

# **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a Meeting of **Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board** held in Council Chamber - County Hall, Durham on **Tuesday 23 July 2019 at 9.30 am**

**Present:**

**Councillor R Crute (Chair)**

## **Members of the Committee:**

Councillors E Adam, R Bell, M Clarke, A Hopgood, P Jopling, L Maddison, R Manchester, C Martin, O Milburn, C Potts, J Rowlandson, F Tinsley, J Turnbull, M Wilkes, J Nicholson, P Crathorne, T Henderson, S Quinn and O Temple

## **1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Boyes, J Chaplow, B Kellett, H Liddle, J Makepeace, J Robinson, A Savory, A Shield, H Smith and A Willis

## **2 Substitute Members**

Councillor J Nicholson for Councillor S Shield

## **3 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **4 A Vision for County Durham 2035**

The Board received a report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships that presented the proposed new County Durham Vision to overview and scrutiny members as part of the final third phase of the consultation process (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Head of Strategy gave a detailed presentation that highlighted:-

- Why we needed to change
- Building on our success – examples of the increase in employment, economy, reducing carbon emissions, improving recycling
- Area Action Partnerships (AAP) success
- Recognising Partners

- Recognising still a long way to go
- Over 24,000 responders to the consultation so far
- What was important to those who have responded –
  - Economy
  - Children and Young People
  - Health and Wellbeing
  - Tourism
  - Housing
  - Towns and Villages
  - Communities
  - Transport
- Proposed Ambition and Objectives –
  - More and Better Jobs
  - Long and Independent Lives
  - Connected Communities

The Head of Strategy informed the Board that the proposed Vision was as follows:-

‘Our vision for 2035 is that County Durham is a place where there are more and better jobs, people live long and independent lives and our communities are well connected and supportive’

A short promotion video was shown on the vision and the Chair thanked the Head of Strategy for her presentation.

Councillor Bell referring to page 11 of the report highlighting tourism, said that a strong message through his AAP was to broaden the offer for tourism across the whole of the County, as it was felt that the current offer was too Durham centric.

The Chair asked that the comments via Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee also be reflected relating to the Dales and the East and West of the County.

In response the Head of Strategy confirmed that the Director of Transformation and Partnerships had presented the vision at the Teesdale AAP and the comments had been noted. In relation to Newton Aycliffe, there had been comments received about looking at the East of the County and in particular the countryside and how the natural environment would be affected.

Referring to page 13 of the report, Councillor Maddison asked if there would be a focus around technology to inspire new ways of working in care homes, for example. The Head of Strategy said that technology had also been

picked up during the feedback on the vision and could be strengthened. Data comparators would also be explored.

In terms of the video, Councillor Rowlandson found it to be rather old fashioned and was informed that this was developed in house for consultation purposes only to support the images shown. The Head of Strategy advised that it was not being proposed to use this in its current form for the launch.

Councillor Crathorne asked how the County would help support and develop the small villages and encourage regeneration, especially those colliery villages that had declined over the years. The Head of Strategy said that this had been a message throughout the AAPs and that it was a real challenge to achieve a sense of realism and balance. The vision hoped to achieve more and better jobs for the whole of the population across County Durham and there was a big focus on children and young people. There would be an emphasis on the education system and skills development and ensuring that local young people could access all opportunities, tackling poverty and deprivation. She added that the vision did not constitute a delivery plan, and that this would be done through existing and new plans. With regards to poverty she informed the Board that there was a poverty working group, chaired by the Director of Transformation and Partnerships.

The Chair said that the vision sets out a broad strategic vision for 2035 and that the Council will be looking at delivery through all of their strategies and plans and through regional boards and local industrial strategies. He emphasised the need for partnership working.

Referring to page 4 of the vision statement, Councillor Tinsley felt that emphasis on more and better jobs should reflect more about poverty and deprivation, as he felt that this was a key element. He was pleased to see the good news on the economy highlighted through the success of Hitachi however was concerned about the demise of the high street and the increase in the use of the foodbanks. He also expressed concerns should the UK leave the EU and felt that if this was the case that the whole vision would need to be re-written to reflect the changes in the economy and the impact this would have on deprivation and poverty. The Chair pointed out that the document was flexible and that risks would be addressed. The Head of Strategy confirmed that deprivation and poverty feature multiple times within the vision document and there was strong feedback from the AAPs to focus on children and young people.

Councillor Hopgood referencing page 15 of the report, said that secondary education was not mentioned and felt that there should be greater emphasis placed on this including working more with academies. The Head of Strategy advised that young people were reflected within the document and access to

good education, employment and a link between primary and secondary schools would be looked at.

With regards to page 10 of the report that sought to reduce carbon emissions and mitigate the impact of climate change, Councillor Wilkes expressed his concerns that this was not early enough and that more should be done to address this sooner.

Councillor Quinn congratulated the team involved in making the presentational video and felt that this made a strong link to the history of the county. She agreed that poverty in the area was a big problem but supported the vision as things needed to move forward.

Ms Morris shared a lot of the views and comments raised but felt that the vision could be misunderstood as being neutral. She said that there should be some bold statements made such as doubling the number of graduates, doubling the number of students achieving a level three. She believed that we should celebrate what could be achieved and that the vision could be sharper.

Referring to Durham University, Councillor Jopling said that it would be good if more local children could go there. With regards to tourism she agreed with the earlier points made by Councillor Bell and that it should be promoted throughout the whole of the County so that each area had something to offer. She also added that high streets needed re-investment to help the economy grow. The Chair explained that the retail offer review, from the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee, was reflected in the findings.

