

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At an Ordinary Meeting of the County Council held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Wednesday 6 December 2017 at 10.00 a.m.**

Present:

Councillor B Kellett in the Chair

Councillors E Adam, J Allen, J Atkinson, B Avery, A Bainbridge, B Bainbridge, A Batey, A Bell, D Bell, J Bell, R Bell, H Bennett, J Blakey, G Bleasdale, L Boyd, D Boyes, D Brown, L Brown, C Carr, J Carr, J Chaplow, J Clare, J Clark, M Clarke, I Cochrane, J Considine, K Corrigan, P Crathorne, R Crute, G Darkes, M Davinson, S Dunn, S Durham, D Freeman, A Gardner, J Grant, N Grayson, O Gunn, C Hampson, K Hawley, T Henderson, S Henig, D Hicks, A Hopgood, K Hopper, L Hovvells, P Howell, S Hugill, E Huntington, S Iveson, I Jewell, O Johnson, C Kay, L Kennedy, J Lethbridge (Vice-Chairman), L Maddison, J Maitland, R Manchester, C Marshall, L Marshall, C Martin, E Mavin, L Mavin, S McDonnell, M McGaun, M McKeon, I McLean, O Milburn, S Morrison, A Napier, H Nicholson, J Nicholson, R Ormerod, A Patterson, C Potts, S Quinn, A Reed, G Richardson, J Rowlandson, A Savory, E Scott, P Sexton, K Shaw, A Shield, H Smith, T Smith, J Stephenson, B Stephens, A Surtees, L Taylor, O Temple, K Thompson, F Tinsley, T Tucker, J Turnbull, A Watson, A Willis, M Wilson and D Wood

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Brookes, J Brown, P Jopling, A Laing, K Liddell, H Liddle, J Makepeace, P Oliver, L Pounder, J Robinson, S Robinson, J Shuttleworth, M Simmons, A Simpson, D Stoker, P Taylor, M Wilkes, C Wilson and S Zair

Prior to the commencement of the meeting the Chairman of the County Council with great sadness reported the deaths of former Durham County Councillors and Aldermen John Toft and William Firby.

The Council stood for a moments silence as a mark of respect.

1 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2017 were confirmed by the Council as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2 Declarations of Interest

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

3 Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman was pleased to announce that Business Durham had recently been awarded a 'Highly Commended' certificate in the 'Improving Business Environment' category of the Enterprising Britain Awards 2017, which were part of the Government's drive to increase entrepreneurial activity in the UK. Councillor Marshall, Portfolio Holder for Economic Regeneration provided the Council with details of the award and placed on record his thanks and appreciation to all officers across the Council who provided a corporate approach to attracting businesses to the County. Councillor Marshall presented the award to members of Business Durham.

The Chairman reminded the Council about awareness sessions which were taking place in the Member Resource Centre. The aim of the sessions was to assist with the move towards paperless committee meetings, with full training and support to follow in January. The Chairman asked those Members who had not yet had the opportunity to attend any of the sessions to visit the Member Resource Centre before 5 p.m., or contact the Member Support Team who would be able to assist.

An extraordinary meeting would take place at the conclusion of the meeting and the Chairman asked all Members to remain in the Chamber.

4 Leader's Report

The Leader congratulated all those involved in Lumiere, which had attracted 240,000 visitors over a four night period. The economic assessment of the event was yet to be carried out. Durham had also hosted the 2017 LUCI Annual General Meeting, a three day event which attracted worldwide delegates and a one day Lumiere Durham Conference.

A video presentation of Lumiere, which contained some 29 light installations, was shown to Council.

The Leader informed Council that following Lumiere he had written to all partners to thank them for their support during the event, including the police, fire and rescue service, funders, staff, volunteers and Artichoke.

The Leader congratulated those who had been successful at this year's Environment Awards, Best Bar None awards and Durham City retail awards.

