

COUNCIL

Thursday, 15 July 2021

PRESENT – The Mayor, Councillors Ali, Allen, Bartch, Bell, Dr. Chou, Clarke, Cossins, Crudass, Mrs Culley, Curry, Donoghue, Dulston, Durham, Harker, Haszeldine, Heslop, Holroyd, L Hughes, Johnson, B Jones, Keir, Laing, Lee, Lister, Marshall, McCollom, K Nicholson, M Nicholson, Preston, Renton, A J Scott, Mrs H Scott, Snedker, Sowerby, Tait, Tostevin, Willis and Wright.

APOLOGIES – Councillors Boddy, Crumbie, Mrs D Jones, Layton, Lucas, McEwan, Mills, Newall, Paley and Wallis.

ABSENT – Councillor Baldwin.

11 **MINUTES - TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THIS COUNCIL HELD ON 25 MARCH 2021, 20 MAY 2021 AND 9 JUNE 2021**

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meetings of this Council held on 25 March 2021, 20 May 2021 and 9 June 2021.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meetings of this Council held on 25 March 2021, 20 May 2021 and 9 June 2021, be approved as correct records.

12 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.**

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

13 **SEALING.**

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

14 **ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

Death in Service – The Mayor reported on the Death in Service of John Haycock, who had sadly passed away on the 26th June 2021. The Mayor advised that John was employed as part of the Town Hall Security Team. As a mark of respect, Members observed a short silence in memory of Mr. Haycock.

Srebrenica - The Mayor informed Members that it was the 26th 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.

Queen's Birthday Honours - The Mayor reported that Ms. Maura Regan, Chief Executive Officer, Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust, which included five Darlington schools, was awarded the Dames Commander of the Order of the British Empire (D.B.E.) for services to education.

The Mayor informed Members that Ms. Gillian Scott, lately Macmillan Prison Lead for Palliative and End of Life Care for the County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust was awarded the Member of the Order of the British Empire (M.B.E.), for services to Palliative and End of Life Care.

The Mayor also advised that Katherine Sarah O'Sullivan, Deputy Chair, British Rowing, and a resident of Darlington, became a Medallist of the Order of the British Empire (B.E.M.) for services to Rowing, and that Tarek Fared Moustafa Thoma, owner of The Oven Restaurant, and a resident of Darlington, became a Medallist of the Order of the British Empire (B.E.M.) for services to the community in Middlesbrough and Key Workers during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

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

(1) THE PUBLIC;

There were three questions, with notice, from Members of the Public, who each received an answer thereon.

(2) MEMBERS TO CABINET/CHAIRS;

There were no questions from Members, where notice had been given, for the Mayor, Members of the Cabinet, or the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees.

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

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

16 COUNCIL REPORTS.

There were no reports for consideration at the meeting.

17 CABINET REPORTS.

The Cabinet Members each gave a report (previously circulated) on the main areas of work undertaken under their relevant portfolio during the previous cycle of meetings. Cabinet Members answered questions on their portfolios.

18 PARTNERSHIP WORKING IN DARLINGTON

The Chief Executive submitted a report (previously circulated) which updated Members on a new partnership approach to delivering success for Darlington, agreed with partners, and sought agreement to amend the Council's Constitution with regard to its lead strategic documents.

The submitted report outlined a number of changes made to partnership working in Darlington, and it was reported that partners had agreed that the Partnership Board would cease and be replaced by a Public Sector Executive Group and other partnership arrangements to be developed. It was also reported that, as a result of the change in circumstances, the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) would cease to be used as the strategic lead for the Borough, and that the lead would now be provided to partners by the Council Plan.

The submitted report advised that this changed approach was considered and approved by Cabinet on the 1 June 2021, subject to approval by Council of the constitutional changes required. Members were informed that the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee had held a Special Meeting on 25 June 2021, after the recommendation of Cabinet was called in. Members were advised that after carefully considering all of the points raised, the majority view of the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee was that it was satisfied with the decision Cabinet took on 1 June 2021.

RESOLVED - (a) That the new approach to partnership working in Darlington be noted.

(b) That the great contribution to Darlington made by current and past Members of the Darlington Partnership be recognised.

