

Cabinet

17 October 2018



Council Activity Update

Report of Corporate Management Team

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Councillor Simon Henig, Leader of the Council

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide an update on work to support some of the council's key priorities.

Background

- 2 The council undertakes an enormous amount of work to realise the vision for the county.
- 3 The following provides an update on progress towards delivering some of the council's key priorities and summarises a number of other newsworthy aspects of the council's work:
 - (a) Welfare support
 - (b) Smoking cessation
 - (c) Fair funding
 - (d) Mental health
 - (e) Jobs and growth
 - (f) Visitor economy
 - (g) New recruits join the council
 - (h) Bin crews launch respect campaign
 - (i) Archive receives national accreditation
 - (j) Approval for phase one of Aykley Heads development
 - (k) Northumbria in Bloom success.

Welfare support



- 4 Since 2012, the council has been working closely with its partners to ease the burden of spending cuts on the county's residents and also mitigate against the significant impact on the public of changes to the welfare system.
- 5 Research released last month by Greater Manchester Poverty Action shows that there has been a collapse in crisis support in some parts of the country and that local authorities across England are struggling to maintain well-funded effective welfare assistance schemes since government funding for such support ceased at the end of 2014/15. However, for the past five years, Durham County Council has built £1 million into its annual budget to allow for the continuation of its scheme. More than 9,000 grants have been awarded to date, including more than 6,000 to help with daily living allowances.
- 6 Support for individual families was also provided during the summer when 76,800 healthy snacks were given out to children and young people using our leisure centres and libraries – an initiative which was developed in response to recommendations by the portfolio holders for social inclusion and children and young people's services and which also offered the opportunity to promote physical and social activities. Work is now underway to look at how we can help similar existing schemes during the October half term and Christmas holidays.
- 7 The authority has an established record of supporting holiday activity projects through its 14 Area Action Partnerships (AAPs), which provide funding for community-based organisations. Since 2013, AAPs have also been supporting wider initiatives aimed at combatting the impact of welfare reform, with each receiving £10,000 from the council's Welfare Assistance Scheme

Fund to invest in local initiatives. Almost £208,000 has been donated in match-funding as a result of this investment.

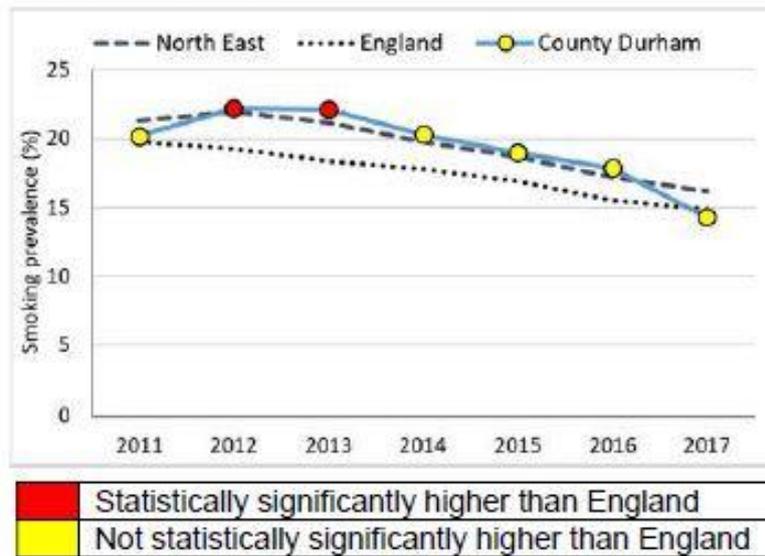
- 8 Further assistance is available to households through a Council Tax Reduction Scheme, which helps residents on low incomes pay their council tax. Durham is one of only a handful of authorities offering a scheme that provides the same level of support as the previous initiative. It has meant that in the past five years there has been no increase in the levels of council tax eligible residents are expected to pay. Northumberland is the only other authority in the region to offer a comparable scheme but recently announced that it will be reviewing the initiative.
- 9 And work to highlight at a national level the impact of welfare reform and funding cuts on residents is also taking place, with the council submitting written evidence to the Work and Pensions Committee's Inquiry into the Benefit Cap. The submission, which was compiled in consultation with a range of partners, details how households have been affected and also outlines the support being provided by the authority and its partners.

Smoking cessation



- 10 County Durham has seen a 36 per cent reduction in smoking prevalence over the past six years, with the most recent figures showing estimated smoking prevalence of 14.3 per cent. For the first time, this figure is defined as not being significantly different to both the national (14.9 per cent) and north east (16.2 per cent) averages.

