

**DECISIONS SHOULD NOT BE IMPLEMENTED BEFORE
MONDAY 24 JANUARY 2022**

CABINET

Tuesday, 11 January 2022

PRESENT – Councillors Mrs H Scott (Chair), Clarke, Dulston, Durham, Keir, Marshall, K Nicholson and Tostevin

INVITEES – Councillors Curry, Harker and Snedker

APOLOGIES – Councillors Tait

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors McCollom

C82 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

In respect of Minute C87(1) below, Councillors Harker and Keir, declared non-pecuniary interests as they were school governors; and in respect of Minute C91 below, Councillor Snedker declared a non-pecuniary interest as he was Chair of the Darlington Credit Union Board.

C83 TO HEAR RELEVANT REPRESENTATION (FROM MEMBERS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC) ON ITEMS ON THIS CABINET AGENDA.

No representations were made by Members or members of the public in attendance at the meeting.

C84 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS CABINET HELD ON 7 DECEMBER 2021

RESOLVED – That the Minutes be confirmed as a correct record.

REASON – They represent an accurate record of the meeting.

C85 MATTERS REFERRED TO CABINET

There were no matters referred back for re-consideration to this meeting.

C86 ISSUES ARISING FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no issues arising from Scrutiny considered at this meeting.

C87 KEY DECISIONS

(1) MAINTAINED SCHOOLS CAPITAL PROGRAMME - SUMMER 2022 AND SECTION 106 FUNDING

The Cabinet Member with the Children and Young People Portfolio introduced the report of the Group Director of People (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given

to the release of capital funding for the schools' summer works programme 2022; devolved formula capital to maintained schools; and Section 106 funding for Heighington Primary, Hurworth Primary and Hurworth Secondary School capital works.

The submitted report stated that the Department for Education (DfE) had allocated £169,396 of School Condition funding for 2021/22 to address capital maintenance needs across the Borough's five maintained schools; the annual summer works programme for 2022 had been compiled using the information from local authority commissioned surveys covering building condition and electrical and mechanical services; that a list of the highest priority works had been developed in conjunction with Building Services; and that the DfE had also allocated £43,141 of Devolved Formula Capital (DVA) to Darlington maintained schools for 2021/22 to help support ongoing capital needs. Particular reference was also made to the release of Section 106 funding to improve education provision in Heighington and to enhance education facilities in Hurworth Primary and Secondary schools.

RESOLVED – (a) That the DfE School Condition Allocation of £169,396, be released, to support the 2022 maintained schools' summer works programme, and that the Group Director of People, be given delegated responsibility to approve individual schemes.

(b) That the 2021/22 DfE Devolved Formula Capital (DFC) of £43,141, be released.

(c) That the Section 106 funding of £156,515 from Bellway Homes and £133,533 from Kew Land Limited, be released, to improve the education provision in the village of Heighington.

(d) That the Section 106 funding of £106,666 from Bellway Homes and £193,985 from Miller Homes, be released, to enhance educational facilities in Hurworth Primary and Secondary Schools.

REASONS – (a) The release of the funds would enable capital investment to be undertaken in the areas identified with the greatest need, in terms of asset management priorities.

(b) Detailed planning to identify priorities had been undertaken which ensured effective use of all investment.

(2) CUSTOMER SERVICES AND DIGITAL STRATEGY

The Cabinet Member with the Resources Portfolio introduced the report of the Group Director of Operations (previously circulated) requesting that considering be given to the draft Customer Services and Digital Strategy 2021/24 (also previously circulated).

The submitted report stated that the Customer Services and Digital Strategy 2021/24 set out the Council's vision for delivering excellent services to its customers and in particular, how more of those services could be delivered through digital channels; provided the commitment to support those customers to access Council services who, for whatever reason, were unable to use the on-line services; and outlined its seven key aims. References were made to the equality impact screening; public consultation exercise that had taken place between 1 and 31 October 2021; the responses received to that consultation; and further work further planned.

Particular references were made at the meeting to providing assistance to members of the public to access the Council's website and its services; to the importance of continuing to support customers who were unable, or did not wish to use, the on-line services; and to the possible impact on mental health, through the increased use of digital services instead of face to face contact. The Cabinet Member with the Resources Portfolio responded thereon.

RESOLVED – That the Customer Services and Digital Strategy 2021/24, as appended to the submitted report, be approved.

REASON – The implementation of the strategy would lead to improvements in the Council's customer services, improvements to digital services and actions taken to reduce digital exclusion in the community.

C88 ACCESS OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The Cabinet Member with the Children and Young People Portfolio introduced the report of the Chief Executive (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to a one-off investment in a range of interventions to support local young people giving them greater prospects of securing work.

The submitted report stated that youth unemployment had been a persistent problem in Darlington for many years and had increased during the pandemic; long-term youth unemployment in particular had grown significantly; a multi-agency group had been established, chaired by the Chief Executive, to consider appropriate interventions; a package of additional supports had been developed that would effectively augment existing services, delivered by a range of stakeholders, that would make a positive impact on helping young people to access employment; those interventions would help ensure that all young people were able to access quality employment opportunities; and that maximising the potential of young people was key to sustained future prosperity of Darlington.

Particular reference was made to the major successes in bringing employment to Darlington with Amazon setting up a major facility and 1700 jobs soon to be created by Government relocations.

Discussion ensued at the meeting on the use of apprentices in the Council to fill vacancies, and in particular, in those areas where there were skill shortages. The Group Director of Operations responded thereon.

RESOLVED - That up to £70,000 of Contain Outbreak Management Funds/Covid Reserve, be released, to fund the package, as outlined in the submitted report.

