinary Meeting** of the County Council held in the **The Main Hall - Spennymoor Leisure Centre** on **Wednesday 22 September 2021** at **10.00 am**

Present:

Councillor W Stelling (Chair) in the Chair

Councillors E Adam, R Adcock-Forster, V Andrews, J Atkinson, P Atkinson, B Avery, B Bainbridge (Vice-Chair), A Batey, A Bell, C Bell, R Bell, G Binney, D Boyes, D Brown, L Brown, J Cairns, J Chaplow, R Charlton-Lainé, J Charlton, J Cosslett, B Coult, R Crute, M Currah, S Deinali, T Duffy, K Earley, J Elmer, K Fantarrow, L Fenwick, C Fletcher, D Freeman, J Griffiths, O Gunn, C Hampson, D Haney, A Hanson, P Heaviside, T Henderson, S Henig, J Higgins, L Holmes, C Hood, A Hopgood, L Hovvels, C Hunt, G Hutchinson, A Jackson, M Johnson, N Jones, P Jopling, L Kennedy, C Lines, L Maddison, R Manchester, C Marshall, C Martin, L Mavin, B McAloon, M McGaun, D McKenna, M McKeon, I McLean, S McMahan, J Miller, B Moist, P Molloy, D Mulholland, D Nicholls, J Nicholson, D Oliver, R Ormerod, E Peeke, R Potts, P Pringle, J Purvis, J Quinn, A Reed, G Richardson, I Roberts, M Roberts, K Robson, K Rooney, J Rowlandson, A Savory, E Scott, P Sexton, K Shaw, A Shield, M Simmons, A Simpson, M Stead, A Sterling, D Stoker, T Stubbs, A Surtees, D Sutton-Lloyd, F Tinsley, S Townsend, C Varty, M Walton, A Watson, M Wilkes, M Wilson, S Wilson and D Wood

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors K Batey, J Blakey, I Cochrane, K Hawley, D Howarth, J Howey, B Kellett, E Mavin, S Quinn, S Robinson, J Shuttleworth, T Smith, P Taylor and E Waldock

Prior to the commencement of the meeting the Chair reported with regret the passing of former Chester-le-Street District Councillor Richard Court who represented the Lumley Ward on the District Council from 2007 to 2009. Members gave a moments reflection out of respect to Richard.

1 To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2021 were confirmed by the Council as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

2 To receive any declarations of interest from Members

There were no declarations of interest in relation to any items of business on the agenda

3 Chair's Announcements

The Chair informed Council that, as restrictions had gradually eased, he had started to resume some of the more regular functions as Chair of the Council as follows:

- met with the Police and Crime Commissioner for County Durham and Darlington, Joy Allen;
- visited Villa Real and Bishop Ian Ramsey Schools, attended the Battle of Britain Service in Durham Cathedral and had visited the Land, Air and Sea Museum in Sunderland;
- attended the Seaham Food Festival. It was fantastic to see the thousands of people supporting the event to support independent traders, boost business recovery and enjoy the outdoor theatre, music and taster activities against the stunning backdrop of Seaham. Seaham Food Festival was just one of a number of events which helped to showcase the county's cultural offer as the Council bid to become UK City of Culture 2025. The Chair was sure that the Bishop Auckland Food festival taking place on 2 and 3 October would be equally as successful.

Councillor A Hopgood, Leader of the Council, **moved** a Motion without Notice under Council Procedure Rule 11 to change the order of business on the Agenda to consider Item No 8 as the next Item so that the Interim Chief Executive could join the meeting. The Leader also **moved** that standing orders be suspended to allow Motions to be heard and debated to a maximum time of 12.15 p.m. to allow the Agenda to be completed before the 2½ hour deadline. **Seconded** by Councillor R Bell, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance.

Both Motions were **unanimously** agreed.

4 Appointment of Chief Executive - Report of the Chief Officer Appointments Committee

The Council considered a report of the Chief Officer Appointments Committee regarding the appointment of the Chief Executive of Durham County Council (for copy see file of Minutes).

Moved by Councillor Hopgood, **Seconded** by Councillor C Marshall and

Resolved:

That John Hewitt be appointed to the post of Chief Executive Officer with immediate effect.

