



RECORD OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The following is a record of the decisions taken at the meeting of **CABINET** held on **Wednesday 18 January 2017**.

The decisions will come into force and may be implemented from **30 January 2017** unless the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or its Committees object to any such decision and call it in.

Welfare Reform and Poverty Issues

Summary

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships and the Interim Corporate Director of Children and Young Peoples Services which provided an update on the welfare reform programme including the wider issues of poverty and the Council's response thus far through its poverty action plan. The report covered all areas of the Council with a particular focus on work planned to respond to child poverty across the County.

The government is continuing with its policy of welfare reform to achieve financial savings and to encourage people to support themselves through employment. It has made further welfare and benefits policy announcements since the last report to Cabinet in October 2015. Key headlines include:

- a) the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Work Programme and Work Choice will be replaced by a new Work and Health Programme, contracts for which will begin from October 2017;
- b) introduction of the Life Chances Strategy, with the first statistical report being published before the end of the financial year ending 31 March 2017;
- c) removal of specific parts of the Child Poverty Act 2010, including the duty placed on local authorities to prepare and publish an assessment of the needs of children living in poverty in their area;
- d) lowering the benefit cap so that the total amount of benefits to which a family on out of work benefits can be entitled to in a year will not exceed £20,000 for couples and lone parents, and £13,400 for single claimants;
- e) changes to the child element of Universal Credit to limit payment for a maximum of two persons who are either children or qualifying young persons for whom a claimant is responsible;
- f) freezing social security benefits for four tax years starting from 2016/17;
- g) reduction in social housing rents by one percent a year for four years from April 2016;
- h) proposal to apply the Local Housing Allowance cap to Housing Benefit all claims in supported and sheltered housing with a top-up paid by the local authority from 2019; and

- i) proposals to halve the disability employment gap published in Improving Lives, the green paper on work, health and disability.

In the 2016 Autumn statement, the government announced that it is to delay its plans to cap the amount of eligible Housing Benefit in the social rented sector both in relation to general needs and supported accommodation from 2018 to 2019. The Chancellor also confirmed that departmental spending plans set out in 2015 Spending Review would remain in place for the current spending review period and that the government has no plans to reduce welfare spending over and above what is already planned during this parliament. In fact, the Chancellor announced that the government intended to reduce the taper rate at which benefits are withdrawn from people when they start work on Universal Credit by two percent from April 2017, at a cost to the Exchequer of £700 million.

In addition, the government announced that it has decided to scrap the 'Pay to Stay' policy which would have forced councils to charge higher-earning social housing tenants more rent. The decision followed repeated calls from the local government sector to drop the scheme as it would be too difficult to implement.

The application of a cap on the amount of Housing Benefit paid to tenants living in the social rented sector and in supported housing schemes could have a major impact locally over the next couple of years. This cap will be brought in line with the existing Local Housing Allowance rates which apply to tenants in the private rented sector.

Supported housing helps home some of the most vulnerable residents, who are already seeing impacts in the level of support available through changes in response to the continuing programme of austerity. From just the cap alone, the financial impact locally could be in the region of £7.5 million per annum.

While there have been some changes to the pace of change, with policy u-turns and delays in the implementation of flagship reforms such as Universal Credit, the initial benefits and welfare changes the government continue to have a discernible effect on residents in the county.

It is important that the council and its partners continue to respond through the more comprehensive approach we now have to welfare reform and poverty issues, overseen by the Poverty Action Steering Group.

Through the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme, the council continues to protect vulnerable working age people from the 10 percent national cut which was made to Council Tax Support. The scheme has been extended for a further year into 2017/18, providing valuable support to many in need.

The use of Discretionary Housing Payments has been one of the ways the council has helped those affected by the changes. The policy adopted has been to try and help those affected improve their personal situation through the triage review and has been successful in helping residents move into employment, training or manage their financial situation better.

This year the council has seen greater demands on the funds available and there is a forecast overspend of up to £332,728. To meet this shortfall it is recommended that funding be transferred from the council's Welfare Assistance fund which remains underspent.

Through the steering group, a poverty action plan has been developed which seeks to tackle poverty on a number of fronts. Progress is being made with implementing the plan and following a mid-term review informed by recent engagement events, the action plan is being revised and updated.

There is a great deal of activity being undertaken locally to support employment and employability and through work commissioned by the area action partnerships.

This will include a detailed analysis and understanding of the data relating to child poverty in the county including the identification of gaps in our knowledge. Existing service provision across a range of sectors will also be mapped and gaps identified in order to inform the development of additional service provision and new interventions where required. A report on the proposed work programme will be brought to Cabinet for consideration at the beginning of the new financial year.

As expected, the government intends to continue with its programme of welfare reform in order to tackle what has been described as a dependency culture and to reduce public spending on welfare. While there have been some changes to the pace of change, with policy u-turns and delays in the implementation of flagship reforms such as Universal Credit, the initial benefits and welfare changes the government made are having a discernible impact on residents in the county and it is important that the council and its partners continue to respond.

