

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Cabinet** held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Wednesday 14 December 2022 at 9.30 am**

Present:

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

Cabinet Members:

Councillors R Bell (Deputy Leader of the Council), T Henderson, C Hood, S McDonnell, J Rowlandson, E Scott, A Shield and M Wilkes

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor John Shuttleworth

Also Present:

Councillor B Coult

1 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received in relation to any items of business on the agenda.

4 Adoption of the Inclusive Economic Strategy [Key Decision: REG/08/22]

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which sought approval to adopt the County Durham Inclusive Economic Strategy (IES), developed through the County Durham Economic Partnership (CDEP) (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Mr Glyn Llewellyn, Chair of the County Durham Economic Partnership was in attendance to present County Durham's first inclusive Economic Strategy. Mr

Llewellyn explained that the strategy had been co-developed with residents, businesses, the voluntary and community sector. It provided a clear framework for delivering a step change in economic growth that would be inclusive for all communities. It was bold and ambitious, yet deliverable and realistic. The plan addressed both intermediate and long-term opportunities and challenges and looked forward to the 2035 economic vision. The strategy built on work already underway to create a step change in economic growth to match the aspirations of communities and residents and deliver tangible change to peoples lives. The strategy provided a clear vision for the future which had been defined and agreed by all partners. Delivering the vision could only be achieved as working as one.

In moving the report, Councillor E Scott, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economy and Partnerships explained that the Economic Strategy was a huge step forward for County Durham and the first ever Economic Strategy for the Council. There were significant strengths in the economy and the Council would continue to invest in people, places and employment sites to create more and better jobs. The Council would always be a driver for the economy but it was vital that all partners and anchor institutions worked together, focussing on a single agreed vision which the strategy provided. The strategy also set out how it would be delivered and was based on evidence, it responded to what communities and business had fed back through the comprehensive e-conversation and provided a clear road map for delivery. Councillor E Scott thanked all staff and the County Durham Economic Partnership for all their hard work.

Councillor J Rowlandson, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources, Investment and Assets seconded the recommendation in the report and informed Cabinet that the strategy provided an understanding of the County economy but also presented a bold, deliverable view of the future. The delivery plan approach set out in the report provided a clear framework for all partners to work together to find new creative solutions. It was an approach for the strategy to be a living document which would be updated and reviewed regularly to reflect any changes in national trends within the economy and opportunities locally.

Councillor R Bell welcomed the first strategy of its type for County Durham and explained that the economic strategy would allow flexibility to respond and take advantage of opportunities whenever they arose, particularly in the current turbulent economic times. Councillor Bell also highlighted the need of a strategy for rural communities such as Stanhope and Middleton in Teesdale which had seen no public economic investment since the 1980s.

Resolved:

That the recommendation in the report be approved.

5 Ecological Emergency: Outline Strategy and Action Plan [Key Decision: NCC/04/22]

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which outlined an initial strategy and action plan for Council activities in response to the declaration of an ecological emergency made by Cabinet on 6 April 2022 (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Councillor B Coult, Chair of Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee provided an insight and the background to the Scrutiny work undertaken in this area. Councillor Coult explained that a summary of available information and trends for habitats, species and conservation management was presented for consideration by the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 14 February 2022. The findings showed that the national picture of decline in priority species was being echoed at a local level across all species atlases. Consequently, the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that an interim report be sent to cabinet recommending that Durham County Council declared an ecological emergency.

The majority of actions were centred around the potential to streamline and improve existing work programmes, such as biodiversity interventions on open space, or by expanding existing programmes, such as awareness around climate change to further include the ecological emergency, however, this was an important first step. Actions proposed to improve biodiversity delivery within new built development and ensure that Council land holdings could benefit from biodiversity-focused financial contributions arising through the planning system were also welcomed.

In moving the report, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Climate Change, Councillor Wilkes explained that the County had an excellent track record in the protection and restoration of ecology and the natural environment, including award winning initiatives to address the industrial legacy of the past and the strides taken to a cleaner, greener future. The 'planet' ran through the recently agreed Economic Strategy as a stated priority. This plan recognised the growing fiscal challenges of the day, however, better thinking did not necessarily mean more expenditure. The plan presented looked to bring actions together, working together better and finding better outcomes for nature from collective actions. The Council had strengthened its Countryside team to protect nature reserves and parks and improved access to nature through public rights of way and active travel initiatives within the last year.

The action plan marked the beginning of a blueprint for more to be done and recognised the importance of ecological issues. It placed the council firmly in a position of leadership regionally and nationally on a issue of vital importance to the planet, our people and our economy.

Councillor S McDonnell, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Digital, Customer Services and Procurement, seconded the recommendation and was proud of the strong leadership role taken in relation to environmental issues under the Joint Administration. This included the climate emergency response plan, refreshed action plan and strong track record on delivery. The equally robust Ecological Emergency Outline Strategy and Action Plan presented to Cabinet would ensure that the future of the County was in good hands. Councillor McDonnell reflected on the impressive progress made to date on vital conservation issues and explained that there was much to admire and be proud of, however, it was important to keep up momentum despite the current financial climate.

Resolved:

That the recommendation in the report be approved.

