

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At an Ordinary Meeting of the County Council held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Wednesday 1 November 2017 at 10.00 am**

Present:

Councillor B Kellett (Chairman)

Councillors E Adam, J Atkinson, B Avery, A Bainbridge, B Bainbridge, A Batey, A Bell, D Bell, E Bell, J Bell, R Bell, H Bennett, J Blakey, G Bleasdale, L Boyd, P Brookes, J Brown, L Brown, C Carr, J Carr, J Chaplow, J Charlton, J Clare, J Clark, M Clarke, J Considine, K Corrigan, P Crathorne, R Crute, M Davinson, S Dunn, D Freeman, A Gardner, J Grant, O Gunn, C Hampson, T Henderson, S Henig, D Hicks, A Hopgood, K Hopper, L Hovvels, P Howell, S Iveson, I Jewell, O Johnson, P Jopling, C Kay, L Kennedy, A Laing, J Lethbridge (Vice-Chairman), K Liddell, H Liddle, L Maddison, J Maitland, J Makepeace, R Manchester, C Marshall, L Marshall, C Martin, M McKeon, I McLean, O Milburn, A Napier, J Nicholson, R Ormerod, A Patterson, C Potts, L Pounder, S Quinn, A Reed, G Richardson, S Robinson, J Rowlandson, A Savory, E Scott, P Sexton, K Shaw, A Shield, J Shuttleworth, M Simmons, A Simpson, H Smith, T Smith, J Stephenson, B Stephens, A Surtees, L Taylor, P Taylor, O Temple, K Thompson, F Tinsley, T Tucker, J Turnbull, A Watson, M Wilkes, A Willis, C Wilson, M Wilson and D Wood

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Allen, P Atkinson, D Brown, I Cochrane, G Darkes, N Grayson, K Hawley, S Hugill, E Huntington, E Mavin, S McDonnell, S Morrison, H Nicholson, P Oliver, J Robinson, D Stoker, S Wilson, R Yorke and S Zair

1 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2017 were confirmed by the Council as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, with the addition of the apologies recorded of Councillor H Smith.

2 Declarations of Interest

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

3 Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman extended a warm welcome to members from Framwellgate Moor Women's Institute who were present at the meeting. The Chairman hoped they would find their visit an interesting experience and looked forward to meeting with them after the meeting.

The Chairman also extended a warm welcome to Councillor Jude Grant who had been successful in the recent by-election for the Trimdon and Thornley Electoral Division. The Chairman hoped that Jude would find her time on the Council an interesting and rewarding experience.

Finally, the Chairman welcomed Jennifer Norman, Stuart Armstrong, Catherine Rowland, and George Nandis, who were the council's national management trainees and were observing the meeting as part of their training programme.

4 Leader's Report

The Leader informed Council that budget consultation was underway, with presentations being made to all 14 Area Action Partnerships and other community meetings, as well as consultation forms being available at meetings and online. Everyone was encouraged to take part and the Council had always involved the public in its budget decisions, after experiencing £200 million of government cuts with 2,500 fewer jobs, with this figure heading towards £250 million.

The Leader had attended consultation events at the County Durham Partnership Forum meeting in Chester le Street and Stanley AAP and would attend as many other AAPs as he was able to, before the consultation period ended on 1 December 2017. Cabinet, Scrutiny and Council would consider final proposals in the New Year, by which time the Chancellor will have delivered his Autumn Statement and Budget at the end of November.

Although government plans for funding post-2020 were unknown, there was a national fair funding review underway and the Council needed to ensure that its needs were fully reflected in any new funding system as well as continued equalisation to compensate for uneven council tax bases, which had been a key part of the finance system since at least World War 2. The previous coalition government began the process of dismantling this system with huge and disproportionate levels of cuts hitting northern councils in particular.

The Leader informed the Council that following the recent Unison ballot, teaching assistants had voted to accept the Council's final offer. All of the recognised trade unions had now agreed to the offer and the changes would be implemented through a local collective agreement.

