

Durham County Council

At an **Ordinary Meeting** of the County Council held in the **Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham** on **Wednesday 23 October 2024** at **10.00 am**

Present:

Councillor J Nicholson in the Chair

Councillors M Abley, E Adam, R Adcock-Forster, V Anderson, V Andrews, P Atkinson, A Batey, A Bell, R Bell, C Bihari, J Blakey, D Brown, L Brown, J Cairns, J Chaplow, R Charlton-Lainé, J Charlton, J Clark, I Cochrane, B Coult, R Crute, S Deinali, T Duffy, K Earley, J Elmer, L Fenwick, C Fletcher, J Griffiths, O Gunn, C Hampson, D Haney, A Hanson, P Heaviside, T Henderson, J Higgins, L A Holmes, C Hood, A Hopgood, L Hovvels, G Hutchinson, A Jackson, M Johnson, N Jones, P Jopling (Vice-Chair), C Kay, B Kellett, C Lines, L Maddison, R Manchester, C Martin, E Mavin, L Mavin, B McAloon, S McDonnell, M McGaun, D McKenna, S McMahan, J Miller, B Moist, D Mulholland, D Nicholls, R Ormerod, E Peeke, R Potts, J Purvis, J Quinn, S Quinn, A Reed, G Richardson, S Robinson, K Robson, K Rooney, J Rowlandson, A Savory, E Scott, J Scurfield, P Sexton, A Shield, J Shuttleworth, G Smith, T Smith, M Stead, W Stelling, A Sterling, T Stubbs, A Surtees, D Sutton-Lloyd, F Tinsley, S Townsend, C Varty, E Waldock, M Walton, A Watson, J Watson, M Wilkes, M Wilson and D Wood

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors K Batey, C Bell, G Binney, M Currah, K Hawley, S Henig, C Hunt, P Molloy, P Pringle, K Shaw, M Simmons, S Wilson and R Yorke

1 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2024 were **Moved** by Councillor Hogood, **Seconded** by the Councillor R Bell, and confirmed by the Council as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

2 Declarations of interest

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

3 Chair's Announcements

The Chair reminded all Members of their obligations under the Code of Conduct and asked that all Members address each other in the correct manner during meetings and show respect at all times.

The Chair and Council congratulated the Vice-Chair of the Council, Councillor P Jopling who had been recognised in the Kings Birthday Honours earlier in the year. Councillor Jopling had recently been presented with her Medal by the Lord Lieutenant of County Durham at a very special investiture with her family.

The British Empire Medal recognised commitment, dedication and hard work over a considerable period for Councillor Jopling's services to Crook and the wider community in County Durham.

4 Leader's Report

The Council noted a report from Councillor A Hopgood, Leader of the Council. In her report, Councillor Hopgood referred to the arrival of Autumn and spoke of the challenges that Autumn and Winter could bring for many people. The Council had teamed up with Point North to deliver the Welcome Spaces scheme for the third year. The project aimed to create a network of places across the county where people could feel safe, warm and included. Last year, 83 organisations joined the network and the feedback showed that there were other benefits as well as keeping people warm.

Welcome Spaces provided a place for people to socialise, along with support on matters ranging from finance, housing and mental health to drugs and alcohol. Councillor Hopgood hoped that even more community organisations would become Welcome Spaces this winter and the Council were offering grants of up to £3,000 with training to support them to do so. She asked that this was shared within communities.

Councillor Hopgood also commented that there was advice on how to stay warm and well in the current issue of Durham County News. The magazine was available to read online and residents could also subscribe to receive email alerts each time an edition was published. The publication was a great way to stay up to date with the latest council news and events.

5 Questions from the Public

The Chair informed the Council that two questions had been received for the meeting.

Mr Tough was in attendance to ask his question.

On 9 October 2024 the Members, our Town Councils and the Public were presented with a document which showed that the Council had the power to apply Article 4 directions to limit any potential proliferation. The document also provided robust evidence as to why Council should apply article 4 directions across East Durham, for example to prevent any further increases in crime in East Durham. Would the Council apply immediate article 4 directions? If not specifically in detail, why not?

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources, Investment and Assets, Councillor James Rowlandson provided the following response:

The Council recognised the role that HMOs could play in providing accommodation and the Council also acknowledged that some communities were expressing concerns about the introduction of HMOs in some areas.