REASONS – (a) Youth unemployment had been comparatively high for years in Darlington, and had worsened as a consequence of the pandemic.

(b) The consequence of high long-term youth unemployment would have detrimental economic and social impacts on the borough.

C89 QUARTER 2 - COUNCIL PLAN 2020/23 - DELIVERING SUCCESS FOR DARLINGTON PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Leader introduced the report of the Chief Officers Executive (previously circulated) presenting an overview of progress made towards achieving the key outcomes of the Council Plan 2020/23 'Delivering Success for Darlington' together with the Performance Management Report April to September 2021 (also previously circulated).

The submitted report outlined the vision of the Council Plan 'Delivering Success for Darlington' which was structured around the key priorities of growing Darlington's economy; maximising the potential of young people; working with communities to maximise their potential; supporting the most vulnerable in the Borough; and a dedicated workforce who were proud to serve the Borough and an accessible, effective and engaged Council.

The performance management report provided a high-level update on overall progress, across all portfolios, towards the overarching vision and priorities together with an update on each Cabinet portfolio area, highlighting progress made against key actions and relevant key performance indicators

RESOLVED – That the progress made against the Council Plan 2020/23 'Delivering Success for Darlington', as set out in the performance management report appended to the submitted report, be noted.

REASON - To update Cabinet on the progress in implementing the Council Plan priorities.

C90 FEETHAMS HOUSE - EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND

The Leader introduced the report of the Chief Executive (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the repayment of £1,710,928.78 of European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to facilitate the temporary use of Feethams House by the Treasury (HMT) and Other Government Departments (OGD).

The submitted report stated that in 2019 the Council commenced the building of Grade A office accommodation in the centre of the town; it was a speculative build project aiming to provide high quality office accommodation for small and medium enterprises (SME's) and general business use; the overall project costs of £8,460,880 were funded through Council capital contribution of £3,329,848, Tees Valley Combined Authority of £3,230,000 and ERDF contribution of £1,901,032; the ERDF contribution was specifically allocated for the provision of office accommodation for SME's; and that the building was completed in 2020 and funding received to date from ERDF was £1,710.928.78.

It was reported that in March 2021 it was announced that the departments of HMT and OGD were to be relocated to Darlington; temporary accommodation for the early cohorts of officers relocating was required; Feethams House had been identified as the preferred temporary location with occupation commencing in March 2022; as the whole building would be required, the two floors identified for use by SME's would not meet the restriction imposed by ERDF funding and would need to be repaid; and that it had been confirmed that the Government were able to offer repayment over a three-year term (March 2022 to March 2024) in line with the ERDF Programme.

A Member enquired whether there would be a need to build further office accommodation

for SME's, as a result of the HMT and OGD's relocating to Feethams House. The Chief Executive responded thereon.

RESOLVED - (a) That the European Regional Development Fund contribution of £1,710,928.78, for the construction of Feethams House, be repaid.

(b) That the funding be sourced in the medium term from the Investment Fund to be repaid through the rental income from Feethams House.

REASONS – (a) To promote new development and Economic Growth.

(b) To facilitate the relocation of officers from HMT and OGD's which would provide several significant economic growth opportunities for the borough and the Tees Valley Region.

(c) To comply with the grant funding obligations.

C91 SUPPORT DARLINGTON CREDIT UNION

The Cabinet Member with the Stronger Communities Portfolio introduced the report of the Chief Executive (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to proposals to support the Darlington Credit Union (DCU), as part of its investment and growth plan and in light of the financial impact the credit union has sustained through the pandemic, by allocating £25,000 as one-off grant funding from the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) and a £75,000 interest-free loan, to be repaid over a 10-year period.

The submitted report stated that the DCU provided a broad range of affordable, sustainable and ethical financial services to its members; encouraged the development of good financial practice across the community; had made an important contribution to the town since its formation in 2009; provided support to around 1,200 people per year with the MoneySmart project, which offered financial literacy education and holistic support to those who were financially vulnerable; and had helped children start in the habit of saving, with over 1,300 pupils in 13 schools having saved over £180,000.

It was reported that the Council had, since its foundation, supported the DCU, which had allowed it to offer interest-bearing accounts and affordable loans, which reduced the risk of residents using loan sharks; the DCU were seeking £150,000 of funding to enable growth but also to assist with the financial challenge the pandemic had presented; Darlington Building Society (DBS) had been approached and had agreed to provide funding of £50,000; and that £100,000 had been requested from the Council. The DBS and this Council had reviewed the 2022 and 2023 financial forecasts which had shown a positive return and both were satisfied that the credit union had plans and actions in place to achieve those estimated returns.

RESOLVED – (a) That one-off funding of £25,000 from the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) fund, as detailed in the submitted report, be approved.

(b) That a £75,000 interest-free loan, repayable over 10 years to support the sustainability and growth of the Darlington Credit Union, as detailed in the submitted report, be approved.

(c) That the authority to draw up a funding agreement for the loan, be delegated to the

Group Director of Operations.

REASONS – (a) Using the credit union enabled individuals to receive advice and support about saving and appropriate lending as well as helping them to avoid reaching crisis through high cost lending. It also helps them to meet other commitments including payment of council tax and housing rent.

(b) ARG funding was designed to assist organisations which had been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

C92 MEMBERSHIP CHANGES - TO CONSIDER ANY MEMBERSHIP CHANGES TO OTHER BODIES TO WHICH CABINET APPOINTS.

There were no membership changes reported at the meeting.

**DECISIONS DATED –
FRIDAY 14 JANUARY 2022**