

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a Meeting of **Cabinet** held in the **Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham** on **Wednesday 19 January 2022** at **9.30 am**

### **Present:**

**Councillor A Hopgood, Leader of the Council, in the Chair**

### **Cabinet Members:**

Councillors R Bell, T Henderson, J Rowlandson, E Scott, P Sexton, J Shuttleworth and M Wilkes

### **Apologies:**

Apologies were received from Councillors S McDonnell and A Shield

### **Also Present:**

Councillors I Cochrane, D Freeman and C Hood

### **1 Public Questions**

There were no public questions.

### **2 Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **3 Declarations of Interest**

No declarations were made.

### **4 Medium Term Financial Plan 2022/23 to 2025/26 and Revenue Budget 2022/23 [Key Decision: CORP/R/21/02]**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided an update on the development of MTFP(12), covering the period 2022/23 to 2025/26 and on the development of the 2022/23 revenue budget in the light of the provisional local government finance settlement published on 16 December 2021.

The report included updated financial forecasts and provisional council tax strategy, subject to the outcome of further consultation, that will be presented to Cabinet and County Council in February as part of the budget setting reports (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Councillor Bell thanked officers for the report which provided a comprehensive overview of the provisional local government financial settlement, and updated forecast for next year and the following three years. He explained that this was the fourth report considered on mtfp 12 as they build up to the budget meetings next month. He advised of the detail behind the updated figures. In advising of the additional funding received from the government in the settlement, which was better than expected, it was disappointing that this was a one-year settlement only, and therefore there was uncertainty beyond 2022/23. This uncertainty was also impacted by not knowing the outcome of the governments fair funding review. This meant that financial planning was difficult, and they would need to be flexible in their planning approach. Work to start to address the savings challenges would commence after the council had agreed its budget in February. He explained that the report considered was not for setting the budgets for next year, those decisions would be made by full council on 23 February.

Councillor Wilkes set out the plans for investment of resources in front-line services which included investments in road sweeping and its technology, pest control, neighbourhood warden service, waste disposal, and to tackle climate change. He advised that he was sure the public would start to see improvements in service provision shortly, and that there would be more good news in the months to come.

Councillor Sexton referred to the size of social care service budgets for vulnerable adults and children, and that the cost pressures in these areas were enormous, and it was right to prioritise investment in these key statutory services. He welcomed the investment made in October in domiciliary care to assist with recruitment issues.

Councillor Rowlandson supported the budget proposals and welcomed investments in allotments, countryside estate management, and the provision to address the current skills and enterprise gap within the community protection service.

Councillor Hopgood thanked all for their contributions in the meeting and officers in preparation of the report. She referenced the number of necessary revisions to the previous mtfp assumptions which build on updated forecasts for pay and price inflation, along with other unavoidable budget pressures in addition to the outcome of the financial settlement published late December. She explained that the updated proposals include significant investment to key front-line services which would make a difference to people's lives.

As other members had, she also expressed her disappointment to the uncertainties going forward with only a one-year settlement from the government, and the impacts of the fair funding review casting a shadow over financial plans from 2023 onwards. She emphasised the importance of protection for those on low incomes and was pleased full council had supported the extension of the council tax reduction scheme. She explained the scale of the challenge beyond next year which would require some difficult choices to be made, and that planning for this would commence.

**Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

## **5 County Durham Partnership Update**

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

Councillor Hopgood welcomed the report and highlighted some of the excellent partnership working that had taken place, and how it continues to be of paramount importance during the pandemic. She advised of the annual County Durham partnership event which was held in November which focused on the local response to the environment and climate change, and that as Leader of the Council had signed a new and refreshed armed forces covenant. She thanked all of those involved.

**Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

## **6 Transport Asset Management Plan - Annual Update**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change which presented the annual update on the 2020-2021 Transport Asset Management Plan (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Councillor Shuttleworth welcomed the report, and advised how it demonstrates the councils continued commitment to maintain its network and investing in the highway infrastructure. He advised that this was used by everybody who lives and works in the county, and that its condition and sustainability will continue to be a priority going forward. He commended the work undertaken by the highways team.

Councillor Bell welcomed the report and that it set out the areas of strength of the highway network, and also areas for investment. He was pleased that the revised plan include the rights of way network.

**Resolved:**

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

## **7 School Loans Scheme**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which recommended changes to the Council's loan scheme for schools, to take account of energy efficiency, carbon emission and sustainability issues (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Councillor Henderson thanked officers for bringing forward this report. He welcomed the report and advised how the amends to the scheme were sensible and pragmatic, and he hoped that as the loans would be more accessible, this would help with the council's climate emergency responses. The scheme would be widely communicated to all of the council's maintained schools.

Councillor Wilkes thanked all for bringing this forward. He explained how many of the council's maintained schools were not as energy efficient as the Council would want them to be, and with 39% of the councils carbon emissions coming from the heating and power to schools buildings the scale of the challenge was significant. The revised school loans scheme would make it easier for schools to invest in energy saving measures. He advised that he was calling on government to ensure that the next round of decarbonisation grants provide for the transformation of school buildings, and Cabinet would be writing to the government urging they provide matched funding particularly for schools, to help meet climate change targets as quickly as possible.

**Resolved:**

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

## **8 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 item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

## **9 UK City of Culture Bid [Key Decision: REG/01/22]**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which provided an overview of County Durham's bid for UK City of Culture 2025 (for copy of report see file of minutes).

### **Resolved:**

That the recommendations in the report be approved.