Decision

The Cabinet:

- a) noted the contents of this report and the progress being made by the council and its partners in addressing welfare reform and the wider poverty issues in the county;
- b) agreed to meet the overspend on the Discretionary Housing Policy for 2016/17, from the Welfare Assistance Scheme budget;
- c) agreed to an in-depth piece of work exploring child poverty in County Durham as outlined in the report.

DurhamWorks Programme – Youth Employment Initiative

Summary

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Interim Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services and the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services which provided an update on the DurhamWorks Programme - Youth Employment Initiative.

The DurhamWorks Programme is a European funded, Durham County Council led partnership project that supports young people aged 16 to 24 who are NEET / unemployed and resident in County Durham.

Delivery of the project commenced in April 2016 (after final approval had been received from the Department for Work and Pensions, following a delay); a DurhamWorks central team had been recruited; Service Level Agreements were in place with 16 External Delivery Partners and 4 Durham County Council Delivery Partners; and a Subcontractor Framework had been established to enable the procurement of specialist and targeted provision to enhance the Durham Works Programme. Since July 2016, there have been a number of unforeseen challenges that have impacted on delivery of the Programme. However, as a result of the resilience and determination of DurhamWorks colleagues, a number of these challenges have been overcome.

The overall target is to engage 5,830 young people into the DurhamWorks Programme. As of 29th November 2016, there were 2,012 participants registered on the Programme, of which 836 had been verified as eligible. In the DurhamWorks application, which was submitted in September 2015, the original target was to register 2915 young people (verified as eligible) by the end of 2016. However, following the delayed start to the Programme, a request was made to the Department for Work and Pensions to reduce this target to 1,000 young people (registered and verified as eligible) by the end of 2016.

Although the delay in payment being received from the Department for Work and Pensions for the delivery of the Programme has created a challenge in terms of managing the financial performance of the Programme, confidence remains that the entire £17.04m Programme will be successfully delivered by July 2018.

The first DurhamWorks marketing campaign commenced in October 2016 for an initial four week period. This is targeted in areas of County Durham that have the highest proportion of young people who are NEET / unemployed. The focus was on making the DurhamWorks brand more recognisable to potential participants. As a result of this activity, there has been a significant increase in the number of enquiries received about the Programme. There will be a further marketing campaign commencing in January 2017 that will target employers. A Participant Task Group has been established, in order to ensure that the views and opinions of young people who engage in DurhamWorks are captured and utilised in order to inform future delivery of the Programme.

A comprehensive Employer Support Pack is being produced, to underpin employer engagement activities. DurhamWorks is liaising closely with Business Durham to enhance the employer offer. Following a process to identify gaps in existing DurhamWorks provision, it is expected that new specialist learning provision will commence delivery from January 2017 onwards. This will be targeted at specific vulnerable groups.

A methodology for evaluating the DurhamWorks Programme has been developed in conjunction with Durham University and procurement of this research project is currently being undertaken. The expectation is that evaluation of DurhamWorks will commence in April 2017.

Significant progress continues to be made in delivering a successful DurhamWorks Programme, which is already resulting in more NEET / young people aged 16-24 in County Durham being supported into education, employment and training.

Decision

The Cabinet:

- (a) noted the information contained within the report;
- (b) agreed to continue to monitor performance in relation to delivery of the DurhamWorks Programme.

Children's Services Update

Summary

The Cabinet considered a report of the Interim Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services which provided an update on the local, regional and national developments in relation to Children's Services. In addition, the report provided an update on progress following the outcome of the Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services in February 2016, and, provided an update on the Stronger Families Programme, Child Sexual Exploitation and the work of the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

A report was presented to Cabinet on 13 July 2016 providing information on the national and local developments which support early intervention and prevention and protection of children and young people. The report provided Cabinet with an overview of the Children's Service's inspection regime and an update on the transformation journey that has been undertaken in Children's Services in Durham.

The Ofsted improvement plan was submitted to Ofsted on 28 September 2016. The Senior Inspector and Lead Inspector were assured by the content of the plan and fed back that it was a comprehensive and focused document with clear actions and timescales.

The improvement plan is grouped into the following four themes covering the 14 recommendations:

- Strengthening management and staffing capacity;
- Strengthening political and management oversight;
- Improving the quality of practice; and
- Compliance with regulations.

A Quality Improvement Board (QIB) is chaired by the Interim Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services and meets monthly to provide strategic oversight and lead improvements in quality. The Board oversees the implementation of the Ofsted improvement plan. A forward plan to ensure all themes are looked at in detail each month has been agreed. To date the Board has considered three themes in detail:

- **Theme 1 - strengthening management and staffing capacity;**

There are five key milestones in Theme 1, all of which are on target:

- M1 Resources required identified and financial management processes applied to meet demand.
- M2 Recruitment process reviewed and monitored through key performance data.
- M3 Evaluation of social work development programmes completed.
- M4 Social Worker Health Check completed.
- M5 Structure designed and implemented.