Smoking Prevalence



- 11 However, despite this success smoking remains the single biggest causal factor in health inequalities and premature death and disease in County Durham with an estimated 60,000 people who continue to smoke, putting their health and the health of others at risk.
- 12 The council and its partners continue to work towards reducing smoking prevalence in the county. Stop smoking support is available across County Durham but targeted work is also taking place to maximise uptake of services in areas of deprivation with routine and manual workers as well as pregnant women. This level of commissioning is consistent with NICE recommendations.
- 13 A recent audit of the stop smoking service, commissioned through Solutions 4 Health, revealed that it is having an impact on reducing inequalities. People from more deprived areas are setting a quit date and quitting smoking at a greater rate than those in the less deprived areas while the rate of people attending stop smoking services in County Durham and setting a quit date is significantly higher than the England average. County Durham also displays significantly better rates for successful quitters at four weeks. Between April 2017 and March 2018, 2,497 residents stopped smoking with support from the smoking support service. This exceeded the smoking support service 2017/18 target of 2,401 smoking quitters.
- 14 As well as the health impact, smoking can also have financial benefits for households. For example, 33 per cent of households with a smoker fall below the poverty line. If money wasn't spent on tobacco, nearly 7,000 households would be lifted out of poverty.
- 15 In County Durham, mothers smoking during pregnancy remains a challenge, with the Durham Dales, Easington and Sedgfield (DDES) clinical commissioning group area having the highest rate (21.9 per cent) in the north east and the third highest nationally. An incentive scheme to reduce smoking

in pregnancy aims to address this issue and early data shows good retention in the stop smoking service amongst these women. However, the challenges of reducing smoking in pregnancy is evident as 61 per cent of those recruited to the scheme live with a smoker.

- 16 The council is taking a long-term and ambitious approach to reducing smoking levels in County Durham through the work of its local tobacco alliance, comprised of the council, NHS, stop smoking service provider and the voluntary sector. The ambition is to achieve five per cent smoking prevalence level by 2025. Working together we can support our local residents to give up smoking and to make their home and local environment smoke free.

Fair funding

- 17 According to the Local Government Association, by 2020 local councils will have faced a reduction in core funding of nearly £16 billion over 10 years. Durham County Council has already made £224 million in savings since 2011/12. This has been achieved through a planned yet creative approach which has focused on protecting frontline services. Public consultation has also played a key part in the budget setting process, with residents being given the opportunity to influence how savings are made through a range of innovative consultation events

- 18 However, with further forecasted savings of £35.3 million required over the next four years, the financial pressures facing the council are set to continue and the impact of the government's ongoing funding cuts will be felt across all areas with significant risks to our funding from the fair funding review.

- 19 In the face of these challenging financial circumstances, the council is proactively campaigning for fairer funding for local government and highlighting the impact of austerity at a local and national level.

- 20 The leader of the council has written to the government in his role as chair of the Association of North East Councils (which represents all 12 of the region's local authorities), to call for fairer distribution of funding in the forthcoming spending review, while the authority's Cabinet member for children and young people's services has written to the governing bodies of all schools and academies in the county to share her concerns about the financial pressures they are currently facing as a result of the government's lack of investment. Furthermore, in response to estimates of a £19 million reduction in public health grant, the authority is looking at working with other councils and public



sector organisations to make the case for the formula for calculating the grant to be changed.

Mental health



let's end mental health discrimination

- 21 Poor mental health can affect anyone. Statistically, one in four of us will be affected by a mental health problem in any given year and in the workplace, almost one in six people of working age have a diagnosable mental health condition. The council and its partners are focused on improving mental health and wellbeing for our residents and joint workforce.
- 22 Durham is one of 15 pilot areas chosen for the LGA's national 'Prevention at Scale' offer involving support and advice to deliver, 'at scale', a preventative approach to significantly change health outcomes for local people. Suicide prevention has been identified as the focus for this work as Durham's rate is above the national average. It builds on a wide range of work, including Youth Aware of Mental Health, an internationally recognised programme of education for young people which is in place across 75 of our schools, the men's sheds (or crees) network and Wellbeing for Life, a dedicated service offering low level support to people wanting to improve their health and wellbeing.
- 23 Work is focussed on supporting our workforce in being able to talk about mental health and equip staff with the skills to be able to identify early signs of stress through a comprehensive training programme. It is also seeking insights from local communities, and men in particular, in relation to mental health and focusing on anti-stigma and discrimination in relation to mental health by supporting the Time to Change pledge.
- 24 To mark World Mental Health Day on 10 October, the County Durham Partnership's key theme at its annual event will be mental health. The event will provide partners with an opportunity to share information about their services and projects, highlighting achievements, best practice and new approaches for supporting people with mental health needs and it will facilitate discussions to look at what more partners can do to support mental health awareness.