6 Quarter Two, 2022/23 Performance Management Report

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources covering performance in and to the end of quarter two 2022/23, which presented an overview of progress towards achieving the key outcomes of the council's corporate performance framework and highlighted key messages to inform strategic priorities and work programmes (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Councillor Hopgood, Leader of the Council thanked for the Corporate Director and his team for the comprehensive performance update. Despite the challenges set out in the report, some areas were performing well. This included the Business Durham property rental portfolio. 64,000 people had attended the various festivals in County Durham in 2022. The Bishop Auckland Food Festival attracted 30,000 visitors, generating a direct £420,000. This resulted in a 697% return on a £60,000 investment. This information would be included in the quarter three update. There had been a 57% reduction in carbon emissions since 1990. The Council had secured £2.5m grant funding to improve the cycling network and extended provision of e-charging points. There had been increased activity of stop smoking services across quarter two and face to face breastfeeding support groups had been re-established with additional targeted support in communities where take up was much lower. A range of targeted regeneration projects had supported 25 local business and secured 64 FTE jobs bringing 315sqm of business space back into use. 336 net new homes had been delivered and 68 empty properties brought back into use following Council intervention. 465

employees had enrolled on the Council's apprenticeship programme. 72 new apprentices started in August and September 2022 and an additional 33 were being recruited. The retention rate for apprentices was 71%.

Areas that required attention included the impact of inflationary pressures and the squeeze on living standards due to the cost of living increases. A major area of concern was the increased demand for welfare assistance, discretionary housing payments and assistance with home energy and fuel debt advice.

The quantity of waste collected was 6% higher than last year but was in line with the revised budget levels set in 2022/23 and much work was ongoing in terms of promoting waste reduction and increasing recycling. The level of contamination remained in line with last year and the Leader of the Council fully expected to see recycling contamination decreasing and recycling increasing in future quarters. There were also other areas to note that weren't factored into the Council plan the most significant being the passing of Queen Elizabeth II, the official period of mourning and the additional bank holiday which also resulted in several events being cancelled and the closure of public buildings.

Councillor Wilkes, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Climate Change thanked the Leader of the Council for referring to the decontamination campaign in relation to recycling. Councillor Wilkes also informed Cabinet that the Council were determined to build upon the significant improvements made in reducing fly tipping and informed Cabinet that he had received some exceptionally positive comments from Councillors and thanked the Environment and Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee for their work. More and more fly tipping cases were going to court which had resulted in fly tipping cases being reduced. Councillor Wilkes thanked all officers for their hard work and dedication in tackling environmental crime.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

7 Adult Social Care Update Report

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Adult and Health Services which provided an update on current issues impacting on the Adult Social Care service in County Durham (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Councillor C Hood, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Adult and Health Services informed Cabinet that compared to the pre-pandemic period the profile of the workforce and the demands it faced had changed significantly. Uncertainty around and changes to social care reform and funding had continued to impact on the ability of the service to plan and sustain its core functions in line with key legislative frameworks.

Recruitment and retention remained a challenge nationally. In Durham high turnover rates in the adult social care workforce had impacted on service continuity and workforce capacity. Despite these challenges the level of quality and assurance was extensive and was being fed into a development programme focussed on 'reset' as the service worked through the recovery period following the pandemic. Some of the key areas of reform included were included within the report. It was important to point out that mental and physical health needs and complex social care challenges were greater than ever before. The service had recently undergone a comprehensive reassurance exercise comprising self-assessment and independent review which demonstrated that service has a high degree of self-insight. This work was being used to shape the service improvement plan including the development of a refreshed quality assurance strategy. Despite the challenges faced, the service was doing everything it could to instil its vision with the hard work and resilience of staff to be commended. It was proposed that the next report to Cabinet would focus on the service preparations for CQC assurance and the wider role of the council in delivering adult social care.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

8 County Durham Plan Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) 2021/22

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth which sought approval for the content of the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) of the County Durham Plan (CDP) and to agree to its publication (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Councillor E Scott, Portfolio Holder for Economy and Partnerships informed Cabinet that the County Durham Plan was adopted in October 2020 and the Council were now in the delivery phase. It was important to have a continuous understanding of whether the policies within the plan were being used effectively, whether they were having the expected impact and that the sites allocated in the plan were coming forward as anticipated. The annual monitoring report was the means of monitoring delivery and was reporting a generally positive position after the first full year.

Councillor J Rowlandson, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources, Investment and Assets seconded the recommendation in the report.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

9 Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of which Children and Young People's Services which provided information regarding the

launch of the government's Family Hubs and Start for Life programme and its implications for County Durham (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Councillors Henderson and Hood welcomed the launch of the family hubs and the start of the programme and hoped it would provide better outcomes for all concerned across County Durham. The programme would further build on current family centres and the broader system such as health visiting and midwifery support and provide a more comprehensive integrated and accessible offer for families.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

10 Proposed revisions to the constitution for the Durham County Council Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE)

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director Children and Young People's Services regarding a request from Durham County Council's Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) to make a change to its membership, an action which requires altering the constitution (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

In moving the recommendation, the Leader of the Council informed Cabinet that the change to the Constitution would ensure proportionate and balanced representation of all worldviews, religious and non-religious, which featured in the R.E. Agreed Syllabus.

Councillor T Henderson, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People's Services seconded the recommendation in the report adding that the equality impact assessment demonstrated that the request was fair and proportionate to enable Humanist representation on Durham SACRE.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.