

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 22 March 2007 at 6.00pm

PRESENT:

Councillor R Harrison (Chairman)

Councillors:

G Armstrong	CJ Jukes
JW Barrett	W Laverick
LEW Brown	DS Meek
C Carr	JM Proud
GK Davidson	D Rand
MJ Gollan	D Robson
TH Harland	IS Smith
SA Henig	DMG Stoker
AK Holden	A Turner
D Holding	A Willis
A Humes	

Officers: R Templeman (Chief Executive), L Chambers (Director of Resources), T Galloway (Director of Development Services), C Potter (Head of Legal and Democratic Services), M Walker (Head of Regeneration), P Stephens (Head of Housing Services), J Underwood (Performance and Improvement Manager), C Scott (LSVT Project Team), L Coverdale (LSVT Project Team) and C Turnbull (Democratic Services Officer).

Also in attendance were six members of the public.

158 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors S Barr, SCL Westrip, L Ebbatson, K Potts, M Potts, P Ellis and PH May.

159 MINUTES OF MEETING HELD 1 MARCH 2007

It was proposed by Councillor A Turner and seconded by Councillor IS Smith that the minutes of the proceedings at the meeting of the District Council held 1 March 2007, copies of which had previously been circulated, be confirmed as a correct record.

The Council RESOLVED:

“That the minutes of the meeting held 1 March 2007 be confirmed as a correct record.”

The Chairman proceeded to sign the minutes.

160 PUBLIC SPEAKING

The Chairman advised there had been three requests under the Council's Public Speaking Scheme to address the Council on item numbered eleven on the agenda concerning the LSVT of Council Housing.

The Chairman welcomed the three speakers.

161 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

Councillors D Robson and A Turner declared personal and prejudicial interests in item no 11 on the agenda regarding the LSVT of Council Housing as members of the Shadow Board.

Councillor A Willis declared a personal and prejudicial interest in item no 11 as a Council House tenant.

Councillors JW Barrett, TH Harland and A Humes declared personal and prejudicial interests in item no 11 because of relationships to Council House tenants.

The Chairman advised that item no 11 on the agenda regarding LSVT of Council Housing would be considered as the next item.

Councillors D Robson, A Turner, A Willis, JW Barrett, TH Harland and A Humes left the meeting during consideration of the item.

The Chairman invited the three speakers to address the Council in turn.

Andrew Draper

Mr Draper advised he was a member of the Tenants Reference Group representing Nettlesworth and Kimblesworth and expressed his delight at being able to speak in support of the transfer of homes from the Council to Cestria Community Housing.

He advised that the previous ten months whilst working as part of the Tenants Reference Group had been an exciting journey for both the Council and the tenants. Through the Reference Group tenants had the opportunity of working with the Council on all aspects of the transfer, in particular the content of the Offer Document.

The Reference Group had also worked with the Independent Tenant Advisor, Jon Holden, and Council representatives, Lisa Coverdale and Christine Scott, on areas of housing policy, contributed to newsletter and promotional correspondence, participated in Working Groups on repairs, modernisation, budgets and even starred in a DVD.

He believed that transferring the homes to Cestria Community Housing would give tenants the standard of homes and the improved delivery of services they expected and deserved.

He said that if the Council supported the tenants ballot result he would look forward to working with the Association in the future to ensure high quality, accessible services to all tenants and ensure the Association plays a full part in creating communities where people want to live, learn and work and raise their families.

Doreen Birleson

Ms Birleson advised she was the Chair of the Tenants Panel adding that tenants in Chester-le-Street had been engaged with the Council for around four years to consider the future of Council Housing in the District and had considered a number of options for the ownership and management of the homes.

She advised that for the previous 18 months tenants from the Tenants Panel and the Tenants Reference Group had worked with the Council to develop the detailed transfer proposals that were endorsed by tenants in the ballot. They considered that the transfer of the houses to Cestria Community Housing represented an opportunity to bring much needed investment in homes, services and communities.

She stressed that it was important tenant's homes were improved to the high standard promised but considered the benefits offered by the transfer were wider than that. The tenants' representatives believed that the additional investment in services and on estates would help to restore pride in communities.

She stated that as tenants representatives they looked forward to working with the Council and Cestria Community Housing to ensure that the transfer was a success.

Brian Cooke

Mr Cooke advised he was Secretary of the Tenants Panel and a member of the Reference Group representing Great Lumley. He stated that over the years the Council had tried to keep houses up to a high standard but due to Government restrictions and finances available it had been impossible to keep services and repairs up to the standard required.

