

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 Thursday 30 March 2006 at 6.00pm

PRESENT:

Councillor A Turner (Chairman)

Councillors:

W Laverick	A Willis
R Harrison	LEW Brown
A Humes	R Richardson
P Ellis	C Jukes
S Barr	C Carr
DS Meek	SCL Westrip
L Ebbatson	JJ Evans
M Gollan	SA Henig
AK Holden	D Holding
GAN Kerr	D Robson
IS Smith	

Officers: R Templeman (Chief Executive), I Forster (Assistant Chief Executive), P Stephens (Head of Housing Services), I Broughton (Director of Community Services), C Potter (Legal and Democratic Services Manager), A Swinney (Head of Organisational Development), T Galloway (Director of Development Services), L Chambers (Director of Resources), A Stephenson (Senior Sustainability Officer), M Ingleby (Sustainability Officer) and C Turnbull (Democratic Services Officer).

Also in attendance was one member of the public.

172 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors G Armstrong, GK Davidson, TH Harland, S Gollan, JW Barrett, D Stoker, K Potts, M Potts K Greenwell and JM Proud.

173 MINUTES OF MEETING HELD 23 FEBRUARY 2006

The minutes of the proceedings at the meeting of the District Council held on 23 February 2006 copies of which had previously been circulated to Members, were submitted.

The Council RESOLVED:

“That the minutes be taken as read and approved.”

The Chairman duly signed the minutes as being a true and accurate record.

174 MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING HELD 2 MARCH 2006

The minutes of the proceedings at the Special Meeting of the District Council held on 2 March 2006 copies of which had previously been circulated to Members, were submitted.

The Council RESOLVED:

“That the minutes be taken as read and approved.”

The Chairman duly signed the minutes as being a true and accurate record.

175 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor JJ Evans queried the need for Members to declare their interests in the item relating to the concessionary travel scheme.

The Legal and Democratic Services Manager advised of the requirements of the Members Code of Conduct and of personal and prejudicial interests. Ultimately whether or not to declare an interest was a judgement call by Members but he recommended declaring.

176 REPORT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Councillor L Ebbatson advised that earlier this week we received the Audit Commission Progress Assessment Report. This is good news and the first significant milestone of a busy year.

As you will be aware the Audit Commission is an independent body which produces a progress assessment each year for Councils judged as 'under-performing' in their CPA.

In summary this year's progress report says: -

"Chester-le-Street District Council is progressing well in addressing the weaknesses identified in the CPA inspection in 2003 and in our Progress Assessment published in December 2004.

During 2005 the Council set out its ambitions for the district clearly in its new Corporate Plan and strengthened its strategic planning and performance management framework significantly. Senior politicians and managers are providing good leadership both internally and externally; the Council is working with the Local Strategic Partnership to update the Community Strategy. The Council is making progress on new strategies and plans including community engagement, equality and information management.

The Council has made good progress in developing and implementing its plans for improvement, in line with its Improvement and Recovery Plan. In doing so it is addressing many of the weaknesses identified in CPA. It has improved its capacity through the appointment of a good senior management team, and is developing its councillors and staff.

The performance of the Council's services remains mixed but is improving overall. There have been significant improvements in the planning service, in the revenues and benefits service and in e-government. The Council is progressing regeneration projects and improving access to its services. However, the housing service continues to face significant challenges. The Council is developing its plans for the future, with a number of strategies in place including a three-year corporate plan and medium term financial strategy. It is developing a culture of improvement and is beginning to learn from others."

This is a very positive progress report and congratulations go to everyone here for their part in a joint venture, a joint effort, and ultimately joint success, particularly the Chief Executive and the Deputy Leader for their unstinting hard work.

While I am confident we will achieve similar success in other key areas, such as the Environmental Services Inspection, it is vital that we do not lose momentum. Much remains to be done. As a good friend of this Council, and the people of Chester-le-Street, is fond of saying "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, Or what's a heaven for?"

177 REPORTS FROM PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

(a) Finance and Leisure

Councillor SA Henig extended congratulations to Councillor Ebbatson for her leadership over the last three years. He believed the Council was on an upward curve which he was sure will continue.

He advised that Ian Simon, Leisure Services Manager, was leaving the Council. Ian commenced with the Council in 1998 and Councillor Henig extended him his thanks for all his hard work over the years. An interim appointment was to be made.

(b) Environment

There was no report from Councillor Holden.

(c) Regeneration

Councillor C Jukes advised that later on the agenda for the meeting the Council will be considering the way forward on Information Management.

The Implementing Electronic Government return number 6 will shortly be sent to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. It shows that we continue to make good progress in this important area of Council service.

In terms of regeneration, the Council has demonstrated, in the last month, in terms of asset management that we deliver value for money for the taxpayer. I am delighted to advise that on Monday of this week, the signing ceremony took place at Pelton Fell Community Centre of the Pelton Fell Partnership Board. The Leader, Councillor Ebbatson, signed her life away on behalf of the Council as our signatory.