John Hewitt, Chief Executive, joined the meeting.

5 Leader's Report

The Council noted a report from the Leader of the Council as follows:

The Leader welcomed all Members back following the summer recess and hoped they were all able to take some time out to enjoy the warm weather and recharge their batteries.

The council's response to the pandemic remained at the heart of much of the council's work, although the Leader was pleased to report that the vast majority of services that had to close due to Government restrictions were now back up and running again.

The council had also launched its Covid Acts of Kindness campaign, to highlight and recognise some of the wonderful things people across the region had done to support others during the pandemic and to provide ongoing support. If any Member knew someone who deserved to be nominated, more information was available on the Beat Covid North East website.

County Durham's campaign to become UK City of Culture 2025 was gathering pace, with the next stage of the bidding process approaching. The Leader encouraged everyone to visit the Durham 2025 website and share the council's social media messages with as many people as possible.

Last week, Cabinet met for the first time following the summer recess and approved plans to invest £49.6 million in the expansion of NETPark at Sedgefield. The third phase of developing the region's premier science and technology park would help create more and better jobs for residents, and would be worth up to £625 million to the county's economy.

The County Durham Care Academy had been awarded a £70,165 grant by the Workforce Development Fund to help local care providers cover the expense of upskilling their staff. This funding was in addition to a £44,000 grant awarded last year and would assist in expanding the academy's training offer.

During the recess, young people across the county received their GCSE and A level results. These students experienced unprecedented challenges during their last academic year, including two lockdowns and periods in between when many students were likely to have had to self-isolate. The Leader was sure council would join her in praising all of the county's young

people for the dedication and resilience in these unprecedented times and also in thanking the school and council staff who had supported them.

Over the summer break, the council's Area Action Partnerships provided a wide range of support to children and young people through the free Fun and Food programme. The initiative provided healthy food for those who took part and was set up in response to the fact that some families struggled to keep children fed and entertained while they were off school.

An estimated 190 community facilities in the county were set to benefit from combined funding of more than £700,000 to help them recover from the pandemic. Venues had been invited to apply for grants from the Covid Outbreak Management Fund to help them reopen safely.

The Leader was pleased to report that visitors to Chester-le-Street could now enjoy free internet access, with the introduction of public wi-fi in the town centre. Funded by the council, the free public wi-fi was part of the council's multimillion-pound Towns and Villages scheme to enhance the vibrancy of communities across the county and aimed to help boost footfall in the town following the easing of coronavirus restrictions.

The autumn would see the return of Lumiere, the UK's leading light festival, which would run across four nights from 18 to 21 November. The council was aiming for this year's event to be bigger and better than ever to light up the county as the dark nights took hold.

Following the success of Seaham Food Festival, Bishop Auckland Food Festival returned on Saturday 2 and Sunday 3 October. The event would offer a packed programme of cookery demonstrations and entertainment as well as fresh produce courtesy of the county's finest food producers.

6 Questions from the Public

One public question had been received from Mr Cunningham as follows:

Reading from the Council's latest Statement of Accounts on Page 124, I note that the Council holds a remainder, from the original gift of six millions Sterling of taxpayers' cash: of three million one hundred and sixty thousand Pounds Sterling which has been 'invested' (my emphasis) in redeemable preference shares in Durham Cricket Community Interest Company (DCCIC); formerly the Durham County Cricket Club. My training and expertise is in heavy Electrical Engineering, and not in Finance, but, having studied the Accounts of the DCCIC, even a neophyte or mere beginner would swiftly realise that there is little or no chance of seeing even a fraction of that cash owed the Council being either available or still there at the end of the "Loan period" (again, my emphasis), mainly due to the parlous financial

position of the aforementioned DCCIC; which owes nearly £6 million pounds Sterling. The Council's duty is to supervise and care for the cash entrusted to it by the people who voted for you, and should make every effort to recoup any money handed to prop up inadequately financed and poorly-run risky endeavours. As I have previously stated, I am no financial expert, but I would ask the Leaders of the New Administration if we should not indeed see the Council, as the majority Debtor, strongly advise the DCCIC directors that they should provide new capital; and allow the redemption of the Loan: or look at the viability of forcing this Company into Liquidation, sell the land to a developer, and see the return of Council Taxpayer's cash from the developer back into the Council's bank accounts?