- 25 At the event, DCC will also sign the pledge to be a 'Time to Change' employer. By signing the pledge, organisations demonstrate their commitment to change how they think and act about mental health in the workplace and make sure that employees who are facing these problems feel supported. Organisations of all sizes are also being encouraged to work towards the Better Health at Work Award. The council is currently working towards a silver award.
- 26 Going forward, following wider stakeholder consultation, the Health and Wellbeing Board will agree a refreshed plan to improve the mental health of people in County Durham.

Jobs and growth



- 27 The council is working hard to generate inward investment, jobs and growth. The county's employment rate is at its highest in nine years and the importance of our strategy to secure the county's future prosperity cannot be understated particularly against the background of Brexit and other economic uncertainty.
- 28 In conjunction with our business arm, Business Durham, and the private sector, we are attracting investment into sites across the county including NetPark in Sedgfield, Jade Enterprise Zone on the A19, Integra 61 on the A1, Forrest Park at Newton Aycliffe and Project Genesis in Consett.
- 29 To support these prime locations, we are investing in our transport infrastructure. Currently, there are junction improvements on our main road corridors on the A1 at Forrest Park and at the Sheraton junction on the A19. Opportunities to invest in and improve the East Coast Main Line are a priority

for us and our case will be highlighted to government to influence and support the new franchise for the east coast. A new £13 million railway station at Horden will also unlock potential opportunities for further developments on the east coast.

- 30 In Durham City, development of the Aykley Heads site will lead to the creation of up to 6,000 high quality, private sector jobs and a £400 million economic boost for the county. Vacating our current HQ will free up a considerable amount of this valuable space and moving to the city's waterside will help support the city's economy. We are also supporting other major developments in the city area including work related to Durham University's masterplan and the Milburngate and Gates developments, which between them will offer a mixture of retail, residential, leisure and office space.
- 31 We continue to invest in our town centres including Bishop Auckland, Stanley, Seaham, Spennymoor and Peterlee with plans to ensure there is a mix of retail and services to meet resident and business needs. With £12m invested to date, we have also supported small business through our targeted business improvement programme and have recently commissioned town centre Wi-Fi solutions for Bishop Auckland and Stanley.
- 32 Our DurhamWorks programme, which targets 16 to 24 year olds, has been granted a further £12 million of EU funding and extended to 2021 having so far signed up 5,000 young people, 3,100 of those having progressed into some form of employment or training.
- 33 The visitor economy is also growing – more information is included in the visitor numbers section below.
- 34 We're also investing in business. As well as having a stake in our business sites and providing business premises, we have our £20 million Finance Durham fund. Managed by Maven Capital partners, it provides flexible funding packages to ambitious businesses based in, or looking to relocate here and who are seeking the growth finance they need to thrive within the county. Funding allows them then to contribute to economic development, job creation and innovation within the county.

Visitor economy

- 35 Research published in July revealed that the county's ambitious tourism targets have been exceeded three years ahead of schedule. The STEAM research – which assesses data from attractions, accommodation, events, transport and visitor expenditure – shows that tourism is now worth £867million to the county's economy.
- 36 The annual study also showed that the county welcomed almost 20 million visitors in 2017, a 2.4 per cent increase on 2016, and the number of fulltime equivalent jobs supported by tourism was up 5 per cent in the same period.
- 37 A number of factors have supported this record growth including a series of themed national destination marketing campaigns delivered by Visit County Durham, the council's tourism arm, the opening of new hotels such as Hotel

Indigo in Durham City and Hotel 52 in Stanley and high profile events such as Lumiere which had a record 240,000 visitors in November 2017.



- 38 A number of activities also support continued growth in the future for this important employment sector – tourism now accounts for 7 per cent of county-wide employment.
- 39 There is continuing investment in the county’s tourism product with substantial development in new attractions and facilities at Beamish Museum, and over £200 million worth of investment in Bishop Auckland including the outdoor spectacle of Kynren and The Auckland Project.
- 40 Our festival programme continues to grow with world class events. Lumiere has recently been recommissioned for 2019 and 2021 and planning for a special tenth anniversary edition next year is already underway. Together with the Cricket World Cup and a new food festival at Seaham – 2019 promises to be a bumper year for festivals.
- 41 The Celebrating Durham campaign, which utilises the place brand This is Durham Place of Light, is also raising awareness of Durham as a vibrant destination to visit with outdoor advertising campaigns on the East Coast Mainline from Kings Cross to Edinburgh Waverley and at Newcastle Airport. There has also been sustained coverage of culture and business in the Journal and other regional news outlets (print and digital) as well as a Times supplement.
- 42 The development work in Durham City has led to a number of enquiries from developers for potential hotel sites and Premier Inn have submitted a planning application as part of the Milburgate development.