As a tenant he had experienced this first hand and the problems it had caused.

He stated that Cestria Community Housing in partnership with the Council offered tenants the opportunity to live in clean modern homes, with improved aids and adaptations, greater investment in older persons services and an improved repairs service, increased customer involvement and safe and secure homes and communities.

He expressed his full support for the transfer and advised he was one of the 60.6% of tenants who voted yes. He requested the Council to support the tenants and proceed with the transfer.

162 LSVT OF COUNCIL HOUSING

The Chairman thanked the speakers and requested Members to give consideration to the report from the Chief Executive on the LSVT of Council Housing.

Councillor IS Smith, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Safety, stated that that week marked a milestone for the Council and tenants. She advised that two years previously the Council had embarked on the largest consultation exercise, listening and involving tenants and over 5,000 tenants had attended consultation events. The tenants' contributions had been invaluable when drawing up the Offer Document.

Councillor Smith advised that in 2005 the Council decided to support a Tenants Panel decision that lead to a full ballot of all tenants on the option of transferring the housing stock to a new not-for-profit organisation. This had resulted in the establishing of a tailor made Registered Social Landlord for Chester-le-Street, know as Cestria Community Housing.

Councillor Smith advised the ballot had taken place with a turn out of 75% and a 60.6% yes vote.

Councillor Smith said that the transfer of the housing stock to Cestria Community Housing was the only way to provide good quality affordable homes for the Council's housing tenants.

The Chief Executive introduced his report and answered questions from Members.

Councillors CJ Jukes, LEW Brown, AK Holden and W Laverick spoke on the report and Councillor Jukes expressed his personal thanks to Councillor Smith for her involvement.

Councillor DMG Stoker proposed and Councillor C Carr seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved.

The Council RESOLVED:

- “1. That the result of the ballot be noted.
2. That the Chief Executive be authorised to commence negotiations with Cestria Community Housing Association with a view to concluding negotiations and securing agreement on land, assets, staff, services and all other related issues relevant to the transfer.
3. That the proposed stock transfer proceed subject to the successful outcome of negotiations and securing consent of the Secretary of State.
4. That the Chief Executive be authorised to submit a formal application for Consent to Transfer to the Secretary of State.

5. That delegated powers be granted to the Head of Regeneration to appoint the Council's post-ballot consultants as detailed in the report.
6. That the Chief Executive be authorised to take decisions on matters related to the negotiations and the form of contractor prior to transfer."

Following the conclusion of the item, the three speakers, L Coverdale and C Scott left the meeting.

Councillors Robson, Turner, Willis, Barrett, Harland and Humes returned to the meeting.

Councillor M Gollan arrived at the meeting at 6.25pm

163 REPORT FROM LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

In the absence of the Leader of the Council, Councillor SA Henig, Deputy Leader, advised of the Key Decisions taken by the Executive on 5 March 2007, as follows: -

'Careline – Delivery of Services to Third Parties

That the undertaking of Careline Services for the third party organisations listed in the body of the report be approved.'

164 REPORTS FROM PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

a) Finance and Leisure

Councillor Henig advised that the Authority had again been successful in achieving funding from the Children's Fund to follow up on last year's free-swimming pilots for juniors. As a result the Leisure Team would be offering free swimming for under 18's during the school holiday periods except for Christmas school holidays to start from the Easter holiday period from Sunday 1st April 2007 until Friday 13th April 2007 inclusive. For children to access the free swimming in 2007 they must have a valid Leisure One card which they can purchase from the Leisure Centre or Riverside Sports Complex which lasts up to twelve months and allows for discounts for other Leisure Services.

He reported that a new Participation Officer for Children and Young People had commenced employment in the Community Leisure Team working on behalf of the District Partnership in promoting the Active Participation of Children and Young People. He advised that this post seeks to promote better understanding of 'Every Child Matters' outcomes and Children and Young People's participation charter, which had been developed with local agents. Other duties would include working to encourage agencies to adopt and apply this charter and develop and improve communication with children and their families.