The first meeting of the Board is in April and is a further step on the way to enabling the regeneration of Pelton Fell.

Finally, the Local Strategic Partnership's Economy and Regeneration Policy Group met on 8 March to consider further developments in relation to the Community Strategy. I can report steady progress and the Policy Group seemed very receptive to the presentation at the meeting, of progress on the Town Centre regeneration.

(d) Housing and Community Safety

Councillor IS Smith advised on another busy time ahead for the housing service.

The Housing Inspection is in May and the Inspectors will be on site from the 8 May for a full week. They will assess the whole of the housing service, including cross cutting themes such as value for money, diversity and access and customer care. The housing staff have been working hard over the last 12 months on improvements and getting ready for the inspection.

The Council has made great strides over the last year and has received positive results from the Environmental Services Inspection. I am very confident we will achieve good results from the Housing Inspection.

It will be good to have all our achievements subject to an independent assessment and review so we can see how far we have come.

There will be a bumper edition of Tenants Talk this time. The newsletter has been expanded to 16 pages to allow coverage of all service improvements. The service has made 300 separate service improvements over the last 12 months and I am delighted that we have been able to publish a 3 year Capital Programme that will see 2453 improvements carried out in tenants homes over the next 3 years.

I am also delighted by the response from our tenants satisfaction survey that took place before Christmas. We will be using this information to improve the service even further.

Anti social behaviour rated a high priority in the survey and as a result we have appointed an additional Tenancy Enforcement Officer to deal with anti social behaviour on our estates. We have also agreed to install a CCTV camera in four villages.

Members will be aware we now have a new allocations policy which will go live on 3 April 2006. This marks a significant change in the way the Council allocates its properties. The new policy ensures that priority goes to those in greatest need through the allocation of points according to a number of different criteria.

The housing staff have arranged training for all Members on the new Allocations Policy and how it works.

(e) Personnel and Communications

Councillor SCL Westrip reported progress on the following: -

Member development – Currently working a policy for Member access to training.

Executive development with IDeA, two sessions have been held.

Work in progress on submission for Members Charter.

Ward based issues forum on 2 May at 6.00pm

Management Development Programme – all managers are now receiving management and leadership development training.

Managers competency frameworks in draft for consultation.

Managers briefings with CMT to discuss competencies, performance and training scheduled for 6 April

Organisational development - employee survey results are being analysed

One Team Inspirational Programme is progressing with 11 action learning sets working on corporate projects until 30 June.

Commitment to working towards IIP progressing

Corporate Training Plan in draft for 2006/7

Training Champions have been relaunched across the Council.

Quarterly Well Being at Work Day introduced for all employees

Equal Pay payments are being signed off today

178 QUESTIONS TO LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

Councillor JJ Evans stated that Durham County Cricket Club had been drip feeding the press regarding applications for Test Matches and including reference to commercial development. He enquired when Members were going to receive a briefing on the proposed development, and why articles from the Journal newspaper were not included in the press releases. He was of the opinion that all Members should receive a copy of the press cuttings.

The Leader advised that the bid for the Ashes was receiving big coverage in the Journal. The proposed development referred to was entirely within the grounds of the Cricket Club and a briefing will be given to Members when there is something to tell. With regard to the press cuttings, the Chief Executive will have to advise, but she believed that articles in publications such as the Local Government Chronicle and Municipal Journal would be of interest to Members.

The Chief Executive stated he had given advice and suggestions to the County Cricket Club. Detailed consultations are still to take place but the Cricket Club are likely to bring proposals forward. He advised that the Press Officer provided copies of press cuttings to Chief Officers and Portfolio Holders and he will speak with him on the matter raised by Councillor Evans.

Prior to consideration of the following item, the following Members declared personal and prejudicial interests and left the meeting: -

Councillors A Turner, R Harrison, A Humes, IS Smith, D Robson, L Ebbatson, LEW Brown, D Holding, JJ Evans, S Barr, P Ellis and GAN Kerr

In the absence of the Chairman and Vice Chairman, Councillor SCL Westrip took the Chair.

179 CONCESSIONARY TRAVEL SCHEME

Consideration was given to a report from the Chief Executive advising Members of an urgent decision, taken by the Chief Executive, in accordance with part 4D paragraph 4 of the Constitution to ensure free travel is available throughout the County and on cross boundary journeys to qualifying residents of the District.

The Chief Executive spoke to the report and requested Members to note the decision made and endorse the action taken.

Councillor SA Henig said this was a good example of the Council's emergency procedure in operation and thanked the Chief Executive for his action.

The Council RESOLVED:

"1. That the decision made, in accordance with part 4D paragraph 4 of the Council's Constitution, with respect to the concessionary travel scheme providing free travel throughout the County and on cross boundary journeys being introduced from 1 April 2006, be noted.

