

## **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 26 April 2007 at 6.00pm

### PRESENT:

Councillor R Harrison (Chairman)

### Councillors:

G Armstrong	A Humes
S Barr	CJ Jukes
JW Barrett	W Laverick
LEW Brown	DS Meek
GK Davidson	JM Proud
L Ebbatson	DL Robson
JJ Evans	IS Smith
M Gollan	A Turner
SA Henig	SCL Westrip
AK Holden	A Willis
D Holding	

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), A Aynsley (Tenancy Services Manager) and C Turnbull (Democratic Services Officer).

Also present were Sara Diggle (Relationship Manager), Caroline Tyrell (Audit Manager) and Jim Daster (Audit Manager), plus three members of the public.

### **173 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors M Potts, K Potts, P Ellis, TH Harland, S Gollan, PH May, C Carr and D Rand.

### **174 MINUTES OF MEETING HELD 22 MARCH 2007**

It was proposed by Councillor A Turner and seconded by Councillor D Robson that the minutes of the proceedings at the meeting of the District Council held 22 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 22 March 2007 be confirmed as a correct record."

The Chairman proceeded to sign the minutes.

## **175 PUBLIC SPEAKING**

There were no requests under the Council's scheme for public speaking.

## **176 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS**

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

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

Councillor Ebbatson advised that the key decisions had been distributed to all Councillors and were available to the public in the Executive minutes for April 2<sup>nd</sup>.

She advised there was no Members Update but there were a few announcements for information –

- 1 The European Confederation of Locally Elected Representatives would take place at the Sage, Gateshead on June 13/14<sup>th</sup>
- 2 Councillors can study for a Certificate for Councillors – a new initiative run jointly by the National Association of Councillors and Sunderland University.
- 3 An induction course on Community Leadership was being offered free by the Improvement Partnership for the N.E. It would complement in-house training and offer Members the opportunity to see the wider local government picture.
- 4 Chester-le-Street was hosting gypsy/ roma / traveller training on May 11. Places were available.

### County Durham Primary Care Trust

Councillor Ebbatson advised of an update on the new working arrangements for County Durham Primary Care Trust.

The new 'Partnership and Delivery Areas' are:

- Durham-Chester-le-Street and Derwentside
- Easington and Sedgefield
- Darlington and Durham Dales

The PDA will be responsible for:

- Delivering clinical services
- Public Health functions
- PALS services
- Patient and Public involvement
- Partnership working

- Practice based commissioning
- Facilities management
- Administrative services

### County Durham Strategic Partnership

Councillor Ebbatson reported having attended the County Durham Strategic Partnership and the Interim Board of the Local Area Agreement when it was agreed that the LAA Board would effectively take over the county-wide strategic partnership in the short term. She commented that what was lacking, was any political ownership of the agreed outcomes, let alone leadership. Or more significantly perhaps, its twin, democratic accountability – we need to work on this. The lack of leadership and accountability at the county level could adversely affect the current economic well-being of the District if County Durham is allowed to become a rural backwater divorced from its neighbouring city regions.

### Local Government Review

Councillor Ebbatson added that these issues would become more pertinent in the light of proposals arising from local government review. The Department for Communities and Local Government had decided, in its wisdom, to proceed to the consultation stage on a single county-wide unitary – something this Council rejected unanimously.

The deadline for consultation responses was June 22. A list of stakeholders to be consulted has been received and this Council was one of them. Local people are notable by their absence and the Leader, therefore, suggested the Council use its position as a stakeholder to remedy that – hence the additional item on the agenda. This was an enabling measure.

### Post Election

Councillor Ebbatson said that post election the Council will continue to work on its response as One Team, in partnership with other District Councils and, most importantly, with local people whose lives will be most closely affected.

This is the philosophy we have brought to our work as Councillors over the past 4 years. We have come to the end of this term of office and it is fitting that we should look back on our achievements.

Councillor Ebbatson advised that in a report given to Council in September 2003 the short, medium and long term aims and objectives were set out. 'Step change' was the buzz-word then and we have certainly 'stepped' and certainly changed. She said it was amazing and gratifying that we can tick almost every objective. But its not just about ticking boxes, although heaven knows we have done enough of that, the difference you have made is all around you – in the town and villages, in the streets and the parks, in the homes and the workplaces. She was confident that the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in June would reflect that.

