

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At an Ordinary Meeting of the County Council held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Wednesday 23 September 2015 at 10.00 am**

Present:

Councillor J Blakey in the Chair

Councillors E Adam, J Allen, J Alvey, B Armstrong, J Armstrong, L Armstrong, B Avery, A Batey, A Bell, D Bell, E Bell (Vice-Chairman), J Bell, R Bell, H Bennett, G Bleasdale, A Bonner, D Boyes, P Brookes, C Carr, J Carr, J Chaplow, J Charlton, J Clark, P Conway, J Cordon, K Corrigan, P Crathorne, R Crute, K Davidson, M Davinson, K Dearden, M Dixon, S Forster, D Freeman, I Geldard, B Graham, J Gray, O Gunn, C Hampson, T Henderson, J Hillary, M Hodgson, G Holland, A Hoppood, L Hovvels, E Huntington, I Jewell, O Johnson, B Kellett, A Laing, P Lawton, J Lethbridge, J Lindsay, A Liversidge, C Marshall, L Marshall, J Maslin, P May, J Measor, O Milburn, B Moir, S Morrison, A Napier, T Nearney, M Nicholls, H Nicholson, A Patterson, T Pemberton, M Plews, C Potts, L Pounder, G Richardson, J Rowlandson, A Savory, K Shaw, A Shield, J Shuttleworth, M Simmons, M Simpson, H Smith, T Smith, M Stanton, B Stephens, D Stoker, P Stradling, A Surtees, P Taylor, K Thompson, F Tinsley, E Tomlinson, J Turnbull, A Turner, A Watson, M Wilkes, M Williams, C Wilson and S Wilson

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Brown, J Clare, N Foster, B Glass, D Hall, J Hart, K Henig, S Henig, D Hicks, K Hopper, S Iveson, C Kay, J Lee, H Liddle, R Lumsdon, J Maitland, N Martin, P Oliver, R Ormerod, J Robinson, S Robinson, W Stelling, L Taylor, O Temple, A Willis, R Yorke, R Young and S Zair

Prior to the commencement of business the Chairman formally report the deaths of:

- former Durham City Councillor and Member of Parliament for Durham City, Gerry Steinberg who was a City Councillor between 1975 and 1987 and Member of Parliament for Durham City from 1987 until his retirement in 2005;
- former Durham City Councillor and Alderman, Ray Gibbon who was Mayor in 2003/2004 and was made an Alderman in 2007. Ray was also a Parish Councillor for Witton Gilbert and a lay preacher in the Methodist Church.

The Council stood for a moments silence as a mark of respect.

1 Presentation of the Chairmans Medal Award

The Chairman informed the Council that she wished to present two Chairman's Medal Awards.

The first medal was to Dr Mike Lavender, a consultant in Public Health Medicine at County Hall, for his outstanding work to the people of County Durham and overseas.

Mike's recent commitment to Nepal had been extensive as he supported the Nepalese people following the appalling earthquake in April that ravaged the country. He had undertaken fund raising and spent time actively assisting the relief programme in Nepal. Soon after the tragic events he flew out to Nepal to help with the rescue effort from the initial disaster to work with Save the Children and the organization, Child Reach Nepal.

Such were the unforeseen dangers, Mike was actually caught up in later aftershocks that caused the loss of further life in Nepal where he witnessed appalling situations.

In County Durham, Mike had been fundamental in the quest to invest in medical checks designed to successfully reduce health inequalities.

Dr Lavender thanked the Chairman for the presentation of the award and referred to the charity Child Reach Nepal, which aimed to improve children's access to healthcare, education and child protection and asked Member's to support the charity in any way possible. He also referred to fundraising work being undertaken by Hugh Stephenson in Children and Adults Services to help rebuild schools in Nepal following the earthquake.

The second medal was awarded to Michael Banks, former Deputy Chief Constable of Durham Constabulary, for his contribution in reducing crime and making a positive difference in County Durham communities.

Michael was a well-known figure throughout County Durham and had served his entire 30-year police career with Durham, being appointed Deputy Chief Constable in 2012. He helped spearhead the force's vision to inspire excellent policing, inspired confidence in victims and communities, doing so by protecting neighbourhoods, tackling criminals and solving problems around the clock.

Michael ensured that a commitment and dedication was maintained in providing a first class policing service for the people and Communities of County Durham. As Deputy Chief Constable Michael had the responsibility for force performance, collaboration initiatives and strategic policing requirements as well as Crime and Justice, Tasking and Co-ordination and Professional Standards and Legal Services Commands.

In accepting the award, Michael said he was both humbled and honoured to receive the Chairman's Medal. He praised the level of partnership working which had taken place in County Durham which had helped turn communities and individuals around from potential criminality.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2015 were confirmed by the Council as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3 Declarations of Interest

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

4 Chairman's Announcements

Charity Cycle Ride Presentation

The Chairman made a presentation to John Philipson of the North East Autism Society following his sponsored 270 mile cycle ride from Trimdon to London which raised over £5,000. Mr Philipson invited Members to see the work of the Society which was taking place in County Durham.

