

# **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

## **CABINET**

At a meeting of **Cabinet** held remotely via Microsoft Teams on **Wednesday 14 October 2020** at **9.30am**

### **Present**

**Councillor S Henig, Leader of the Council (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 I Jewell and J Shuttleworth

## **1 Public Questions**

There were no public questions.

## **2 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2020 were agreed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chair.

## **3 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **4 Medium Term Financial Plan(11) 2021/22 – 2024/25 [Key Decision: CORP/R/20/02]**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided an update on the development of the 2021/22 budget and the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP(11)) (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Napier, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, spoke of the challenges in setting the budget for 2021/22 with uncertainty over the comprehensive spending review, and, future Covid-19 costs. Cabinet noted that the budget and the medium term financial plan assume a cash-flat grant settlement, however, the Council will be required to continue to make savings, due to the increased cost pressures across all services.

Councillor Napier highlighted the prudent financial management which has allowed for a budget support reserve and he added this will be increasingly important for managing the budget over the forthcoming year, with savings of £12.8 million forecast to be required to balance the 2021/22 budget. Future Cabinet reports will include details of the potential impact of Covid-19 on income and expenditure and Councillor Napier urged government to provide the resources required to support local communities and businesses in the years ahead.

The Chair, Councillor Henig, Leader of the Council, said the possibility of receiving a one-year settlement, later in the year, would lead to further complications for budget planning and he thanked the officers involved in this work, in such difficult circumstances. He added he had written to the government, on behalf of the Council, and the Association of North East Councils to seek clarity on a number of issues and Cabinet will be informed of the response in due course.

### **Resolved:**

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

## **5 County Durham Plan Adoption [Key Decision: REG/04/20]**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Economic Growth which presented the County Durham Plan, for approval, following its independent examination by the Planning Inspector (for copy see file of minutes).

In presenting the report, the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth highlighted the equalities impact assessment work in respect of the plan. The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on local authorities, when exercising their duty under Section 149 of the Act to have due regard to the need to:

- (i) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- (ii) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- (iii) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Cabinet noted an equality impact assessment was undertaken to inform the plan as it progressed, which was reviewed and updated throughout the plan process. No negative impacts on equality were identified which indicates the plan is likely to have a positive impact on all protected groups. Relevant stakeholders were consulted and their comments, where possible, were used to shape the plan to ensure the council meets its public sector equality duty.

The Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth informed the Cabinet that the plan had been developed, consulted on, and, independently examined, in accordance with the relevant legislation, and, having had due regard to all relevant factors, no issues were identified that would prevent the adoption of the County Durham Plan, from an equalities impact perspective.

Councillor Shuttleworth, local member for Weardale, referred to paragraph 42 of page 13 of the Inspector's Report and asked that, given the uncertainty in the county and country, what economic benefits would be brought to the people of the county, in adopting the County Durham Plan.

Councillor Marshall, Portfolio Holder for Economic Regeneration thanked Councillor Shuttleworth for the question saying the plan, which proposes almost 25,000 homes and the potential to create over 32,000 jobs, is critical to the economy. He explained that central government had recently published a planning white paper, which, if introduced, would have a detrimental impact on development proposals in County Durham. The adoption of the plan therefore is timely, and aims to promote sustainable development, and, allow an effective plan-led approach which is sound and consistent with national policy. He added the plan will provide much needed certainty to businesses, encourage investment and development, and, meet housing needs and the needs of rural communities.

In moving the report, Councillor Marshall thanked the team who had worked tirelessly to bring the plan to this stage and all those who had participated in the consultations. He also thanked the Planning Inspector, William Fieldhouse, for his professionalism and transparent examination.

Councillor Shaw, Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Assets endorsed the plan which he said is key to ensuring a positive future for County Durham and presents the opportunity to ensure the right mix of housing is delivered to meet current and future needs.

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services and Rural Issues, Councillor Patterson, expressed disappointment that the proposal for the relief roads will not be going ahead and added that other connectivity options will be considered. She highlighted the plan takes account of the rurality of the county, it offers the flexibility to adapt to local needs, and, importantly, it makes provision for avoiding unwanted development from taking place. She undertook to work with the Portfolio Holder for Economic Regeneration to maximise opportunities for the rural communities.

**Resolved:**

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

## **6 Council Housing Delivery - Durham County Council development potential [Key Decision: REG/02/20]**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Economic Growth which detailed the business case to begin building council housing and sought approval to begin a programme of council house building from 2021 - 2025 (for copy see file of minutes).

In moving the report, Councillor Shaw said the report represented a positive move by the Council to increase the provision of affordable homes throughout the county, including a targeted plan to ensure delivery in the places of greatest need.

Councillor Marshall highlighted the potential positive economic impact adding that he was pleased at the intention to maximise the take up of contracts by local builders and the local supply chain.