Councillor Ebbatson said the Council had achieved this success because we have worked constructively and consistently towards our goals. We have not allowed ourselves to be distracted by small differences or adversity but stuck to the common good. Therefore it was timely to thank everyone who had contributed to that success. In particular, but not exclusively, her Labour colleagues whose support and understanding had been unstinting and invaluable.

She added that all members of the Executive, past and present, had climbed a Mount Everest of a learning curve and she believed all are personally stronger for that experience.

She thanked Councillor Davidson as Chair of Planning for outstanding success in that area. Councillor Davidson was the first to deal with public speaking rights, which we welcomed, but could perhaps be likened to climbing the north face of the Eiger.

She thanked also Councillor Carr for shepherding through the new Licensing Act. Likewise thanks went to Councillor Armstrong for his almost Cromwellian efforts on behalf of Smoke Free NE and the health of local residents.

To the retiring Members, Councillors Smith, Rand, Carr, Evans, Richardson, Sharon Gollan, and Stoker we said 'ave et vale' 'hail and farewell' and wished them all the best in their future endeavours.

Councillor Ebbatson said that with the Chairman's permission she wished to make 2 personal awards:

First to Councillor Evans who served his community for 12 years. Long service is nothing in itself – at best it denotes stamina, at worst blind indifference. The latter could never be applied to John and she hoped he would accept a small token of her appreciation – a tribute to the man she consider to be the wittiest and most erudite of our little band.

Secondly she had a small personal tribute for a Councillor to whom we all owed a great deal, tenants and residents alike, Councillor Smith. Isabel takes the public speaking award. Her candour, commitment and passion were all there when it counted. Isabel's contribution to success in the stock transfer was enormous, not least because she is a kind, courageous and hard working human being – in other words a model Councillor.

Councillor Ebbatson said that the other Members faced election day, adding that all knew the things we have done, and the things we had left undone. Our peers would judge us, not the Audit Commission.

In conclusion, Councillor Ebbatson said that to paraphrase a Poet Laureate, as you stand on the doorstep,

“Think of what our nation stands for

Treats from Tesco and country lanes  
Free speech, free passes, class distinction  
Democracy and proper drains”

## **178 REPORTS FROM PORTFOLIO HOLDERS**

### **a) Finance and Leisure**

Councillor Henig advised having also been originally elected to the Council eight years ago and having been re-elected he had seen a large number of changes that had taken place in the last four years. From his prospective this was a different Council to what it had been over four years ago in almost every respect.

He passed on his particular appreciation to all the Officers whom he had dealt with over the last four years. He referred in particular to the improvements in Finance and Financial Management that were reflected in the report which was to be considered on the Agenda later in the Meeting. He felt that this area had changed out of all recognition from what was quite a big weakness four years ago to what was now undoubtedly an area of great strength. He also spoke in relation to the many other areas of success within the Council and passed on his appreciation to all the Officers he had worked with during his time in office.

He was in agreement with Councillor Ebbatson that everybody in the room and those not present deserved their share of credit for the changes that had taken place. He advised that there had been a number of difficult decisions that had been made over the last few years and how others had felt that it would have been an easier course of action to keep things as they were several years ago, but thankfully it was not the one that was taken and the results were there for all to see. He felt everybody deserved a pat on the back for what had been achieved whether it was changes on the outside or indeed changes on the inside and referred to the fact that in the Meeting they were sitting with microphones in front of them, real windows out of the Council Chamber and much more professional looking Council Chamber. From one extreme to the other everything had changed and it had been a pleasure to be part of it.

### **b) Environment**

There was no report from Councillor AK Holden.

### **c) Regeneration**

Councillor CJ Jukes reported that the developments at the Civic Heart in the Town Centre were reaching physical conclusion. The scaffolding around the Arch would be removed over the course of the next week. Work on the Civic Square element of the Civic Heart was nearing completion and the market stalls were in place. During May a number of the usual markets would be held at the Civic Heart site and a formal launch was anticipated for early June.

Councillor Jukes advised that the former Mechanics Institute, now known as MILE House, was in operation again and the feedback from tenants in the building was extremely positive. He reported that partners had been appointed to carry out work on delivering the Town Centre Masterplan.