In concluding, the Leader wished all Members and officers a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

5 Questions from Area Action Partnerships

Questions had been received from Great Aycliffe and Middridge AAP and 4Together AAP relating to the following:

- Further measures which could be introduced to enforce the clearance of littered yards and gardens in some housing properties.

- How the portfolio holder for social inclusion was approaching her role to find out what local projects were being developed by grants to tackle welfare reform and poverty issues, how these were helping those affected by welfare reform and poverty, and, how learning from such projects could be shared across the County to benefit others?

Brian Riley, Great Aycliffe and Middridge Partnership AAP Coordinator and Lee Copeland, 4Together AAP Coordinator were in attendance to ask their questions.

Councillor K Shaw, Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Assets thanked the Great Aycliffe and Middridge AAP for their question and provided a response.

Councillor A Surtees, Cabinet Support Member for Social Inclusion thanked the 4Together AAP for their question and provided a response.

6 Questions from the Public

One question had been received from a Member of the Public regarding the role of teaching assistants:

In the absence of the questioner, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services informed the Council that a copy of the question, together with the response would be placed on the Council's website and a copy of the response would also be sent direct to the questioner.

7 Petitions

There were no petitions for consideration.

8 Report from the Cabinet

The Leader of the Council provided the Council with an update of business discussed by Cabinet on 15 November 2017 (for copy see file of Minutes).

9 Mid-Year Review Report on Treasury Management for the period to 30 September 2017

The Council considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided information on the treasury management mid-year position for 2017/18 and sought approval of a revision to the Council's Investment Strategy (for copy see file of Minutes).

In **moving** approval of the report Councillor Napier, Portfolio Holder for Finance informed Council it was important that treasury management was in line with best practice guidance. There was a need for transparency while also a need to manage borrowing prudently. Councillor Napier welcomed the proposed changes, which sought ways to increase investment returns while minimising risk.

Seconded by Councillor Henig.

Resolved:

- (a) That the proposed changes to the Treasury Management Strategy for 2017/18 be approved;
- (b) That the contents of the mid-year review report for 2017/18 be noted.

10 Electoral Boundary Review - Revised proposals for new Parliamentary Constituencies in Durham

The Council considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which presented the revised proposals of the Boundary Commission for England for new Parliamentary constituency boundaries in England and the Constitution Working Group's recommendations thereon (for copy see file of Minutes).

In **moving** the recommendations Councillor Henig informed the Council that it would object in the strongest possible terms to the proposals. The proposed response was at Appendix 2 of the report.

In **seconding** the report Councillor Hopgood informed Council that there were massive changes in the proposals to those which the public had been consulted on.

Councillor R Bell informed the Council he could not support outright rejection of the proposals because they had brought Barnard Castle back into a Bishop Auckland constituency.

Resolved:

That:

- 1 the objection to the BCE's revised proposals for new Parliamentary Constituency boundaries across County Durham as set out at Appendix 2 be submitted.
- 2 the Head of Legal and Democratic Services be requested to send the letter on behalf of the Council to BCE before the consultation closes on 11 December 2017.

11 Motions on Notice

In accordance with a Notice of Motion it was **Moved** by Councillor Surtees, and **Seconded** by Councillor Corrigan:

This Council supports the NJC pay claim for 2018, submitted by UNISON, GMB and UNITE on behalf of council and school workers subject to the additional costs being provided for in future Local Government and associated funding settlements.

Councillor R Bell informed Council that the Motion did not say what the pay claim was and expressed concern it could undermine the employers side of negotiations. He added that he had a lot of sympathy for council and school workers, especially those not on incremental points.

Councillor Hopgood **moved** a Motion without Notice to adjourn the debate. The Motion moved by Councillor Surtees contained no detail of financial implications. While being supportive of what the Motion wanted to achieve, because of the lack of detail contained within it, the debate should be adjourned and the Motion brought back with more detail included.

