

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

At a Meeting of **Cabinet** held on **Wednesday 21 April 2021** at **9.30 am** via Microsoft Teams

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

Prior to the commencement of business, as a mark of respect to His Royal Highness, The Duke of Edinburgh who died on 9th April 2021, one minute's silence was observed.

1 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2021 were confirmed as a correct record to be signed by the Chair.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Proposal to amalgamate Ox Close Primary and Oxclose Nursery Schools into one primary school in a replacement new build on the Durham Road site of the former Tudhoe Grange Comprehensive School from 1 September 2024 [Key Decision: CYPs/03/2021]

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services which sought approval to amalgamate Ox Close Primary and Oxclose Nursery Schools into one primary school in a replacement new build on the Durham Road site of the former Tudhoe Grange Comprehensive School from 1 September 2024 (for copy see file of minutes).

Moving the report, Councillor Gunn, Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People's Services, spoke of the increased pressure on primary school places in the Spennymoor area, saying the proposal for the new build school underlines the Council's priority to invest in education and meet the demand for school places. She highlighted that the majority of those who responded to the statutory notice were in support of the proposal.

The Portfolio Holder for Adult and Health Services, Councillor Hovvels, seconded the report, commenting that the new facilities will not only create a unique learning environment but will also be of benefit to the wider community.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

5 High Needs Block Funding for SEND and Inclusion Support

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services and the Interim Corporate Director of Resources which provided an update on spend and pressures on the High Needs Block (HNB) of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), which supports Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and inclusion support services for children and young people (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Gunn stated the Council had increased resources in recognition of the growing demand on the service and whilst she welcomed the additional government funding into the HNB, she pointed out that the long term position remains unclear and the delay in the government's review into special educational needs, added to the uncertainty. Having written to the Secretary of State for Education on a number of occasions to express her views with regard to SEND services; school funding and the special educational needs review, she hoped her concerns would be addressed.

Councillor Gunn paid tribute to education providers and staff who had worked tirelessly to support young people and families throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and expressed a strong wish to ensure the government grants due consideration to the likelihood that additional support will continue to be required in the future, which will further impact resources.

Seconding the report, Councillor Napier, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance credited officers for the comprehensive report which outlined the vast amount of work ongoing in this area despite the financial challenges. Whilst he too was pleased to see increased investment into the SEND service to address the rising demand and the increasingly complex caseload, he expressed concern that the current shortfall in funding will lead to the

challenge of recovering the shortfall through planned underspending against future grant allocations.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

6 Health Protection Assurance Annual Report

The Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Public Health which provided an update on health protection assurance arrangements in County Durham (for copy see file of minutes).

Members were pleased to see the increased uptake in flu vaccinations across all cohorts and that County Durham's performance in the childhood immunisation programmes generally exceed national averages. Councillor Gunn welcomed the fact that the in-house team of Infection Prevention and Control nurses had been extended to schools for children with special educational needs.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

7 Workforce Strategy 2021-23

The Cabinet considered a report of the Interim Corporate Director of Resources which sought approval for the adoption of the Council's new Workforce Strategy for the period 2021 - 2023.

Councillor Patterson, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services and Rural Issues, thanked the Interim Corporate Director of Resources and his team for the hard work undertaken to present the report to Cabinet, noting this had been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the delay had been opportune, as it had enabled learning from the pandemic to inform the strategy.

Councillor Patterson commended officers for the ambitious plans for a workforce suitable for the future. She spoke of the workforce being the Council's greatest asset and she paid tribute to the hard work, dedication and adaptability of staff which had never been demonstrated so clearly as it had been over the past year.

Central to the strategy, Councillor Patterson said, is the partnership agreement between officers, trade union representatives and elected members and she added that support from the trade unions had assisted the

Council to face the many challenges that had presented over the past decade. She acknowledged the role of Councillors Napier and Stephens in employee relations, saying their wisdom and guidance had proved invaluable and she thanked them for leaving the Council in a strong position.

In moving the report, Councillor Patterson said she particularly welcomed the rural impact assessment and the positive contribution it will make to this predominantly rural county.

Seconding the report, Councillor Hovvels highlighted the focus on wellbeing, with the physical and mental wellbeing of the workforce being at the heart of the plans. Councillor Allen, Portfolio Holder for Transformation, Culture and Tourism, spoke of the Council's foresight in developing a programme of flexible working, improving work-life balance and facilitating remote working which had proved essential to business continuity throughout the pandemic.

Portfolio Holder for Social Inclusion, Councillor Surtees, referred to the advantages of having a wide and diverse workforce and welcomed the adoption of the strategy which embraces diversity and promotes Durham County Council as an equal opportunities employer.

Resolved:

That the recommendation in the report be approved.

8 Any other business

At the conclusion of the meeting the Chair remarked that the meeting was the final Cabinet meeting for a number of members who will stand down at the local election in May. He acknowledged the contributions made by Councillor Napier and Councillor Stephens, both of whom led authorities prior to unification in 2009, and the contribution of Councillor Allen. On behalf of the Cabinet, he expressed gratitude for their years of dedication and commitment and wished them well for the future. He hoped they would reflect on their time at the Council with great pride.