He advised that the Riverside would be included as a potential training camp for Athletics in a Regional offer by Sport England North East for the London

2012 Olympics Organising Committee. Further discussions will be held and a final decision will be made in early 2008.

b) Environment

Health Act 2006

Councillor Holden advised that the Environmental Health Team had begun its implementation of the Health Act 2006. This legislation would create Smoke Free premises in most workplaces, enclosed public places and public transport. The team was working closely with partners to ensure there was a comprehensive and co-ordinated response. Over 800 letters were distributed with the Council's non-domestic rate bills advising businesses of their responsibilities and the help and advice that are available from the Council and its partners. A further mailshot would follow giving more specific advice on smoking shelters and possible licensing implications. Officers gave a presentation to over 50 businesses on 20 March 2007 at the Durham County Cricket Ground. The event was organised jointly by the Chamber of Commerce and the PCT and included presentations by Fresh North East and the Environmental Health Department. Drop-in days would be organised where businesses could get comprehensive advice on all aspects of the new legislation. The drop-in days would run from early morning to late evening and would allow businesses to access all the necessary advice at a convenient time.

Safer Food and Better Business.

Councillor Holden reported that March 2007 saw the 100th Chester-le-Street food business achieve the Food Standard Agencies Safer Food Better Business Standard. This scheme was introduced to assist small food businesses to comply with Food hygiene legislation. The Environmental Health Team offers businesses a half-day training course with follow-up visits coaching and mentoring. Chester-le-Street is the only Council within the County to offer this level of assistance to businesses and the scheme has been extremely well received.

Development Control and Planning

Councillor Holden advised that at the March Planning Committee, approval was granted to implement the multi-disciplinary approach also more commonly known as the Development Team one-stop shop approach within the Planning service. This change in operational procedures would help developers that were proposing major investment into the District to benefit from a more joined up project-managed approach. Starting at the pre-application stage being followed through to include any post approval issues. The implementation of the approach would also ensure that the service would achieve a maximum of 100% score of BVPI 205 quality of service checklist and would also achieve corporate planning objective RD8.

Fairtrade Fortnight

Councillor Holden reported that the Fairtrade fortnight took place between 26 February 2007 and 11 March 2007. During the fortnight the Chester-le-Street group hosted a stall on four occasions at the Co-op and the Parish Centre and gave away free samples of Fairtrade goods and encouraged people to pledge to buy fair trade products once a month. Over 1200 people signed this pledge, which would help in a bid to become a Fairtrade town. At the Parish Centre, Kevin Jones MP signed the pledge in front of newspaper reporters, which gave great publicity to the event. During the build up to the fortnight the Council's Senior Sustainability Officer carried out talks to schools on Fairtrade and encouraged pupils to enter a competition to design a logo for the Chester-le-Street group. Over 250 entries were received some of which were displayed in the restaurant over the Fairtrade fortnight. The overall winner was Dominic Hunter from Lumley Junior School who was presented with a box of prizes by the Leader. Councillor Holden circulated a copy of the winning logo, which would be used for Fairtrade in the future.

c) Regeneration

Information Technology

Councillor Jukes advised that the Information Technology Management Project continued to be rolled out and took the opportunity to thank the staff in IT who had enabled this to happen.

Regeneration Inspection

Councillor Jukes reported that the Audit Commission had carried out a County wide inspection of Regeneration including Chester-le-Street. He thanked all the staff involved in ensuring that the tour of the District was a success. He spoke in particular in relation to the work ongoing in Sacriston and Pelton Fell where there was a tremendous amount of Regeneration taking place and private sector investment going into it. He advised that the inspectors were generally impressed by the social enterprise and environmental improvements that were being carried out in Grange Villa. He advised of a business plan that was being developed for the Pelton Fell Community Resource Centre and multi-use games area, which hopefully would be presented at the Executive and Council Meetings soon.

Civic Heart

He referred to the Civic Heart and the developments of the Civic Arch that was erected the previous week and which was currently undercover awaiting 10,000 handcrafted bricks to go onto the structure. The Arch was developed by and engineered by local enterprise manufacturers. He advised that once the Arch was developed there would be a Civic square around the Arch, which would be available for public celebration, festivals and events to

compliment the market. The market would be moving back to the original location on the first Saturday in May and there would be a series of celebratory events throughout May. He advised that a business plan for the market would be developed which would enable the market to take off.

Mile House Project

Councillor Jukes updated Members on the Mile House Project where further works were proposed for the inside of the building. He emphasised the fact that £2.5M of external funding had been brought into the Town Centre to complete all those projects and that had this Authority not bid for it, it would have gone elsewhere. Shortlists were to be drawn up for the Town Centre Master planning exercise.

Drum Lane Development

Councillor Jukes referred to the private sector development taking place on the Drum Lane, which was being developed as part of the £130 million worth of investment being brought into this District over the last few years.

He concluded that the Council had been engaged in regenerating in its communities to ensure those hearts of the communities are vibrant and to enable business and social enterprise to become sustainable.

d) Housing and Community Safety

Councillor Smith advised that she had attended the final presentations on the CPI (Continual Progress Improvement Project) where there had been four presentations given on routine repairs, benefit overpayment, voids update and adaptations.

