

Electoral division(s) affected:

All

Purpose of the Report

To provide information to the Council on issues considered by the Cabinet at its meeting held on 18 September 2024 to enable Members to ask related questions by no later than midday 3 working days before the day of the meeting.

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1. Medium Term Financial Plan(15), 2025/26 – 2028/29 and Review of the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Council Tax Discretionary Discounts and Premiums Policy Key Decision: CORP/R/2024/001

We considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided an update on the development of the 2025/26 budget and the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP(15)) covering the period 2025/26 to 2028/29. The report also outlined the consultation to be undertaken over the coming months.

The report also considered a review of the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2025/26. Durham County Council were now the only local authority in the North East to retain entitlement levels for Council Tax support within the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) in line with that which applied under the national Council Tax Benefit regime prior to 2013/14, although two other authorities (Northumberland CC and Stockton BC) now also provide up to 100% LCTRS reduction, having reviewed their schemes in recent years and increased the level of support they provide.

This policy has protected vulnerable residents at a time when welfare reform changes and, in recent years, the pressure on household incomes from cost of living increases, have had a significant adverse impact.

The report recommended that the current LCTRS policy be retained and remain unaltered for a further year into 2025/26.

Decision

We noted:

- the updated MTFP forecasts and the requirement to identify additional savings of £64.130 million for the period 2025/26 to 2028/29 attached at Appendix 2 of the report;
- noted that at this stage it is forecast that additional savings of £21.720 million are required to balance the 2025/26 budget (£4.931 million more than the level of additional savings that were forecast as being required in 2025/26 as part of the MTFP (14) planning process);
- noted the previously agreed MTFP(14) savings proposals agreed as part of the 2024/25 budget and MTFP(14) at Council in February 2024 and attached at Appendix 3 of the report; and

We agreed the high level MTFP(15) and 2025/26 budget setting timetable and the approach outlined for consultation on the 2025/26 budget and MTFP(15) proposals.

We agreed the proposals to continue to build equalities considerations into decision making; and agreed that Cabinet recommend to Full Council that the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme should remain unchanged for 2025/26.

2. Simpler Recycling: Introduction of Food Waste Collections and other waste collection changes across County Durham Key Decision No. NCC/2024/003

We considered a report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change that outlined the new statutory requirements for local authority waste management functions arising from the Environment Act 2021 and associated regulations, collectively termed Simpler Recycling reforms. The report also asked us to consider and select from options, a favoured method for weekly separate collection of household food waste which is required to be in place by 31 March 2026 and for some larger trade waste businesses by 31 March 2025, with separate collections for smaller businesses being in line with the household weekly collection changes.

The changes to the current recycling service would be the largest change in a decade. The introduction of the co-mingling of glass into the main (blue lidded) recycling bin, will help limit the number of receptacles for residents, improve operational efficiency and improve health and safety for the Refuse and Recycling collection workforce. The proposals allow for the separate collection of batteries, currently a fire hazard when transported as part of residual waste loads.

Decision

We agreed:

- the procurement of vehicles, caddies and treatment necessary to implement a separate food waste collection service to large businesses by 31st March 2025, noting the costs of this will be fully recovered from the charges levied to those businesses who access this new service;
- progression with procurement processes necessary for separate weekly food waste collections to households and small businesses by March 2026, including the dedicated stillage vehicles, caddies and waste treatment; and
- the proposed changes to the recycling service around the co-mingling of glass into the blue wheeled bin to coincide with the introduction of the separate weekly food waste collections.

We noted:

- the opportunity is to be taken in providing for the collection of small household lithium-ion batteries and used vapes in a recycling compartment on the food waste vehicles;
- the variety of waste management changes for the Council arising out of the Environment Act 2021 and Simpler Recycling reforms;
- noted the shortfall in capital funding for the separate weekly food waste collections to households and that the Council has made representation on this;
- noted the uncertainty around New Burdens funding to cover transitional and ongoing revenue costs to offset the additional operational costs and that the Council has made representation on this; and
- noted that further reports will be provided once statutory guidance is published which will help shape such matters as exclusions (based on practicality of collections) as well as frequency or duration of garden waste collections. These reports will detail what is known or forecast regarding revenue costs, and sufficiency of grant support for those changes, which will inform MTFP forecasts, which is currently earmarked £1.6 million annually as a provisional figure.

Item 3 - Leisure Transformation Programme Key Decision (REG/2024/003)

We considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth that provided a summary of the leisure transformation programme, and an update on current and planned works and completed project delivery to date.

The report outlined the challenging financial environment facing the council in its overall operation, the delivery and operation of leisure facilities and the overall costs of the programme. Within that context it outlined the proposed approach to the facilities that had not yet commenced in the programme.

Decision

We noted the update on the committed projects to transform leisure centres and the updated Leisure Transformation Budget of £62.820 million. This represented a significant commitment to the health and wellbeing of County Durham residents.

We noted the revenue pressures within the council's leisure centres and the work being undertaken to address this.

We agreed to ringfence the £10 million capital budget provision as part of MTFP (14) to safeguard the current buildings at Seaham and Chester-le-Street Leisure Centres.

We also agreed that other than essential capitalised maintenance, no work would be undertaken under the current leisure transformation programme at Freemans Quay, Meadowfield and Shildon leisure centres at this time, due to budget constraints.

We noted the outcome of consultation and stakeholder inputs for Riverside Sports complex and the resulting pause in transformation plans for the site while alternative project options are explored. We also noted the outcome of Chelmsford City Council v HMRC that results in VAT on leisure services now falling outside of the scope of the partial exemption calculation.

