

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Cabinet** held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Wednesday 19 April 2023 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor A Hopgood (Leader of the Council)

Cabinet Members:

Councillors R Bell (Deputy Leader of the Council), T Henderson, C Hood, S McDonnell, J Rowlandson, E Scott, A Shield, J Shuttleworth and M Wilkes

Also Present:

Councillor J Nicholson

1 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to comments made by Councillor M Wilkes being added to the item relating to the provision of a sustainable solution for Wellfield School.

3 Declarations of Interest

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

4 Health Protection Assurance Annual Report

The Cabinet noted a report of the Corporate Director of Adult and Health Services which provided an update on the health protection assurance arrangements in County Durham and health protection activities over the course of the year (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Cllr C Hood, Cabinet Portfolio for Adult and Health Services explained that Health Protection assurance was a statutory function and the annual report

presented Cabinet with an update on the arrangements and areas identified for further assurance in coming year. Significant work had been undertaken by the Director of Public Health, around the coordination of agencies and exercises undertaken to test emergency plans which had identified recommended actions for coming year, including access to screening and vaccinations and schools immunisation coverage.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

5 Quarter Three, 2022/23 Performance Management Report

The Cabinet noted a report of the Chief Executive which presented an overview of progress towards achieving the key outcomes of the council's corporate performance framework and highlighted key messages to inform strategic priorities and work programmes in and to the end of quarter three, 2022/23, October to December 2022 (for copy of report see file of minutes).

The Leader of the Council thanked the Head of Corporate Affairs for his update and highlighted the legacy of the pandemic and the cost of living squeeze. It had been pleasing to note that there were over 250 more core tourism businesses were in operation as more businesses reopened. The success of the festival programme including the Durham Book Festival, Seaham Food Festival and Brass had generated a significant impact on the local economy. Combined economic impact of £850,000.

There were 1200 social housing decarbonisation funding properties with increased Energy Performance Certificate ratings which would mean reduced energy costs for in September 2023.

There had been a low referral rate for children's social care support and 1134 families turned around by the stronger families programme, 1039 significant and sustained outcomes which meant that the Council had exceeded its annual 2022/23 target.

In terms of Adult social care reablement service, 93% of older people had returned to home after release from hospital. The highest proportion since 2015/16.

In communities, although there had been fewer net housing completions, however, the Council remained on target. The Council had provided for cost of living crisis support with £200,000 of grant funding for a network of 68 warm spaces, distribution of food vouchers worth £110 to 28,500 households. The 2023/24 budget continued to support low income households through the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme. The Council

were also committed to supporting young people into the workplace with 2.7% of workforce enrolled on apprenticeship programme, which equated to 484 employees of which 270 were new to the organisation and 214 were existing staff upskilling.

In 2021/22, 45% of Key Stage 4 pupils achieved a slightly lower percentage than our statistical neighbours. Education Durham were continuing to work with all schools, to equal or better access to high quality provision.

The proportion of Adult Social User receiving a review remained low at 61%, a new central review team had been created to provide more resource.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

6 Consultation on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan 4 (ROWIP4)

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which sought approval to begin a 12-week public consultation on the Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan 4 (ROWIP4). The report also explained the development of the consultation version of ROWIP4 and the intention of the strategic objectives and policies as drafted (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Councillor J Shuttleworth, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Rural Communities and Highways explained that the Public Right of Way Network was extremely important and sometimes overlooked. It was important to update the Plan and have a forward-thinking vision given that the existing plan was now five years out of date and overdue. This was now being addressed by way of the improvement plan presented which was more strategic than the previous plan and had a ten-year life span which would open opportunities for strategic funding. The network brought huge benefit in terms of accessibility and communication as well as the wider mental and physical wellbeing for all. The Joint Administration recognised the importance of consultation on key plans and the consultation would run from 3 May to 26 July.

Councillor E Scott, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economy and Partnerships thanked officers for bringing forward the plan, the value of which had been outlined. Councillor Scott also highlighted the importance of the plan as a significant part of the tourism, recreation and leisure offer which linked in with the Council vision, Council Plan, Climate Change and Ecological Emergency which had all been refreshed and reframed over recent months. Improved signage, protection of routes ensured that the Council were putting the correct policies in place for residents and businesses alike.

Councillor R Bell, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finances also highlighted the importance of the public footpath network and bridleways in terms of the economy, environment, wellbeing and health. Councillor Bell explained that core budgets were limited and following the consultation would like the Public Rights of Way Service to bring forward local proposals through the respective Area Action Partnerships and delegated Councillor budgets to support, if they so wished.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

7 Corporate Asset Management Plan 2023-2025

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which presented the Corporate Asset Management Plan 2023-2025, setting out how the property portfolio will support the Council's corporate priorities and objectives and the direction for the ongoing management of the portfolio over the next two years (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Councillor J Rowlandson, Portfolio Holder for Resources, Investment and Assets explained that the strategic management of property was paramount and needed to be encapsulated by good governance. The Corporate Asset Management Plan set out the context and ambition for the next two years on how the Council could do things more efficiently and bring benefits to the whole authority. Councillor Rowlandson expressed his appreciation of the work carried out by Susan Robinson and Anna Wills in the development of the plan, which along with Council tax assets were the backbone of the council. The Joint Administration were ensuring that they were rectifying the failings of the previous Labour administration.

Councillor R Bell, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance added this thanks to the teams responsible for producing the plan and in doing so ensuring the best use of the Council's assets through an effective Corporate Asset Management Plan which was key to the Medium-Term Financial Planning Process in terms of maximising income from assets and supporting communities through agile management of assets.

Councillor M Wilkes thanked the Cabinet Portfolio Holder and Officers for their hard work in addressing this important issue. Councillor Wilkes pointed out that it had taken over two years to correct previous failures by the former Labour administration who had cut back investment of assets team to the point where it had difficulty in functioning. Councillor Wilkes referred to the

sale of a former school in East Durham which was sold for £1 by the previous administration and explained that it should serve as a reminder to residents of County Durham in future elections. Councillor Wilkes supported the plan and would look to see progress on issues that had blighted communities such as run-down council owned properties.

Resolved:

That the recommendations be approved.