Recent news

Dozens of new recruits join the council



- 43 A campaign to recruit apprentices to posts across the council resulted in more than 500 applications.
- 44 Fifty-three people were successful and were invited to attend an induction day at County Hall where they were able to meet managers and learn more about the authority.
- 45 The apprentices are working across most council departments ranging from business admin to civil engineering, bricklayer to financial management, technical theatre assistant to large goods vehicle fitter, corporate fraud investigators to highways operatives, catering to corporate procurement.
- 46 They vary from Intermediate (Level 2), Advanced (Level 3), higher (Level 4) to Degree (Level 6).
- 47 An induction day was held for the apprentices at which they were welcomed by the council's chief executive Terry Collins; managers from across the authority and trade union representatives; and learned more about the organisation and how it works.

Bin crews launch respect campaign



- 48 Bin crews, council managers, trade unions and police have joined together to highlight concerns over abuse, violence and reckless driving that endangers staff and the public.
- 49 While over 250,000 bins are collected every week without issue, there is a low but growing number of cases where staff have been harassed or assaulted, and had a number of near misses as impatient motorists drive along pavements.
- 50 Since introduction of CCTV on the vehicles a number of these incidents have been caught on camera, graphically illustrating the problem.
- 51 The new respect campaign – which has the backing of Durham County Council, Durham Police and the Unison, Unite and GMB trade unions – follows 24 serious incidents in the last year.
- 52 Whilst the overall number of incidents is low, the small number that do occur not only endanger crews, but can also impact on wider community safety too.
- 53 One incident saw an impatient motorist driving on the pavement to avoid having to wait behind a refuse wagon – clearly endangering not only the vehicle's crew but also pedestrians.

Archive receives national accreditation



- 54 The archive service for County Durham has received a prestigious national honour in recognition of its excellent practice and services.
- 55 Durham County Record Office, run by Durham County Council, has been awarded Archive Service Accreditation. Only 5 per cent of the 2,500 archives in the UK hold the accreditation.
- 56 Accreditation is the UK quality standard for archives, recognising good performance in all areas including management, the care of its unique collections and what the service offers to its entire range of users.
- 57 Between 2017 and 2018 outside visitors engaged with the archive 900,000 times in person, via the website and through enquiry services. The panel noted the Record Office's excellent relationship with volunteers, including those who have worked on the Durham at War project which engaged over 250 volunteers to create an interactive mapping website.
- 58 The accreditation scheme is supported by a partnership of the Archives and Records Association (UK), Archives and Records Council Wales, National Records of Scotland, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Scottish Council on Archives, The National Archives and the Welsh Government through its Museums, Archives and Libraries Wales division.

Council set to deliver first phase of 'game-changing' business park



- 59 A new private sector business park capable of attracting up to 6,000 new jobs, worth £400 million to the county's economy is set to move into its first phase of development.
- 60 The unique site on Aykley Heads, set in mature parkland and with outstanding views over the World Heritage site, offers a once in a generation opportunity to transform Durham's economic fortunes. Already home to Atom Bank, the North East England Chamber and Salvus House – Aykley Heads is just a few minutes' walk from both the city centre and the main line rail station.
- 61 Now Durham County Council's Cabinet has agreed a report which will trigger the development of phase one of the exciting project on the northern zone of the site, bringing forward 21,000 square feet of new business space next year.
- 62 Expert led research has been completed to inform the best way to maximise the site's potential and the building design will be flexible to accommodate multiple tenancies or expansion requirements for businesses locating onto the site. That approach will maximise potential demand and minimise the council's financial risk.
- 63 The site has the potential to attract over 700,000 square feet of development supporting approximately 6,000 new jobs.

We've bloomin' done it!



- 64 County Durham is bloomin' marvellous – that's the verdict of judges of a prestigious regional gardening competition.
- 65 The county has won a series of awards in Northumbria in Bloom, including best overall entry and best small city for Durham, and best large town for Chester-le-Street.
- There was further success for Sedgfield and Tanfield, in the best small town and best small village categories.
- 66 Belmont also claimed best urban community, with the accolades adding to the county's list of success in the annual competition over many years.
- 67 The Durham City and Chester le Street entries were submitted by Durham County Council with the others put forward by either town or parish councils, or local 'In Bloom' groups.
- 68 Northumbria In Bloom is part of the Royal Horticultural Society's Britain in Bloom, a yearly nationwide gardening competition. Durham is in the running for an award in Britain in Bloom following its success in last year's regional event, and welcomed judges from the national competition in August.

Recommendation

- 69 Cabinet is recommended to note the contents of this update.

Background papers

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – Not applicable.

Staffing – Not applicable.

Risk – Not applicable

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty – Not applicable.

Accommodation– Not applicable.

Crime and Disorder– Not applicable.

Human Rights– Not applicable.

Consultation– Not applicable.

Procurement– Not applicable.

Disability Issues– Not applicable

Legal Implications– Not applicable.