

## **Durham County Council**

At an Ordinary Meeting of the County Council held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Wednesday 17 July 2024 at 10.00 a.m.**

**Present:**

### **Councillor J Nicholson in the Chair**

Councillors R Adcock-Forster, V Andrews, J Atkinson, P Atkinson, A Batey, K Batey, A Bell, C Bell, R Bell, C Bihari, J Blakey, D Boyes, D Brown, L Brown, J Charlton, J Clark, J Cosslett, B Coult, R Crute, M Currah, S Deinali, T Duffy, J Elmer, L Fenwick, D Freeman, J Griffiths, O Gunn, D Hall, C Hampson, D Haney, P Heaviside, S Henig, J Higgins, C Hood, A Hopgood, G Hutchinson, A Jackson, M Johnson, N Jones, P Jopling (Vice-Chair), C Kay, B Kellett, C Lines, L Maddison, R Manchester, C Marshall, C Martin, S McDonnell, D McKenna, I McLean, S McMahan, J Miller, B Moist, D Mulholland, D Nicholls, D Oliver, R Ormerod, E Peeke, R Potts, P Pringle, J Purvis, A Reed, G Richardson, K Rooney, J Rowlandson, A Savory, J Scurfield, P Sexton, K Shaw, A Shield, J Shuttleworth, A Simpson, G Smith, T Smith, W Stelling, A Sterling, D Stoker, T Stubbs, A Surtees, D Sutton-Lloyd, F Tinsley, S Townsend, C Varty, E Waldock, M Walton, A Watson, J Watson, M Wilkes, M Wilson, S Wilson, D Wood and R Yorke

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E Adam, I Cochrane, K Earley, A Hanson, K Hawley, D Howarth, C Hunt, E Mavin, L Mavin, P Molloy, J Quinn, S Quinn, S Robinson and P Taylor

The Chair reported the deaths of Honorary Alderman, and former Durham County Councillor and Sedgefield Borough Councillor, Bill Blenkinsopp; and former Derwentside District Councillor Margaret Jopling.

Bill represented the Aycliffe East Division on the County Council from 2001 to 2005. He had also represented the Neville Ward on Sedgefield Borough Council from 1995 to 2009 and had been a Town Councillor for more than 30 years.

Margaret represented the Leadgate Ward on Derwentside District Council from 2003 to 2007.

The Council stood for a moments silence in respect.

## **1 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 June 2024 were **Moved** by the Leader and **Seconded** by the Deputy Leader, and confirmed by the Council as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

## **2 Declarations of interest**

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

## **3 Chair's Announcements**

The Chair reminded all Members of their obligations under the Code of Conduct and asked that Members address each other in the correct manner during meetings and show respect at all times.

The Chair extended a warm welcome to the newly elected Councillor for the Coxhoe Division, Councillor Viv Anderson. She congratulated Councillor Anderson on her election and hoped that she would find her time on the Council an interesting and rewarding experience.

The Chair also congratulated all those elected as Members of Parliament for County Durham at the Parliamentary Elections held earlier in the month.

The Council were joined by Chester Cross, a Year 10 student from St. Bede's in Lanchester who was attending the meeting as a part of a week long work experience. The Chair hoped Chester enjoyed his work experience and welcomed him to the meeting.

Finally, the Chair, as reported in May 2024, announced that Tiny Lives was one of the chosen charities for her year in office. Tiny Lives were an independent charity, so all of their funds were raised by supporters. Like many other charities they received no government funding and needed to raise £350,000 a year to maintain their services. A short video would be played at the conclusion of the meeting to show the work of the charity.

## **4 Leader's Report**

The Council noted a report from Councillor A Hopgood, Leader of the Council as follows:

The summer events season was in full-swing and hoped those who attended the Brass events across the county had a great time.

Events were not only fun, they were a major driver of footfall and spending in the local economy. There was another cause for celebration in the shape of

some newly released tourism figures. Visitor spend in the county passed the £1billion mark for the first time ever in 2022 and new figures released last week confirmed that visitor spend had risen again, climbing to record high of £1.23billion in 2023. That only told part of the story, as visitor numbers and the number of people employed in tourism had both surpassed pre-pandemic levels for the first time. The Leader highlighted that there was a lot to be positive about, with much more to look forward to, including the up and coming Durham City Run Festival and Seaham Food Festival.

