

COUNCIL
Thursday, 16 July 2020

PRESENT – The Mayor, Councillors Ali, Allen, Baldwin, Bartch, Bell, Boddy, Dr. Chou, Clarke, Cossins, Crudass, Crumbie, Mrs Culley, Curry, Donoghue, Dulston, Durham, Harker, Haszeldine, Heslop, Holroyd, Howarth, Howell, C L B Hughes, L Hughes, Johnson, B Jones, Mrs D Jones, Keir, Laing, Layton, Lee, Lister, Lucas, Marshall, McCollom, Mills, Newall, K Nicholson, M Nicholson, Paley, Preston, Renton, A J Scott, Mrs H Scott, Snedker, Tait, Tostevin, Wallis and Wright.

10 MINUTES - TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THIS COUNCIL HELD ON 30 JANUARY, 20 FEBRUARY AND 25 JUNE 2020

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meetings of this Council held on 30 January, 20 February and 25 June 2020.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes be approved as correct records.

11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

12 ORDER OF SEALING DOCUMENTS

Presented – The Register showing the documents which had been sealed since the last meeting of Council.

13 ANNOUNCEMENTS.

Death of Former Councillor Geoff Walker – The Mayor reported on the death of Former-Councillor Geoff Walker, who had sadly passed away on 12 April 2020. The Mayor referred to Former-Councillor Walker's years of service on the Council, and invited Councillor Lucas to say a few words on behalf of the residents of the Red Hall and Lingfield Ward.

As a mark of respect, Members observed a short silence in memory of Former-Councillor Walker.

Srebrenica - The Mayor informed Members that it was the 25th anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and that Councils and elected representatives had been encouraged to remember and acknowledge both the victims and survivors of Srebrenica. Members observed a short period of silence and reflection to honour the victims and survivors of this terrible atrocity.

14 QUESTIONS - TO ANSWER QUESTIONS (WHERE APPROPRIATE NOTICE HAS BEEN GIVEN FROM):-

(1) THE PUBLIC;

There were no questions, with notice, from members of the public.

(2) MEMBERS TO CABINET/CHAIRS;

There was one question, with notice, from a Member to a Member of the Cabinet, who received an answer thereon.

(NOTE: The question, with notice, was raised by a Member on behalf of a Member of the Public, in accordance with Paragraph 27 of the Meetings (Coronavirus) Protocol).

(3) MEMBERS TO THE ACTING POLICE, CRIME AND VICTIMS' COMMISSIONER FOR DURHAM AND DARLINGTON.

The Acting Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner for Durham and Darlington attended the meeting, addressed Members and answered questions thereon.

16 COUNCIL REPORTS.

(1) MANAGING DIRECTOR'S APPRAISAL

The Assistant Director – Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that Members endorse the recommendation of the Appraisal Sub-Group in respect of the Chief Executive's Performance Appraisal.

The submitted report stated that the Appraisal Sub-Group had met on 9 March 2020 to consider the Managing Director's Performance Appraisal, in accordance with the previously agreed process. The Appraisal Sub-Group noted that, as this was the first appraisal for the new post, no targets had been set for review, however the Managing Director did present a report on the priorities he had been working on following consultation with the three leaders he had worked with since his appointment. It was reported that the Appraisal Sub-Group had agreed the Managing Directors priorities for the following year.

RESOLVED – That, in respect of the Managing Director's Appraisal, the Council note that the Appraisal Sub-Group has met to consider the Managing Director's Appraisal for 2020/21 and has agreed that the Managing Director will undertake a 360 degree review of his performance, and that a further meeting of this Sub-Group be held in six months' time to share that review information.

REASON – To enable the appraisal to be confirmed.

17 CABINET REPORTS.

The Cabinet Members each gave a report (previously circulated) on the main areas of work undertaken under their relevant portfolio since the previous meeting of the Council, with a particular focus on the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Cabinet Members answered questions on their portfolio thereon.

18 NOTICE OF MOTION - TO CONSIDER A MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR C. L. B. HUGHES, AND SECONDED BY COUNCILLOR ALI

Protecting Children and Young People during the Pandemic

The following Motion was moved by Councillor C. L. B. Hughes, and seconded by Councillor Ali:

'This Council notes:

1. Today, many children are living in families where parents are newly unemployed and reliant on universal credit. The working age population in Darlington currently claiming Universal Credit (UC) is 6.6% some 4,653 people; nationally it is 4.5%.
2. There were over 3 million new claims for UC since mid-March nationally and more workers are at risk of losing their jobs. The number of people on UC in Darlington has risen by 1,598 within just the past two months. Whilst the government has increased the UC standard allowance, working age benefits are still at their lowest level relative to average wages in several decades
3. There are currently 9,900 furloughed workers in Darlington. Changes to the furlough system and further business collapse and redundancy will inevitably lead to many furloughed workers joining those on UC over the next few months. Furloughed workers have been receiving 80% of their pre-crisis wage but- if they are made redundant- UC will only cover 53% of their previous wage.
4. Before the pandemic, there were estimated to be 8,705 children in Darlington (35%) living in poverty with this number anticipated before the pandemic to increase to 39% by 2020-21. Economists believe that number will be much higher now. Many families where jobs have been lost, where someone has been furloughed or where working hours have been reduced are likely to experience a drop in income, some a significant drop. Rising unemployment more generally risks a higher incidence of indebtedness, destitution and child poverty. Shoring up UC to help avoid increases in child poverty and economic insecurity must now be an urgent priority for government.