The Council were aware that an Article 4 Direction, in specific circumstances, could be made to extend the need for planning permission to smaller HMOs. It was important to note however that under national guidance, the tests to implement an Article 4 Direction would require a level of impact that was not currently evidenced for the area proposed. It should also be noted that an Article 4 direction would apply to a specific area. Council should also note that the need for planning permission does not mean that HMO's would not be supported, they would simply be subject to planning approval. Members of this Council would also be aware that we were under pressure to meet the housing needs of all of our residents, which might be exacerbated by the recent proposals from government to deliver on higher housing targets going forward. However, as a proactive step, and following concerns raised by some residents in relation to HMO's, the Council had submitted comments in response to the recent consultation on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework, and had written separately to Angela Rayner MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government regarding the process for Article 4 directions being granted.

HMO's were also subject to licencing requirements, which remained the key mechanism that local authorities had to ensure that HMO's operated appropriately. If members of the public had any specific concerns regarding any issues they should be reported through to the Council for further investigation.

The second question had been submitted by Mr Williamson. Mr Williamson was unable to attend the meeting and therefore the Chair put his question to the Council:

My question relates to Freemans Quay and was asked on behalf of some of my fellow concession members using this facility. Could we ask the Council how they could justify raising the membership fees for concession members (in some cases over £100) when nearly half of the equipment was not in full working order? For example, the pool floor had been unable to be used correctly since 2022 and the steam room had been unable to be used for the past 6 months. These were just two of several issues at Freemans Quay.

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources, Investment and Assets, Councillor James Rowlandson provided the following response.

Freeman's Quay was an extremely popular centre with just over 3,000 members. Naturally this led to inevitable wear and tear, especially in high traffic areas across the facility. Officers across the Council and the facility staff did everything possible to prevent maintenance issues arising and when they did happen to rectify them as quickly as possible.

The pool had been set at a fixed depth since December 2022 as there had been an issue with the mechanics on the floating floor. This allowed the pool to remain open to the public and ensured that swimming activities were not affected. The sauna had been subject to considerable investment in repairs over the last 6 months, including the installation of a new generator, however there had been new issues identified which had delayed plans to re-open it to the public.

The gym equipment was serviced annually, it was checked daily by staff and a contractor was employed to undertake responsive repairs. Although there maybe occasional times when an individual piece of equipment was out of use, this would not result in a disruption to the gym experience.

The Chair announced that the questions and responses would be posted on the Council's website following the meeting.

6 Petitions

There were no petitions.

7 Report from the Cabinet

The Council noted a report from the Cabinet which provided information on issues considered at its meeting held on 10 July 2024 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Chair announced that one question has been received in relation to Item 7 of the Cabinet report.

Councillor D Wood asked what feedback from residents, elected members and AAPs was considered in the 8 months since full council voted unanimously for Free After 2pm parking to be reintroduced in County Durham for towns such as Chester-le-Street.

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economy and Partnerships, Councillor E Scott provided the following response:

At County Council on 14th January this year, Cabinet accepted a motion, which was approved after a vote, to reconsider the decision to end Free After 2pm. Full council did not vote unanimously for Free After 2pm parking to be reintroduced.

Following the removal of Free After 2pm in off street car parks on 1st January 2024, Parking Services received 9 complaints via direct email, an MP, the CRM system, and corporate complaints. Residents may have contacted Councillors about removal of the initiative, however, no cases had been logged via Member Services.

The impact of the temporary Free After 2pm initiative, and its removal, had now been assessed in light of:

- The original decision to implement the temporary measure as a stimulus to support the economic recovery from the global pandemic.
- Governments removal of all covid restrictions
- The lack of evidence linking changes in car park charges to changes in town centre footfall
- The costs of delivering a parking regime and the Secretary of State's expectation that neither national or local taxpayers should meet any deficit in the parking account
- Our Declared Climate Emergency and the fact that transport emissions account for 33% of all emissions in County Durham
- The need to balance the economic vitality of commercial centres and the environmental impact in providing a scheme that incentivises people to drive
- The fact that Park and Ride usage increased when Free after 2pm on street was removed.
- From the data available, car park usage, in 2024/25 is expected to exceed pre-pandemic levels.

A report was considered by Cabinet on 18 September 2024 where Cabinet concluded that the decision to remove the initiative was the correct decision when reviewed against the available evidence. She added that if members of the opposition had attended Cabinet they would have been aware of this information.