(c) That the change of emphasis with the Council Plan standing as the Council's lead strategy and agree that the Council ceases to have a separate Sustainable Community Strategy be approved.

(d) That authority be delegated to the Assistant Director, Law and Governance to make consequential amendments to the Constitution.

REASONS - (a) To refresh partnering in Darlington and continues to thrive and acknowledge the general work done.

(b) For the matter to be considered by Council in accordance with the procedure for making changes to documents that are part of the policy framework.

(c) To enable appropriate amendments to the Constitution to be made.

19 SCRUTINY REPORTS - TO CONSIDER SCRUTINY OVERVIEW REPORTS:-

The Scrutiny Committee Chairs each submitted a report (previously circulated) on the main areas of work undertaken by their relevant Scrutiny Committee during the last cycle of Committee meetings, and responded to any questions thereon.

20 NOTICE OF MOTION

(1) TO CONSIDER A MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR MCCOLLOM, AND SECONDED BY COUNCILLOR HASZELDINE

The following Motion was moved by Councillor McCollom, and seconded by Councillor Haszeldine:

This Council notes :-

- (1) The worrying official statistics published on 22nd June 2021 by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) that show that hundreds more families in the North East have seen their benefits capped since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- (2) In Darlington, 184 families had their benefits capped during February 2021, which was a rise of 56% on the same period last year. Households impacted lose an average of £62 per week.
- (3) Most families affected by the cap cannot work to escape its effect — as many are looking after young children or cannot find affordable childcare they can combine with work and single parenting. In fact, of the households impacted this year in Darlington, 133 were headed by single parents.
- (4) Many households who have lost jobs to Covid-19 are now subject to the cap, even though in the pandemic it is much harder to find ways to replace their lost earnings and thereby become exempt.
- (5) The cap limits the total amount of benefits low-earning or non-working claimants can receive. Universal Credit claimants are exempt if they earn at least £617 per month (equivalent to working 16 hours per week on minimum wage).
- (6) Many families are earning their poverty as three quarters of children in poverty live in working families.

This Council resolves :-

- (1) That the leaders of all political parties represented on this council write a joint letter to our two MPs seeking their support for a review of the benefit cap policy aimed at people who could work but chose not to being applied to single parents with young children and those, through no fault of their own, have been impacted by the structural economic changes brought on by Covid.
- (2) That data is collected and made available to the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee on a quarterly basis highlighting the number of applications (both successful and unsuccessful) for discretionary housing benefits from Darlington residents whose benefits have been capped.

The following amendment to the Motion was moved by Councillor Clarke, and seconded by Councillor Willis:

(a) Delete the following from the 'Council resolves' paragraphs:-

- (1) That the leaders of all political parties represented on this council write a joint letter to

our two MPs seeking their support for a review of the benefit cap policy aimed at people who could work but chose not to being applied to single parents with young children and those, through no fault of their own, have been impacted by the structural economic changes brought on by Covid.

And replace with :-

(1) Undertake work to try and identify those households that have been affected by the benefit cap for targeted support, including :- A review of their benefits and wider access to support e.g. Free school meals, The Bread and Butter thing, Discretionary Housing Payments, Darlo millions, CAB and others to determine if they may be eligible for any benefits which exempt households from the cap and / or maximise wider support services to mitigate the impact of the cap.

Amendment Carried.

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

21 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 2021/22.

RESOLVED – (a) That Councillor Mrs. D. Jones be replaced by an Independent Member (Liz Dargue) on the Tees Valley Combined Authority Independent Remuneration Panel;

(b) That Councillors Sowerby and Willis be appointed to fill the Conservative vacancies for Named Substitutes on the Tees Valley Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee, for Councillors Mrs. D. Jones and Renton respectively;

(c) That Councillor Lee be appointed to the Combined Fire Authority's Performance Committee (formerly Policy and Performance Committee)

(d) That Councillor B. Jones be appointed to the Combined Fire Authority's newly created Pension Board;

(e) That Councillor Crumbie be appointed to the Combined Fire Authority's Audit and Finance Committee (formerly Audit and Risk Committee), and

(f) That Councillor Crumbie be appointed to the Combined Fire Authority's newly created Human Resources Committee.