Seconded by Councillor Temple.

Upon a vote being taken the Motion without Notice was **Lost**.

Upon a further vote being taken the substantive Motion was **Carried**.

12 Questions from Members

Councillor O Temple

To its credit, despite government having withdrawn the direct grant for Welfare Assistance in 2015, Durham County Council has continued each year to budget £860,000 to help residents in crisis with short term support through Daily Living Expenses, or to live on their own through Settlement Grants.

Unfortunately, however, in recent years only around half of this money has been allocated to individuals in need, with the balance allocated to employability schemes and AAPs.

With the roll-out of Universal Credit now happening across the county, what steps are the council taking to ensure that the whole Welfare Assistance budget is utilised for the relief of hard-pressed individuals and families, and in particular what steps will be taken to make the application process more accessible?

Councillor K Shaw, Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Assets thanked Councillor Temple for his question and provided the following response on behalf of Councillor J Brown, Portfolio Holder for Social Inclusion.

As stated previously by Cllr Surtees in responding to the question from the AAP, residents of the County continued to struggle with the Government's ongoing programme for welfare reform and the lasting impacts of the recession in our area.

With the roll out of Universal Credit having already started in in Peterlee and Seaham in October this year, it was important that the Council understood the impact on local people and provide support wherever possible.

The Council continued to provide a budget of £1m for its welfare assistance scheme despite government funding for the scheme being withdrawn. Many other councils had cut this vital support, but the Council had so far been able to continue to support the most vulnerable people in County Durham.

Since 2013 over 2,800 residents had benefitted from a settlement grant award and over 5,330 residents had received a daily living expense award. The scheme was kept under review and sought ways to ensure the scheme was as accessible as possible for those who needed it. Recent changes had been made to provide

additional support for those affected by Universal Credit. Feedback on the scheme from those the Council had helped had been very positive and the recent change to the provision of food baskets from Asda had been particularly welcome.

The Council was planning to undertake further communications amongst its front line teams and partners to ensure everyone was aware and could access the support available easily and with the minimum fuss. The Council was also promoting the scheme through its Advice in County Durham Partnership so that all advice agencies remained fully aware of the scheme.

If the annual budget for the Welfare Assistance Scheme was not fully spent in a particular financial year, the full budget remained available to help those in need, with any underspends carried forward in an earmarked reserve to augment the following years' budget allocation.

The Welfare Assistance Scheme budget was overseen by the Councils Poverty Action Steering Group and any requests for funding from this budget must clearly demonstrate that the funds would be used to assist 'hard pressed' individuals and families with immediate help or longer term support.

As an example, the Welfare Assistance Scheme fund was used to provide immediate help to residents struggling to meet their housing costs, by topping up the council's Discretionary Housing Payments grant budget by £118,000 in 2016/17. The Welfare Assistance Scheme budget had also funded a qualified Energy Efficiency Advisor for three years to help residents improve residents' financial situations by ensuring they were not over paying on energy costs.

Funding had also been provided for an employment and employability initiatives which supported individuals by helping them become closer the employment market, or to assist those who would like to explore self-employment as a route to improving their life chances and achieving a positive outcome.

Since 2014, over 745 people had been supported into employment; over 700 residents had undertaken skills training; over 180 wage subsidies had helped business create positions for residents to be able to gain employment; and over 60 residents had set up their own businesses.

No resident had been turned away due to lack of funds in this County and the Council was hopeful this would never be the case. The revised scheme would be in operation for April next year and the Council would continue to monitor and collect feedback to ensure the scheme was available and accessible to those who needed it.

Councillor Temple thanked Councillor Shaw for his response and asked whether, if this year, the Council did not manage to get more money into the hands of individuals, this would be seen as a failure of the Scheme. Councillor Shaw replied that he would take this to the Portfolio Holder to provide a response.

The Chairman concluded the meeting by wishing all a Merry Christmas and New Year.