

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Cabinet** held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Wednesday 14 June 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:

Councillors S Deinali, K Shaw and S Zair

1 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 May 2023 and the Special meeting held on 31 May 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

3 Declarations of interest

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

4 Quarter Four, 2022/23 Performance Management Report

The Cabinet considered a report of the Chief Executive which presented an overview of progress towards achieving the key outcomes of the council's corporate performance framework in and to the end of quarter four, 2022/23, January to March 2023 (for copy of report see file of minutes).

The Leader of the Council explained that there had been a strong performance alongside a sharp focus on service delivery, communities and partners in the latest update.

Areas performing well included, Business Durham which had exceeded targets in terms of the number of jobs created or safeguarded of 647 against a target of 375, bringing the total for 2022/23 to 1,986 against a target of 1,500.

94% of major planning applications had been determined within the 13 week target and 87% of planning applications had been considered within their deadline, which placed the Council in the top quartile nationally.

All carbon reduction works, including the solar farm at Morrison Busty depot were now complete. The Council had also been successful in a bid to install a heat pump at Meadowfield depot.

In relation to household recycling, targeted action had seen the quarterly rate of contamination reduce.

1,384 families had been turned around through the stronger families programme. Reablement and rehabilitation services remained high.

Latest data indicated a 15% fall in anti-social behaviour. There had been 5,614 incidents of fly tipping in the last quarter which was the lowest volume in the Council's history of fly tipping and was a third lower than a few years ago. Benchmarking data from 2021/22, showed that continued education and enforcement activity was performing strongly against all comparator groups.

1250 net homes had been completed in 2022/23 and 208 empty properties had been brought back into use following council intervention. Action was continuing to be taken in areas such as municipal waste.

There had been increases to the number of children in care and changes to the composition of children entering care continued to cause placement pressures. In SENS and disability services there had been significant increases over last few years, which had also been evidenced nationally. This had been compounded by high levels of demand in partner organisations such as Health. The Council had invested in SEND and casework team and educational psychologists but there were national shortages for specialist roles which was hampering progress.

Councillor M Wilkes, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Climate Change commented that it was good to see that the latest update which demonstrated how much was being achieved, particularly around energy efficiency. Councillor Wilkes highlighted that more funding had been acquired than in all previous years combined, with many projects being completed and worked upon. The decarbonation work at Morrison Busty depot was groundbreaking and work was ongoing at Peterlee, Newton Aycliffe and Teesdale Leisure Centres.

Every opportunity was being taken in applying for grants to bring down running costs and making the Council greener. Work had also extended to residential housing in county Durham, with over 600 properties improved in the last quarter on energy efficiency, particularly in the social housing sector. The Council were onto its third reiteration of the Business energy efficiency programme which had supported 500 businesses. Councillor Wilkes felt that the Council didn't promote its successes enough and was proud to be part of the Joint Administration working together for the benefit of all residents.

Councillor J Rowlandson clarified that paragraph 44 of the report made a reference to transformation works at Seaham but the reference should have related to Spennymoor.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

5 Annual Enforcement Programme. Tackling underage sales of age restricted products and sales of illicit and non-compliant age restricted goods

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change which presented details of enforcement activities relating to the underage sales and illicit age restricted products over the period April 2022 to March 2023 and sought approval of a new enforcement programme for 2023/2024 (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Councillor J Shuttleworth, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Rural Communities and Highways informed Cabinet that the report provided a summary of activity along with significant successes dealing with rogue traders and outright criminals. Councillor Shuttleworth publicly thanked all young volunteers engaging in test purchases and the enforcement officers working on the front line alongside other partner agencies.

Councillor C Hood, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Adult and Health Services explained that the report was proactive and tackled the harms associated with a range of products. There were a number of concerns about levels of smoking and access to illegal vapes and a comprehensive response had been provided to the government on this issue. Councillor Hood also praised the work of the enforcement team.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

6 County Durham Housing Strategy Principles and Priorities Paper

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhood Services which presented the Housing Strategy Principles and Priorities paper (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Councillor J Rowlandson, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources, Investments and Assets informed Cabinet that the County Durham Housing Strategy had been developed to consider housing issues across County Durham. The strategic framework to inform the actions and investments of the Council had been developed to ensure that the Council positioned itself well to maximise future opportunities. It would align with the County Durham Vision, County Durham Plan and Homelessness Strategy and would also support the inclusive economic strategy and the CERP. The Council recognised the importance of consultation and would hold an extensive housing conversation with AAPs, partnership groups and others. The consultation would include three different surveys, a social media campaign and online events.

