

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board** held in County Hall, Durham on **Monday 17 December 2018 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor R Crute (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors A Patterson (Vice-Chairman), E Adam, A Batey, R Bell, J Chaplow, M Clarke, P Jopling, H Liddle, J Makepeace, C Martin, O Milburn, C Potts, L Pounder, J Robinson, A Shield, H Smith, F Tinsley, J Turnbull, M Wilkes and A Willis

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Boyes, K Hawley, L Maddison, J Rowlandson and M Simmons

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M Simmons.

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute Members in attendance.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2018 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Matters Arising

With regards to matters arising, the Head of Strategy confirmed the following;

Minute no. 6,

- An update on the Tree Policy was scheduled for Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (ESCOSC) on 8 March 2019 and all Members were welcome to attend.
- Councillor Shield had received a response that should a former employee return on a senior grade within 12 months of leaving payments were able to be recovered. There was still a level of uncertainty on whether the number of people who had been re-employed was extractable due to the way data was recorded.
- A response had been provided to Councillors Martin and Wilkes with regards to the budget outturn reports.

Minute no. 7,

- There was no minimum age for a young person to use the CRM to report environmental issues, however Members were reminded that parental permission should be considered.
- Regarding access to computers in rural and deprived areas, information had been received detailing the location and availability of free access to PCs in libraries and community buildings. Members were requested to identify any gaps in provision in their areas particularly in view of the requirement to apply for Universal Credit online.
- There would be an informal workshop session on the emerging findings on the refreshed County Durham Vision for all Members of Overview and Scrutiny Committees to attend on 14 January 2019.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Update on the delivery of the Medium Term Financial Plan 8

The Board considered a report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships which provided an update on the progress made at the end of September 2018 on the delivery of the 2018/19 Medium Term Financial Plan (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of Strategy referred to a typing error in the report which stated progress made to the end of June 2018 which should have read September 2018.

Councillor Wilkes queried whether it was possible to receive further information on whether savings for 2019/20 were already being made in the current financial year, considering 88% of the total savings had already been made.

The Chairman noted that good progress had been made with regards to the savings for 2019/20 and he would be interested in what impact this had on communities.

Councillor Shield referred to the gender balance of the workforce as five times more female employees had left than male. The Head of Strategy confirmed that this related to the services which had been restructured and the figure was based on small numbers over only two quarters. If the information was considered over a number of years it would show a more balanced ratio between male and female staff of approximately 2/3 female, representing the proportion of female staff working for the Council.

Resolved:

That the contents of the report be noted.

6 Quarter Two 2018/19 Performance Management Report

The Board considered a report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships which presented progress towards achieving key outcomes of the Council's corporate performance framework (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Robinson referred to education reform which had taken place in the previous year and the positive exam results for Durham. He complemented the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services, the schools and their teachers for the achievement and asked the Chairman if those comments could be shared with them on behalf of the Board.

With regards to the maintenance of unclassified roads, Councillor Wilkes noted that one in five were recommended as requiring maintenance and considered this to be a significant issue which was not highlighted as such in the report. He commented that should the Highways maintenance backlog fall even further behind, it would be difficult to recover.

With regards to the percentage reduction in carbon emissions, Councillor Wilkes referred to a recent Cabinet meeting where he stated he had received conflicting information and asked for some clarity on the information in the report. The Head of Strategy confirmed that this report covered a short term period and over a longer term the trend was more positive. She confirmed that figures since 1990 had shown an overall improvement of 52.3% across the County and since 2009 an improvement of 40% in local authority operations, however the figure in the report was down 9% since 2016/17. It was important to recognise how much the Council had reduced carbon emissions over the long term.

Councillor Wilkes referred to the average time taken to answer a telephone call and requested a breakdown by service to identify where took longest to answer. Depending on the nature of the call it may not be a big issue, however for some services where customers required urgent assistance, Members may consider a delay of 60 seconds to be unacceptable.

It was noted that Customer Services had an ongoing improvement project based on a first point of contact model.

Councillor Shield referred to 641 jobs having been created or safeguarded by Business Durham and asked whether more detailed localised information could be provided. He noted that the employment figures were not representative of household earnings and those employed could still be in receipt of benefits or employed on zero-hour contracts. He requested information on the cumulative effect on household income of new and safeguarded jobs.

Councillor Martin suggested it was also worth considering whether the cost of living was rising at a slower rate than pre-recession and was interested to know whether this was an element investigated by the Council.

