

**THE DISTRICT COUNCIL OF CHESTER-LE-STREET**

Minutes of the proceedings at the meeting of the District Council of Chester-le-Street held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Chester-le-Street on Wednesday 24 January 2007 at 6.00pm

PRESENT:

Councillor R Harrison (Chairman)

Councillors:

G Armstrong	CJ Jukes
S Barr	GAN Kerr
L Ebbatson	W Laverick
JJ Evans	JM Proud
MJ Gollan	DA Rand
SA Henig	IS Smith
AK Holden	A Turner
D Holding	SCL Westrip
A Humes	A Willis

**Prior to commencement of proceedings the Chairman of the Council made reference to the recent death of Rev. Elliott Davison, Chairman of the Council's Standards Committee, and everyone stood in silence as a token of respect.**

Officers: R Templeman (Chief Executive), L Chambers (Director of Resources), T Galloway (Director of Development Services), I Broughton (Director of Community Services), I Forster (Assistant Chief Executive), C Potter (Head of Legal and Democratic Services), J Underwood (Improvement Programme Manager), M Walker (Head of Regeneration), P Stephens (Head of Housing Services), A Swinney (Head of Organisational Development), A Hutchinson (Head of Planning and Environmental Health) and C Turnbull (Democratic Services Officer).

Also in attendance were two Members of the public.

**122 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors JW Barrett, C Carr, GK Davison, S Gollan, TH Harland, PH May, R Richardson, D Robson, and DMG Stoker.

**123 MINUTES OF MEETING HELD 21 DECEMBER 2006**

It was proposed by Councillor CJ Jukes and seconded by Councillor D Holding that the minutes of the proceedings at the meeting of the District Council held 21 December 2006, copies of which had previously been circulated, be confirmed as a correct record.

The Council RESOLVED:

“That the minutes of the meeting held 21 December 2006 be confirmed as a correct record.”

The Chairman proceeded to sign the minutes.

#### **124 PUBLIC SPEAKING**

There were no requests under the Council’s Public Speaking Scheme.

#### **125 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS**

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

#### **126 REPORT FROM LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

##### Key Decisions

The Leader advised of the Key Decisions taken by the Executive on 8 January 2007 as follows: -

##### ‘Regeneration Projects Quarterly Reports

That the progress on the regeneration projects as set out in the Regeneration Projects Quarterly Report, as set out at Appendix 1 be noted.

##### Disposal Of Surplus Land And Property

- 1 That the contents of the development brief for each particular site be noted and disposal of the sites be progressed to the next stages.
- 2 That officers explore and develop a wide range of options for the land at Stone Row, Grange Villa, for further consultation with local community representatives.
- 3 That the disposal of land for residential development at East Parade, Kimblesworth is not progressed and that a report detailing future options for the land is prepared and presented to the Executive.
- 4 That a letter be sent to the communities involved in discussion relating to land at Stone Row, Grange Villa and East Parade, Kimblesworth detailing the decision taken by the Executive and a clear explanation why the decision has been reached.’

### Rev Elliott Davison

The Leader advised she was sorry to hear of the sudden death of Rev Elliott Davison, the serving Chairman of the Council's Standards Committee. Sincere condolences had been sent to Rev Davison's family on behalf of the Council.

### Head of Planning and Environmental Health

The Leader welcomed Anneliese Hutchinson the recently appointed Head of Planning and Environmental Health.

### Health Service Event

The Leader advised that Councillor R Harrison had attended, on her behalf, a Health Service event organised by the new PCT, the focus for which was future working with partners.

### Climate Change

The Leader reported that climate change was beginning to take a much higher profile on the regional agenda and David Miliband hosted an event on 12 January at which Local Authorities were asked to consider ways in which they could help tackle the big issues. She advised that the Association of North East Councils was currently setting up a task finish group to identify short term measures in addition to the medium to long term steps all were taking. She envisaged that the Council would be an active, innovative participant in line with its corporate priorities.