Councillor Wood confirmed that he had read the Cabinet papers and was concerned that no consultations had taken place before September 2024. He asked why the Cabinet members thought they knew what was best for Chester-le-Street than the local members and the Area Action Partnership.

Councillor Scott confirmed that nine representations had been made about the changes and she would be happy to share the responses with Councillor Wood.

8 Report of the Audit Committee for the Period September 2023 to August 2024

The Chair invited Councillor A Watson, Chair of the Audit Committee to present the report.

Councillor Watson said that it was considered good practice for the Audit Committee to report on its work to full Council on an annual basis and as Chair of the Council's Audit Committee and he was pleased to present this report. The report covered the work of the Audit Committee during the period September 2023 to August 2024 and set out how the Audit Committee had fulfilled its role in gaining assurances as to the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's governance, risk management framework and internal control environment.

The report set out details of the various meetings that had been held over the last twelve months and the issues that had been considered at those meetings. There were three key areas of the Committee's work during the last twelve months that he drew the Council's attention to:

The first area related to the work of Internal Audit where the Audit Committee had continued to promote and champion the work of Internal Audit across the organisation. The Committee agreed the Internal Audit Strategy, Charter and the internal audit plan for the year and progress updates were provided to the committee on a quarterly basis.

Councillor Watson was satisfied that the committee provided the appropriate challenge to this process, with a number of officers attending the Committee to provide explanations and answer questions across the year through the delivery of presentations.

Secondly, the External Audit of the Council's Statement of Accounts the Committee received a report from the Corporate Director of Resources which presented the final Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2023 for review/approval, alongside the External Auditors report following the conclusion of the 2022/23 audit. The statutory requirement was for the Council to finalise its accounts by 30 September 2023 but as that was not

possible as Mazars were unable to complete their audit review in time, with arrangements made for a public notice to be added onto the council's website to this effect. The Audit Committee were satisfied that there was nothing the Council or its officers could have done to achieve the 30 September deadline last year as the delay was wholly down to External Audit capacity.

In June 2024 this year, the Committee considered the draft un-audited Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2024 and the draft accounts were certified and provided to external audit within the statutory deadline.

A verbal progress update report on the draft statement of accounts for the year ended 31 March 2024 was presented to Audit Committee in September 2024 and the final statement of accounts would be presented to the meeting of the Audit Committee in November 2024 for review/approval.

Thirdly, the continuing good work of the Council's Corporate Fraud Team was highlighted. The Protecting the Public Purse reports considered demonstrated, across the Council, the counter fraud activity that was being completed in order to acknowledge, prevent and pursue fraud under the Council's Counter Fraud & Corruption Strategy. We had acknowledged fraud as a strategic risk and that prevention was indeed better than cure.

The Council had an excellent local and national profile for its work in this area and the Corporate Fraud Team had developed strong partnerships with other public sector organisations which continued to enhance the reputation that the Council had.

Finally, the report also contained information on the outcome of the self-assessment evaluation of the effectiveness of the Audit Committee, carried out in February 2024 in accordance with CIPFA's Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police 2022.

The report also highlighted the increase in the Audit Committee Co-opted membership from two to three members with effect from 1 May 2024 following the recruitment of co-opted Independent Members to the Audit Committee earlier in the year.

In summary Councillor Watson reported that whilst the report was largely for information, he considered the effectiveness of the Audit Committee to be excellent and Council was recommended to note the report and the work undertaken by the Audit Committee during the period September 2023 to August 2024.

Councillor Watson Moved the recommendations.

Councillor R Crute thanked the Chair and Vice Chair of Audit Committee, Councillor Watson and Fenwick. He asked what would happen should a red flag be raised if this did not coincide with the bi-monthly reports to Council from the Audit Committee. He presumed that any issues would be raised with the appropriate head of service or Corporate Management Team but that in order to strengthen arrangements for red flag issues he suggested that there should be a mechanism in place to also report to the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Deputy Monitoring Officers advised that regular reporting from the Audit Committee did not preclude any red flag issues being brought to the attention of the appropriate officers and members. He suggested that any changes in reporting mechanisms would need to be discussed at the Constitution Working Group and brought back to Council with recommendations.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

9 Review of the Council's Statement of Licensing Policy

The Council considered a report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change which presented the revised Statement of Licensing Policy and sought its adoption (for copy see file of Minutes)

The Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change presented the final draft statement of licensing policy for the period 2024 – 2029.