The Council was now committed to moving ahead with the career progression board, with a planning meeting taking place yesterday. The Council would continue to work with recognised trade unions, teaching assistants and head teachers to consider options for progression. The Leader thanked all those involved for the work undertaken to resolve this issue.

The Leader informed Council that Anne Longfield, the Children's Commissioner for England, had completed a visit to County Durham to recognise and celebrate the work of the Council's children and young people's service, presenting a Gold Award in recognition of outstanding work during the 2016 'Takeover Challenge'. During her time in Durham the Commissioner also visited Aycliffe Secure Centre and heard from other parts of the Children and Young People's service.

Another set of parliamentary boundary proposals had been received. He pointed out that they may never see light of day because they would need parliamentary approval. County Durham would lose one and a half constituencies with Sedgefield merging with Billingham in Stockton and Durham City merging with Easington, although both of these constituencies were actually broken into three parts with some wards to the north and west of Durham transferred to North Durham and North West Durham respectively, Blackhalls and Wingate moving in with Hartlepool and Seaham with Houghton in Sunderland. Burnopfield and Dilton would also move into Blaydon.

Much of this was different to the last set of proposals which were consulted on, yet despite the significant level of change and disruption in the new proposals, the Boundary Commission proposed no further public hearings at this stage. This was completely unsatisfactory and would be discussed at the Constitution Working Group in two weeks' time.

The Leader informed the Council that after a record-breaking Durham Book Festival during October which included a series of packed out sessions during the ten-day programme, the County welcomed the UK's largest light festival, Lumiere, back to Durham from 16 to 19 November. This was understood to be the largest arts event in the whole of the UK in November and large numbers were anticipated on all nights. A presentation had been given to Members in terms of some of the logistics of this. Lumiere was immediately followed with another huge event for County Durham as Tim Peake's space capsule would arrive at Locomotion in Shildon, thanks to the strengthening partnership with the Science Museum Group.

The Leader was proud to announce that Durham was the first local government organisation in the country to work with the UK's largest publisher, Trinity Mirror, to live stream images from two of the county's most stunning views to the world via Facebook.

As part of a major campaign to Celebrate Durham the Council was working with a range of partners, including Kynren, to showcase County Durham on a global stage by focussing on Durham's vibrant cultural programme and its unique offer as a fantastic place to live, work, visit and invest in.

From 6.30 a.m. this morning people from all over the world could use Facebook to watch the sun rise over Cow Green reservoir in the Durham Dales. In the evening audiences would be invited to watch the sun set over High Force, England's highest waterfall. The live stream from Cow Green reservoir had already had 13,000 views with comments from as far afield as Singapore.

The Leader asked all Members to support the county by sharing today's video and using the #HelpDurhamShine.

Councillor Wilkes referred to budget savings proposals and asked that more detail be provided of what the savings proposals were.

The Leader replied that the consultation document included a full page of details for each saving proposal as well as a link to the Cabinet report. However, there was a balance between the provision of enough and too much information. Consultation had been successful in the past and there was a need to provide the right amount of information to make this a success. Each AAP meeting would have a senior council officer in attendance to answer questions. Councillor Wilkes had previously raised this issue regarding the provision of information for the scrutiny process and pointed out that officer support was provided to all political Groups.

5 Questions from Area Action Partnerships

Questions had been received from Derwent Valley AAP and Spennymoor AAP relating to the following:

- The strategies deployed by the Council on drug misuse and the progress being made to address it.
- How the Council was working with partners to ensure essential services, such as GPs, were adequately provided, particularly in those areas outlined for increased housing allocations.

Councillor L Hovvels, Portfolio Holder for Adult and Health Services thanked the Derwent Valley AAP and the Spennymoor AAP for their questions and provided responses.

6 Questions from the Public

No questions from the public had been received.

7 Petitions

There were no petitions for consideration.