Councillor E Scott, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economy and Partnerships commented that the Housing Strategy would seek to ensure County Durham had good quality homes that met the needs of existing and future residents. The strategy would support economic growth, improve health and ensure that communities were sustainable mixed and balanced.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

7 Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which sought approval to formally adopt Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPS) for Bishop Auckland, Consett, Crook, Peterlee, Seaham, Spennymoor, Shildon and Stanley (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Councillor E Scott, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economy and Partnerships informed Cabinet that the plans presented were an important part of active travel throughout the county and provided the evidence required to source more funding to improve tracks. Engagement had helped shape the network plans.

Councillor M Wilkes, Cabinet Portfolio for Neighbourhoods and Climate Change explained that the Cabinet were committed in improving and providing a better infrastructure for active travel and more investment was being put into Public Rights of Way, which had not been the case for many years previous. Councillor Wilkes commented that he would look forward to continuing to work with the Joint Administration in improving all parts of County Durham.

Resolved:

That the recommendation in the report be approved.

8 Barningham Parish Meeting: Application for Order Conferring Functions of a Parish Council

The Cabinet considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer to consider an application which has been made by Barningham Parish Meeting for an order conferring upon it functions of a parish council (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Councillor R Bell, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources commented that Barningham Parish Meeting had supported and more importantly maintained support of the Parish Meeting. Councillor Bell supported the proposal to confer the powers of expenditure on the Parish Meeting and that the relevant order be made.

Councillor J Rowlandson, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Investments, Resources and Assets thanked the Councils legal team for working with Barningham Parish Meeting in order to make use of limited powers to maintain village amenities.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

9 Home to School Transport Services - Consultation Outcomes

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services, the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth and the Corporate Director of Resources which presented the outcomes of the public consultation on the Home to School Transport Service (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor T Henderson, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Children and Young Peoples Services explained that Home to School Transport was a vital service provided to many families to ensure that children and young people could attend school in a safe way. It was a complex operation and involved delivering 1000 transport routes, working with 300 contractors and suppliers. Growing demand has, through inflation, increased the costs of the service from £23.4m in 2022/23, £3.9m above the budget. The budget for 2023/23 had further increased to £29.1m to reflect estimated increases in demand and cost pressures. Whilst the County Council must meet their statutory duties in providing free transport to children and young people who meet specific criteria, it was vital to look at the sustainability of the service and explore positive opportunities to transform provision and control expenditure. The 2021 review of the service identified that the Council currently provided transport services that went beyond the Council's statutory duty. These services were not provided in most other County Councils. Consultation had taken place on a range of proposals to seek the stakeholder views on how best to transform the service. The proposals were aimed at supporting the Council's environmental policies, being safe for providers and users of the service, meet identified needs of the young people, supporting the independence of young people where it was appropriate and delivering efficiency and value for money. Feedback to the consultation had been very supportive of most of the Council's proposals and provided a strong basis on which to develop a transformation programme for the service. The Council had also listened to the stakeholder feedback in relation to the proposed fee of £2.80 per day for the concessionary scheme and reduced the charge to £2.00 per day.

Councillor R Bell, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance explained that the Council is faced with unprecedented pressures on financing of services. Home to School transport services expenditure had doubled over a period of four years to levels where it was simply no longer affordable. The report proposed transformation priorities for the next few years to tackle increasing expenditure and demand.

Councillor E Scott, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economy and Partnerships explained that the report provided a clear overview of the challenges being experienced by all Councils across the country. Worldwide events had escalated over the last 18 months which had impacted on transport providers, especially in relation to the recruitment and retention of drivers and operating costs. Feedback to the consultation highlighted the need to balance the individual needs of the safety of young people. The report provided opportunities to do things differently and maintain a strong transport market whilst offering a balanced programme of work to ensure that the Council complied with its statutory duties whilst developing aspects of provision which could be done more efficiently.

Councillor Scott highlighted that it was imperative that the Council moved swiftly to implement recommendations to ensure a sustainable and robust service.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.