

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At an Ordinary Meeting of the County Council held in the Council Chamber - County Hall, Durham on **Wednesday 19 September 2018 at 10.00 a.m.**

**Present:**

**Councillor J Lethbridge in the Chair**

Councillors J Allen, J Atkinson, P Atkinson, B Avery, A Bainbridge, B Bainbridge, A Batey, A Bell, D Bell, E Bell, R Bell, G Bleasdale, D Boyes, P Brookes, D Brown, J Brown, L Brown, C Carr, J Carr, J Chaplow, J Charlton, J Clare, J Clark, M Clarke, J Considine, K Corrigan (Vice-Chairman), P Crathorne, R Crute, G Darkes, M Davinson, S Dunn, J Grant, N Grayson, O Gunn, D Hall, C Hampson, T Henderson, A Hopgood, K Hopper, L Hovvels, P Howell, S Hugill, E Huntington, S Iveson, I Jewell, O Johnson, C Kay, A Laing, H Liddle, L Maddison, J Maitland, J Makepeace, R Manchester, C Marshall, L Marshall, C Martin, L Mavin, M McKeon, I McLean, S Morrison, A Napier, H Nicholson, J Nicholson, P Oliver, A Patterson, C Potts, L Pounder, S Quinn, A Reed, G Richardson, J Robinson, S Robinson, A Savory, E Scott, P Sexton, K Shaw, A Shield, J Shuttleworth, A Simpson, H Smith, J Stephenson, B Stephens, A Surtees, P Taylor, O Temple, K Thompson, F Tinsley, T Tucker, J Turnbull, A Watson, M Wilkes, A Willis, C Wilson, M Wilson, S Wilson, D Wood, R Yorke and S Zair

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E Adam, J Bell, H Bennett, J Blakey, I Cochrane, S Durham, D Freeman, A Gardner, K Hawley, S Henig, D Hicks, P Jopling, L Kennedy, K Liddell, E Mavin, S McDonnell, M McGaun, R Ormerod, J Rowlandson, M Simmons, D Stoker and L Taylor

### **1 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2018 were confirmed by the Council as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **2 Declarations of interest**

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

### **3 Chairman's Announcements**

#### **Durham, North Carolina**

The Chairman informed the Council, that he had conveyed the council's well wishes to the Mayor and community of the County Council's twinned town of Durham, North Carolina following the destruction and distress caused by Hurricane Florence.

## **Durham County Record Office**

The Chairman announced that Durham County Record Office had recently become a fully accredited archive service under the archive service accreditation scheme. The scheme was the UK quality standard for all areas of archive service delivery.

A warm welcome was then extended to Neil Sweetmore from the National Archives, former Chief Archivist of the Tyne and Wear Archives Service and member of the accreditation panel, Liz Rees.

Addressing the Council, Mrs Rees explained that the recent achievement was a tribute to everyone involved with the County Record Office. Mrs Rees explained that the importance of archives could not be underestimated and were a collective memory to hold governments to account, connect generations and inspire innovation. In presenting the award, Ms Rees spoke of the strengths of the record office which included a strong policy framework and an excellent team of dedicated volunteers.

Gill Parkes, Principal Archivist was delighted to accept the award on behalf of the Record Office and paid tribute to Liz Bregazzi, County Archivist who had been instrumental in the work of the record office but could not be present at the meeting due to illness.

## **Royal British Legion**

The Chairman extended a warm welcome to Peter Milne, Community Fundraiser for the Royal British Legion representing the areas of Durham, Sunderland and North Tees. The Council were shown a brief film entitled 'Thankyou' produced by the Royal British Legion. The film, made to commemorate 100 years of World War I, recognised those who fought on the front line, the women who fought to vote, the families affected by war and those who worked in ammunitions factories. Mr Milne praised the fundraising contributions made by the people of County Durham which had amounted to over £250,000 in 2018.

## **4 Leader's Report**

The Deputy Leader of the Council explained that in the absence of the Leader, the Leader's report would be held over till October. However, Councillor Napier wished to utilise the time to acknowledge and place on record the Council's testimony to head teachers, teachers, governing bodies and all those associated with the education system in County Durham following the recent good news relating to exam results in County Durham. The Deputy Leader handed over to the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People's Services.