The Licensing Act 2003 required local authorities to publish a Statement of Licensing Policy every five years and as the current policy was published in October 2019, a new policy would be required no later than October 2024.

An extensive consultation exercise had been carried out and responses had been considered and where appropriate incorporated into the new draft policy in Appendix 2.

There were no significant changes proposed in the new policy other than minor amendments and the provision of additional guidance as outlined in paragraph 21 within the report.

As part of the policy consultation, some organisations in the City of Durham had called for the council to introduce a late-night levy (LNL) and consider the introduction of a cumulative impact policy (CIP). These were discretionary tools that licensing authorities could adopt if there was sufficient

evidence available to substantiate such measures. This could be a lengthy process which would require significant assistance from a wide range of partners and other council services.

The draft statement of licensing policy was considered and endorsed for recommendation to full Council by the Statutory Licensing Committee on 15 July 2024.

At that meeting, the Committee also determined that consideration of both the Late Night Levy and the Cumulative Impact Policy should take place at a later date to allow for the draft policy to be adopted before the statutory deadline of October 2024 and also to take into account new commercial developments in the city centre. This approach had been supported by the Police & Crime Commissioner's Office which was a statutory consultee for issues relating to both the Levy and Cumulative Impact Policies.

Councillor D Brown, Chair of the Statutory Licensing Committee reported that this Statement of Licensing Policy confirmed the Council's commitment to promoting the four statutory licensing objectives and in doing so prevent crime and disorder, promote public safety, prevent public nuisance and protect children from harm. It was vital that the Council regularly reviewed this policy and had in place a clear and robust framework to assist decision making and to support effective regulation of licensed premises and activities to ensure that they were safe and well run and continued to support the local economy and vibrancy of the County.

Councillor Brown acknowledged that further work would be required around the need for a late night levy or cumulative impact policy and should sufficient evidence be obtained then this would be considered and potentially incorporated into the main policy at a later date.

He thanked the members of the Statutory Licensing Committee for their ongoing dedication to the Council in developing this policy and to the Council officers involved in undertaking this review. This policy had been developed following extensive consultation and reflected current national guidance and best practice. He **Moved** the report and proposed this policy for adoption by the Council.

Councillor J Shuttleworth said that this policy promoted effective and responsible management of licensed premises and regulated activities throughout the County and had been reviewed having had regard to the statutory guidance, the licensing objectives and to the views of those consulted. He extended his thanks to the members of Statutory Licensing Committee and officers involved and he **Seconded** the report.

Referring to the timeline, Councillor R Crute said that should members have any questions about the changes there would be no time to respond. The Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods of Climate Change advised that the submission was late but still in time to respond by the statutory deadline, and confirmed that the consultation had started over a year ago so had taken on board all points raised.

Resolved:

That the revised Statement of Licensing Policy, as contained in Appendix 2, be agreed and adopted.

10 Motions on Notice

The Chair informed Council that there were two Motions for consideration. The second Motion was to be moved by Councillor L Hovvels and not Councillor J Miller, as stated on the agenda.

The Chair invited Councillor Martin to move his Motion.

Moved by Councillor C Martin and **Seconded** by Councillor J Blakey

Council strongly believed that the two-child limit to benefit payments, introduced by the Government in 2017, was a cruel and harmful policy that should be scrapped. Research from the University of York had shown its introduction had had no positive impacts on employment and earnings. Instead, it had dragged thousands of local families into poverty.

Council noted with concern the stance of the Government who were committed to keeping the cap – going as far as suspending the whip from MPs who rebelled against this position.

Council resolves to:

Call upon the Portfolio Holder for Equalities and Inclusion to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister indicating Durham County Council's strong belief that the two child limit to benefit payments should be scrapped.

Further request the Portfolio Holder to write to all MPs covering the Durham County Council area, asking them to commit their public support to the campaign to end the cruel two child limit to benefit payments.

An Amendment was **Moved** by Councillor A Surtees, **Seconded** by Councillor D Wood.

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should be scrapped. Research from the University of York had shown its introduction had had no positive impacts on employment and earnings. Instead, it has dragged thousands of local families into poverty.

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Council welcomed the stance of the Government in reviewing Child Poverty and all the determinants through the formation of a Child Poverty Strategy Plan and Ministerial Task Force.