On a related note, Councillor Hopgood confirmed her formal appointment as the Culture, Creative, Tourism and Sport portfolio holder for the North East Combined Authority, further to fulfilling the role on an interim basis throughout the period of gearing up for the new combined authority. She looked forward in continuing to champion all that the county and the region had to offer.

Finally, the Leader of the Council was delighted to confirm the appointment of Michael Laing as the new Corporate Director for Adult and Health Services. Michael was joining the Council from his role as Director of Integrated Community Services with County Durham Care Partnership and would take up post later in the year following the announcement that Jane Robinson would be retiring in November. The Leader wished Michael every success in his new role.

## **5 Questions from the Public**

No questions from the public had been submitted.

## **6 Petitions**

There were no petitions.

## **7 Report from the Cabinet**

There was no report to consider from Cabinet.

## **8 County Durham Minerals and Waste Policies and Allocations Document Adoption**

The Council considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth that sought approval to adopt the County Durham Minerals and Waste Policies and Allocations Document (MWPAD) following its independent examination by planning inspectors appointed by the Secretary of State (for copy see file of Minutes).

Councillor Wilkes in moving the report said that since the adoption of the County Durham Plan in 2020 this new document added further details and clarity for new developments. He added that it was re-assuring for residents that 24 policies were

included in this document, including noise, air quality and transport. The document also included reference to lithium and there was a specific policy relating to waste development.

Councillor Rowlandson said that the document allowed for the steady supply of minerals and raw materials that would be used for road, shops, hospitals, schools etc. The policy would also develop a framework for waste and looked at principles for waste prevention. Councillor Rowlandson seconded the report.

Councillor Elmer referred to a recent ruling about the extraction of coal and the CO2 burning of coal, considered in a planning application, and asked of the implications around this. The Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth would report back to Councillor Elmer on the High Court ruling. The Director of Legal and Democratic Services advised that it was not uncommon for a Council to adopt a policy, recognising that it would evolve over time. She added that relevant case law would be taken into account. Should any significant implications arise, then the policy would need to be revisited and amended as appropriate.

**Resolved:**

That the report be approved.

## **9 Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-2029**

The Council considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth that sought approval to adopt the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (HRSS), as detailed at Appendix 2. Cabinet had agreed to adopt the accompanying 12-Month Delivery Plan, as detailed at Appendix 3, subject to the HRSS being adopted by County Council (for copy see file of Minutes).

Councillor Shield recognised the hard work in development of the strategy by officers, partners, stakeholders and the significant data analysis and extensive consultation that had taken place. A very pro-active approach had been taken with early intervention which had helped offset costs for hotel and B&B accommodation. The report highlighted the challenges faced and how the Council would tackle homelessness by focusing on delivering a partnership approach, using the strategic framework to allow any future government funding opportunities. Councillor Shield was pleased to see a clear set of actions and outcomes and approval had been given by Cabinet and moved the recommendations in the report.

Councillor Rowlandson explained that homelessness affected friends and family of those that found themselves homeless. It placed pressure on physical, mental health and wellbeing and put pressure on relationships. It was a long journey to rebuild someone's life after they had been homeless and the strategy provided direction on how to target this and seconded the recommendations detailed in the report.

Councillor Miller referred to the self-help tool element of priority one including use of the website and web pages. Councillor Miller asked if the cuts to digital services would affect the provision of this. Moving on to the increasing pressures in utilising temporary accommodation due to the lack of council owned stock he asked if

compulsory purchase had been considered rather than going to auction. The Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth advised that the website was already in place, and up and running. With regards to acquisition of property she explained that compulsory purchase would be a last resort but would be dependent upon the circumstances. The Corporate Director assured Councillor Miller that the Service would always work through the options before resorting to compulsory purchase.

**Resolved:**

That the report be agreed.