Councillor Gunn explained the importance of appreciating the work of children and young people, schools, staff and governing bodies across County Durham. 62% of pupils had achieved level four and above in both English and Mathematics, a 3.5% increase on the previous year. This equated to 156 more pupils achieving the benchmark, signifying a major improvement. Those pupils achieving level five had increased by 4.4%. Councillor Gunn said the results were all the more pleasing to

note as they had been achieved against some of the most significant changes to the exam system since 'O' levels were introduced.

Referring to A-levels, Councillor Gunn explained that early indications were that the County's successes had continued from previous years, with above average grades of A\*-B and the majority of students being able to obtain their first choice of university.

## **5 Questions from Area Action Partnerships**

Questions had been received from Derwent Valley Area Action Partnership and Spennymoor Area Action Partnership relating to the following:

- investment plans or opportunities being explored for investment in town (and village) centres physical environments; and
- progress with the development of Festival Walk, Spennymoor.

Derek Snaith, Derwent Valley AAP Co-ordinator and Michael Wilkes, Spennymoor AAP Coordinator were in attendance to ask their questions. Councillor C Marshall, Portfolio Holder for Economic Regeneration thanked both Area Action Partnerships for the questions and provided a response to both.

## **6 Questions from the Public**

A public question had been received seeking the costs or projected costs of the extensive ground investigations that had taken place along the proposed northern relief road route earlier in 2018 and the costs for a similar exercise held a number of years ago for a proposed western relief road.

In the absence of the member of the public the Head of Legal and Democratic Services informed the Council that the questioner would receive a written response to the question and both the question and response would be published on the Council's website following the meeting.

## **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 considered by Cabinet on 11 July 2018 (for copy see file of Minutes).

## **9 Code of Our Values, Behaviours and Conduct**

The Council considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which presented proposals to replace the current code of conduct with a new code of values, behaviours and conduct (for copy see file of Minutes).

The current code had been reviewed with input from Human Resources, Legal Services and Internal Audit. This had resulted in a new modernised code which was easier to read and understand. It had also been extended to incorporate the council values which aligned to the new direction of travel. All employees would receive a copy of the new code in due course.

Councillor J Brown explained that the new code had been prepared to align with the work of the Council, the new modern ways of working and documented the high standards expected from all employees. The revised code has been agreed by the Constitution Working Group.

Councillor A Hopgood endorsed the comments made by the Cabinet Portfolio Holder and was pleased to note that suggestions made throughout the process had been incorporated into the final version.

**Moved** by Councillor J Brown, **Seconded** by Councillor A Hopgood and

**Resolved**

That the Council agree to the revised Code of Values, Behaviours and Conduct.

**10 Treasury Management Outturn 2017/18**

The Council noted a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided information on the treasury management outturn position for the year ended 31 March 2018 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Corporate Director of Resources informed the Council that the report was technical in nature and reflected the detailed work reported through the Cabinet and the Audit Committee. The report provided a summary of net debt, borrowing activity and interest rates. The Corporate Director of Resources reported that all of the Council's investment activity had remained within the benchmarks for managing investment risk and investment was in line with the Council's investment strategy.

**11 Community Governance Review - West Rainton**

The Council considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services regarding the Community Governance Review of West Rainton parish which provided outcomes from the initial consultation and proposed draft recommendations (for copy see file of Minutes).

Councillor A Napier informed the Council that he supported the parish council's request given that they had difficulty in filling vacancies on the parish council and whilst the response rate was disappointing, it was important to note that 284 people had signed a petition, supporting the proposals.

**Moved** by Councillor A Napier, **Seconded** by Councillor A Hopgood and

**Resolved**

That Council agree to make a draft recommendation that the name of the parish/ Parish Council be changed to West Rainton and Leamside with effect from 1 April

2019; and that the council size be reduced from 11 to 9 councillors with effect from the ordinary elections in 2021.

## **12 Work of the Audit Committee for the Period September 2017 to August 2018**

The Chairman of the Audit Committee presented the report which covered the work of the Audit Committee for the period September 2017 to August 2018.

Councillor E Bell placed on record the Committee's thanks to one of the outgoing coopted members for the valuable contribution they had made to the Committee. A new co-opted member had been appointed in May and had settled in well.

The Chairman drew the Council's attention to the work of Internal Audit, which continued to promote and champion the work of internal audit across the organisation. The Committee had agreed a revised version of the internal audit strategy, charter and the annual internal audit plan.