### Corporate Performance Assessment

The Leader advised that the inspectors involved in the Council's Corporate Performance Assessment would arrive on site during February in response to the request made at the end of October 2006. The initial visit would be in mid February with the on-site work being carried out during the last week in February. She added the Council's self-assessment documents, where the Council assessed itself as 'fair', had been despatched. The Assistant Chief Executive was overseeing the process and the Leader thanked him for his excellent contribution.

## 127 REPORTS FROM PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

### a) Finance and Leisure

#### Budget Process

Councillor SA Henig advised that the Executive considered the revenue budget projections for both the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account on 8 January 2007. For the General Fund, this included the agreement of savings proposals totalling approximately £450,000 and all Members were advised of the Executive's budget proposals immediately after that meeting.

Councillor Henig stated that the Overview and Scrutiny Panels would be considering the 2007/8 budget proposals for the services within their remit, incorporating all the savings agreed by the Executive, at their meetings in February. The reports to be considered would include the 2006/7 projected outturn, based on the nine months' monitoring position. For the first time, the budget reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Panels would summarise the Value for Money Self Assessments for each service area. These would be completed in accordance with the corporate VFM toolkit and were challenged during the budget Star Chamber meetings.

He advised that a meeting would be arranged with representatives of non domestic ratepayers in order that they may be consulted on the Council's budget proposals. The Executive would then consider the outcome of the Scrutiny Panels' review of budget proposals at a Special Meeting on 19 February, before making its final budget and Council Tax recommendations to Council on 1 March 2007, when the 2007/8 Council Tax would be set.

With regard to the Capital Programme, Councillor Henig advised that the Capital Working Group was prioritising bids and the Executive would consider the outcome on 19 February for recommendation to Council. He stressed that, as in previous years, expenditure on schemes could only go ahead once the resources were available to fund it.

#### Leisure

With regard to the Leisure Service, Councillor Henig advised of four items to report as follows: -

#### 1. Community Sport Coaches Scheme

The Council had received confirmation from Sport England that it had been successful in its application for over £85,000 of funding, over two years to support its community sport coaches project.

## 2. Training Opportunities at the Leisure Centre

Councillor Henig advised that the Leisure Centre Team had established links with Jo Forster from the Learning for Life Programme in order to enable the Leisure Centre to become a training centre for some community based courses. Pilot training would be a 10 week driving theory course that was already well subscribed. Not only would income be generated for the Leisure Centre, it would also create increased use of the multi purpose room and help the Centre engage in a more diverse way with the community.

## 3. New Vending Service

A new vending service had been introduced at the Leisure Centre with the vending company owning the machines and responsible for filling and cleaning them and collecting the cash. In accordance with the agreement, the Centre would receive a % of the cash collected.

Councillor Henig advised that a Gershon saving of approximately £12,000 would be achieved in respect of staff time saved.

## 4. Play Areas

Councillor Henig reported that a new play area had been completed at The Wynd, Pelton using Section 106 funding and that play areas at Edmondsley and The Brooms, Ouston were being refurbished using Capital Programme funds. He advised that the work continued the process of refurbishing/replacing the play areas within the District to bring them up to European standards and that by the end of the current financial year 17 of the 28 play areas would be refurbished or replaced.

### District Leaders Sounding Board

Councillor Henig advised of his delight at being invited to join the new District Leaders Sounding Board which was a group of approximately 20 leading Members from District Councils across the country who would meet quarterly to boost the profile of Districts within the Local Government Association. He explained that many had felt that since the LGA was established in the 1990s Districts' interests had been given less weight than those of Unitary or County Councils and the Sounding Board would be a chance to raise issues at a national level of particular importance to Districts. He advised that he had already made a number of suggestions but would be delighted if any Member had any further ideas.

### b) Environment

Councillor AK Holden reported on the following matters:-

## Planning

A recent Best Value survey of customer satisfaction with the Development Control service revealed that 85% of customers were satisfied or very satisfied with the service received and represented a 7% increase in satisfaction from the previous survey in 2003.

The Building Control Team hosted the first in a planned series of technical seminars for frequent users of the services. The seminar was well attended with 40 Agents and plan drawers present.

