

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

At a meeting of **Cabinet** held remotely via Microsoft Teams at **9.30 am** on **Wednesday 13 January 2021**

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

1 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

2 Minutes

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

3 Declarations of Interest

The following disclosable pecuniary interests were declared.

Councillor A Patterson, in relation to item 5, as a business owner eligible to apply for grant funding.

Councillor B Stephens in relation to item 7, as a member of the Town Board.

Councillor J Allen, in relation to item 7, as a member of the Town Board.

The members confirmed they would leave the meeting during the consideration of the respective reports.

4 County Durham Partnership Update

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change which provided an update on the issues being addressed by the County Durham Partnership and other key initiatives being carried out in partnership across the county (for copy see file of minutes).

The Chair, Councillor S Henig, Leader of the Council, thanked the people of County Durham for the role they are playing during the pandemic, and, all those involved in the wider partnership, including the County Durham Together Hub, the COVID-19 Community Champions, Area Action Partnerships and the many other partnership groups who, together, continue to do a huge amount of work to provide valuable support in their local communities.

The Chair added that he had been privileged to attend virtual meetings of all 14 of the county's Area Action Partnerships held during the autumn, where he had taken the opportunity to thank community groups for their hard work over recent months. At these events, members of the public were invited to give their views on a wide range of local issues. Over 1,300 comments were received which will be used to inform the Council's approach to the regeneration of towns and villages across the county.

Councillor B Stephens, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Local Partnerships, paid tribute to the excellent work of partners in the voluntary and community sector, including the AAPs, who have continued to secure valuable funding for projects to support the needs of the people within their local areas.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

Councillor A Patterson left the meeting.

5 Grant Support for Business Recovery

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which sought approval for a package of measures to support County Durham businesses to recover from the impact of COVID-19 in order to safeguard jobs and facilitate economic recovery (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor C Marshall, Portfolio Holder for Economic Regeneration, commented that the introduction of the £5 million business recovery grant scheme would enable businesses to plan for recovery from the pandemic and potentially safeguard jobs. As companies in all sectors suffer reduced levels of income, planning for the return to trading in due course, would bring further challenges, as businesses adapt workplaces and methods of operation.

Councillor A Napier, Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance, highlighted that the proposal builds upon the excellent work done to support businesses through the business grant schemes, with the Council being at the forefront of implementing the schemes quickly and efficiently. He referred to the inevitability of a prolonged period of recovery from the pandemic and the importance of protecting employment, to ensure the situation is not exacerbated by further job losses.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

Councillor A Patterson re-joined the meeting

6 Social Value and Local Wealth Building (“The County Durham Pound”)

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth and the Interim Corporate Director of Resources which provided an update on a programme of targeted interventions to build on the Council’s strong track record of using its buying power and policy functions to drive local value (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor C Marshall placed on record his thanks for the amount of work undertaken over the years to position Durham County Council as a national leader in this area. He welcomed the ten key initiatives outlined in the report which aim to continue to maximise the impact of the Durham pound.

Councillor A Napier echoed Councillor Marshall’s comments and thanked the Chief Procurement Officer, Darren Knowd, and the Procurement Team, for the excellent work carried out to lead on this issue, both locally and nationally, through the LGA Social Value Taskforce.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

Councillors J Allen and B Stephens left the meeting.

7 Bishop Auckland Town Fund: Submission Approval

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which provided an overview of the process of submitting a Town Investment Plan to Government in order to secure capital resources from the Towns Fund. The report identified the timescale for the submission of the Bishop Auckland Town Fund application and requested the Council’s approval is facilitated via a delegated authority arrangement (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor C Marshall provided assurance that the Council will continue to challenge government on the bidding criteria for these schemes which precludes the submission of more than one bid. He commented on the ambitions of the project which are in line with the Bishop Auckland Masterplan approved by Council in 2019, with the areas of potential investment proposed also being beneficial to the wider south Durham area. He expressed his support for the proposal to make an exceptional case, and to submit a bid above the standard £25 million, subject to that case being made.

Councillor A Napier welcomed the investment and remarked that there are many other town and villages across the county that require similar investment. He added that he is awaiting, with interest, the government's proposals for the shared prosperity and levelling-up funds, in the hope that these funds will be distributed on the basis of need.

Resolved:

That the recommendation in the report be approved.