### **Resolved:**

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

## **7 Towns and Villages Strategy [Key Decision: REG/01/20]**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Economic Growth which sought approval for the refocused approach to the regeneration of towns and villages across the county (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Marshall commented that, despite the loss of local funding streams and the impact of ten years of austerity, the Council had continued its work with partners to modernise and improve town centres. With communities throughout the county being faced with different issues, the strategy will ensure a localised response. The strategy also seeks to supplement current regeneration projects with targeted regeneration activity, informed through consultation with Area Action Partnerships. He informed Cabinet that work will take place with local residents and partners, over the coming months, with a view to bringing forward a delivery plan in the new year.

The Chair announced that members of the public will have the opportunity to contribute to the strategy, through Area Action Partnership meetings taking place during October and November, where the public will be invited to have their say on the most important activities to help to regenerate towns and villages.

### **Resolved:**

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

## **8 Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2019-20**

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services and the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change which presented the Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report for 2019-20 (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Gunn, Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People's Services, highlighted the extensive work carried out in response to the joint targeted area inspection recommendations and she pointed out that the introduction of the Young People's Commissioner ensures the voice of the child is heard. Councillor Hovvels, Portfolio Holder for Health and Community Safety, commented that it was clear that the voice of the child is at the heart of the report, and emphasised the importance of safeguarding children and young people, particularly during the difficult time throughout the pandemic.

### **Resolved:**

That the recommendation in the report be approved.

## **9 Annual Report 2019/20 County Durham Safeguarding Adults Board**

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Adult and Health Services and the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change which presented the annual report of the County Durham Local Safeguarding Adults Board for 2019-20 (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Hovvels welcomed the report, and, speaking as a member of the Local Safeguarding Adults Board confirmed she witnesses the hard work carried out to keep vulnerable adults safe from abuse and neglect. Councillor Stephens, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Local Partnerships said he was pleased to see that the Board works with multiple agencies, including local Area Action Partnerships, to keep adults safe.

### **Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

## **10 Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2019-20**

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services which presented the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report for 2019 – 20 (for copy see file of minutes).

In presenting the report, the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services highlighted the significant progress made by the Panel which was recognised in the Ofsted Inspection carried out in September 2019; the Panel's nomination for a Local Government Chronicle award, and, the important role of the Children in Care Council.

Councillor Jewell, Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel, thanked all those involved in the work of the Panel and he explained the role of the young people of the Children in Care Council. Young people from the Children in Care Council participate in Corporate Parenting Panel meetings and this provides a real insight into the challenges faced by looked after children and care leavers. For example, the young people encouraged Corporate Parenting Panel members and officers to participate in the 'Care Leavers Challenge', which challenges participants to live on a budget of £57.90 a week, which is the amount of money care leavers who are not in employment receive. The input of the young people is important to inform how the Council can provide support. The young people are also involved in training sessions for foster carers, social workers and teachers, providing their perspective.

Councillor Jewell referred to some of the priorities for the future which include improving the local offer through looking into the provision of subsidised transport and the possibility of extending the 'Freedom Card', which is a discount scheme for shops and leisure. In addition, some of the young people are undergoing training to become 'Young Inspectors' for children's residential homes, which would encourage them to share their views on the services provided and he thanked the Commissioning Team for the residential homes inspection process.

In conclusion, Councillor Jewell paid tribute to Terry Collins, Chief Executive, for all his hard work in supporting and championing the cause of looked after children and care leavers.

The Chair thanked Councillor Jewell and the Corporate Parenting Panel for their work during the year.

Councillor Gunn commended the report and thanked the Corporate Parenting Panel members for their work, particularly for ensuring the young people are actively involved and that their voice is reflected in the work. She acknowledged the recent challenging times during the pandemic and she thanked those who had worked remotely to continue the dialogue with the Children in Care Council. Councillor Gunn outlined some of the financial support developed with looked after children, including council tax exemptions, the winter fuel allowance, the 'Freedom Card' and the 'Drive' project, which provides assistance to looked after young people with the cost of driving lessons.

The Cabinet congratulated the Corporate Parenting Panel on being shortlisted for a Local Government Chronicle award, and wished the Panel well for the final award ceremony on 28<sup>th</sup> October.

**Resolved:**

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

## **11 Witton Gilbert Allotments**

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Economic Growth which sought authority to make a Compulsory Purchase Order pursuant to section 25 and section 39 of the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908 in respect of the land at Witton Gilbert allotments (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Shaw commented that the allotments provide a popular and valuable resource to the community and he was satisfied there is a need for allotments in the vicinity of the land, and that no suitable alternative sites were available.

**Resolved:**

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

## **12 Decisions taken under Urgency Powers**

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive on executive decisions taken under urgency powers during the Covid-19 pandemic (for copy see file of minutes).

**Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

## **13 Exclusion of the public**

**Resolved:**

That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

## **14 Decisions taken under Urgency Powers**

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive on executive decisions taken under urgency powers during the Covid-19 pandemic (for copy see file of minutes).

### **Resolved:**

That the report be noted.