In December 2006 the Planning Team held its inaugural service users forum, which was well attended, and it was hoped to continue with meetings on a quarterly basis to increase the profile of the service and improve customer relationships.

## Environmental Health

Councillor Holden advised that as part for the Environmental Health Sections BVPI Improvement Plan, Officers had reviewed and updated the permits issued to a variety of commercial and industrial processes that could cause significant pollution emissions to the environment. The Improvement Plan was developed in partnership with Gateshead MBC.

The Food Safety Team had recently delivered a Chartered Institute of Environmental Health approved food hygiene course to 16 members of the Chester-le-Street Church Community. Councillor Holden advised that the course had been a success with all members passing and a similar event was to be organised for the Great Lumley area.

### c) Regeneration

There was no report from Councillor CJ Jukes.

### d) Housing and Community Safety

Councillor IS Smith reported that on 3 January 2007 the Council launched its Housing Formal Consultation Document with a copy of the document and a DVD being sent to every tenant and she stressed that it was important for tenants to understand that the Offer Document would be a legally binding contract between the Council and the proposed Housing Association.

She advised that all tenants would receive a visit from a member of staff to answer questions or queries. A mobile display unit was touring the district to give tenants the opportunity to see samples of units for bathrooms and kitchens. She added that responses received from tenants were very positive and she congratulated the staff who were visiting tenants

With regard to rent collection, Councillor Smith reported that performance continued to improve with record collection rates expected for the second year

running. Staff assistance was successful in 22 arrears cases that otherwise would have resulted in applications for eviction.

e) Personnel and Communication

Customer Care

Councillor SCL Westrip reported that a new telecommunications system was to be installed in the Civic Centre and a Sacriston Depot during February.

Communications and Public Relations

A new Communication Strategy was under development that would build on the success to date, and Councillor Westrip advised that further details were available in the Members Update.

Human Resources

Councillor Westrip advised of the following matters:

- a feedback day had been arranged for 8 February 2007 for those involved in action learning sets.
- Investors in People staff sessions would be held in February with a view to going for assessment in March 2007.
- From 1 April 2007 all Managers will be responsible for dealing with short term sickness absence.
- Sickness absence – the current performance of 11.4 days was exceeding the target of 11.6 days
- Single status was progressing well.

**128 QUESTIONS TO LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBERS**

Councillor G Armstrong referred to the reference in the Leader's speech to new health arrangements for the county and requested a report on the event.

Councillor R Harrison reported as follows:

'Since the First of October 2006 there had been a radical change in how primary care is delivered in the County and it is unique to the rest of the country.

Previously, there were five PCT's serving the approximately 500,000 people of the county, Durham Dales, Derwentside, Durham and Chester-le-Street, Sedgefield, and Easington. Darlington will retain its own PCT with some links to the Hospital Trust via the Memorial Hospital.

Since October 2006, the County of Durham has one Primary Care Trust (PCT) that will have full control of primary care in every part of the County from April 2007.

Health care will consist of Commissioners and Providers with the PCTs being the Commissioners, the ones who purchase treatments or procedures; with an initial budget of £712million, rising to £800 million in the first year and subsequently to £1000 million. They will buy the services from the Providers, the Hospitals, and sign a legal contract agreeing the number of patient treatments with the PCT, delivered two ways one by block allocation, the other by tariff.

The Government thinking was that the money chases the patient therefore patient choice was the driver as patients can either have procedures done in a NHS hospital Trust, a Foundation Hospital Trust or at a private Hospital, or even go abroad. Alternatively for minor operations, then perhaps at a nearby Doctors Surgery within the PCT.

For treatment patients can consider, (i) how many times has hospital performed the operation, (ii) the success rate, (iii) the mortality rate, (iv) its location and (v) its cleanliness and infection status.

The choice of where to go for treatment puts pressure on any hospital. From the end of January 2007, a hospital may apply to become a Foundation Hospital and will have to 'up their game' and provide an efficient service with fewer beds.

Why fewer beds when the population is increasing?

