

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

At a Meeting of **Cabinet** held in the **Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham** on **Wednesday 17 November 2021** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor A Hopgood (Leader of the Council) in the Chair

Cabinet Members:

Councillors R Bell, T Henderson, S McDonnell, P Sexton, E Scott, A Shield, J Shuttleworth and M Wilkes

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J Rowlandson

Also Present:

Councillors A Batey, R Crute, S Deinali, O Gunn and C Marshall

1 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 13 October 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Council Tax Base 2022/23 and Forecast Deficit on the Council Tax Collection Fund as at 31 March 2022 [Key Decision: CORP/R/21/03]

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources to determine the council's tax base for domestic properties liable to pay council tax, which is an important component in the council's budget setting process for 2022/23 and to report on the estimated collection fund deficit as at 31 March 2022 (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Bell thanked officers for the preparation of the report. He explained that calculating and forecasting the council tax base is complicated and requires officers to make prudent assumptions about house building, what will happen over the next 18 months, the types and numbers but also who would occupy those properties. He advised that he had spoken previously and written to ministers about how the council suffers from having a low tax base therefore has limited council tax raising authority.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

**5 Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme Support Payments
[Key Decision: CORP/R/21/05]**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided an update on the Local Council Tax Support Payments awarded in 2020/21, funded through the Government's Covid 19 Hardship Funding and in 2021/22 through the Government's Local Council Tax Support Scheme funding. The report provided Cabinet with information on the current and forecast expenditure against the Covid-19 Hardship Fund and the Local Council Tax Support Scheme Grant received. The report also sought approval for the allocation of the remaining Covid-19 Hardship/Local Council Tax Support Scheme Funding to continue to provide support, through the additional awards, on a tapered basis, to vulnerable residents during 2022/23 and 2023/24 (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Shield in responding to the question from Councillor Crute explained how the impact on disposable income from the increased pressures on family budgets had been a material consideration in bringing the proposals forward.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

6 County Playing Pitch Strategy

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which sought approval for the adoption of the Playing Pitch Strategy for 2021-2035 (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Bell responded to the questions from Councillor Gunn about the facility at Hunwick, and Councillor Batey about evidence gathering, consultation, and the fairness to all communities. As Councillor Howey was not present at the meeting a written response to the question she had submitted would be provided to the member after the meeting.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

7 Forecast of Revenue and Capital Outturn 2021/22 - Period to 30 September 2021 and Update on Progress towards achieving MTFP(11) savings

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided Cabinet with updated information on the:

- (a) forecast revenue and capital outturn for 2021/22, based on the position to 30 September 2021;
- (b) forecast for the council tax and business rates collection fund position at 31 March 2022, based on the position to 30 September 2021; and
- (c) forecast use of and contributions to earmarked, cash limit and general reserves in 2021/22 and the estimated balances to be held at 31 March 2022.

The report also sought approval of the revised capital programme, other budget adjustments and proposed sums treated as outside of the cash limit in year and provided Cabinet with an update on progress towards achieving MTFP(12) savings in 2021/22 (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Sexton responded to Councillor Crute's question about the impact any short fall in social care funding may have on residents, the care sector and the NHS.

Councillor Bell commended officers for the comprehensive report, and advised that as the pandemic continues to cast a shadow over financial performance and making forecasting challenging, it was pleasing to note that net covid pressures and loss of income are currently forecasted to be fully offset by the covid 19 grant funding from government. He advised that the Audit Committee would at the end of the month receive the external auditor's value for money assessment, and that it was particularly complementary of the council's robust financial management, and budget and MTFP processes.

Councillor Hopgood thanked the Corporate Director and his team, and all budget mangers for their effective budget management, and was pleased to note the external auditors finding as outlined earlier. The task of forecasting continues to be difficult when factoring in all of the financial uncertainties faced, however was pleased that overall the forecasting showed that will be

able to keep spending within budget, with the financial pressures in children services offset following the budget transfer after the base budget review.

Councillor Shuttleworth spoke of the position with highways and transport infrastructure budgets, and in explaining that they were complex budgets thanked staff for their hard work.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

8 Mid-Year Review Report on Treasury Management for the period to 30 September 2021

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided information on the treasury management mid-year position for 2021/22 (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

9 Sniperley Park Masterplan

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which sought agreement of the draft Sniperley Masterplan for public consultation. The masterplan will guide approximately 1,700 new homes and associated infrastructure across the site on the edge of Durham City. Alongside the masterplan, a Healthy Active Travel Connectivity Plan has been prepared to illustrate the significant opportunities for active travel both within and surrounding the site (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Scott responded to Councillor Marshall's question about planning application processes and the delivery of the plan.

Councillor Scott in moving the report advised that the Sniperley Park would be an extraordinary development due to its location and character, and an exemplar of design. She set out the plans for consultation, and thanked the team for their hard work so far with the development of the plan.

Councillor Wilkes expressed his thanks to officers for the significant work undertaken, and that it was essential to move forward with this to secure environmentally sustainable large-scale housing development in the North East, and which aims to be as carbon neutral development as possible. Consultation would now take place in the community.

Councillor Shield in referring to road infrastructure welcomed that as part of a planning application for this development robust transport modelling would assess the impact and identify sufficient new infrastructure to mitigate the impact of this.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

10 Chester le Street, Newton Aycliffe, Peterlee, Stanley and Three Towns Masterplan and Durham City Framework

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which sought approval to commence consultation on a number of masterplans across County Durham (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Scott expressed her thanks to the teams for their hard work. She advised of the consultation period that was coming forward in December and January and encouraged all to take part.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

11 Digital Durham Programme Update

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided an update on the work being delivered as part of the Digital Durham Programme to support enhanced digital connectivity across County Durham. The report also described the expanding portfolio of projects that underpin the digital community theme of the Council's Digital Strategy, which sets out the digital ambitions for the county including improving and enhancing digital inclusion (for copy see file of minutes).

In responding to questions from Councillor Deinali, Councillor McDonnell, advised of the gigabit rollout, and the support from the council.

Councillor McDonnell thanked the Corporate Director and the Digital Durham team for their drive with this for County Durham and the region. She explained that it was a very complex matter, and although much had changed to move the programme on since it commenced in 2013 due to improvements in technologies, much had already been achieved, and that they would continue to drive this agenda forward.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.