



RECORD OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The following is a record of the decisions taken at the meeting of **CABINET** held on **Wednesday 14 December 2022**. The decisions will come into force and may be implemented from **Tuesday 3 January 2023** unless the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or its Committees object to any such decision and call it in.

Adoption of the Inclusive Economic Strategy

Key Decision: REG/08/22

Summary

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which sought approval to adopt the County Durham Inclusive Economic Strategy (IES), developed through the County Durham Economic Partnership (CDEP).

In December 2021, Cabinet agreed the process for developing a new Inclusive Economic Strategy (IES). This is a strategy of the county, not of one organisation, and has been codeveloped in partnership. It takes a holistic view of what the economy needs so that all people and places can contribute to and benefit from growth and the county's success, whilst having a positive impact on the planet. It has been developed by CDEP with residents, businesses, anchor institutions, and the voluntary and community sector. It sets a clear long term vision for the County's economy through to 2035, and will be delivered through a series of delivery plans formed and delivered in partnership through CDEP.

The IES is underpinned by a comprehensive evidence base and an economic statement. This informed the IES vision, priorities, and areas of focus such as strengths in advanced manufacturing, key opportunity sectors for growth, and addressing the causes of economic inactivity around health. The draft strategy was considered by Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its feedback was important in shaping the final IES.

The vision for County Durham's future is to have a sustainable, inclusive economy with a diverse range of jobs to meet all skill levels, with targeted training and learning programmes tailored to our employment specialisms and needs of business.

The strategy which was set out at Appendix 2 aims to raise aspirations in young people and deliver a step-change in economic growth and deliver an agreed future vision. To achieve this, the IES sets a framework for an inclusive economy, focusing on people, productivity, places, promotion and planet.

The next steps are to develop a detailed delivery plan and monitoring framework to deliver the strategy. CDEP will engage stakeholders, residents, businesses, education providers, and communities in decision-making and the development of relevant actions and initiatives. The use of a delivery plan approach throughout the vision period will enable regular reviews to respond to economic changes; allow priorities to be reassessed and recalibrated; and actions to be refined based on whether outcomes are being achieved. This will ensure the IES remains a relevant and live document throughout its lifespan.

Decision

The Cabinet adopted the County Durham Inclusive Economic Strategy.

Ecological Emergency: Outline Strategy and Action Plan **Key Decision: NCC/04/22**

Summary

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change which presented an initial strategy and action plan for Council activities in response to the declaration of an ecological emergency made by Cabinet on 6 April 2022. Further iterations of these plans will be integrated into a wider Local Nature Recovery Strategy for County Durham, as well as future Climate Change Emergency Response Plans.

Durham has a rich tapestry of habitats from its upland peatland and moorland, to the Wear and Tees lowlands with semi-natural ancient woodland, meadows and wetlands, to the magnesian limestone plateau with its species rich pasture and Heritage Coast. This represents not only a valuable resource for biodiversity and a store for carbon, but an incredible asset for recreation and wellbeing. The Council, working with partners, has done considerable work in enhancing these assets, for example in several landscape scale initiatives, habitat restoration and creation, including tree planting and the management of nature reserves.

The overall trend internationally, nationally and locally is one of biodiversity and habitat decline. This was examined in detail by the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee and responded to by Cabinet with the declaration of an Ecological Emergency on 6 April 2022. Cabinet asked for an initial action plan on Council activities in response to this declaration be provided within six months.

The Ecological Emergency Action Plan (EEAP) is a corporately derived and cross-Council action plan which responds to the ecological emergency through activity across three proposed key themes: 'Land Management', 'Engagement, Education, and Behaviour Change', 'Policies and Strategies'. New investment, announced as part of the MTFP 22-26, provides further impetus for this work through the appointment of two nature reserve officers, and staff to promote education/awareness, volunteer investment and a post of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy Officer. Most are now in post and have commenced their work.