Councillor R Bell, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance thanked Mr Cunningham for his question and gave the following response:

Durham County Cricket Club is one of the only major representative sports teams that represent the county on the national stage and able to bring international sport to the county and ensure the county of Durham receives exposure on a global stage.

This has been recognised in the past, with the county council providing financial support to the club in the form of loans, very much in line with the support other local authorities across the country have provided to their county cricket clubs. At the same time, the council has always sought to be prudent in the funding provided, has set clear expectations on repayment of any sums it has loaned it and has sought to protect the public funding invested.

In this regard the county council provided loans of £4.3 million to the cricket club between 2009 and 2014, a period that culminated in the staging of an Ashes five day game at Chester-le-Street in 2013. Over the period 2009 to 2017 the cricket club repaid £560,000 of principal repayments and were also required to pay £750,000 of interest that was being charged at rates of up to 7.5%. This interest return to the council being significantly higher than what the council could have received from investing this sum elsewhere.

During 2016 and 2017 the council worked in partnership with the English Cricket Board to secure the future of the cricket club. As part of this arrangement the English Cricket Board agreed to write off all of their debt whilst the council agreed to convert its remaining outstanding debt of £3.740 million into ten-year redeemable preference shares. In this circumstance the redeemable preference shares do not attract dividend payments but the value of the redeemable preference shares must be repaid to the council over the 10 year period to 2027.

In that regard the cricket club have continued to commit to repay sums to reduce the value of the sum to be redeemed even during the period of the pandemic. In total since 2017 the club have redeemed £780,000 from the outstanding sum, resulting in the sum still to be redeemed reducing to £2.960 million currently. The council have board membership to the club and have access to all financial performance information. This would indicate that the club are in a stronger position that at any time over the last 10 years and are now receiving additional income in relation to the new 'hundred' cricket competition.

To summarise, the council has provided £4.3 million of financial support to the cricket club, with this support provided a number of years ago now. To date the cricket club have repaid or redeemed £1.340 million or 30% of this sum, with £2.960 million still left to be redeemed. Interest repayments of £760,000 have been received. In line with the 10 year redemption deadline, the council fully expects that the outstanding £2.960 million will be redeemed by 2027 and are content that the improved financial position of the club will ensure this is the outcome that is achieved.

7 Petitions

There were no petitions for consideration.

8 Report from the Cabinet

The Council noted a report from the Cabinet which provided information on issues considered by the Cabinet at its meeting held on 7 July 2021 (for copy see file of Minutes).

9 Motions on Notice

Moved by Councillor J Miller, **Seconded** by Councillor L Hovvels

In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was highlighted that many school children go hungry during school holidays, with the campaign for central Government to fund free school meals. However, what was missed is that school holidays take place every year, and not just during pandemics. This means that children are at risk of hunger every year-round. And it is not just children that are at risk of hunger, as many parents across the County are struggling with being able to afford the household necessities, with food being just one example. Some adults are working multiple jobs but are still struggling with this issue. And when the pandemic is finally over, and the impact on family finances truly comes to light, this problem will become bigger and harder.

A Food Action Plan would be able to highlight the areas across the County that are most affected by this crisis, and enable a local response, by empowering community groups, AAPs and local councillors to become involved in supporting those that need the Council's help.

Therefore, this Council resolves to:

Request the lead Member for Food Poverty within Cabinet, to work across all parties within the Council, to create a consistent and inclusive Food Action Plan that reflects and addresses the needs of all families across County Durham.

An Amendment was **Moved** by Councillor A Shield, Portfolio Holder for Equality and Inclusion, **Seconded** by Councillor T Duffy

Therefore, this Council resolves to:

To request that the appropriate Portfolio Holder within the Joint Administration Request the lead Member for involved in dealing with Food Poverty within Cabinet, to work works with all partners, stakeholders across all parties within and the relevant officers of this the Council, to develop create a consistent and a holistic and all-encompassing inclusive Food Action Plan Poverty Strategy that reflects and addresses the needs of all vulnerable and disadvantaged families across County Durham, and to promote effective engagement and positive interaction with all members to ensure that families in need are fully and comprehensively supported.