She advised that the presentation had given her a greater understanding and appreciation of the learning and skills attained and how these would inform future service improvements across the whole of the organisation. What had impressed her most was the enthusiasm of the staff and the efficiencies they have received.

She advised that the DLO had just completed health checks, which were still in draft format. She praised the DLO for their efforts and quoted a paragraph from the findings of the health checks, which stated that the service delivery of the DLO was excellent.

e) Personnel and Communications

The Portfolio for Personnel and Communications was not present at the meeting, therefore no update was given in his absence.

165 QUESTIONS TO LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

There were no questions for the Leader or Executive Members.

166 LOCAL LAND CHARGES SERVICES REVIEW

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Legal and Democratic Services on the setting of fees for Local Land Charge services in respect of the Statutory Local Land Charges Register, copies of which had previously been circulated.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that fees setting for local land charges services had been devolved to local authorities with effect from 1 April 2007.

Councillor IS Smith proposed and Councillor C Carr seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved.

The Council RESOLVED:

- “1. That the services and descriptions of services as detailed in the appendix to the report be provided by the Council and the fees as set out in the right-hand column of the appendix be levied with effect from and including 1 April 2007 until further notice.
2. That details of the said services and descriptions of services and fees relating thereto be published in the Civic Centre and on the Council’s web site as soon as possible.”

167 SCHEME OF MEMBERS ALLOWANCES

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Legal and Democratic Services that advised of the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel on a revised Scheme of Members Allowances and the allowances payable under it. Copies of the report had previously been circulated.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services spoke to the report and answered questions from Members.

Councillors G Armstrong, A Turner, LEW Brown, W Laverick IS Smith C Carr and D Holding spoke on the report.

Councillor SA Henig proposed and Councillor GK Davidson seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved.

The Chairman requested a show of hands for and against the motion and announced that there were 5 votes for and 12 against the motion.

The Council RESOLVED:

- “1. That the existing arrangements for Members Allowances continue.
2. That the Officer report to a future meeting on payment for travel and telephone allowance.”

Councillors TH Harland and JM Proud left the meeting at 7.14pm

Councillor D Stoker left the meeting at 7.15pm

168 EQUALITY SCHEME – GENDER EQUALITY DUTY

Consideration was given to a report from the Performance and Improvement Manager seeking approval to a gender duty action plan, copies of which had previously been circulated.

Councillor A Turner proposed and Councillor LEW Brown seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved.

The Council RESOLVED:

“That the Gender Duty Action Plan, as appended to the report, be approved for inclusion in the Council’s approved Equality Scheme.”

169 ANNUAL COUNCIL MEETING

The Council RESOLVED:

“That the Annual Meeting of the Council be held on Thursday 17 May 2007.”

170 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: -

Licence to Assign and Charge in duplicate relating to land adjoining the Old England Public House, Great Lumley

Dedication Agreement in duplicate relating to land adjacent to St Benet’s RC Primary School, Ouston

Transfer in duplicate relating to 40 Medwyn Close, Bournmoor

Form DS1 in respect of 1 Uphill Drive, Sacriston”

171 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 paragraphs 1 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.”

Prior to consideration of the following item Councillors D Robson and A Turner declared personal and prejudicial interests as members of the Shadow Board and left the meeting.

Councillor A Willis declared a personal and prejudicial interest as a Council House tenant and left the meeting.

Councillors JW Barrett, TH Harland and A Humes declared personal and prejudicial interests because of relationships to Council House tenants and left the meeting.

Councillor M Gollan left the meeting.

172 LSVT OF COUNCIL HOUSING

Consideration was given to a report from the Chief Executive on staffing and financial matters associated with the LSVT of Council Housing, copies of which had previously been circulated.

The Chief Executive introduced the report and answered questions from Members.

Councillors C Carr and SA Henig spoke on the report.

Councillor C Jukes proposed and Councillor LEW Brown seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved.

The Council RESOLVED:

- “1. That the requirement to separate staff teams in order to avoid conflict of interest be noted and the Chief Executive and Head of Organisational Development be authorised to progress with a process of seconding staff for the RSL and backfilling posts where appropriate in accordance with approved personnel policies and procedures.
2. That an application be made on behalf of the Cestria Community Housing Association for a loan under Section 25 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1988 and the Chief Executive be authorised to make the relevant application to the Secretary of State.”

The meeting terminated at 7.27pm