

Durham County Council

At a Meeting of **Cabinet** held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Wednesday 15 May 2024 at 9.30 am.**

Present:

Councillor A Hopgood (Leader of the Council) in the Chair.

Cabinet Members:

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

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor C Hood and Councillor A Shield.

1 Public Questions

The Leader of the Council informed Cabinet that one public question had been received from Mr Watson. Mr Watson was unable to be present at the meeting, therefore a written reply would be provided following the meeting.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 April 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 Declarations of Interest

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

4 Workforce Strategy 2024-2027

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which requested the adoption of the Council's revised Workforce Strategy for the period 2024 – 2027 (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Councillor R Bell, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Portfolio Holder thanked the Corporate Director of Resources, the Head of HR and all of the officers involved in bringing the Strategy forward. The key priorities and detailed action plan that underpinned the strategy would provide a solid platform for the development of the workforce going forward. It was ambitious and far reaching and would help

create the workforce for the future. The single biggest asset to the Council was 'Our People' and the strategy would support all employees regardless of their role. It would ensure necessary focus and prioritisation of the Council workforce going forward. The strong relationship between officers, staff, trade union representatives and elected members would be central to the strategy. The Council had always held strong relationships in these areas and these would need to continue for the challenges ahead.

Councillor S McDonnell, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Digital, Procurement and Customer Services spoke in support of the report and in doing so, added her thanks to the officers for bringing the report forward. The Council had exited the pandemic as a different organisation, doing things differently, but always with the customer in mind. The Council did not get everything correct all of the time, however, no organisation did. The Council always learned from that and sought to move forward in the right direction. Services provided by the Council were relied upon by many people and the workforce made a difference to the lives of customers each and every day. Without the workforce the Council would not be able to improve the lives of the people served and Councillor McDonnell was more than happy to support the recommendation and recognised the important role the strategy would have on the transformation journey going forward and to good customer care. The workforce would be crucial to this success.

Resolved:

That the recommendation in the report be approved.

5 Shopfront Design Guide, Energy Efficiency, Renewables and the Historic Environment, Biodiversity and Non-designated Heritage Asset Supplementary Planning Documents - Report of Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which sought approval to commence consultation on four Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). It was the second draft of the Shopfront Design Guide SPD and Energy Efficiency, Renewables, and the Historic Environment SPD, and the first draft of the Biodiversity SPD and Non-designated Heritage Asset (NDHA) SPD. All four documents would support the County Durham Plan (CDP) adopted in October 2020 (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Councillor E Scott, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economy and Partnerships thanked the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth for the huge amount of work in the development of the themes and documents, which would supplement the County Durham Plan adopted in October 2020. Shopfronts were the first point of contact between the businesses and the public. The SPD would help improve the general standard of design and help improve town centres and local business. The Energy Efficiency, Renewables, and the Historic Environment SPD would help

property owners improve the energy efficiency of historic buildings and recognise that the historic environment should play its part in local and national net zero goals. The Biodiversity SPD was a key component of the Council's Ecological Emergency Action Plan and would help ensure that new developments delivered the best outcomes for biodiversity. The NDHA would provide clarity to developers and the community on how NDHAs were assessed. Consultation was key and the Council were now seeking views on all SPDs.

Councillor M Wilkes, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Climate Change explained the relevance and need for the supplementary planning documents which provided additional detail and clarity and expanded on the priorities of the County Durham Plan. For example, they would help residents to install solar panel and make improvements to their homes, whilst protecting the historic environment.

Biodiversity was critical to ensure that developments had the least impact on the environment. The protection of riverbanks and streams and the need to ensure a wild habitat for species was hugely important. The loss of biodiversity over the years had been breathtaking, and the work being done within the County in these areas showed leadership, contributed to the physical and mental health of residents whilst protecting, improving and bringing back biodiversity for future generations. There was also a call for developers to go beyond the minimum national standards wherever they could. Cllr Wilkes urged as many people to respond to the consultation.

Councillor R Bell, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance noted that the Government had recently set out the mandatory requirements for the majority of developments to achieve a 10% net gain in biodiversity. The biodiversity supplementary planning document was important in this respect and demonstrated how gains could be achieved and supported.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

6 Exclusion of the public

Resolved:

That under section 100(A)4 of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to the said Act.

7 Speculative Development of North East Assembly Integration and Test Facility on NETPark Phase 3A [Key Decision: REG/2024/006]

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which sought approval to progress an inward investment enquiry (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

8 Lease of Aykley Heads Southern Car Park, County Hall, Durham

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth and the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services which sought approval to lease an area of land at the council's main Headquarters (County Hall) building (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.