The Chairman commented on the roll out of Universal Credit, which had had an initial delay of 13 weeks, was currently 5-6 weeks, and the financial impact this may have had on some families.

Councillor Bell referred to a recent report published by Zoopla which had listed Bishop Auckland as one of the most affordable towns to live in the UK with one of the least affordable being Richmond. He referred to the wider picture and stated that employees in the public sector were doing well when considering the house price to household income ratio.

The Chairman noted that those two areas could not be compared as the average house prices were on opposite ends of the spectrum.

Councillor Wilkes reminded the Board that despite the comments from Councillor Bell, even people in more affluent areas of the County were struggling. Councillor Bell clarified that he was not implying that everyone in the public sector was doing well, but when considering the complete picture, there was a cohort of people doing well, which was not reflected in the report.

Councillor Tinsley suggested a Head Teacher would undoubtedly be in a better position than a lower skilled worker, however there were 550,000 people in County Durham and if Members were to explore jobs advertised in job centres, they mostly consisted of minimum wage employment.

Councillor Batey reminded the Board that lower paid workers within the public sector and NHS, represented the many working poor in the County.

Councillor Jopling referred to the effect of having such a large rental market in Durham and rent increases which were entirely at the discretion of the landlord. These increases mostly affected families on working tax credits.

Councillor Jopling then referred to an issue with a wayleave which was delaying the installation of broadband on a new housing estate and having a detrimental effect on businesses. The Vice Chairman confirmed that Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be picking up broadband issues in early 2019 as it was a Countywide issue.

Councillor Makepeace referred to the number of letters received since the meeting in October when he had raised the issue of the Council's Tree Policy and a news article had been published.

Councillor Makepeace stated he needed to raise the issue of bins and residents not taking them in again. For a month the Community Action Team were observing the street and everything was as it should be, however as soon as they retreated, the problem returned. He had received an acknowledgement from the Head of Direct Services and had been advised to do a straw poll on the suggestion of glass bins being placed inside the recycle bin following collection. The results, he confirmed had no objection. Councillor Adam confirmed that the ESCOSC would be investigating refuse collections in March 2019.

With regards to staff sickness absence Councillor Tinsley queried whether specific service areas such as Children's Services have higher absence rates and whether any benchmarking had been done with other local authorities.

Councillor Shield referred to broadband issues within County Durham and a successful business which had been established in south west England to assist in bringing broadband to rural areas. He suggested Members might want to explore this further if their areas still experienced issues with broadband.

The Head of Strategy confirmed that the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 8 March 2019 would deal with the Tree Policy and CO2 emissions.

Councillor Jopling asked for confirmation that the Council did not offer zero-hour contracts. She also referred to a programme which had shown the effects of coastal landfill site erosion and queried whether the ESCOSC could investigate whether this was a problem in County Durham, as the programme seemed to indicate. The Chairman confirmed that Durham Heritage and the Environment Agency would be able to assist with information regarding waste pollution.

Resolved:

That the contents of the report be noted.

7 Quarter 2 2018/19 Customer Feedback Report

The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which presented customer feedback, complaints, compliments and suggestions for quarter 2, 2018/19 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Chairman referred to 46% of customers who need additional support with their claim not having access to the internet and the issue of not being able to submit an application for Universal Credit any other way. The Customer Relations Team Manager confirmed that it had been identified that many people had a small data package which restricted their internet access, or were unable to use the technology. Of the survey undertaken on a small percentage of Universal Credit claimants, digital awareness was a concern.

Councillor Wilkes referred to extremely long telephone waiting times when making a claim for Universal Credit which was an issue for those who did not have unlimited calls and data.

Councillor Bell queried the responsibility for providing bins to new housing developments and the Customer Relations Team Manager confirmed that the onus was not on the developer, although in most cases they would provide bins before occupation of the property. Problems arose when people moved into a new property to find they did not have a bin and were informed of the charge to have one provided.

Councillor Wilkes referred to the number of complaints upheld regarding contamination notices on recycling bins as almost all of the complaints had been upheld and he asked for information regarding why the wrong people were being served notices.

Councillor Makepeace queried the policy on fly tipping as waste would often remain untouched for weeks with tape around, before finally being removed. Councillor Turnbull advised that if a notice had been served for its removal, there was a 28 day period before action could be taken, giving the offender the opportunity to remove the rubbish before the Council did so.