Northumbria in Bloom Awards

The Chairman was pleased to announce that County Durham had won a number of awards in the Northumbria in Bloom Awards 2015.

Durham City won gold and was a category winner while Chester-le-Street won a silver gilt. Stanley secured silver in the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Northumbria in Bloom contest.

The accolades came after the Council entered Durham City and Chester-le-Street into the large town category and Stanley into the town section. The entries were supported by local residents, organisations, businesses and partners.

Other town and parish council and community-led entries from around the county also enjoyed success with gold awards being received for Sedgfield, Waldrige, Tanfield and Sunderland Bridge (Small Village category winner)

- Ferryhill, Newfield/Pelton Lane Ends and Medomsley all picked up silver awards
- Chilton, Shotley Bridge and Middleton-in-Teesdale were handed silver gilts
- Belmont, Carrville and Gilesgate Moor secured silver gilt and was named Urban Community category winner
- Cornforth, High Pittington, Low Pittington and Littleton all enjoyed bronze and High Pittington was also named 'most improved'

Judges visited Durham City, Chester-le-Street and Stanley twice where they met members of the community who were involved in the various environmental improvement projects.

The Chairman invited Council to join her in congratulating everyone concerned for their hard work, effort and dedication and for winning the awards which once again showcased the very best of County Durham.

The Chairman informed Council that she would be holding a formal reception in County Hall for the winners and details would be announced once they had been finalised.

International Exchange Event

The Chairman referred to the work which pupils at Parkside Academy had been involved in which was displayed outside of the Council Chamber.

Their work was financed by a ninety thousand euros grant from the European Commission which allowed the International Relations team, the Durham County Record Office and DLI museum to work with the school and with partners in the Council's French partner region of the Somme.

Together they had created a model for historical investigation by young people which allowed them to make use of archive material to learn about people from their community. The young people from Willington explored the lives of two soldiers who lived close to their school and followed their journey to the trenches of the Somme and then to the place where one name was recorded on the immense memorial as one of the missing of the Somme.

The Chairman hoped that Members would take time to speak to the school's representatives at the end of the meeting if they had not already done so and find out about the project in greater detail.

Newly elected Councillor for Shotton and South Hetton ED

The Chairman extended a warm welcome to Councillor Alan Liversidge, the newly elected Councillor for the Shotton and South Hetton Electoral Division and hoped he would find his time on the Council an interesting and rewarding experience.

5 Leader's Report

The Chairman informed Council that the Leader of the Council could not be in attendance at the meeting and would provide a full report at the next Council meeting.

Councillor Napier, Deputy Leader of the Council informed Council that all Members had this morning received an email from Councillor N Foster, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Economic Development to inform them that a judge had quashed the interim report of the Planning Inspector into the County Durham Plan and that an examination of the Plan would now take place with a new Inspector.

Councillor Tomlinson, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Assets, Strategic Housing and Rural Issues provided the Council with details of the Durham Humanitarian Support Partnership which had been established to address the current Syrian refugee crisis. The Partnership chaired by himself would consider all needs families seeking refuge in the County may have including housing, food, health, education, translation services and community support. It would be a cross party Partnership and would also seek to work with churches, the voluntary sector and other partners to identify what help may be required and how it should be provided.

The Partnership was due to hold its first meeting on Friday and Councillor Tomlinson thanked those who had already contacted the Council with offers of support. Members would be kept fully informed of the work of the Partnership.

6 Questions from the Public and Area Action Partnerships

There were no questions from the public.

Questions had been received from the Mid Durham Area Action Partnership and the Teesdale Area Action Partnership relating to the following:

- The monitoring of Careers Advice to pupils to ensure each pupil had access to good quality advice
- Steps being taken to ensure that young people could access apprenticeships and training no matter where they lived in the County
- What the Council was able to do to protect the limited bus services that existed in Teesdale.

Paul Fitchett, Vice Chairman and Public Representative for the Mid Durham AAP was in attendance to ask their question and Craig Morgan, AAP Coordinator for the Teesdale AAP was in attendance to ask their questions.

Councillor Ossie Johnson, Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People's Services thanked the Mid Durham Area Action Partnership for their question and provided a response. Councillor Trish Pemberton, Cabinet Support Member for Economic Regeneration thanked the Teesdale Area Action Partnership for their questions and provided responses.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services informed the Council that the questions, together with the responses, would be placed on the Council's website and a copy of the responses would also be sent direct to the Area Action Partnerships.

7 Petitions

There were no petitions for consideration.

8 Report from the Cabinet

The Deputy Leader of the Council provided the Council with an update of business discussed by the Cabinet at its meeting held on 15 July 2015 (for copy see file of Minutes).

Councillor R Bell referred to the new office headquarters for the Council and queried why these should be city centric where land prices were high and parking would be difficult. Councillor Napier, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance replied that no decision had yet been taken on the new office headquarters. This was an information gathering process to produce an outline case. The site of the current County Hall had many positives as an employment site and was considered to be one of the best employment sites in the region. It was anticipated that up to 2,500 high quality jobs could be created on the site which would add to the gross value added in County Durham.