Medical techniques are continually improving, operations that previously required four days hospitalisation are now done in six hours as day surgery.

Why do we need all of the hospitals?

Consultants are concerned that if their workload continues to fall they may lose their skills and they will move on, so the hospital goes down in stature. Some hospitals are Private Finance Initiative (PFI) funded for which the Government will be paying for the next 35 years.

Another problem was the location of the Hospital Trust's Haematology (Blood) Unit for weekend admissions of chemotherapy patients. Both Bishop Auckland and Darlington Hospital's patient support groups, separately have raised large sums of money for both of them to be kept open. They both have staffing and recruitment problems; there are 4 beds in one hospital and 5 in the other, but weekend Consultant cover is not available for both hospitals.

The County Health Scrutiny Chairman and the two Vice Chairs, of which Councillor Harrison was one, together with the Scrutiny Officer and Leader of the County Council met Lady Anne Calman, the Chair of the new County PCT, and the Chief Executive Jasmin Choudray on 5 December to discuss



progress. A further meeting was held on 9 January 2007 with the County Durham and Darlington Acute Hospital Trust (CD&DAHT) Chief Executive, John Saxby, Corporate Director, Ed Lovell, and Heads of Medicine and Nursing together with the Darlington Council Scrutiny Team. Another meeting was to be held on 5 February 2007 in County Hall, between the Health Scrutiny committee, Hospital Trust and the PCT, and for future meetings perhaps the next stage could be to include the local MPs.

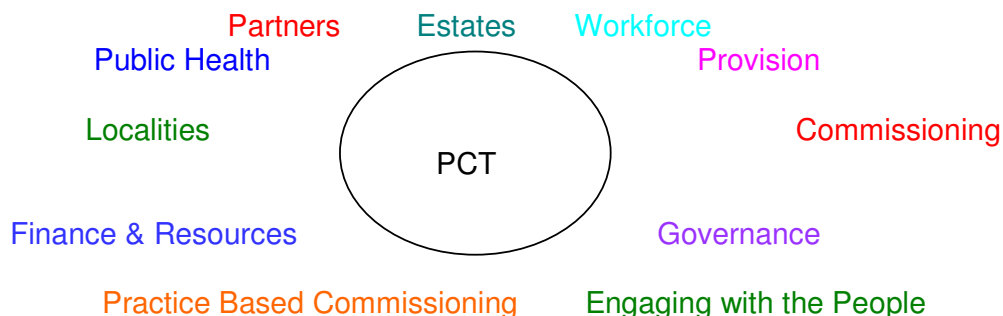
Councillor Harrison attended a seminar with the PCT on 16 January 2007 at the Ramside Hall Hotel, Durham, on behalf of the Leader, and learned a little more about their plans, and a fuller structure should be available in the near future.

The PCT's objectives were:

Commissioning: Best Value: Choice: Ensuring that it works.

Previously the PCT both commissioned and were involved in service delivery. In future, they will test the hospitals for delivery and if they don't measure up there will be moves to correct or change the service delivery.

The diagram for the proposed structure is below.



The PCT is wanting to have practice based commissioning i.e. groups of doctor's practices linked to the PCT and based in general on the old PCT localities but the areas have yet to be confirmed. The current thinking was for five, probably based on the Dales and Sedgfield, Derwentside, Chester-le-Street, Durham, and Easington. There would not be physical structures, such as buildings but would be connected electronically. The idea being to sift and channel the bids for treatment and procedures from GP's through a clearing house of GPs to the PCT for agreement of funding, and then to a hospital (provider) as either a block or tariff bid.

A recommendation was made to link the localities to LSPs for local input and although it met with a good response, it would need adjustments geographically. The objective was to level all treatment and initiatives up to the best, the table below shows their relative strengths and weaknesses.

Former PCT's	Services	Resources
Durham Dales	Excellent	Fair
Derwentside	Fair	Weak
Durham & Chester-le St	Excellent	Weak
Sedgefield	Good	Weak
Easington	Good	Good

Councillor Harrison stated it was a structure that could work. He advised that the PCT would talk to the Council at any time and would continue to consult.

