

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At an **Ordinary Meeting** of the County Council held in the **Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham** on **Wednesday 4 December 2019** at **10.00 a.m.**

**Present:**

### **Councillor K Corrigan in the Chair**

Councillors E Adam, J Allen, P 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, D Brown, J Brown, L Brown, C Carr, J Carr, J Chaplow, J Clare, J Clark, M Clarke, I Cochrane, J Considine, B Coult, P Crathorne, R Crute, M Davinson, S Dunn, J Grant, O Gunn, D Hall, C Hampson, T Henderson, S Henig, J Higgins, A Hopgood, K Hopper, L Hovvels, S Iveson, I Jewell, O Johnson (Vice-Chair), P Jopling, B Kellett, A Laing, J Lethbridge, H Liddle, L Maddison, J Maitland, J Makepeace, R Manchester, C Marshall, L Marshall, C Martin, I McLean, O Milburn, S Morrison, A Napier, P Oliver, R Ormerod, A Patterson, C Potts, L Pounder, A Reed, G Richardson, J Robinson, S Robinson, J Rowlandson, E Scott, P Sexton, K Shaw, J Shuttleworth, M Simmons, A Simpson, H Smith, J Stephenson, B Stephens, D Stoker, A Surtees, O Temple, K Thompson, F Tinsley, T Tucker, A Watson, A Willis, M Wilson, S Wilson and D Wood

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Atkinson, P Brookes, J Charlton, D Freeman, A Gardner, Geldard, K Hawley, D Hicks, S Hugill, G Huntington, C Kay, K Liddell, E Mavin, S McDonnell, M McKeon, J Nicholson, S Quinn, A Savory, A Shield, T Smith, W Stelling, P Taylor, J Turnbull, M Wilkes, C Wilson and S Zair

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, the Chair reported the sad news of the following deaths:

- Former Easington District Councillor and Durham County Councillor Charlie Walker. Charlie represented the Dawdon area on Easington District Council from 1999 to 2008 and on Durham County Council from 2008 to 2013.
- Former Sedgfield Borough Councillor John Piggott who represented the Neville and Simpasture Ward of the Borough Council for 8 years from 1999 to 2007.

The Council stood for a moments silence as a mark of respect.

## **1 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 October 2019 were confirmed by the Council as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

## **2 Declarations of Interest**

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

## **3 Chairman's Announcements**

The Chair thanked all Members and officers who helped with the Chair/Mayor coffee morning at the Town Hall on 30 November. A lot of money had been raised for the Chair's chosen charities.

On Monday 2 December the Chair was joined by Lyla O'Donovan to switch on the Christmas tree lights at County Hall. Lyla, who was seven years old and from Ushaw Moor, was diagnosed with a brain tumour in 2016 and had undergone nine operations and suffered multiple complications. Despite all she had been through Lyla had kept on smiling and had gone out of her way to help other poorly children.

Last month, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex presented Lyla with a Wellchild Award in recognition of her strength, bravery and generosity. The Chair wished Lyla and her family a very merry Christmas.

The Chair's Salvation Army Toy Appeal collection would run until 13 December. Unwrapped presents could be placed under the Christmas tree in the Durham Room and the Chair urged Members to consider supporting this worthwhile cause.

Finally, the Chair reminded Members about the Christmas Carol Concert which was being held in the Durham Room on 5 December at 1.00 p.m. The concert which would be facilitated by the Durham Music Service and would last for approximately one hour. If attending, the Chair advised Members to arrive in good time to be seated by 12.45 p.m.

## **4 Leader's Report**

The Council noted a report from the Leader of the Council as follows:

- As the festive season approached the Council was once again supporting small businesses ahead of a key trading period through a number of initiatives, including bringing back the Free after 3 offer which would see free parking available in council owned car parks

across the county after 3pm every day in December. In addition, free parking would be available across the county after 10 a.m. on Saturday 7 December in all Council off-street car parks and on-street spaces. This coincided with Small Business Saturday, a national campaign which encouraged people to shop local and support small businesses in their communities.

- The Council's Year of Culture, #durham19 was continuing with Christmas festivals, fayres, pantomimes and events taking place across the county. Following on from the successful Take Off Festival, England's leading festival of theatre for children and young people, and the much-awaited re-opening of Auckland Castle, last month saw the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lumiere.