Council notes with concern:

5. The impact that the two-child limit is having in Darlington according to the latest national official statistics for the first two years of this policy (to April 2019):--
 - 156,540 households had been affected by the two-child limit, equivalent to 18% of all households claiming tax credit or UC with three or more children,
 - For the families affected, this translates to an average annual loss of approximately £2,780 per child,
 - The majority of those affected were working families (59%), the majority were couples (61%) and the majority had three children (58%),
 - Extrapolating these figures to the beginning of April 2020, before the pandemic and the unprecedented rise in UC claims, it was estimated that 1,200 Darlington families and 3,900 Darlington children were being hit by

the two-child limit.

6. That many parents whose hours have been cut as a result of the lockdown and/or social distancing measures can no longer reach the earnings threshold at which they are exempted from the benefit cap for families;
7. The difficulties faced by a small number of families in Darlington who are currently denied recourse to public funds as a result of their immigration status;
8. The families who find themselves in need of UC not receiving their first payment for 5 weeks by which time many have built-up substantial debt;
9. The problems faced by those families just above the UC thresholds who are having difficulty buying food, paying utility bills and meeting many of their family's basic needs.

Council therefore resolves to:

- (1) Write to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to request-
 - a) The suspension of the two-child limit on Universal Credit and tax credits affecting more than 3,900 children in Darlington,
 - b) The suspension of the benefit cap for all families in light of the fact that many have had their working hours cut during the pandemic,
 - c) The suspension of No Recourse to Public Funds conditions so that all vulnerable individuals are entitled to receive support during the coronavirus crisis,
 - d) That families who find themselves in need of Universal Credit receive their first payment straightaway rather than going deeper into debt,
 - e) A £10 per child weekly uplift in child benefit to help all families meet the additional costs of raising a family during the crisis.
- (2) Write to the Children's Commissioner enclosing a copy of this resolution to request her continued support for the calls we are making to address child poverty in Darlington.
- (3) Write to the MP for Darlington and the MP for Sedgefield enclosing a copy of this resolution and requesting support and assistance in securing these urgent actions to protect the welfare of children and young people in the Borough of Darlington.
- (4) Instruct the Managing Director to commission an on-going Child/Young Person Poverty Needs Assessment to gather key data for policy focus and effective strategic action to meet the Darlington Children and Young People's Plan 2017-2022 stated ambitions articulated by Darlington Borough Council and partners (Education Providers, Mental Health/ Health Providers, Police, Businesses, Voluntary Sector, Community Groups, Faith Communities and others) and to provide the first such report to full Council as a matter of urgency.'

The following amendment to the Motion was moved by Councillor Mrs. Scott, and seconded by Councillor Dulston:

'Delete paragraph 1 as it stands and replace with:

- (1) Highlight to vulnerable residents of Darlington that they should apply to the Hardship Fund, the Crisis Fund and the recently funded Food Poverty provision.

Delete paragraph 2 and replace it with:

- (2) To write to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to request that families who find themselves in need of Universal Credit receive their first payment straightaway rather than going deeper into debt.

Delete paragraph 3 and replace with:

- (3) That we continue to lobby our two MP's on behalf of the welfare of children and young people in Darlington.

Amend the penultimate paragraph of paragraph 4 after 'others' – replacing 'and to provide the first such report to full Council as a matter of urgency' with 'and to report to Council at the earliest opportunity'.

Amendment Carried.

The Amendment then became the Substantive Motion and was put to the meeting and carried.

19 MEMBERSHIP CHANGES - TO CONSIDER ANY MEMBERSHIP CHANGES TO COMMITTEES, SUBSIDIARY BODIES AND OTHER BODIES.

Consideration was given to membership changes of the Committees, Subsidiary Bodies and Other Bodies for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2020/21.

RESOLVED – (a) That Councillor Lee replace Councillor Howell on the Audit Committee;

(b) Councillor Mrs. Culley be appointed as the Named Substitute for Councillor Renton on the Tees Valley Combined Authority Scrutiny Committee;

(c) That Councillor Donoghue be appointed as the Named Substitute for Councillor Mrs. Jones on the Tees Valley Combined Authority Scrutiny Committee; and

(d) That Councillor Wright be appointed to the vacancy on Cruse Bereavement Care (Tees Valley).