8 Report from the Cabinet

The Leader of the Council provided the Council with an update of business discussed by Cabinet on 13 September and 18 October 2017 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Chairman informed Council that one question on the Cabinet report had been received. Councillor Martin asked the following question:

'Transport for the North, as a new Sub-National Transport Body, may have the tendency to become obsessed with Newcastle, Sunderland, and the Metro system. The danger is that County Durham will continue to lose out on buses and roads due to its rural nature, and towns like Chester-le-Street and Bishop Auckland that are in great need of an hourly rail service to improve the local economy will be neglected in favour of ever more trains linking Newcastle to London at speed. How will cabinet ensure Transport for the North will take an interest in, and allocate resources to, County Durham in an equal manner to other parts of the region?'

Councillor C Marshall, Portfolio Holder for Economic Regeneration thanked Councillor Martin for his question and for submitting it in advance of the meeting to enable a full reply to be given.

Transport for the North covered all of the Northern Regions, the North West, Yorkshire and the North East. It was becoming the Government's preferred vehicle for looking at the major strategic transport issues for the North of England. As such, it was vital that Durham was able to feed in the strategic transport issues around road and rail that affected the County and ensure they were picked up as priorities for the North East and then the wider North.

The Council was able to do that through its position on the North East Combined Authority, where it continued to promote the main road corridors, the A1, A19, A66 and the A690, as well as the rail links on the East Coast Main Line and the Durham Coast Line. In addition to influencing the strategic transport agenda, the Council retained full control of locally commissioned bus services, and would continue to work with the operators to improve the coverage from commercial services.

Transport was at the heart of the Council's economic strategy for County Durham, and the Council would continue to maximise all opportunities to influence decision-making and bring in new investment for the benefit of local residents and businesses.

9 Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2018/19

The Council considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which sought approval for the continuation of the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) for a further year into 2018/19 (for copy see file of Minutes).

In Moving the report, Councillor Napier, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance, informed the Council that this was the fifth year of the Council supporting the Scheme and he hoped it would receive unanimous support of Members.

Despite years of austerity borne by local government there was a need to protect the most vulnerable in society as this was how society was measured.

Durham was one of few Councils who were proposing an unchanged LCTRS. Austerity was hitting the residents of County Durham hard and benefits had been frozen until 2020 despite inflation running at 3%. The discredited Universal Credit scheme, which was morally wrong, was being rolled out despite there being cross party support for a moratorium on this.

Continuation of the Scheme for a further year would continue to protect 34,000 low income families within the County, would award 100% Council Tax support where eligible, and would also protect 26,000 pensioners. Durham was only one of two Local Authorities in the region to continue to offer this level of support and only one of a dwindling number nationally.

In those areas which did not provide a 100% LCTRS evidence showed that there had been a stark increase in the issuing of summonses for Council Tax arrears which caused those most vulnerable to spiral into debt and also resulted in the collection of funds not being achieved.

In Seconding approval of the Scheme Councillor J Brown, Portfolio Holder for Social Inclusion informed the Council that it provided support to the most deprived communities which had suffered an onslaught of welfare cuts. She was proud that the County Council, which had worked hard to protect the Scheme, was one of a few Councils to continue to support such a Scheme. There was evidence that in areas which had drawn back from such level of support Council Tax arrears had increased and bailiffs used which added costs of £400 for a relatively small debt.

Councillor R Bell informed the Council that he supported the continuation of the Scheme and there was a strong pragmatic case for doing so.

Councillor A Hopgood also expressed support for continuation of the Scheme, which she had done so each year, as there was a strong moral case for doing so.

Resolved:

- (a) That the current Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme be continued into 2018/19, which would retain the same level of support to all working age council tax payers on low incomes;
- (b) That the extension to the Scheme be initially for a further year only and be kept under continuous review with a further decision on the Scheme to apply in 2019/20 to be considered by Cabinet in July/September 2018 and Full Council by January 2019.

10 Trimdon and Thornley By-Election

The Council noted a Statement of the Returning Officer following a by-election held on 28 September 2017 in the Trimdon and Thornley Electoral Division.

11 Motions on Notice

There were no motions for consideration.

12 Questions from Members

No questions had been received from Members.