Councillor Chaplow advised that some new developments did not have registered postcodes and could therefore not receive deliveries. She had been experiencing her own problems since August and wondered whose responsibility it was to register details.

Resolved:

That the contents of the report be noted.

8 Quarter 2 September 2018: Forecast of Revenue and Capital Outturn 2018/19

The Board considered reports of the Corporate Director of Resources and Corporate Director of Transformation and Partnerships (TAP) which provided details of the forecast outturn budget positions for the Resources and TAP service groupings highlighting major variances in comparison with the budget based on the position to the end of September 2018 (for copies see file of minutes).

Councillor Wilkes commented on the budget and underspend on homeworking and queried whether the money initially allocated should have been spent elsewhere.

Resolved:

That the contents of the reports be noted.

9 Response of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee to the County Durham Environment Partnership report 'Phasing Out Unnecessary Single Use Plastics' (SUPs)

The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director of Transformation and Partnerships which presented the response of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (ESCOSC) to the County Durham Environment and Partnership's report 'Phasing Out Unnecessary Single Use Plastics (SUPs)' (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Adam, Chairman of ESC OSC referred to the Council's decision on 24 January 2018 for a report to be submitted to the Board on the options to bring an end to the use of unnecessary SUPs in County Durham.

A report was presented to the Board in February 2018 which recommended that a task group be established, and a final report considered by the ESC OSC. At a Special meeting of the ESCOSC on 12 November 2018 a final report of the task group was considered. The report provided detail of the significant work undertaken by DCC and partners and identified a number of quick wins which had already been implemented. In addition, the report identified a number of future actions to be introduced, with performance to be monitored by the ESC OSC.

Councillor Adam continued that the ESCOSC supported the introduction of a local bespoke pledge for County Durham. He highlighted the need to continue to offer reward schemes for the use of alternatives to SUPs and the need to reconsider the use of SUP free gifts at promotional events. The response also highlighted the need to develop a communications plan to ensure that residents were informed of both when and why alternatives to SUPs were used.

Cllr Adam concluded that the ESC OSC would continue to monitor the progress made against the key actions identified in the report and the supporting action plan and confirmed that further progress updates would be included in the ESCOSC work programme for 2019/20. The response will be shared with Cabinet at a future meeting.

Councillor Wilkes praised the vast amount of work which had been undertaken by the task group and made reference to the County News, which he considered could be used to provide detail of the work undertaken by DCC and partners to reduce the use of unnecessary SUPs.

Councillor Jopling made reference to crisp bags which were not recyclable in normal waste collections, however some companies had developed schemes to recycle them. There were a lot of crisp packets being disposed of on a regular basis and suggested the Council consider the provision of collection boxes and delivering them to the appropriate companies for recycling.

Councillor Adam replied that the task group had found that not all crisp and snack packaging was recyclable, however there was work being undertaken by the industry to provide alternative packaging.

In response to a comment from Councillor Bell questioning manufacturers' ability to still produce packaging that could not be recycled, Councillor Adam confirmed that progress was being made by government with a pledge to eliminate the use of SUPs by 2040, however businesses were being encouraged to reduce the amount of packaging that they used.

Resolved:

(i) That the response of the ESC OSC to the report 'Phasing out unnecessary Single Use Plastics' and the revised action plan be noted.

(ii) That the ESC OSC continues to monitor the progress made against the key actions identified in the 'Phasing out unnecessary Single Use Plastics' report and action plan with the first update scheduled for the ESC OSC on 5 April 2019.

10 Update in relation to Petitions

The Board considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which provided the quarterly update in relation to the current situation regarding various petitions received by the Authority (for copy see file of minutes).

The Committee Services Officer advised that since the last update four e-petitions had been submitted and three had been rejected;

- One was not within the jurisdiction of the Council
- One was a series of questions rather than a petition
- One was similar to a previous petition considered within 12 months.
- One e-petition was currently on the website collecting signatures until 28 December 2018 concerning a speed limit between Brancepeth and Meadowfield.

In addition, three new paper petitions had been submitted.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

11 Notice of Key Decisions

The Board considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which provided details of key decisions that were scheduled to be considered by the Executive (for copy see file of minutes).

The Senior Committee Services Officer advised that new to the plan was:

- School Funding Formula & High Needs Transfer

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

12 Information Update from the Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees

The Committee received a report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships which presented an update of overview and scrutiny activity from 1 November – December 2018 (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the report be noted.