

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At an Ordinary Meeting of the County Council held via Microsoft Teams on  
**Wednesday 2 December 2020 at 10.00 am**

**Present:**

**Councillor K Corrigan in the Chair**

Due to technical issues we are unable to confirm attendance at the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Bell, P Brookes, C Carr, I Cochrane, S Iveson, D Stoker and S Zair.

### **1 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2020 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 Chair's Announcements**

The Chair informed Council that the meeting would be the final full council meeting for the council's Chief Executive, Terry Collins who was retiring at the end of the year. Terry had served a successful 43-year career in local government at the City of York, Redcar and Cleveland, Brighton, Eastleigh, Darlington and South Tyneside Councils.

Terry joined the council in February 2009 as Corporate Director for Neighbourhoods, two months before the new unitary authority became operational.

Terry had been the council's Chief Executive for the past five years and had racked up a number of notable achievements during his time including the development of the council's culture-led regeneration programme into one of the most extensive and ambitious in the country, in turn increasing Durham's national and international reputation as a great place to invest and visit, increasing visitors to the County and boosting job creation and the economy. This had included Lumiere, the UK's largest light festival, which attracted its one millionth visitor in November 2019.

Terry had provided robust financial management during years of austerity to ensure that the council could continue to provide strong frontline services and had been instrumental in the development and delivery of a countywide investment programme including the new Integra 61 development and the expansion of NETPark. He also led the team responsible for bringing the Amazon facility to County Durham, which was one of the largest in the country.

More recently Terry had led the Council through its response to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Chair placed on record her personal appreciation to Terry for his time as Chief Executive. The Council's achievements under his leadership spoke for themselves and the Chair was sure all Members of the Council would associate themselves with her remarks.

Councillor Henig, Leader of the Council thanked Terry for his service to the council as both Corporate Director of Neighbourhood Services and as the council's Chief Executive. He wished Terry all the best for a long and happy retirement.

Councillor Amanda Hopgood, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, Councillor J Shuttleworth, Leader of the Durham County Council Independent Group, Councillor R Bell, Leader of the Conservative Group, Councillor A Shield, Leader of the Durham Independent Group and Councillor L Maddison, Leader of the Spennymoor Independent Group all added their thanks to Terry for his service to the council, particularly for his leadership during the pandemic, and wished him all the best for a long and happy retirement.

Terry Collins, Chief Executive thanked Members for their kind comments. He thanked all Members for their help and support during his service with the council, his CMT colleagues for their support and all staff who worked for the council.

The Chair informed Council that the meeting had a lengthy agenda and sought agreement from to waive standing orders to allow for the extension of the meeting should it go beyond 2 and a half hours, and if time allowed for motions goes beyond 30 minutes. **Seconded** by Councillor O Johnson.

**Resolved:**

That standing orders be waived to allow for the extension of the meeting should it go beyond 2 and a half hours, and if time allowed for motions goes beyond 30 minutes

## 4 Leader's Report

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

- Staff across the authority continued to work incredibly hard in responding to the many challenges brought about as a result of the pandemic and the Leader thanked everyone for their hard work and commitment.
- In recent weeks the Director of Public Health and the Leader had met regularly with colleagues from across the north east councils that made up the LA7 to discuss coronavirus rates and what could be done to try and bring these down. A series of rallying calls had been issued by the LA7 to people who lived across the north east asking everyone to play their part to bring down the rates and keeping each other safe.
- Infection rates in County Durham and across the north east had been falling for several days. However, the government had decided to place the whole of the north east under the highest restriction, Tier 3, once the national lockdown expired.
- At the beginning of November as England entered lockdown the Council had once again had to close libraries and leisure centres, although the Council was now looking to reopen some of these services as the country returned to a Tiered system.
- Since the start of the pandemic the Council's priority had been to maintain key services and thanks to the safety measures now in place the council had been able to ensure that schools, household waste recycling centres, playgrounds, parks and allotments had remained open during the second national lockdown. At the time of entering the second lockdown the Council had written to those classed as clinically extremely vulnerable to advise them of the support available and to ensure they were aware of the latest government guidance.
- The Council had recently acted to ensure residents had increased access to coronavirus testing by opening a new facility in the upper County Hall car park. Testing at the site was available seven days a week from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. and this would continue for at least the next three months.
- The Council had launched its Covid Community Champions Scheme through which members of the public were helping pass on important information and guidance needed to keep communities safe. The Council was keen to add more community champions and further information was available on the Council's website.
- Council teams continued to work hard to support businesses affected by the latest local and national coronavirus restrictions. Staff were busy contacting those who may be eligible for funding to highlight the support available and to process the governments Local Restrictions Support Grants as soon as possible.
- Following the House of Commons vote against extending the national school meals scheme to cover school holiday periods in October the