The biggest cultural event in the Council's calendar, initial estimates showed that Lumiere attracted 165,000 visitors this year and the millionth visitor since Lumiere began ten years ago, despite very challenging weather conditions on the first three nights. The Council was particularly pleased to welcome many international visitors this year, including delegations from Galway in Ireland which was next year's European Capital of Culture and from the Council's twin town Tübingen in southern Germany.

Lumiere also touched the lives of hundreds of people of all ages and backgrounds across the county through community outreach programmes, providing the chance to work with professional artists and become part of the festival and this was the case with many of the installations this year.

The Leader thanked Artichoke, partners including the Arts Council England, Durham University and Durham Cathedral, sponsors, businesses, residents, the emergency services, Council staff and the 300 volunteers who, despite the rain, made Lumiere 2019 such an incredible experience, and the Council very much looked forward to its return in 2021.

- The Council had become the first local authority in the country to sign-up to the GMB trade union's Disability Passport initiative. The passport was a live record of up to date and appropriate reasonable adjustments which had been agreed and recorded between a manager and an employee to support individuals at work with a health condition or disability. The passport was owned by the employee and alleviated the need for them to repeat potentially difficult conversations if their line manager changed, or they changed roles within the organisation.

- The Council-led £2.5m Durham Advance scheme for residents who were out of work with a health condition or unemployed over 50s, had now provided support to over 500 people. The programme had helped 523 residents overcome the barriers preventing them re-entering the labour market, so that they could progress into employment or self-employment by providing one to one support, helping develop their skills or providing the training they needed.
- Members of both the Safeguarding Adults Board and the Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership gathered at an event organised as part of National Safeguarding Adults Week. The national week ran from 18 to 24 November and aimed to encourage agencies to focus on safeguarding adults. Safeguarding was the protection of a person's right to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect. The event saw speakers from statutory and voluntary organisations on a range of safeguarding issues, such as loan sharks and domestic abuse.
- Primary school pupils across County Durham learnt how people of different religions used light to celebrate their faith at a festival last month. Over 100 children, from years 4 and 5, were invited to the Festival of Lights, where they met with leaders from Hindu, Jewish, Sikh, Buddhist, Muslim and Christian communities to learn how each faith used light to celebrate important events in its calendar. As well as enjoying stories and games, pupils got creative, trying traditional Indian arts as part of a celebration of the Hindu festival Diwali.
- Twelve schools from across County Durham were honoured at Durham Town Hall last month as part of the International School Awards. The British Council scheme recognised schools that had demonstrated their commitment to raising awareness of other countries, traditions and languages. The schools hosted pupil exchanges with countries all over the world, including Spain, Finland, France, Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic and many also had partner schools in countries such as Kenya and Sri Lanka and collaborated on projects focusing on a range of issues.
- Aycliffe Secure Centre, which provided a secure children's home environment, had been given an outstanding judgement by Ofsted in all four areas assessed. The centre provided high quality, specialist secure accommodation for up to 38 vulnerable 10 to 18-year olds. The centre was judged to be 'outstanding' in terms of the overall experiences and progress of children and young people, based on how well they are helped and protected; their health; the effectiveness of leaders and managers; and outcomes in education and related learning activities.

- The Council's Practice Lead for the Social Work Academy, Shelley Gill, had received the silver award in the Practice Educator of the Year category in the annual Social Worker of the Year Awards.

Shelley was an exceptional practitioner and had played a key part in the success of the Council's workforce development programme and support to newly qualified social workers within the academy over the last three years. The award was well deserved.

- County Durham Youth Justice Service was also highly commended in the Youth Volunteering and Social Action category at the prestigious national Children and Young People Now Awards 2019. The team was shortlisted for the With Youth in Mind group, which provided activities for young people who had been victims of crime. Since it was set up in 2015, the group had supported over 150 children and young people aged up to 18 years old. The group was led by young people, supported by agencies including Durham Constabulary, the Police, Crime and Victims Commissioner and Investors in Children. The Leader congratulated everyone involved.
- The Leader paid tribute to a number of senior officers for whom this would be their last full council meeting before they left the authority. Brian Archer had led Business Durham through a period of continued economic growth over the last two years but would now move back to his native Yorkshire to take up a post with the West Yorkshire Combined Authority in Leeds. Steve Howell had been the Council's Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism for many years during which County Durham had developed a real reputation for delivering high quality cultural and sporting events. Lorraine O'Donnell had served as Assistant Chief Executive and more recently Director of Transformation and Partnerships, areas in which the council had set the standard for others to follow. Lorraine had played a key role in many different areas of work, including the transformation programme, the County Durham Partnership and performance management, helping ensure that identified budget savings were delivered on time, something achieved each year in spite of the large budget reductions which had unfortunately been required during the years of austerity. The Leader was sure all Members would join in thanking Lorraine as well as Brian and Steve for all of their hard work and wish them well in their future endeavours.