2. That the action of the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive that led to the outcome, be endorsed."

At this point, Councillors A Turner, R Harrison, A Humes, IS Smith, D Robson, L Ebbatson, LEW Brown, D Holding, JJ Evans, S Barr, P Ellis and GAN Kerr returned to the meeting.

Councillor A Turner returned to the Chair.

180 FAIRTRADE COUNCIL

Consideration was given to a report from the Environmental Health Manager requesting the Council pass a resolution to become a fairtrade Council as a step towards Chester-le-Street achieving Fairtrade Town status.

Councillor AK Holden presented the report and thanked the Senior Sustainability Officer and the Sustainability Officer for their work, and the Chairman of the Council for his support during Fairtrade Week

Councillor C Jukes left the meeting at 7.22pm

The Council RESOLVED:

“ That this Council resolves to support fairtrade and the Chester-le-Street Fairtrade Steering Committee furthermore, the Council resolves to serve only fairtrade tea and coffee at all future Council meetings and in its offices and canteens.”

181 DISREGARD OF WAR PENSIONS

Consideration was given to a report from the Revenues and Benefits Manager seeking approval to disregard war pensions in full in the assessment of Housing and Council Tax Benefit from 1 April 2006.

The Council RESOLVED:

“That with effect from 1 April 2006, war pensions be disregarded in full in the assessment of Housing and Council Tax Benefits.”

Councillor A Humes left the meeting at 7.45pm

182 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN

Consideration was given to a report from the Director of Community Services seeking approval for the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan.

Councillors JJ Evans, R Richardson and LEW Brown left the meeting at 7.48pm

The Leader congratulated the Officer concerned for production of the Plan. She suggested the insertion of the following words in the fourth paragraph, third line, after ‘in accordance with tenants’ wishes’:-

‘and subject to a successful ballot of all tenants’

The Council RESOLVED:

“1 That the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan, as amended as suggested by the Leader, be endorsed.

2. That the Director of Community Services prepare a desk top (summary) version of the Plan for wider distribution.”

183 INFORMATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Consideration was given to a report from the Assistant Chief Executive seeking approval to the Information Management Strategy.

Councillor SCL Westrip said that as a Council we have to appreciate the value of information and data and our need to protect it and to be able to access it effectively. This strategy presents a phased plan to achieving these aims. It will help us achieve Priority Outcome G19 to have an electronic document and record management system for the Council. The strategy is a key aspect

of our overall customer excellence strategy and will be significant in helping us meet IRP2 and the Corporate Plan. It will on completion provide us with an efficient way of meeting Freedom of Information Act requests; to protect data currently stored on paper systems; and help provide potential cost efficiencies.

The Council RESOLVED:

“That the Information Management Strategy detailed in the appendices to the report be adopted.”

184 INFORMATION BOOKLET

The Information Booklet containing items on the following subjects was submitted: -

Minutes of the Executive held 6 March 2006
Report of the Licensing Committee held 1 March 2006
Report of the Planning Committee held 13 March 2006
Report of the Green Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel held 8 March 2006
Report of the Safe and Healthy Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel held 16 March 2006
Report of the Strong Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel held 22 March 2006
Report of the Parish Council Liaison Meeting held 31 January 2006
Information Bulletin – Human Resources Team
Monthly planning delegated decisions

The Council RESOLVED:

- “1 That the contents of the Information Booklet be noted.
2. That the reference to Inspector Robson in the last paragraph on page 45 of the Licensing Committee minutes be altered to Sergeant Robson.”

185 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 11 Marigold Crescent, Bournmoor
Transfer in duplicate relating to 23 Kings Lane, Pelton
Transfer in duplicate relating to land at 12 Cranleigh, Great Lumley
Lease in duplicate relating to Roseberry Grange Golf Complex
Transfer in duplicate relating to 56 Bullion Lane, Chester-le-Street
Transfer in respect of former Sacriston Baths site, Victoria Street, Sacriston
Transfer in respect of land at Laburnum Court, Sacriston
Section 104 Agreement in quadruplet relating to sewers at Ivy Way, Pelton
Transfer in duplicate relating to 14 Charlaw Close, Sacriston

Lease in duplicate relating to Unit 10 Stella Gill Industrial Estate, Pelton Fell
Transfer in duplicate relating to 7 Lynn Street, Chester-le-Street
Transfer in duplicate relating to 3 Primrose Crescent, Bournmoor
Lease in duplicate relating to Units 53 and 54 Stella Gill Industrial Estate.”

186 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

The Council RESOLVED:

“That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 the Public and Press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 11 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.”

187 RESTRUCTURE OF FINANCIAL SERVICES

Consideration was given to a report from the Director of Resources that proposed changes to the structure of the Finance and Accountancy Service Team.

The Council RESOLVED:

“1 That the proposed structure as indicated on the appendices to the report be noted.

2. That the replacement of the posts of Finance and Accountancy Manager and Principal Accountant (Technical) with posts of Accountancy Manager and Risk and Financial Services Manager, be approved.”

The meeting terminated at 8.00pm