Council provided vital support to those families most in need. Parents and carers whose children were eligible for means-tested free school meals were able to apply for one £15 voucher to buy food and drink supplies. The scheme received more than 4,000 applications within hours of its launch and overall the total of £156,270 was given to families to provide meals for 10,418 children across County Durham. The Leader thanked Cabinet colleagues and council officers for implementing this vital scheme at very short notice.

- Last week saw the government spending review. While the Council welcomed new funding announcements such as the first details of the government's Shared Prosperity Fund the Council awaited the precise implications and allocations for County Durham. These would be reported to Cabinet and Council when they became clear.
- In terms of the Shared Prosperity Fund it was essential that the previous regional funding received by County Durham and the north east was not reduced and that decisions on how the fund was spent should be made locally, not nationally.
- One less positive aspect of the spending review statement was the pay freeze announced for many public sector workers who had performed heroically over recent months during the coronavirus pandemic.
- The Council had been named as one of the top employers in the country for its apprenticeship opportunities. The Council was awarded a place in the governments top 100 apprenticeships employers list, joining 10 other local authorities who had made the list. The Council currently had 259 apprentices working in a wide range of roles across services and schools, including catering, accounting, construction and business administration.
- New research showed that the Council had one of the best Climate Change Action Plans for addressing food emissions. SUSTAIN analysed 92 Council Plans and found that only 13, including Durham's, were adequate given the scale of the crisis and the significant footprint from the food system.
- As part of the Council's Climate Emergency Response Plan the Council had been rolling out energy efficiency measures in buildings and public places across the County. This included replacing bulbs with LED lighting in more than 400 bus shelters, newly renovated subways and some schools.
- Last month the Council launched its Find and Fix Scheme as part of a £31m investment in frontline services. The project built on the Councils routine green maintenance and street cleaning work and worked alongside communities to address cleanliness concerns identified by the Teams or residents as soon as possible.
- More than 600 people from across County Durham attended virtual events organised by the Council's 14 Area Action Partnerships to thank the many local groups, individuals and businesses who supported their communities during the pandemic. The 'Better for

Everyone' sessions were also a chance for residents to have their say on longer-term regeneration projects such as the Councils Towns and Villages Programme. The Leader had spoken at all 14 on-line events and thanked all those involved in the running of the events and all those who had participated.

- Sadly, the pandemic had resulted in many Remembrance Sunday Services, parades and wreath laying ceremonies not being able to take place. To allow people to commemorate the occasion in a safe and meaningful way the Council staged a series of online activities as well as lighting up six landmarks in red as a tribute to the fallen. The Council also worked with the Durham Light Infantry collection to produce a learning programme for schools. The activities were well received and the Leader thanked residents again for keeping communities safe by commemorating at home.
- The Highways Team had completed a new link road between Renny's Lane and Damson Way which was carried out to support an increase in vehicles using the A181, Dragon Lane and Sunderland Road following recent developments in the area including Durham City Retail Park and the opening of The Range and Lidl.
- Work continued on New Elvet Bridge in Durham City centre with the central section of the structure being raised. This was a major milestone in the project and the Leader was pleased to report that deck lift had been successful.
- Work had also begun to transform Festival Walk in Spennymoor from an outdated shopping precinct into a new, free to use town centre car park and retail area. The Council had invested £600,000 into the project as part of ongoing regeneration work across the county.
- The Council had teamed up with East Durham College to deliver heritage construction training courses as part of the £2.25m Seaham Townscape Heritage Project.
- Lumiere would return to County Durham next year. The festival, which boosted the county's economy by £11.5m in 2019, would take place from Thursday 18 to Sunday 21 November 2021.

## **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 discussed by Cabinet in October and November 2020 (for copy see file of Minutes).

Due to technical difficulties with the live stream broadcast the meeting was closed following consideration of Item No 7.