Councillor Bell said that there needed to be greater control from central planning and housing with regards to council tax on empty properties and the availability of social housing. As young people tended to want to move into newer estates he said that it was important to link the vision with the delivery stage. The Chair agreed that the issue of the failure of the housing market should be highlighted however it was important to replace empty properties with a level of affordable options.

Councillor Maddison said that it was a long process to bring properties back into use and that she thought there should be a deadline pushed by government to enable housing companies to take back properties not in use.

**Resolved:**

That the new vision and the comments received, be noted.

**5 Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities**

The Board received a report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships that provided information on the new statutory guidance on overview and scrutiny in local government and combined authorities published on 7 May 2019 by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and to consider the Council's response (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Head of Strategy informed the Board that the Council's overview and scrutiny arrangements were already robust and effective. It could be demonstrated that much of the new guidance was already incorporated into the scrutiny work carried out. She went on to highlight the four principles of scrutiny, which were already embedded in the overview and scrutiny guidance:-

- Provide constructive 'critical friend' challenge;
- Amplify the voices and concerns of the public;
- Be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role;
- Drive improvement in public services

The guidance covered six areas – culture, resourcing, selecting committee members, power to access information, planning work and evidence sessions.

The Head of Strategy advised of the actions required further to the new guidance and a report would be discussed at the Constitution Working Group prior to submission to Cabinet and full Council. This included training for officers when presenting reports, training for members around finance and questioning, a quarterly update to Council, scrutiny to be sighted on North East Combined Authority (NECA) working and the reporting of thematic overview and scrutiny work programmes to COSMB.

Councillor Wilkes said that in order to ensure the independence of the leadership of the scrutiny committees there should be political balance rules for the election of chairs and vice-chairs and he suggested that a secret ballot would work. He referred to budget proposals and said that having an independent chair would ensure they had the proper consideration. He went on to say that all councillors should be considered for these roles and that there were a number of councillors who were more than capable of carrying out the role of chair or vice-chair. He reminded members that scrutiny should be non-political.

Councillor Clarke agreed that having feedback from NECA and what was being considered relevant to this area would be helpful.

Referring to page 46 of the report which set out that an independent mindset was fundamental in the approach to carrying out this work, and that the

scrutiny chairs should work pro-actively to set the work programme, Councillor Hopgood felt that this could not be achieved when one party had overall control. She said that it was important to look forward towards 2035 in line with the County Durham Vision, and not backwards.

With regards to the point made about a secret ballot, Councillor Martin agreed that this would prevent members from having to toe the party line and make independent decisions on who was best for the role of chair and vice-chair. He questioned how this was independent when the decision on who to elect to the positions of chairs and vice-chairs at full Council had already been made at the Labour Group meetings.

Councillor Tinsley disagreed and confirmed that decisions should be made at full Council. He believed the comments around the need for a secret ballot were disingenuous.

Councillor Temple said that there should be equality between councillors who have been elected by residents to be able to chair an overview and scrutiny committee and the vote should be opened up at full Council. He suggested that the Constitution Working Group consider widening the talent pool of councillors eligible.

**Resolved:**

- (i) That comments and consideration of the new guidance be noted.
- (ii) That comments upon the recommendations set out in the report be noted.
- (iii) That a report to be submitted to the Constitution Working Group following completion of any work required as set out in the report be noted.

## **6 County Durham Partnership update**

The Board considered a report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships which updated Members on issues being addressed by the County Durham Partnership (CDP) including the board, the five thematic partnerships and all area action partnerships (AAPs). The report also included updates on other key initiatives being carried out in partnership across the county (for copy see file of Minutes).

Councillor Tinsley commented that there were good results within the primary schools that should be sustained throughout the secondary education. He also expressed the importance of retaining young people in the local area and asked that the partnership focus on this.

Councillor Bell commended the work of the AAPs and in particular the information shared in relation to foodbanks, mental health and other groups

in the Teesdale area. He also commented that should young people be leaving the area for employment it would make the unemployment figure look better than what it actually was.

**Resolved:**

That the content of the report be noted.

## **7 Year End 2018/19 Customer Feedback**

The Board considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Resources and Director of Transformation and Partnerships, which presented the Customer Feedback: Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions report for 2018/19 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Chair was pleased to see the reduction in complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman due to the robust systems in place.

With regards to the way in which people were kept up to date with cases, Councillor Clarke asked if Heads of Service looked at queries in the first instance and allocated cases according to workload. He added that it was important to get things right at the early stages of a complaint which would prevent it escalating. The Chair agreed that this could be frustrating for the complainant.

The Customer Relations Team Manager responded that there had been some challenges around communication and timelines but the service had been pro-active using the portal to track the journey of a complaint. This helped drill down the statistical data. She added that the majority of problems were around some letters distributed in relation to contaminated waste however the service continued to work with crews to address the problems.

The Chair commented that the increase in some results in the report was similar to issues with the way some crime figures were recorded due to different reporting mechanisms.

Councillor Tinsley said that it would be useful to have comparators for other authorities to ascertain how we were performing. The Chair said that this would be difficult due to the different types of health issues and the rurality of the county. He thanked the officer for an excellent report and for addressing concerns previously raised by the Board.

**Resolved:**

That the content of the report be noted.