The Leader took the opportunity to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

The Chairman invited Group Leaders, or their representatives, to say a few words about the officers due to leave the authority.

Councillor A Hopgood, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group informed Council that it was sad to see Lorraine O'Donnell leaving the authority. Lorraine had always been approachable, a dedicated member of CMT for the last 10 years and a great advocate for public engagement across County Durham. Councillor Hopgood wished Lorraine the best of luck for the future.

Councillor Hopgood wished Steve Howell a long and happy retirement and thanked him for his 10 years of service to the Council, particularly the work he did for Wharton Park in establishing the investment for its refurbishment.

Brian Archer had been an excellent ambassador for County Durham businesses, had engaged small businesses and had led by example. Councillor Hopgood wished Brian good luck in his new job.

Councillor J Shuttleworth, Leader of the Durham County Council Independent Group endorsed the sentiments of Councillor Hopgood and wished all three officers all the best in their new ventures.

Councillor R Bell, Leader of the Conservative Group gave his Group's best wishes to all three officers and thanked them for their service. They had played an important role in building up the Unitary Council over the years and relationships outside of the Council through partnership working in the fields culture, sport and business and public service delivery.

Councillor Jopling on behalf of the Durham Independent Group wished all three officers the best of luck.

Councillor L Maddison, Leader of the Spennymoor Independent Group thanked all three officers for the contribution they had made over the years and wished them all good luck for their future.

Councillor J Allen, Portfolio Holder for Transformation, Culture and Tourism thanked Lorraine for leading a significant change and transformation agenda which had already delivered major benefits to both residents and staff. Austerity measures and budget cuts had presented many challenges and innovative ways had been adopted to accommodate budget pressures to achieve the necessary savings. Many peer reviews had been undertaken which had identified improved ways of working to deliver more efficient, economic and effective services. Councillor Allen also thanked Steve Howell for his invaluable service and achievements and wished him all the best for his retirement.

Councillor L Hovvels, Portfolio Holder for Adult and Health Services thanked Lorraine for her work on the Police and Crime Panel and wished all three officers the best for the future.

Councillor B Stephens, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Local Partnerships thanked Lorraine for her work with Area Acton Partnerships and wished Steve and Brian the best for the future.

## **5 Questions from the Public**

There were no questions from the public.

## **6 Petitions**

There were no petitions for consideration

## **7 Report from the Cabinet**

The Leader of the Council provided the Council with an update of business considered by Cabinet at its meetings held on 16 October and 13 November 2019 (for copy see file of Minutes).

## **8 Restructuring of the Corporate Management Team**

The Council considered a report of the Chief Executive regarding a proposed restructuring of the Corporate Management Team (for copy see file of Minutes).

In presenting his report, the Chief Executive thanked all three officers who were leaving the authority for their service.

The report sought to establish two new posts of Corporate Director Regeneration, Economy and Growth and Corporate Director Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and proposed the deletion of the posts of Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services and the Director of Transformation and Partnerships and provided details of the subsequent re-distribution of responsibilities to other posts.

In **moving** the report Councillor C Marshall, Portfolio Holder for Economic Regeneration informed Council the report identified that in recent years there had been significant extra activity within County Durham with major new developments and significant investment. The culture, sport and tourism offer of County Durham had also grown significantly in recent years. The proposed restructuring of the Corporate Management Team would allow the Council to dedicate resource to growing the economy and jobs.

In **seconding** the report Councillor B Stephens, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Partnerships informed Council that the proposed restructure of the Corporate Management Team would help the Council to

continue to deliver important services as well as focussing on the sustainable future of the county.

**Resolved:**

That:

- i) The creation of two new posts of Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth and Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change be approved;
- ii) The deletion of the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services post and the Director of Transformation post and consequent proposed changes be noted.

## **9 Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2020/21**

The Council considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which sought approval for the continuation of the current Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) for a further year into 2020/21, with two minor amendments, which would continue the protection afforded to all claimants in line with what their entitlement would have been under the Council Tax Benefit System, as agreed by Cabinet at their meeting on 10 July 2019. The proposed amendments to the scheme would enhance flexibility in terms of backdated awards (for copy see file of Minutes).

