

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Cabinet** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Wednesday 13 November 2019** at **10.00 am**

Present:

Councillor S Henig (Leader of the Council) in the Chair

Cabinet Members:

Councillors J Allen, O Gunn, L Hovvels, C Marshall, A Napier, A Patterson, K Shaw, B Stephens and A Surtees

Also Present:

Councillors R Crute, J Shuttleworth, H Smith and M Wilkes

1 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Review of School Provision – Wolsingham School & Sixth Form [Key Decision: CYPs/03/2018]

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services and the Corporate Director of Resources which provided an update on the future of Wolsingham School and Sixth Form. The report set out the issues and implications arising from the decision of Wolsingham School and Sixth Form to seek to join the Advance Learning Partnership Academy Trust in order to achieve a financially sustainable position for the school going forward (for copy see file of minutes).

In response to a question from Councillor Shuttleworth about whether there were any negative aspects for the school becoming an Academy, Councillor Gunn advised that the pros and cons of an academy was not a focus of the report, and that the school would have given due diligence to any negative as well as positive aspects. She explained how a school being part of a Multi Agency Academy may differ for it.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

**5 Review of the Council Tax Long Term Empty Premium Charges
[Key Decision: CORP/R/19/03]**

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services and the Corporate Director of Resources which considered the outcomes of the consultation on the council's policy in terms of empty homes discounts and the policy of applying 50% premium on properties which have been unoccupied and unfurnished for more than 2 years, where councils now have the power to:

- a) apply a maximum 100% premium on such properties (from April 2019) along with;
- b) apply a maximum 200% premium on properties which have been unoccupied and unfurnished for more than 5 years (from April 2020).

(for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Shaw in responding to a question from Councillor Wilkes advised that any funding generated from the proposals would form part of the council's medium term financial plan income for 2020/21. He advised of the increase in staffing resources, and the number of empty properties brought back into use, and the initiatives being taken to help people who are homeless, vulnerable or living in poor conditions.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

**6 Council Tax Base 2020/21 and Forecast Surplus on the Council Tax Collection Fund as at 31 March 2020
[Key Decision: CORP/R/19/02]**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which determined the council's tax base for domestic properties liable to pay council tax, and, reported on the estimated collection fund surplus as at 31 March 2020, which will need to be distributed to the principal precepting authorities in 2020/21 (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

7 Mid-Year Review Report on Treasury Management for the period to 30 September 2019

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided information on the treasury management mid-year position for 2019/20 (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

8 Overview and Scrutiny Review, Children's Residential Care Homes

The Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships which presented a draft report for approval, following review activity on Children's Residential Care Homes by Members from the Children and Young People's and Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committees (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor H Smith, Chair of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee presented the report and the findings from the review. Cabinet members thanked the Chair and its members of the joint committee for the work they had undertaken and welcomed the comprehensive review report.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

9 Forecast of Revenue and Capital Outturn 2019/20 – Period to 30 September 2019

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided Cabinet with information on the:

- (a) updated forecast revenue and capital outturn for 2019/20;
- (b) updated forecast for the council tax and business rates collection fund position at 31 March 2020;
- (c) updated forecast use of earmarked, cash limit and general reserves and estimated balances to be held at 31 March 2020.

The report also sought approval of the budget adjustments and proposed sums outside of the cash limit (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

10 County Durham Plan – Delivery of the Western Relief Road

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services and the Corporate Director of Resources which sought agreement to the delivery of the proposed Western Relief Road (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Marshall in responding to a question from Councillor Wilkes advised that when the plan to Cabinet was considered earlier in the year it was confirmed that a further paper would be brought back to Cabinet to provide more clarity in terms of the delivery of the Relief Road should they be accepted by the inspector. He advised that this was the report and it provided additional information regarding the financial costs and phasing of the road.

The western relief road is a major priority for thousands of residents in the County as it will bring significant benefits. It is required to reduce traffic congestion at the west side of the City and through Nevilles Cross, thereby reducing journey times, and for the development of Sniperley which will bring more housing options for people to live in the County.

He explained that they were currently in the middle of an examination in public looking into these matters and as such the officers undertaking this project were very busy in facilitating this important process, and that having only received the question the day before did not have the precise figures at that time but would provide them in the near future once officers became available. There is no further current spend committed pending the outcome of the examination.

Resolved:

That the recommendation in the report be approved.