## **10 County Durham Housing Strategy 2024**

The Council considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth that sought approval to adopt the County Durham Housing Strategy (CDHS) as detailed at Appendix 2. Cabinet had agreed to adopt the accompanying 12-Month Delivery Plan, as detailed at Appendix 3, subject to the HRSS being adopted by County Council (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth advised that the current housing strategy was adopted in 2019. The wider economy had changed significantly since then, with the impact of covid, the cost-of-living crisis and rising levels of homelessness requiring a new strategy and vision for housing in County Durham. The Housing Strategy set out the strategic direction for housing activity in County Durham and a vision to provide good quality housing that met everyone's needs, was affordable for local people and supported the creation of great places to live. It's purpose was to set the context as to how we would meet the housing challenges faced. The Strategy would help deliver the ambitions of the County Durham Vision, the Council Plan, the County Durham Plan, the Climate Emergency Response Plan and the Inclusive Economic Strategy (IES) which recognised that housing was a major enabler to achieving economic growth and better social outcomes for the council's communities. It was also recognised that the Housing Strategy was being developed in the context of emerging devolution work, including a Strategic Place Partnership between the North East Combined Authority and Homes England. The Housing Strategy had been developed following two rounds of consultation with partners and stakeholders, including residents. The first round of consultation focused on developing the high-level principles and priorities for the strategy, with a second round focusing on the draft strategy itself undertaken between 30 October 2023 and 18 December 2023. The consultation determined that there was overwhelming support for the proposed vision, principles, and priorities. However, comments were received suggesting changes to improve the document, and these were made wherever possible. Also, as a result of comments made during the consultation and working with partners, including the Housing Forum, a delivery plan had been prepared for the first 12-months following adoption. Cabinet had agreed to adopt the 12-Month Delivery Plan, subject to the County Durham Housing Strategy being adopted by County Council. A more long-term delivery plan would be prepared following adoption.

Councillor Rowlandson recognised the hard work put into the development of the Housing Strategy by officers and partners and he thanked residents and other

stakeholders who had engaged in the process in enabling a clear and focussed document. He believed that housing was more than just bricks and mortar. It was at the heart of families, communities and the local economy. Whether renting or buying, there was clear evidence that having access to good quality, suitable, secure and well-maintained housing had a profound impact on health and wellbeing and, therefore, quality of life. A sufficient supply of housing, including affordable housing, was also a key component of achieving inclusive economic growth.

The new Housing Strategy would build on the successes of the existing 2019 Housing Strategy which included:

- bringing 955 properties back in to use;
- 7500 properties benefiting from new energy efficiency improvements;
- the issuing of nearly 13,000 licenses in selective licensing areas;
- over 4000 properties receiving adaptations; and
- securing a partner to deliver the Council House Building Programme.

Councillor Rowlandson said that the County Durham Housing Strategy provided a framework to inform the actions and investment of the council and its partners and would ensure the council was well positioned to maximise future opportunities for funding support. The Housing Strategy aimed to support people, to live independently with support where required, and remain in their home for as long as they desired by ensuring houses were flexible to differing needs over their lifetime, including supporting family living and adaptability for older age. He added that needed to do much more to drive up the quality and standard of properties, whether newly built houses coming through the planning system or existing houses in the private rented, market or affordable sectors, so that everyone had access to a warm, safe and decent property that they could afford.

Bringing empty properties back into use, wherever possible, was a key aim of the strategy as this both helped deliver much needed housing and tackled what could otherwise be a blight on the community. The actions and outcomes in the 12-month delivery plan would ensure no delay in delivering the strategy as the council developed a longer-term delivery plan. Some examples of the important outcomes in the delivery plan included:

- delivering the Council House New Build Programme to deliver affordable homes to meet needs;
- developing a housing delivery pipeline to access funding opportunities;
- reviewing the current allocations and lettings policy to ensure it met the needs of customers;
- preparing a temporary accommodation placement strategy to provide suitable accommodation for those in need and reduce costs; and
- delivering the disabled facilities grants to enable people to stay in their own houses.

Councillor Rowlandson moved the recommendations set out in paragraph 11 of the report.

Councillor Wilkes seconded the report.

Members debated the strategy at length and some members expressed concerns about houses of multiple occupation (HMOs), particularly in former mining areas, amidst growing public concern and the impact HMOs had on local communities. A number of Members felt there were discrepancies from the information reported to Scrutiny, which they believed had changed when reported to Cabinet and Council on the number of houses proposed to be built. A number of councillors opposing the report referred to 500 new build properties in addition to any acquisitions. In response the Corporate Director advised that HMOs were subject to licensing criteria and the Article 4 threshold needed to be met locally, and that the aspiration was for 500 homes including new builds and those the Council would acquire. She added that the presentation to scrutiny was a critical step in the process before going to Cabinet for approval.