Council calls upon the Portfolio Holder for Equalities and Inclusion to write to the Secretary of State for Education and the Secretary of State for the Department of Work & Pensions to ask how Durham County Council could help and support the delivery of the new Child Poverty Strategy Plan which would drive cross-government action to address child poverty.

Council further requests the Portfolio Holder to write to the North East Mayor who had already launched her Child Poverty Unit to ask how Durham County Council could get more involved with the NECA Child Poverty Unit.

Councillors A Shield, A Hopgood and M Wilkes spoke against the amendment.

Councillors C Bihari, R Crute and O Gunn spoke for the amendment.

Councillor O Gunn requested for a named vote which was supported.

Councillor C Martin said that the reason for bringing this forward at this stage was essentially due to having a new government in place. The previous government had been content with the policy and now that a Labour government was in place, Councillor Martin believed it was the correct time to write to ministers and MPs. To include child poverty overall was diluting

the point of this Motion as it was regarding the two child benefit cap, and he urged members to submit a further Motion of Child Poverty at a later date.

For the Amendment

Councillors E Adam, R Adcock-Forster, V Anderson, V Andrews, P Atkinson, A Batey, C Bihari, J Chaplow, R Charlton-Lainé, J Clark, I Cochrane, R Crute, S Deinali, K Earley, L Fenwick, C Fletcher, J Griffiths, O Gunn, C Hampson, A Hanson, J Higgins, L Hovvells, M Johnson, C Kay, B Kellett, L Maddison, R Manchester, B McAloon, M McGaun, D McKenna, S McMahon, J Miller, B Moist, D Mulholland, D Nicholls, J Purvis, S Quinn, J Scurfield, P Sexton, G Smith, T Smith, A Surtees, F Tinsley, S Townsend, C Varty, E Waldock, J Watson, M Wilson and D Wood.

Against the Amendment

Councillors M Abley, R Bell, A Bell, J Blakey, D Brown, L Brown, B Coult, T Duffy, J Elmer, D Haney, P Heaviside, T Henderson, L Holmes, C Hood, A Hoggood, G Hutchinson, A Jackson, N Jones, P Jopling, C Lines, C Martin, E Mavin, L Mavin, S McDonnell, J Nicholson, R Ormerod, E Peeke, R Potts, J Quinn, A Reed, G Richardson, S Robinson, K Robson, K Rooney, J Rowlandson, A Savory, E Scott, A Shield, J Shuttleworth, M Stead, W Stelling, A Sterling, T Stubbs, D Sutton-Lloyd, M Walton, A Watson and M Wilkes.

Abstentions

Councillors J Cairns and J Charlton.

Councillor A Surtees said that this was an opportunity for Durham County Council to get behind the North East Combined Authority and establish a cross party working to look at child poverty, which included the two child cap. Councillor Surtees spoke of the significant importance of supporting our people and our communities and be being an exemplar for the Country on good practice. She asked for a named vote on the Substantive Motion, which was supported.

For the Substantive Motion

Councillors E Adam, R Adcock-Forster, V Anderson, V Andrews, P Atkinson, A Batey, A Bell, C Bihari, J Blakey, D Brown, L Brown, J Cairns, J Chaplow, J Charlton, R Charlton-Lainé, J Clark, I Cochrane, B Coult, R Crute, S Deinali, T Duffy, K Earley, J Elmer, L Fenwick, C Fletcher, J Griffiths, O Gunn, C Hampson, D Haney, A Hanson, P Heaviside, T Henderson, J Higgins, C Hood, A Hoggood, L Hovvells, G Hutchinson, M Johnson, N Jones, C Kay, B Kellett, C Lines, L Maddison, R Manchester, C Martin, E

Mavin, L Mavin, B McAloon, S McDonnell, M McGaun, D McKenna, S McMahan, J Miller, B Moist, D Mulholland, D Nicholls, J Nicholson, R Ormerod, J Purvis, S Quinn, A Reed, G Richardson, S Robinson, K Robson, K Rooney, J Rowlandson, A Savory, E Scott, J Scurfield, P Sexton, A Shield, J Shuttleworth, G Smith, T Smith, M Stead, W Stelling, A Surtees, F Tinsley, S Townsend, C Varty, E Waldock, A Watson, J Watson, M Wilkes, M Wilson and D Wood.