With regard to the regeneration scheme at Pelton Fell, Councillor Jukes advised that the site was unrecognisable from only a few months previous and work was continuing on supporting processes in relation to the Community Resource Centre and the Multi-Use Games Area.

Councillor Jukes advised that he had attended, on behalf of the Council, the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner of the Chester-le-Street and City of Durham Enterprise Agency.

In relation to Information Technology, Councillor Jukes advised of the most recent developments:

- The self service electronic payments system on the Council website
- An extranet – a closed website that will allow the Council and its twin Council in Kamp-Lintfort to share improvement ideas and best practice.

With regard to Asset Management, Councillor Jukes reported that the Modernisation Team was in the process of implementing a new Land and Property Asset Management System.

Councillor Jukes added that it had been a privilege to work with all Members and Officers over the previous four years and to be part of the One Team environment. In conclusion, he wished the Council, its Members and Officers his sincerest and very best wishes for the future.

**d) Housing and Community Safety**

Councillor IS Smith advised that the past eight years as a Councillor, four of which had been as an Executive Member, had been exciting and challenging but very rewarding. The Leader of the Council in May 2001, Councillor Pratt, had asked if she would like to be Chairman of the Council, but as a relatively new Councillor she had declined as she had much to learn. She said that she was still learning.

Councillor Smith said that in May 2003 Councillor Henig had said in his report to Council that 'the wind of change was blowing through the Council'. She said that with hindsight he could have changed that to a hurricane or a tornado.

As Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Safety Councillor Smith advised having seen so many changes and improvement. She stated the Council's decision to ballot tenants on transferring its housing stock to Cestria Housing was the right decision and, as a result, the tenants would see the improvements they had requested and would benefit from improved living

conditions. Councillor Smith said she was proud of the achievement and extended her congratulations to the Director of Community Services and his team.

Councillor Smith said that all Departments of the Council had made vast improvements and everyone had contributed to the success, hence the One Team. She said she looked forward to the final CPA report in June.

She gave special thanks to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Ebbatson, for granting her the opportunity to work with the Executive and to the Director of Community Services for his hard work and enthusiasm and especially for his help. She added that she had made many friends during her 8 years service and she would miss them all, but warned she would be back as an observer.

**e) Personnel and Communications**

Councillor SCL Westrip reported on the following: -

- Initial OD Programme had been completed satisfactorily
- 360 degree appraisal programmes successfully introduced
- OD Strategy approved in January 2007 and 43 actions had been completed on target to date
- Workforce Development Planning had been introduced across the Council
- Corporate Training Plan for 2007/2008 had been developed and was being rolled out
- OD Programme 'Rising Stars' for 2007/2008 had been developed and was due to commence in June 2007.

Councillor Westrip thanked staff within his Portfolio area for their support and commitment, and also his colleagues on the Executive.

**179 QUESTIONS TO LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBERS**

A. Councillor A Turner commented that at the last Council Meeting, Councillor IS Smith reported on the CPI presentation at Beamish Hall and advised that he was also present in his role as a member of the Shadow Housing Board.

Councillor turner advised having been approached by two different stakeholders on different occasions who had indicated how impressed they had been with the presentation and the enthusiasm of the staff. One of the stakeholders had remarked how proud she was to be part of Chester-le-Street District Council.

Councillor Turner requested the Chief Executive on this praise to everyone involved with the day at Beamish.

B. Councillor JJ Evans spoke in relation to the kind words expressed by Councillor Ebbatson and reflected on his past service with the Council.

He stated that had the Chester-le-Street of the mid 1990's been different from the organisation that it was then, the past five years would not have been necessary to anything like the degree that it had because there was so much to put right. He had served twelve, hopefully useful, years and he hoped that his contribution had been worthwhile. He wished the Council best wishes for the future.

Councillor Ebbatson spoke in relation to the comments made by Councillor Evans and advised that she believed that what you see in the Council now is a 'can do will do' attitude and that was positively encouraged through the organisational and development work for which Roy Templeman had been the inspiration. She agreed there was still a long way to go.

## **180 ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER**

Consideration was given to a report from the Assistant Chief Executive appending a copy of the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter, copies of which had previously been circulated.

The Assistant Chief Executive introduced the report and the representatives from the Audit Commission who were present.