In response to a point made about the revised report not going back to scrutiny the Director of Legal and Democratic Services advised that there was no requirement for the report to go back to scrutiny. Members were advised that the report had been available for members to see and raise any questions for the Cabinet meeting held on 10 July and that members also had the opportunity to submit any questions ahead of the meeting.

Councillor R Bell, referring to Article 4 directives about HMOs said that the Council would need to consult with central government about changes to the legislation.

Councillor K Shaw moved a Motion without Notice to defer the report. The Motion was seconded by Councillor J Miller.

Councillor M Wilkes said that if the main issue about approving the strategy was due to HMOs then the Council needed to ask central government to look at the legislation around this and change the rules. Councillor Wilkes expressed concern that delaying the approval of the strategy would delay the development of housing that was so badly needed in the County. He felt that deferring adoption of the strategy would not be beneficial for residents of County Durham and that councillors could lobby the new 412 Labour MPs to help with the HMO issue.

Councillor C Hood requested a named vote, which was supported.

Councillor Rowlandson confirmed that it was reported that there would be 500 new build homes, this was alluded to in paragraph 5 of the report. The housing sites had been put forward to the North East Combined Authority (NECA) and was the biggest plan for the North East. Councillor Rowlandson was concerned that any delays in agreeing the strategy would set back any new developments. He added that rural housing was a new addition to the report which was welcomed, and that HMOs could often provide wrap around care for the homeless. Councillor Rowlandson commented that it appeared that those opposing the strategy and seeking deferment wanted this in the east of the county which sent the wrong message.

Upon a vote being taken

**For the Motion – 48**

Councillors R Adcock-Forster, V Anderson, V Andrews, J Atkinson, P Atkinson, A Batey, K Batey, C Bihari, D Boyes, J Clark, R Crute, S Deinali, L Fenwick, J Griffiths, O Gunn, D Hall, C Hampson, S Henig, J Higgins, M Johnson, C Kay, B Kellett, R Manchester, C Marshall, D McKenna, I McLean, S McMahan, J Miller, B Moist, D Mulholland, D Nicholls, P Pringle, J Purvis, J Scurfield, P Sexton, K Shaw, G Smith, T Smith, T Stubbs, A Surtees, F Tinsley, S Townsend, E Waldock, J Watson, M Wilson, S Wilson, D Wood and R Yorke.

### **Against the Motion**

Councillors A Bell, C Bell, R Bell, J Blakey, D Brown, L Brown, J Charlton, J Cosslett, B Coult, M Currah, T Duffy, J Elmer, D Freeman, D Haney, P Heaviside, C Hood, A Hopgood, G Hutchinson, A Jackson, N Jones, P Jopling, C Lines, C Martin, S McDonnell, J Nicholson, D Oliver, R Ormerod, E Peeke, R Potts, A Reed, G Richardson, K Rooney, J Rowlandson, A Savory, A Shield, J Shuttleworth, A Simpson, W Stelling, A Sterling, D Stoker, D Sutton-Lloyd, C Varty, M Walton, A Watson and M Wilkes.

### **Abstentions**

Councillor L Maddison

The Motion was **carried**.

## **11 2023/24 Treasury Management Final Outturn**

The Council noted a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided an overview of the councils treasury management outturn performance for 2023/24, including a summary treasury position, details of borrowing activity during the year and the position as at 31 March 2024, an overview of investment activity and details of investments held at 31 March 2024, performance against the key treasury management indicators and performance against the key prudential indicators (for copy see file of Minutes).

Councillor R Bell, Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance said it pleasing to note that the Council had fully complied with all the requirements of the Treasury Management Policy and Strategy and officers had managed cash flow and investment in line with the framework.

In response to a question from Councillor D Hall about debts, land sale strategies, the use of revenue to fund services and using land, the Corporate Director of Resources explained that the capital programme had to be funded in a certain way. Capital receipts generated from sales of land and buildings would fund capital projects, together with government grants. In terms of borrowing, the annual revenue budget made provisions for prudential borrowing. The questions around assets sat outside of the report but the Director would respond to Councillor Hall outside of the meeting.