In **moving** the report Councillor A Napier, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance informed Council that the LCTRS proposals were a continuance of the current scheme with some added flexibility to help those most vulnerable. Durham was now the only Council in the north east to have a scheme that continued with the benefits available under the former Council Tax Benefits Scheme and the Council should be proud that it had supported such an important benefit for people across the County. People were struggling to make ends meet. Universal Credit, constant welfare reform and years of austerity had hit people hard. By continuing the LCTRS the Council would provide much needed support to those who needed it most.

In **seconding** the report Councillor Surtees, Portfolio Holder for Social Inclusion informed Council that the LCTRS supported financially vulnerable households in County Durham in line with that available under the former Council Tax Benefits Scheme.

Councillor K Thompson, while supportive of the LCTRS, informed Council that when the scheme was introduced the Council Tax Base for his town was reduced by 14%, the equivalent of £¼ million. This had happened every year for the last seven years and for the last two years no grant had been received. Councillor Thompson asked why the scheme could not be made available to everybody in County Durham. Large swathes of the County did

not, because they did not have a Town or Parish Council, pay towards this system and there should be a way in which these areas contributed to the LCTRS.

The Corporate Director of Resources replied that he would discuss this with Councillor Thompson outside of the meeting.

Councillor Napier mentioned that this had been discussed on numerous occasions with the local councils who had agreed with the scheme. The Council was not obliged to passport any of the grant to Parish or Town Councils.

**Resolved:**

That

- (a) the current Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme be continued into 2020/21, which will retain the same level of support to all working age council tax payers on low incomes;
- (b) the scheme be amended to allow for a maximum of 12 months backdating where appropriate and allow applications to be treated as made on the date council tax liability started where applications are received with one month, or longer if reasonable, of the date that the council tax liability was created;
- (c) the Scheme be extended initially for a further year only and be kept under continuous review with a further decision on the scheme to apply in 2021/22 to be considered by Cabinet in spring/summer 2020 and Full Council by 11 March 2021.

## **10 2019/20 Treasury Management Half Year Update**

The Council considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources that provided information on the treasury management mid-year position for 2019/20 (for copy see file of Minutes).

In **moving** the report Councillor A Napier, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance informed Council that the report was a half year update on treasury management activity. It was pleasing that investments and borrowing were being well managed in accordance with the Treasury Management Strategy that the Council had agreed. The report recommended increasing the operational boundary and authorising the limit for external debt.

**Seconded** by Councillor S Henig.

**Resolved:**

- (a) that the progress with the Treasury Management Strategy 2019/20 be noted;

- (b) that a revised operational debt boundary of £556 million and authorised limit of £611 million for 2019/20 reflecting increased finance lease commitments as referred to in the report be approved.

## **11 Review of the Officer Code of Conduct in relation to Gifts and Hospitality**

The Council considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which sought approval for proposed revisions to the Employee Code of Values, Behaviours and Conduct on Section 5.10 Gifts and Hospitality (for copy see file of Minutes).

**Moved** by Councillor S Henig, **Seconded** by Councillor A Hopgood and

**Resolved:**

That the changes to Section 5.10 of the Employee Code of Values, Behaviours and Conduct as attached at Appendix 2 be approved.

## **12 Witton Gilbert Neighbourhood Plan**

The Council considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services regarding the formal adoption of the Witton Gilbert Neighbourhood Plan (for copy see file of Minutes).

In **moving** the Plan Councillor C Marshall, Portfolio Holder for Economic Regeneration congratulated all those involved in the production of it.

In **seconding** the Plan Councillor K Shaw, Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Assets informed Council that the Neighbourhood Plan was another way of reinforcing the Council's approach of placing an increased emphasis on its towns and villages.

Councillor B Coult gave the background to the production of the Neighbourhood Plan and encouraged all Members to support it.

**Resolved:**

That the Witton Gilbert Neighbourhood Plan be formally made (adopted) by the Council to become part of the statutory development plan.

## **13 Public Health Annual Report 2019/20**

The Council considered a report of the Director of Public Health regarding the 2019 annual report of the Director of Public Health for County Durham (for copy see file of Minutes).

Councillor L Hovvells informed Council that the annual report gave a flavour of the work which had been undertaken. Councillor Hovvells was pleased to see the emphasis being placed on mental health and the changes being made to stigma and mental health.

**Resolved:**

That the annual report of the Director of Public Health, County Durham be received.

**14 Motions on Notice**

There were no Motions on Notice.

**15 Questions from Members**

There were no questions from Members.