Good progress has been made in relation to Theme 1 and a number of positive outcomes have been achieved which were detailed in the report.

- **Theme 2 - strengthening political and management oversight; and**

There are four key milestones in Theme 2, all of which are on target:

- M1 Political and senior management reporting programmes set.
- M2 Opportunities to discuss success and issues are generated across the Council.
- M3 Updated electronic record management system procured and implemented.
- M4 Review existing working practices and undertake audits to determine effectiveness in key areas of service delivery.

The work of Theme 2 is linked to the Council's Transformation Programme which recognises the significant challenges that the Council faces, aims to redesign services to reduce cost, prioritise resource on the front line, manage demand by helping individuals, families and communities become more resilient, make best use of partners and empower staff. The Children and Young People's Services Transformation Programme is an intrinsic part of the Council's Transformation programme, informing the prioritisation of council-wide transformation activity and being shared by organisational wide work.

Theme 3 - improving the quality of practice- outcomes

There are seven key milestones in Theme 3, all of which are on target:

- M1 Review existing working practices in relation to assessment and undertake internal and external audits to determine effectiveness.
- M2 Practice standards for care planning are agreed and implemented.
- M3 Introduce family friendly care plan documentation.
- M4 LSCB strategy meetings attendance monitored and comprehensive IRO report on quality of planning to CYPSMT.
- M5 Family outcomes framework developed and evaluated to determine service improvement.
- M6 Culture of quality instilled with the workforce.
- M7 Comprehensive programme of internal and external audits undertaken and areas of concern acted upon.

The Service has undertaken a number of actions in relation to Theme 3 to ensure greater challenge, clearer expectations on what good quality casework entails and ensuring that learning and improvement as result of audit, are being acted upon and the feedback 'loop' is being strengthened.

The report also provided information on the Stronger Families Programme, Child Sexual Exploitation and the work of the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

Decision

The Cabinet:

- (a) noted the contents of this report;
- (b) agreed to receive further updates in relation to Children and Young People's Services on a six monthly basis.

Masterplan Updates

Summary

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director, Regeneration and Local Services which presented the masterplans for Peterlee, Seaham, Spennymoor, Shildon, Barnard Castle, and Bishop Auckland and requested Cabinet to endorse that the updates are taken through the relevant Area action Partnership (AAP) meetings for discussion.

The Masterplan Updates reflect activities undertaken by the Council directly as well as by partners and stakeholders, including the private sector. The AAPs have set their own priorities in each locality which are reflected in the Masterplan Updates.

In respect of future actions, the Masterplan Updates set out future projects and priorities for each locality, including:

- (i) **Peterlee:** The new station at Horden Sea View is a Council priority and work is underway to deliver this. The new station will help connect Horden, Peterlee and the surrounding villages with areas of opportunity as well as maximising inward investment opportunities by facilitating access to a wider labour market.
- (ii) **Seaham:** Improvements to Seaham Marina will continue with £1.7 million funding from the Coastal Communities Fund. Works yet to commence include: extension and addition of facilities to the boatyard; extension of the pontoon system for an additional 19 boats and extra power modules to existing pontoons; and the removal of the access road palisade fencing and gates to be replaced by sympathetically designed fences and gates.

- (iii) **Spennymoor:** The owners of DurhamGate have acquired the former Wellsprings site and it will be developed for mixed use consisting of up to 12,000 sqm of business/office/light industry, general industrial and storage. It is envisaged that this would be developed in a flexible manner reflecting market demands. It is also intended that a 930 sqm car showroom, 270 sqm crèche and 350 sqm café/restaurant/drive thru be provided.
- (iv) **Shildon:** Shildon's three decorative arches will remain after local residents voted in favour of their retention. These arches will be repaired by Durham County Council as part of the continued improvements to the town Centre.
- (v) **Barnard Castle:** As a result of the Digital Durham project supported by the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport, British Telecom and the Council most areas in and around Barnard Castle should experience an improvement in the quality and speed of Broadband services through the roll out of fibre services.
- (vi) **Bishop Auckland:** The completion of the Auckland Castle projects such as the Walled Garden, Welcome Tower, Scottish Wing, restaurant and hotels. A Regeneration Partnership body will be established for Bishop Auckland to develop a coordinated land use framework for the town.

Preparing Masterplans for our larger towns was to ensure that the Council had a way of communicating its ambition and financial commitment to delivering on local priorities. The Council has seen other investments come as a result of this more joined up approach which also provides confidence to businesses in making investment choices going forward.

Decision

The Cabinet agreed that the Masterplan Updates for Peterlee, Seaham, Spennymoor, Shildon, Barnard Castle and Bishop Auckland:

- (a) be approved to provide an update on activity in the towns for the community; and
- (b) that the Masterplan Updates be taken through the relevant Area Action Partnership meetings for discussion.

Colette Longbottom
Head of Legal and Democratic Services
20 January 2017