Councillor Hopgood referred to the development framework for future play provision in County Durham and asked when the funding strategy would be developed and who would be involved in developing the strategy. Councillor Plews, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Libraries and Lifelong Learning replied that she would provide Councillor Hopgood with a response outside of the meeting.

Councillor Wilkes referred to the level of Council reserves and to a statement made by Councillor Napier that the Council had drawn down £59m of reserves since 2011. This being the case, the Council should now only have £42m in reserves, yet had more than this. Councillor Wilkes considered it was misleading for Councillor Napier to make such a statement when reserves had been increased.

Councillor Napier, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance thanked Councillor Wilkes for his question. In May 2010 the Liberal Democrat's signed up to a joint Liberal Democrat/Conservative manifesto which set out a program of austerity, without any detail about the austerity programme, how deep austerity would be and its impact on people and the public sector. This had given the 'green light' to drive austerity forward which it was claimed was needed to balance the country's finances but which had impacted on the vulnerable and the needy. Council finances had been cut year on year by government and there was a need for the Council to hold reserves to allow it to work to the best of its ability to meet the wishes of local people. The County Council had used its reserves when needed but had also replenished them whenever possible to avoid possible financial crisis, as had many other councils, as a prudent approach to strategic financial management.

9 Treasury Management Outturn 2014/15

The Council noted a report of the Corporate Director, Resources regarding the treasury management outturn position for 2014/15. The report was required under the regulatory framework of Treasury Management and provided detailed information of the Council's cash management, loans and investments (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Council was informed that the report also incorporated the needs of the 'Prudential Code', regarded as best operational practice, to ensure adequate monitoring of the Council's capital expenditure plans and prudential indicators.

In reply to a question from Councillor Shuttleworth on the level of return on investments, the Corporate Director, Resources informed Council that a strategy had been agreed by the County Council that no investments would be for a period of more than 12 months. However, there was now scope to invest for longer periods and the County Council had recently started investing in Blue Chip Banks for 2 year periods.

Councillor R Bell referred to the recovery of debt from Icelandic banks and praised the work of officers in achieving such a good rate of recovery.

Councillor Wilkes referred to the level of Council reserves and asked whether there would be opportunity for more invest to save schemes. The Corporate Director, Resources replied that the Council would continue to use invest to save if robust

business cases were made. Councillor Napier added that reserves could also be used to protect the MTFP or used as revenue for capital building, and this would be reviewed in due course.

10 Accommodation Member Working Group

The Council considered a report of the Corporate Director, Resources regarding the setting up of an Accommodation Member Working Group to consider options for the Civic and Democratic requirements in the proposed new city centric council headquarters (for copy see file of Minutes).

In **moving** the report, Councillor Napier informed the Council that it was important for the Working Group to seek the views of all Members and encouraged all Members to put their views forward to the Group.

Seconded by Councillor C Marshall and

Resolved:

That the recommendations contained in the report be approved.

11 Review of the Independent Persons Remuneration and Term of Office

The Council considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services regarding the remuneration and terms of office of the Council's 'Independent Persons' (for copy see file of Minutes).

Moved by Councillor Napier, **Seconded** by Councillor Stephens and

Resolved:

That the recommendations contained in the report be approved.

12 Community Governance Review of Pelton and Newfield

The Council considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services regarding the outcome of the final stage of consultation undertaken as part of the community governance review of Pelton and Newfield (for copy see file of Minutes).

Moved by Councillor Napier, **Seconded** by Councillor Cordon and

Resolved:

That the recommendation contained in the report be approved.

13 Community Governance Review - Pelton Fell

The Council considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services regarding the draft terms of reference and consultation documents for the community governance review of Pelton Fell (for copy see file of Minutes).

Moved by Councillor Napier, **Seconded** by Councillor L Marshall and

Resolved:

That the recommendation in the report be approved.

14 Changes to the Constitution

The Council considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services regarding proposed amendments to the Constitution to reflect changes to the law (for copy see file of Minutes).

Moved by Councillor Napier, **Seconded** by Councillor Stephens and

Resolved:

That the recommendation contained in the report be approved.

15 Annual Report of the Standards Committee

The Council noted a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which provided a summary of the work of the Standards Committee during 2014/15 and set out the direction the Committee intended to take during 2015/16 (for copy see file of Minutes).

Councillor A M Williams, Chairman of the Standards Committee informed the Council that the report reflected on the work of the Committee during the previous year and also set out the proposed direction for the current year. While there was no requirement for the Committee to produce an Annual Report, it believed that doing so demonstrated good practice.

The report set out the Code of Conduct complaints which had been dealt with during the previous two years. While there had been a welcome reduction in complaints during 2014/15 from the number received a year earlier, the Standards Committee remained fully committed to supporting and advising local Councils where necessary in a bid to ensure high standards of conduct from all elected members. It was hoped that a local councils training session planned for later in the year would go some way to reducing the number of complaints even further.

Councillor Williams thanked the Monitoring Officer and her staff for their support during the year and also thanked Councillor J Armstrong, the outgoing Chairman of the Committee.

16 Motions on Notice

There were no motions for consideration.

17 Questions from Members

There were no questions from Members.