Sarah Diggle and Caroline Tyrell spoke to the report and drew attention to the action needed by the Council as referred to on page 5 of the report.

The Leader thanked the Audit Commission representatives and advised that the Council always takes the Annual Reports very seriously and tries to react to them.

Councillor CJ Jukes proposed and Councillor IS Smith seconded that the recommendations included in the report be agreed.

The Council RESOLVED:

- "1. That the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter be formally received.
2. That the implementation of improvement plans in place to secure continuous improvement and positive direction of travel be supported.
3. That the Council's improved performance be acknowledged and celebrated."

**Following consideration of the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter the three Audit Commission representatives left the meeting.**



## **181 NEW MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEMBERS**

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Legal and Democratic Services on the new Model Code of Conduct for Members and recommending the adoption of the model Code without amendment to take effect on and from 3 May 2007 and to adopt the ten General Principles as an annex to the new Code.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced the report.

Councillor L Ebbatson proposed and Councillor GK Davidson seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved.

The Council RESOLVED:

“1. That the Model Code of Conduct set out in the Schedule to the Local Authorities (Model Code of Conduct) Order 2007 be adopted in place of the Council’s existing Code of Conduct, with effect on and from 3 May 2007.

2. That the ten General Principles be adopted as an annex to the new Model Code with effect on and from 3 May 2007.

3. That the Council’s Constitution be duly amended by the inclusion of the Appendix to the report to reflect the above resolutions.

4. That the Head of Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to publish the required statutory notice in at least one newspaper circulating in the entire District of Chester-le-Street.”

## **182 COUNTY COUNCIL’S PROPOSAL FOR A SINGLE UNITARY AUTHORITY**

Consideration was given to a report from the Chief Executive seeking delegated authority in consultation with the Leader of the Council to prepare a draft response to the Minister for Communities and Local Government having regard to the views of our principle partners, stakeholders and communities.

The Chief Executive spoke to the report and advised that the deadline for responses was 22 June 2007.

Councillor L Ebbatson proposed and Councillor JJ Evans seconded a motion without notice in accordance with the Council’s Constitution, that the revised recommendations as detailed on the paper circulated at the meeting be approved.

The Council RESOLVED:

“1. That delegated authority be granted to the Chief Executive to commission work in order to obtain the views of communities in producing a

draft response to the Government's consultation on the Future of Local Government in County Durham provided that before exercising such authority he liaises with either the Leader of the Council or the Chairman of the Council.

2. That, in view of the special circumstances relating to the short timescale for consultation, the Council waives Contract Standing Order 3.2 to the extent of not requiring at least three written quotations in respect of any contract in respect of such work.

3. That a budgetary provision of £30,000 be made from the 2006/2007 Local Authority Business Growth Incentive grant to enable the commissioning of such work.”

### **183 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 relation to Phase 2B Pelton Fell Regeneration  
Lease in duplicate in relation to Units 15 and 16 Sacriston Industrial Estate  
Section 106 Agreement in duplicate relating to land at Vigo Lane, Chester-le-Street  
Transfer in duplicate relating to 26 Boyntons, Nettleworth  
Form DS1 in respect of 46 Edenfield, West Pelton  
Form DS1 in respect of 1 Ninth Avenue, Chester-le-Street  
Temporary Road Closure Order in respect of Good Friday march  
Transfer in duplicate relating to 16 Carnation Avenue, Bournmoor  
Form DS1 in respect of 5 Medway, Great Lumley  
Transfer in duplicate relating to 3 Greenacres, Pelton  
Transfer in duplicate relating to land adjacent to 31 Delaval, Chester-le-Street  
Transfer in duplicate relating to 74 Lambourne Close, Bournmoor  
Transfer in duplicate relating to 7 Stone Row, Grange Villa  
Public Path Diversion Order 2007 in duplicate relating to diversion of  
Bridleway Number 56 Little Lumley Parish, Morton House, Fencehouses  
Form DS1 in relation to 17 Pelaw Square, South Pelaw  
Transfer in duplicate relating to 30 Ridley Avenue, Chester-le-Street  
Leas in duplicate relating to Donald Owen Clarke Centre, Riverside, Chester-le-Street.”

The Meeting terminated at 7.15pm