4. Forecast of Revenue and Capital Outturn 2024/25 – Period to 30 June 2024 and Update on Progress towards achieving MTFP (14) savings

We considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources that provided:

- a) the forecast revenue and capital outturn for 2024/25, based on the position to 30 June 2024;
- b) an update on the dedicated schools grants and forecast schools' outturn as at 31 March 2025, based upon the position to 30 June 2024;
- c) the forecast for the council tax and business rates collection fund outturn at 31 March 2025, based on the position to 30 June 2024; and
- d) details of the updated forecast use of and contributions to earmarked, cash limit and general reserves in 2024/25 and the estimated balances that will be held at 31 March 2025.

The report also provided an update on progress towards achieving MTFP (14) savings in 2024/25.

Decision

We noted the council's overall forecast financial position for 2024/25 and the continuing significant inflationary and demand led cost pressures, particularly in Children's Social Care and in temporary accommodation budgets.

We agreed the proposed 'sums outside the cash limit' and transfers to and from general contingencies as set out in the report. We also agreed the revenue and capital budget adjustments outlined in the report.

We also noted:

- a. performance against the various prudential indicators agreed by Council in February 2024;
- b. the forecast use of earmarked reserves in year;
- c. the forecast 2024/25 net cash limit overspend of £5.798 million including the CYPS overspend of £7.609 million (£1.811 million underspend excluding CYPS) and the forecast cash limit reserves of £10.887 million;
- d. the forecast General Fund overspend of £4.135 million resulting in a forecast overall net council overspend in 2024/25 of £2.324 million (£4.135 million less a £1.811 million services cash-limit underspend);
- e. the forecast General Reserve position at 31 March 2025 (c£27.926 million) and the requirement to utilise £0.317 million of MTFP reserve to replenish the General Reserves in line with the council's policy of ensuring this reserve is 5% of the net revenue budget (i.e. a minimum requirement of £28.243 million);
- f. the net unavoidable demand-led and inflationary pressures which are forecast to be managed from the General Reserve;
- g. the Dedicated Schools Grant and Schools forecast outturn position;
- h. the position on the Collection Funds in respect of Council Tax and Business Rates; and
- i. the amount of savings delivered to 30 June 2024 against the 2024/25 targets and the total savings that will have been delivered since 2011.

5. Health and Wellbeing Board Annual Report 2023/2024

We considered a joint report of the Interim Corporate Director of Adult and Health Services and Director of Public Health that presented the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) Annual Report 2023/24 for endorsement.

Decision

We noted the work that has taken place in 2023/24 by the Health and Wellbeing Board and endorsed the Health and Wellbeing Board Annual Report 2023/24.

6. Adult Social Care Update

We considered the report of the Interim Corporate Director of Adult and Health Services that provided an update on developments in Adult Social Care; including the Care Quality Commission (CQC) assessment of Adult Social Care in County Durham, a new service delivery model for Adult Mental Health Services, Unpaid Carers Service in relation to hospital discharge, and the Breakthrough Service.

The report also provided an update on developments in relation to health and social care integration, particularly the advances made through the County Durham Care Partnership (CDCP) on the Transfer of Care Hub (ToCH), the Therapies Project and extended work on the Children and Young People's Integrated Services.

Decision

We:

- (a) noted the outcome of the CQC Assessment report which, with a service improvement action plan, will be presented to Cabinet on 16 October 2024;
- (b) noted progress on the developments across Adult Social Care;
- (c) noted the continued commitment of partners to further health and care integration through the County Durham Care Partnership (CDCP);
- (d) noted the impact of the Statutory Guidance (March 2024) on the likelihood of the previously preferred option of a Joint Committee to deliver significantly better outcomes for the residents of County Durham;
- (e) agreed that the Council should continue to promote and participate in health and care integration through the CDCP but the option of a Joint committee should not be pursued in the current circumstances;

- (f) noted that if there are changes to Statutory Guidance or ICB proposed delegations to place based arrangements further reports will be made to Cabinet;
- (g) noted the developments in relation to health and social care integration to improve outcomes for the people of County Durham;
- (h) noted the extension of the integration programme to include Children and Young People's Service;
- (i) receive future updates on Adult Social Care and progress on health and social care integration.

7. Review of Removal of Temporary Free After 2pm Parking concession

We considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth that asked us to review the removal of the 'free after 2pm' concession in council owned car parks as agreed by County Council meeting held on 24 January 2024 and to consider the impacts of the removal of the concession.

Decision

We noted the outcome of the review of the decision to end Free Parking After 2pm concession and endorsed the decision taken by Cabinet in October 2023 that parking charges after 2pm be reintroduced with effect from 1 January 2024, which was reconsidered based on the evidence available for the following areas:

- a) Original cabinet decision on 17th March 2020;
- b) Governments removal of all COVID measures from 24th Feb 2022;
- c) Free after 2pm period extended beyond original agreement;
- d) Principles relating to parking management;
- e) Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, Section 55;
- f) Our Parking Strategy;
- g) Declared Climate Emergency;
- h) Air Quality Management Area;
- i) Complaints received;
- j) Footfall data;
- k) Car park and Park and Ride usage data;
- l) Neighbouring authorities; and the
- m) Medium Term Financial Plan

8. Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) to control instances of Anti Social Behaviour in Durham City

We Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change that provided the outcome of the consultation exercise carried out in relation to a potentially new Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) for begging, urinating, and defecating in public and the use of psychoactive substances in Durham City.

Decision

We considered that sufficient evidence is available to warrant a PSPO for begging, urinating, and defecating in public and the use of psychoactive substances in Durham City.

We agreed to introduce a PSPO to control the activities listed in the report; and that the fixed penalty amount is set at the maximum of £100.

Background Papers

Cabinet Agenda and Reports

[Cabinet – 18 September 2024](#)

Councillor A Hopgood
Leader of the Council
15 October 2024