Councillor C Marshall questioned the legality of the wording Joint Administration in the amendment and whether there was any formal agreement establishing the Joint Administration. There was no reference to the Joint Administration in the Constitution. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that there was a Memorandum of Understanding between the Groups which had formed the Joint Administration and that Cabinet had been appointed in accordance with the Council's Constitution. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that the amendment was valid.

Councillor R Crute informed Council that he wished to move an amendment to the amendment to remove the term Joint Administration and replace it with Cabinet. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised Council that under the Rules of Debate only one amendment could be moved at a time.

Councillor P Sexton **moved** that the Amendment be put to the vote, **Seconded** by Councillor J Nicholson. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services informed Council that under Council Procedure Rules if, in Council's

view, it considered the matter had been sufficiently discussed, the procedural motion would be put to the vote.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services clarified that a vote was being taken on the procedural motion to put the amendment to a vote.

Upon a vote being taken it was

Resolved:

That the amendment be put to the vote.

For the Amendment

Councillors B Avery, B Bainbridge, A Bell, C Bell, R Bell, D Brown, L Brown, J Cairns, J Charlton, J Cosslett, B Coult, M Currah, T Duffy, J Elmer, K Fantarrow, D Freeman, D Haney, P Heaviside, T Henderson, L Holmes, C Hood, A Hopgood, C Hunt, G Hutchinson, A Jackson, N Jones, P Jopling, C Lines, L Maddison, C Martin, L Mavin, B McAloon, M McGaun, B Moist, P Molloy, J Nicholson, D Oliver, R Ormerod, E Peeke, R Potts, J Quinn, A Reed, G Richardson, M I Roberts, K Robson, K Rooney, J Rowlandson, A Savory, E Scott, P Sexton, A Shield, M Simmons, A Simpson, M Stead, W Stelling, A Sterling, D Stoker, T Stubbs, D Sutton-Lloyd, M Walton, A Watson and M Wilkes.

Against the Amendment

Councillors E Adam, R Adcock-Forster, V Andrews, J Atkinson, P Atkinson, A Batey, G Binney, D Boyes, J Chaplow, R Charlton-Lainé, R Crute, S Deinali, K Earley, L Fenwick, C Fletcher, J Griffiths, O Gunn, C Hampson, A Hanson, S Henig, J Higgins, L Hovvels, M Johnson, L Kennedy, R Manchester, C Marshall, D McKenna, M McKeon, I McLean, S McMahon, J Miller, D Mulholland, D Nicholls, P Pringle, J Purvis, I Roberts, K Shaw, A Surtees, F Tinsley, A Townsend, C Varty, M Wilson, S Wilson and D Wood.

The Amendment was **carried** and therefore became the Substantive Motion

An Amendment was **moved** by Councillor R Crute, **Seconded** by Councillor K Shaw, that the words 'Joint Administration' be removed from the Substantive Motion and replaced with the word 'Cabinet'.

Councillor M McKeown **Moved** a procedural motion that the Amendment be put to the vote, **Seconded** by Councillor D Wood. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that there as there were no Members registered to speak Councillor Crute's Amendment could be put to the vote without the need for a vote on the procedural motion.

For the Amendment

Councillors E Adam, R Adcock-Forster, V Andrews, J Atkinson, P Atkinson, A Batey, G Binney, D Boyes, J Chaplow, R Charlton-Lainé, R Crute, S Deinali, K Earley, L Fenwick, C Fletcher, J Griffiths, O Gunn, C Hampson, A Hanson, S Henig, J Higgins, L Hovvells, M Johnson, L Kennedy, C Lines, R Manchester, C Marshall, D McKenna, M McKeon, I McLean, S McMahon, J Miller, D Mulholland, D Nicholls, P Pringle, J Purvis, I Roberts, K Shaw, A Surtees, F Tinsley, A Townsend, C Varty, M Wilson, S Wilson, and D Wood.