Councillor Bell highlighted the challenge and support made by the Committee on the proposed work programme for the coming year. The work completed by internal audit continued to provide assurance of the council's control environment, governance arrangements and risk management.

Internal Audit continued to update the committee on a quarterly basis. The committee provided the appropriate challenge and a number of officers had attended to provide explanations and answer questions.

It had been very pleasing to note receipt of an unqualified opinion on both sets of financial statements for the County Council and the Pension Fund by the Council's external auditor. This had been achieved against an earlier deadline compared to previous years given that the Council's statement of accounts for 2017/2018 had to be audited and approved by 31st July 2018.

Councillor E Bell highlighted that the work of officers to achieve an unqualified opinion had been an enormous achievement, given the size and complexity of the Council. The external auditors had been complimentary of the Council's efforts in answering queries and ensuring a timely outcome and an unqualified opinion. The Audit Committee's thanks had been passed onto all of the officers involved in the process.

Finally, the Chairman spoke of the continuing good work of the Council's Corporate Fraud Team. The Committee continued to be updated on the excellent work being completed in terms of proactive counter fraud work. To provide some context the Corporate Fraud Team had completed 705 investigations in 2017/18 on a wide range of areas including blue badge abuse, council tax and business rates reduction claims, insurance claims and housing tenancy. The team had either stopped or recovered £796,691 of public money. As a result the team had an excellent local and national profile for their work and had developed strong partnerships with other public sector organisations which continued to enhance the reputation of the Council.

Councillor Shuttleworth, referring to the Audit Committee of 31 July, expressed his disappointment that the Chairman of the Audit Committee had not mentioned the comments made at that meeting about the Asset Management service.

### **13 Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Update**

The Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Panel presented the first Corporate Parenting Panel update which had come about as a result of changes to the constitution and the role and functions of the panel (for copy see file of Minutes).

Councillor P Brookes informed the Council that the new annual report was easy and interesting to read and understand. The changes to the panel arrangements had been very successful, with new terms of reference, new links with the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and a focus on fulfilling the promises made by the panel.

Corporate parenting remained a huge challenge for the Council and its partners with 822 looked after children across the County, an increase from the previous year. This impacted on budgets and childcare services. Councillor Brookes paid tribute to those who contributed to the day to day assistance for looked after children and explained that the service provided could not be achieved without them.

Councillor O Gunn said that the report, written by the Children in Care Council with support from young people was an excellent example of what children and young people could do. It had been produced with children and young people in mind, where the real focus was on what children and young people have told us and what the panel had agreed. As a result, care leavers no longer paid council tax and the amount of apprenticeships that the Council offered had increased.

Councillor Gunn echoed the praise afforded by Councillor Brookes regarding foster carers and for those who adopted children. Councillor Gunn said they were amazing people and were the reason why so many children smiled, slept soundly, attended school and had a willingness to learn. Councillor Gunn explained that it would be remiss of her not to mention the role of elected members who served on fostering and adoption panels.

Councillor E Scott informed the Council that it was her second year of serving on the Corporate Parenting Panel which had been a very positive and rewarding experience. Councillor Scott explained that the panel were able to contribute meaningful input into service development and that officers were open and honest. It was an example of good practice across the authority and the work carried out was absolutely fabulous.

### **14 County Durham Youth Offending Service Youth Justice Plan 2018/19**

The Council noted a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services which presented the annual refresh of the Youth Justice Plan 2017/19. The report highlighted some of the key achievements in reducing reoffending during 2017/18 and provided areas for improvement which would be

focussed upon during the next period in accordance with the service improvement plan (for copy see file of Minutes).

Councillor O Gunn informed the Council that the refreshed plan ensured that the Council met its statutory requirements and set out governance, implementation plans. The Council had improved performance in relation to first time entrants to the youth justice system, re-offending and use of custody.

Councillor Gunn also informed the Council that the County Durham Youth Offending Service had been shortlisted in the Improved Partnerships between Health and Local Government category of the 2018 HSJ Awards, the world's largest healthcare awards programme for the Health and Social Justice. Councillor Gunn congratulated the service on their shortlisting and wished them good luck for the final.

**15 Motions on Notice**

No motions on notice had been submitted.

**16 Questions from Members**

No questions from Members had been submitted.