In recognition of the tight financial climate, the action plan focusses on what can be achieved using existing resources, as well as potential income from the planning system, with any additional requirements in future plans, being subject to the usual Medium Term Financial Plan processes. Most of the actions are therefore centred around the potential to streamline and improve existing work programmes, such as biodiversity interventions on open space, or by expanding existing programmes, such as awareness around climate change to further include the ecological emergency. Actions are also proposed that will improve biodiversity delivery within new built development and ensure that Council land holdings can benefit from biodiversity-focused financial contributions arising through the planning system. Systems are also proposed to ensure that procurement and decision making within the Council considers the impact on biodiversity in a similar manner to the processes in place for responding to the climate emergency.

Decision

The Cabinet approved the Ecological Emergency Action Plan (EEAP).

County Durham Plan Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) 2021/22

Summary

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which sought Cabinet approval for the content of the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) of the County Durham Plan (CDP) and to its publication. The Council adopted its new local plan, the County Durham Plan on 21 October 2020. This is the second AMR, but the first that covers a full year, of the adopted CDP and covers the period from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

All local authorities are required to produce a monitoring report of its local plan by the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. The AMR monitors the effectiveness of planning policies contained within the County Durham Plan (CDP). The CDP has 61 policies, all of which have monitoring indicators associated with them. The AMR includes analysis of all policy indicators and assesses whether policies have met any targets that have been set.

As of March 2022, the CDP has been adopted for 17 months, therefore in some instances there is limited analysis, however some comparison can be made with the data collected last year. This and future Annual Monitoring Reports (AMR) will assist in determining whether any intervention or early review of the CDP is required. Key information within the AMR includes analysis of the levels of employment land approved and completed. It also details housing approvals and housing completions.

The CDP allocates 300ha of general employment land as well as specific use and safeguarded site allocations. In the last year approximately 29 hectares of employment land has been approved for employment uses, over half of this is at NETPark Phase 3a. A further 5.51ha of employment land has also now been completed mainly smaller units at Aycliffe, Belmont, St Helen Auckland, Willington, Consett and South Hetton. The AMR confirms that the Council has passed the Housing Delivery Test (HDT) with 1,671 net housing completions in the year compared to an annual target of 1,308 and that the Council can demonstrate a 5-year supply of housing of 5.47 years, in line with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The County Durham Plan is working well and its policies can continue to be used to determine planning applications.

Meeting the need for affordable housing is a key objective of the County Durham Plan. During the reporting year 536 affordable houses were completed. Of these, 411 were for Affordable Rent, 75 were Rent to Buy, 13 were Help to Buy, 6 were Affordable Home Ownership and there were 31 where tenure was not specified. The AMR reports on the performance of the county's town centres in terms of vacancy rates and occupancy and finds that the average vacancy rate has decreased from 16.4% to 16.1% which, however, is still 2% higher than the national average. Performance varies across our towns however, from 32.8% for Peterlee to 10.6% for Barnard Castle. The Council's response to climate change features prominently within the CDP and there are several policies which seek to support the transition to a low carbon economy. The AMR provides data on the levels of renewable energy generation in the county, this data shows growth in renewable energy generation from 505,899MWh in 2018 to 545,522MWh this year.

Decision

The Cabinet agreed the content of the County Durham Plan Annual Monitoring Report and its publication on the Council's website.

Proposed revisions to the constitution for the Durham County Council Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE)

Summary

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services regarding a request from Durham County Council's Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) to make a change to its membership.

An alteration to the SACRE constitution can only be approved by Cabinet, therefore the report set out the background, circumstances and implications of a request to change membership and requested that Cabinet approves the change. The establishment of SACRE is part of the Council's statutory duties under the Education Act 1996, and its membership must represent an appropriate reflection of the principal religious traditions of the region. In attempting to achieve this, SACRE advises the Council that a representative of the Humanist non-religious worldview, currently co-opted without voting rights, should become a full member alongside denominations and religions currently forming Committee A of SACRE. Other SACREs nationally have responded to the question of Humanist representation, either fully (as Durham SACRE advises it would like to achieve through the proposed constitution change), by co-opted representation (as Durham SACRE has currently), or not at all. The Council is able to make the decision that most appropriately meets its statutory duties.

Decision

The Cabinet:

- a) noted note the current membership arrangements of Durham's SACRE;
and
- b) approved the request that Cabinet alters the constitution to enable Humanist representation.

Helen Lynch
Head of Legal & Democratic Services
16 December 2022