Councillor Hall raised a further question about under borrowing and services being cut. In response the Corporate Director of Resources explained that the revenue account showed the cost of borrowing, however, at this stage the interest rates were still too high to take out further loans.



**Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

**12 Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 23-24**

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

**13 Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2023/24**

The Chair invited Councillor M Walton, Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel to present the report and informed Council that Billie Leigh, Luke and Cory, three young people co-opted onto the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) were in attendance to speak to the report, supported by Rob Walker, Project Worker for Investing in Children (for copy see file of Minutes).

Councillor Walton presented the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report for endorsement. She thanked officers from the Corporate Parenting Panel along with all the young people who made the Annual Report possible.

The Annual Report covered the period April 2023 to March 2024, and covered a wide range of work taking place in County Durham to support young people in care, as well as care leavers.

Councillor Walton alluded to some of the particularly proud achievements including:

- Learning around the language we use, we might not always get it right but are making progress
- Know 'what when' guide
- Poetry book
- Education Fun Fund
- Supply Pack funding
- Good Luck cards for exams
- John Pearce was ADCS Director last year and invited young people to present at the ADCS conference at Manchester
- Establishment of a Regional CPP Chairs / Vice Chairs Network across the 12 LA areas

Councillor Walton said that anyone who served on the Corporate Parenting Panel knew that she used the phrase 'So What?' as she wanted to see real action and improved outcomes for young people..

Councillor Walton highlighted work that had taken place throughout the year which included meeting with young people from the children in care council, who hold the CPP to account on the progress against priorities, and reminded members that all Councillors were corporate parents and had a duty to fulfil corporate parenting responsibilities. Those members not on the Corporate Parenting Panel should still champion young people on the committees and panels they sit on, look out for them, and ensure that decisions taken have a positive impact on their lives.

The CPP Annual Report was a great resource to see the breadth and scope of work undertaken by the Corporate Parenting Panel and the service. She asked that the annual report was shared as a tool to highlight the good work and to champion our young people.

Councillor Walton was extremely proud of the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel, and the commitment within the service to ensure the best possible experiences and outcomes for the young people who were in our care, and she presented the annual report for endorsement.

Councillor Walton handed over to Luke, Cory and Billie Leigh from the Children in Care Council.

Luke said that this was the third time he had attended and presented at a Council meeting and appreciated that young people were being heard and had their voices listened to and their ideas put forward at CPP. He added that it was important to work together to ensure Children's Services received the funding required to make people in care have a better start. He was very proud to be working and sharing his thoughts with the CPP.

Cory said that to him, the CPP allowed him to speak to officers and councillors and to scrutinise all of the services affecting young persons. He urged everyone to offer something or make a change to service provision that would make the young people's experience of being in care a better one.

Billie Leigh said that children in care became part of the Durham family, who in turn were responsible for these young people. She felt empowered, being listened to and coming up with resolutions to problems at the CPP and looked forward to the year ahead. She asked people to act and not standstill.

The Chair thanked Luke, Cory and Billie Leigh for their presentations.

Councillor A Reed congratulated the officers and the CPP who supported the young people in care, and thanked the young people in attendance who were a great example to everyone one of us.

Councillor S Deinali said that it was a pleasure to be a member of the CPP and to see all of the work carried out. She added that it was evident that so many strategies and support were in place especially in high levels of deprivation, however, it was an area that was underfunded. She praised the social care teams that went above and beyond by listening and supporting the young people and praised the report that celebrated the young people's achievements. She thanked the young people on the panel who were very eloquent in putting forward their ideas and she looked forward to what could be achieved in the future.

Councillor Hopgood, Leader of the Council thanked every member of the CPP and to our young people. She also thanked Rob Walker for his support to the young people, who were an inspiration to us all.

Councillor C Varty said that she felt it was an honour to be part of the CPP listening to what the young people were going to do and say next. She said that it had been a treat to listen to them at this meeting and said they should keep doing what they were doing.

**Resolved:**

(a) That the content of the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report be noted.

(b) That the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report, which provided oversight of the work undertaken during 2023-24, and the priorities for the year ahead be endorsed.

**14 County Durham Youth Justice Service, Youth Justice Plan 2024/2025**

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

**15 Motions on Notice**

The motion on the agenda was deferred to the next meeting.

**16 Questions from Members**

There were no questions from Members.