Against the Amendment

Councillors B Avery, B Bainbridge, A Bell, C Bell, R Bell, D Brown, L Brown, J Cairns, J Charlton, J Cosslett, B Coult, M Currah, T Duffy, J Elmer, K Fantarrow, D Freeman, D Haney, P Heaviside, T Henderson, L Holmes, C Hood, A Hopgood, C Hunt, G Hutchinson, A Jackson, N Jones, P Jopling, L Maddison, C Martin, L Mavin, B McAloon, M McGaun, B Moist, P Molloy, J Nicholson, D Oliver, R Ormerod, E Peeke, R Potts, J Quinn, A Reed, G Richardson, M I Roberts, K Robson, K Rooney, J Rowlandson, A Savory, E Scott, P Sexton, A Shield, M Simmons, A Simpson, M Stead, W Stelling, A Sterling, D Stoker, T Stubbs, D Sutton-Lloyd, M Walton, A Watson and M Wilkes.

The Amendment was **Lost**.

A vote was then taken on the Substantive Motion.

For the Motion

Councillors E Adam, R Adcock-Forster, V Andrews, J Atkinson, P Atkinson, B Avery, B Bainbridge, A Batey, A Bell, C Bell, R Bell, G Binney, D Boyes, D Brown, L Brown, J Cairns, J Chaplow, J Charlton, R Charlton-Lainé, J Cosslett, B Coult, R Crute, M Currah, S Deinali, T Duffy, J Elmer, K Fantarrow, L Fenwick, C Fletcher, D Freeman, J Griffiths, O Gunn, C Hampson, D Haney, A Hanson, P Heaviside, T Henderson, S Henig, J Higgins, L Holmes, C Hood, A Hopgood, L Hovvells, C Hunt, G Hutchinson, A Jackson, M Johnson, N Jones, P Jopling, L Kennedy, C Lines, L Maddison, R Manchester, C Marshall, C Martin, L Mavin, B McAloon, M McGaun, D McKenna, M McKeon, I McLean, S McMahon, J Miller, B Moist, P Molloy, D Mulholland, D Nicholls, J Nicholson, D Oliver, R Ormerod, E Peeke, R Potts, P Pringle, J Purvis, J Quinn, A Reed, G Richardson, I Roberts, M I Roberts, K Robson, K Rooney, J Rowlandson, A Savory, E Scott, P Sexton, K Shaw, A Shield, M Simmons, A Simpson, M Stead, W Stelling, A Sterling, D Stoker, T Stubbs, A Surtees, D Sutton-Lloyd, F Tinsley, A Townsend, C Varty, M Walton, A Watson, M Wilkes, M Wilson, S Wilson and D Wood.

Abstention

Councillor K Earley

The Substantive Motion was **carried**.

The Chair informed Council that the second Motion on the Agenda had been withdrawn by Councillor Deinali and therefore the Motion from Councillor Surtees would be considered next.

Moved by Councillor A Surtees, **Seconded** by Councillor **E Adam**

This Council condemns the decision by government to remove the Universal Credit £20 Uplift.

An Amendment was **Moved** by Councillor A Shield, Portfolio Holder for Equality and Inclusion, **Seconded** by Councillor K Rooney

This Council ~~condemns~~ *disagrees, questions & challenges* the decision by *National* government to remove the *temporary* Universal Credit £20 Uplift, *but we will engage with all key partners and stakeholders to collectively work together to address and try to minimize the shortfall impact of household income preventing undue financial hardship.*

For the Amendment

Councillors B Avery, B Bainbridge, A Bell, C Bell, R Bell, D Brown, L Brown, J Cairns, J Charlton, J Cosslett, B Coult, M Currah, T Duffy, J Elmer, K Fantarrow, D Freeman, D Haney, P Heaviside, T Henderson, L Holmes, C Hood, A Hopgood, C Hunt, A Jackson, N Jones, P Jopling, C Lines, L Maddison, C Martin, L Mavin, M McGaun, B Moist, P Molloy, J Nicholson, D Oliver, R Ormerod, E Peeke, R Potts, J Quinn, A Reed, G Richardson, M I Roberts, K Robson, K Rooney, J Rowlandson, A Savory, E Scott, P Sexton, A Shield, M Simmons, A Simpson, M Stead, W Stelling, A Sterling, D Stoker, T Stubbs, D Sutton-Lloyd, M Walton and M Wilkes.