Against the Substantive Motion

Councillors R Bell, L Holmes, A Jackson, E Peeke, R Potts, J Quinn, A Sterling, D Sutton-Lloyd and M Walton.

Abstentions

Councillors M Abley, P Jopling and T Stubbs.

The Substantive Motion was **Carried**.

In accordance with the Council Procedure Rules, the Chair announced that the time for consideration of Motions had lapsed and announced that Councillor Hovvels Motion would be deferred until the next meeting.

11 Questions from Members

The Chair announced that one question had been submitted jointly by Councillors E and L Mavin.

The subject matter was very important but also very sad, which some may find upsetting.

Councillor L Mavin said that suicide was the biggest killer of all people under the age of 35 and three quarters of these were male. The North East had the highest rate of suicide in England. Three months ago, our 19-year-old nephew took his own life. The three Dads walking came together after their daughters took their own lives and had walked hundreds of miles over the last year across the UK to raise awareness of suicide and to ensure the topic was spoken about in schools in a safe and age -appropriate way. She asked Cabinet member for Children and Young People and the Cabinet member for Adult and Health Services to write to the Secretary of State for Education to request that she ensured suicide awareness and prevention was a compulsory part of the RHSE curriculum, to raise the profile and reduce the stigma of suicide? People don't die from talking about suicide, they die because we don't talk about it.

The Chair passed on condolences on behalf of the Council to this young man's family and friends in these very tragic circumstances.

The Chair would not usually allow any further speeches or discussion in relation to questions from Members, however, felt it appropriate to allow Councillor E Mavin to say a few words.

Councillor E Mavin reflected on the devastating loss and said that if his nephew had shared his burden that we may not have been here talking about this today.

Councillor C Kay reflected on his own journey and the help that had been given to him by the Crisis Team and that by talking about it did help. He offered his condolences to the family.

The Chair invited Cabinet Portfolio Holder of Adult and Health Services, Councillor Chris Hood, to respond to the question.

Councillor Hood passed on his sincere condolences to the family while they were mourning their loss and that they were right when stating that people died when not talking about suicide. He thanked them both for their courage in bringing this forward for the Council's attention.

Despite the work of partners across the system, County Durham continued to experience one of the highest rates of suicide in the country and behind the statistics each individual was a tragic loss of life with a profound impact on all those left behind. Good mental health, wellbeing and resilience were key protective factors to support suicide prevention. This area was one of the four priorities for the Health and Wellbeing Board, identified in the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy, published last year. Whilst suicide in children was thankfully rare, every case was one too many, and it was known that promotion of effective resilience mechanisms and positive mental wellbeing at a young age provided a sound foundation as children move to adulthood. It was therefore vital that young people received appropriate information guidance and, where needed, individual support. Teaching about mental health and emotional wellbeing was a requirement as part of statutory Health Education, 'to enable pupils to make good decisions about their own health and wellbeing, to understand the links between physical and mental health, to recognise problems in themselves or others and to seek support when needed.' Within County Durham a tailored whole school approach around the mental wellbeing of children and young people, based on self-assessed need was promoted. Over 75% of schools in County Durham now had a Senior Mental Health Lead as part of their senior leadership teams. A range of interventions were available to schools including Youth Aware Mental Health (YAM), The Durham Resilience Programme, Anxious about schools and Critical Incidents Loss & Bereavement. Every school had Resilience Nurse provision which included the delivery of a number of group and 1:1

sessions within schools for low level mental health. Schools also had access to the Educational Psychologist teams and school counselling service. In addition, schools were encouraged to sign up to R;pple which identified young people who searched for methods of suicide using school computers signposting them to help and support that was available. Support to upskill school staff was also in place through the implementation of the RSHE quality framework, a whole school approach to delivering RSHE, alongside measures such as peer mentors and Emotional Health and Wellbeing Forums.

Councillor Hood added that from May 2024 and July 2024, the Department for Education held a public consultation on proposed changes to the statutory Relationship, Sex, Health, and Education (RSHE) guidance. The consultation sought the views on how sensitive and complex subjects were taught in an age-appropriate way and proposed the addition of new subjects to the curriculum, including suicide prevention. The outcome of this consultation and subsequent revised guidance for education settings had not yet been published. As the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people was of great importance to us all, he confirmed that he would write to the Secretary of State requesting a further update on the outcome of the consultation, and urged her to ensure that suicide prevention was added to the statutory curriculum as an outcome of the review.