## **129 CORPORATE EQUALITY PLAN**

Consideration was given to a report from the Assistant Chief Executive seeking approval and adoption of a revised Corporate Equality Plan.

Councillor L Ebbatson proposed and Councillor CJ Jukes seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved.

The Council RESOLVED:

“That the draft revised Corporate Equality Plan, as appended to the report, be approved and adopted.”

## **130 CORPORATE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Organisational Development seeking approval to a Workforce Development Plan.

The Head of Organisational Development advised that the strategy addressed the requirement of the Council to introduce a Workforce Development policy at both corporate and service level

Councillor SCL Westrip proposed and Councillor CJ Jukes seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved.

The Council RESOLVED:

“That the Corporate Workforce Development Plan, as appended to the report, be approved.”

## **131 ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Organisational Development seeking approval to an Organisational Development Strategy for the period 2007-2009.

The Head of Organisational Development advised that the purpose of the report was to present proposals for an Organisational Development Strategy that sets out how, through organisational development, the Council would

continue to make the improvements required and move towards excellence. In addition, the strategy contained organisational development objectives and actions that would enable the Council to respond to national drivers for change including the White Paper and the Government's Pay and Workforce Strategy, as well as outlining how, through organisational development, the Council would meet corporate objectives and aspirations of the Community Development Strategy.

Councillor SCL Westrip proposed and Councillor CJ Jukes seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved.

The Council RESOLVED:

"That the Organisational Development Strategy as appended to the report, be approved."

### **132 WHITE PAPER – 'STRONG AND PROSPEROUS COMMUNITIES'**

Consideration was given to a report from the Chief Executive giving details of the draft bid to Central Government for a 'Pathfinder to Unity' that responded to an invitation to submit proposals to improve two-tier working in English Shire Counties. The report sought approval to support the bid on behalf of the six Districts of Easington, Wear Valley, Sedgfield, Teesdale, Derwentside and Chester-le-Street.

Councillor L Ebbatson advised that the proposal was in line with previous decisions of the Council and proposed a 'bottom up' approach as against the County Council proposal of 'top down'.

The Chief Executive advised that the Pathfinder approach required support from other Districts involved whereas the County Council proposal did not.

Councillor SCL Westrip advised that the Pathfinder proposal involved working with people and hoped that the Minister would support this approach.

Councillor SA Henig expressed his disappointment that Durham City Council had not engaged with the six other Districts in the County.

Councillor JM Proud expressed her support for the Pathfinder proposal.

Councillor IS Smith proposed and Councillor JJ Evans seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved.

The Council RESOLVED:

"1. That the draft bid document, as appended to the report, be agreed as the basis of the submission to the Government in response to the invitation to improve two-tier working in County Durham.

2. That authority be granted to the Chief Executive to make any necessary minor final drafting amendments prior to publication of the submission document.”

### **133 BISHOP OF JARROW**

A letter was submitted from the Bishop of Durham advising that Bishop John, the current Bishop of Jarrow, would shortly be taking up a new post of Bishop of Oxford, and seeking views about the nature of the job to be done.

The Council RESOLVED:

“That Members submit their comments to the Chief Executive by Monday 29 January 2007 for onward transmission to the Bishop of Durham by the deadline of end of January 2007.”

### **134 COMMON SEAL**

The Council RESOLVED:

“That the action of the Officer in affixing the Common Seal of the Council to the following documents be confirmed:

Transfer in duplicate relating to 5 Medwyn Close, Bournmoor  
Deed of Variation in duplicate relating to Section 106 Agreement between Chester-le-Street District Council and Barratt Homes Limited  
Transfer in duplicate relating to 16 Southfield, Pelton  
Form DS1 in respect of 7 Southfield, Pelton  
Eight parts of the County Durham E-Government Partnership Joint Committee Agreement dated 30 November 2005  
Transfer in duplicate relating to 31 Riding Hill, Great Lumley”

The meeting terminated at 7.05pm