Against the Amendment

Councillors E Adam, R Adcock-Forster, V Andrews, J Atkinson, P Atkinson, A Batey, G Binney, D Boyes, J Chaplow, R Charlton-Lainé, R Crute, S Deinali, K Earley, L Fenwick, C Fletcher, J Griffiths, O Gunn, C Hampson, A Hanson, S Henig, J Higgins, L Hovvels, G Hutchinson, M Johnson, L Kennedy, R Manchester, C Marshall, B McAloon, D McKenna, M McKeon, I McLean, S McMahan, J Miller, D Mulholland, D Nicholls, P Pringle, J Purvis, I Roberts, K Shaw, A Surtees, F Tinsley, A Townsend, C Varty, A Watson, M Wilson, S Wilson and D Wood

The Amendment was **carried** and therefore became the Substantive Motion

Upon a vote being taken the Substantive Motion was **carried**.

The Chair informed Council that the time allowed for Motions had been reached and the Motion put forward by Councillor Tinsley would be carried forward to the next meeting.

10 Questions from Members

Councillor J Elmer asked the following question

On the 30th June 2021 the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee released their report Biodiversity in the UK: Bloom or Bust? that states “Since 1970 there has been a 68% decrease in population sizes of mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, and fish” and “15% of UK species are threatened with extinction. Of the G7 countries, the UK has the lowest level of biodiversity remaining”

Ecosystems might be considered as the planet’s ‘life support system’. Ecosystems provide the oxygen in the very air we breathe, they ‘host’ the carbon cycle fixing gaseous carbon dioxide, they provide pollination for our food crops and maintain a stable climate. Climate change should properly be understood as the consequence of humans exceeding the natural capacity of the planet’s ecosystems to take in CO2.

So two crises, inextricably combined, are challenging humanity on a planetary scale. The Climate Crisis is certainly the higher profile of the two, and the Council is already addressing this issue through the Climate Emergency Response Plan. The Ecological Crisis is perhaps less well understood, but its correction is equally urgent and requires profound change.

County Durham, like the rest of the Country and world has suffered a catastrophic crash of species and habitats that collectively form our natural systems. There is no question that we are currently experiencing and ecological emergency. This situation remains, despite the excellent work that the Council has delivered in relation to the North Pennines AONB, the Heritage Coast, coalfields restoration and many other worthy projects.

Cllr Wilkes, will the Council:

- *-declare an Ecological Emergency; then,*
- *-review services to ensure cessation of any activities that negatively impact upon ecosystems and to identify opportunities to enhance ecosystems; and,*
- *-report back to Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny regarding the measures needed to address this emergency and their implications to the Council.*

In short, will the Council adopt the same approach to tackle the Ecological Emergency as it has for the related Climate Emergency?

Councillor M Wilkes, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood and Climate Change thanked Councillor Elmer for his question and provided the following response

The ecological systems that maintain our planet are under severe pressure, of that there is no doubt. The issue is well evidenced and well understood, and the question of how that relates to County Durham and the activities of this Council is a valid and appropriate one to be raising.

The landscapes and natural habitat of County Durham - from the heritage coast, through our rivers, dales and valleys and the uplands of the Pennines - are some of our key assets. This is not only in their contribution to global environmental health, but also in making Durham an attractive place to live, work, visit and in which to thrive.

While there has historically been significant improvements in our post-industrial landscape and wildlife habitats, Councillor Elmer is correct to point out that there remains much to do.

That being said, there is a lot to consider in this question with some big and important issues being raised, and in order to give these issues proper consideration I will commit to bring a report to cabinet in October to set out a way forward on the questions that he raises.

Our goal will be, to tackle the ecological challenges we face as a county, making sure that we protect and improve our wildlife and landscapes.

My view is that we should embed into everything we do a consideration of not only our climate impact but also our ecological impacts and to promote improvement and protection of our country's environment with every household and every business.

I look forward to working with Councillor Elmer and fellow councillors to achieve this goal.

Councillor B Moist asked the following question

At the July meeting of the Economy Enterprise OSC the Regeneration, Economy & Growth Service Grouping Report was presented alongside The Performance Management Report for the year ending March 2021, where it was highlighted that the Co Durham economy was worth £9bn. However, the economy was operating at 25% less than the UK Average, therefore the

Co Durham Economy should be £12bn even if we achieved the UK average level?

At that same Economy Enterprise OSC meeting the Minutes of the Co Durham Economic Partnership meeting held on 5th May 2021, was presented where it was stated and accepted that (and I quote)

“There is no economic strategy for the County and associated programmes & pipeline of both physical infrastructure & revenue projects. It has been determined that the core aim of ‘More and Better Jobs’ from the Co Durham Vision is no more than a wish and a hope, with no real job creation strategy in place?

In summary County Durham has consistently fallen behind the rest of England in its economic activity rate, employment rate and self-employment rate. At the same time, it exceeds the rest of England in terms of unemployment and the long-term sick economically inactive population.

Can I seek assurances that this council will support this administration to deliver an all-encompassing, strong, vibrant, varied and successful economy with specific targets for job creation within a planned structured economic strategy challenging economic strategy to help DCC deliver real, ‘More and Better jobs and real improved economic benefits to the people of Co Durham.

Councillor E Scott, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economy and Partnerships thanked Councillor Moist for his question and provided the following response:

Sadly, Durham’s relatively poor economic performance has remained a consistent and perpetuating feature of the County and one which the last administration appeared to accept. This counties fortunes have not been revived by previous governments of any political colour, not even by Labour when Tony Blair was Prime Minister.

The job before us, the Joint Administration, is to swiftly and decisively take action to boost the economy, create jobs, enable prosperity and ensure that County Durham can realise it’s true potential in a fair and equitable way.

We have inherited a number of strategies including; a regeneration strategy, housing strategy and skills strategy, and the area is also part of the wider regional arrangements that include the joint transport strategy and strategic economic plan.

However, I can confirm that County Durham does not and never has had an Economic Strategy. I’ll just give you a minute to take that on board.

I am able to advise that I intend to bring a report to Cabinet this year seeking approval to widely consult on and develop a strategy that will underpin economic growth in County Durham over the coming years and support wider updates on key issues such as skills, transport and housing.

The report to Cabinet will provide a detailed overview of the current economic position in the County particularly to understand our strengths, opportunities and areas where we must be stronger to give our communities the best opportunities.

This report will provide a clear foundation on which we can build strategic plans, implement economic and social interventions and deliver specific outcomes that will see the County Durham economy bridge the gap with the national indicators.

Under Labour we have seen plenty of unsubstantiated sound bites around job creation. Most famously the Aykley Heads announcement of 6,000 jobs which quickly turned into 4,000 jobs in the blink of an eye. I dare say if they were still in control it would be 2,000 by now.

Our new economic strategy will provide the evidence base and ambition that will help the County Council and its partners to secure regional and national funding and powers to help drive economic growth and will be closely developed with businesses, communities and the voluntary sector.

It will ensure that we are “ready” when opportunities arise and that our voice is heard both regionally and nationally. Seizing opportunities like City of Culture is vital the process. We won’t always win, but we will always be in the game.

This is going to be an intensive piece of work that will take some time to complete and in the meantime I will also ask Cabinet to approve an economic statement to help articulate our challenges and ambitions. We will use this statement until the full strategy is in place later in 2022.

An important part of the process to develop the Economic Strategy is ensuring that we have a series of ‘conversations’ with a wide group of stakeholders and I will provide further details of this to Cabinet. The strategy will need the buy in of the private sector, education, other public sector partners and the third sector if it is going to deliver our ambition.

Although the Council will be the key driver of the development of the strategy it is something that must be owned by a range of organisations and bodies. Those conversations have already begun and the response that we are

getting from partners is quite overwhelming. They see a new dawn and a fresh approach and they like it.