

**THE MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING
OF THE DISTRICT COUNCIL OF EASINGTON
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 25 APRIL 2007**

Present: Councillor C Walker (Chair)
Councillors B Bates, E Bell,
S Bishop, Mrs G Bleasdale, B Burn,
A Burnip, R Burnip, P J Campbell,
A Collinson, Mrs E M Connor, R Crute,
Mrs J Freak, J Goodwin, J Haggan,
H High, A J Holmes, Mrs E Huntington,
B Joyce, T Longstaff, Mrs J Maitland,
D Milsom, D Myers, Mrs A Naylor,
Mrs M Nugent, C Patching, G Patterson,
W R Peardon, G Pinkney, B Quinn,
D Raine, M Routledge, Mrs B A Sloan,
D J Taylor-Gooby, R Taylor, R J Todd
and P G Ward

1 LONG SERVICE AWARDS

The Chair presented long service awards to the following Members for their 20 years service to the Council:-

Councillor S Bishop
Councillor A Burnip
Councillor W R Peardon

At this point the Chair wished retiring Councillors J Goodwin, C Reynolds, W R Peardon, R G Wharrier and D Chaytor every success in the future, and on behalf of the Council thanked them for the valuable contributions they had made over the years in the various positions they had held.

2 ANNUAL AUDIT AND INSPECTION LETTER 2005/2006

The Chair welcomed S Diggle, Relationship Manager and P Heppell and J Dafter, Audit Managers from the Audit Commission who were in attendance to discuss the District of Easington's Annual Audit and Inspection Letter for 2005/2006.

S Diggle took Members through the overall summary within the Letter, stating that the Direction of Travel 2005/6 report was structured around the Council's nine key priorities with significant improvements in some services. The Audit Commission recognised the good progress made in improving community engagement and highlighted progress made against the key priorities as detailed in the Letter. It was also pleasing to note that action was being taken to focus on services which were under performing and of the 11 low performing areas focused on, improvement had been achieved in 10.

Paul Heppell, Audit Manager took Members through the Audit Letter in detail. With regard to financial management and value for money he explained that the Audit Commission had reported separately to the Council in September 2006 on the issues arising from the 2005/6 audit and had provided an unqualified opinion on the accounts, together with a conclusion that value for money arrangements were

Extraordinary Meeting of the District Council of Easington – 25 April 2007

adequate and a report confirming that the Best Value Performance Plan had been audited.

Audit findings were an important component of the CPA framework and the Use of Resources score was derived from audit assessments made in financial reporting, financial management, financial standing, internal control and value for money. He briefly explained to Members how the Council's arrangements for use of resources had been assessed for 2005/6, as detailed in Section 28 of the report, which had resulted in an overall score of 3 out of 4.

He highlighted areas of improvements made in financial management arrangements, internal control arrangements and arrangements to manage and improve value for money. Key actions to further strengthen these included the need to continue to develop partnership arrangements, ensure that the views of a wide range of stakeholders were considered when deciding whether to publish an annual report and assess the level of backlog maintenance to the Council's asset base, developing a plan for its phased and prioritised reduction for approval by Members.

In conclusion, the Council needed to continue to prioritise the improvement of its services by continuing to focus on under performance and ensuring that local communities were engaged in driving service improvements. It should also ensure that the new political arrangements and improved performance management arrangements contributed to the delivery of improved services.

J Johnson thanked the Audit Commission for the positive report for 2005/6 which recognised work carried out that was not always measured through national performance indicators. Performance of BVPIs was improving and the Council recognised the need to ensure that this continued. The Deputy Leader added that there was to be a period of uncertainty with the forthcoming local government re-organisation, and during this the Council would need to maintain its momentum in terms of performance management and continue to improve services.

Following discussion it was **RESOLVED** that the information given, be noted.

At this point J Johnson thanked Paul Heppell for the work he had undertaken on behalf of the Council in his time as Audit Manager.

3 **APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL AUDITOR**

For information, T Bell, Director of Finance and Corporate Services referred to correspondence received which advised that the Audit Commission (Northern Region) had nominated Steve Nicklin to be Engagement Lead (appointed Auditor) for the audit of accounts for 2007/8, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

4 **ADDITIONAL URGENT ITEM OF BUSINESS**

In accordance with Section 3(2) of the Council Procedure Rules contained in Part 4 of the Council's Constitution, the Chair agreed that consideration be given to the following item of business not shown on the Agenda, as a matter of urgency.

5 PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE UNITARY STRUCTURES IN COUNTY DURHAM

Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Executive on proposals for future unitary structures in County Durham, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The purpose of the report was to note the announcement from the Secretary of State for the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) with regard to the results of the stage one assessment and shortlisting proposals for potential future unitary structures.

The report also gave details of the consultation process announced by the Government and set out arrangements for the Council to undertake consultation with its stakeholders prior to submission of its formal response on or before 22 June 2007.

J Johnson explained that it was essential that the Council raised awareness of the consultation with the public and key local stakeholders and made it easy for them to have their views known in the process. This needed to happen expeditiously in order to feed in effectively within the tight timescale of the consultation period.

There would be a need to incur expenditure in undertaking surveys and consultation events with stakeholders and the Council would be working closely with the other Durham Districts on this. The proposed survey of opinion would involve the engagement of contractors as a matter of urgency and the Council's Monitoring Officer would work closely with the team tasked with preparing the response to ensure that the Code of Recommended Practice on local authority publicity was adhered to.

Costs would be met from efficiencies already identified within the elections budget.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the Chief Executive lead a team of officers in preparing a formal response to the proposals for County Durham in accordance with the timetable set out in the Stakeholder Consultation document published by the CLG;
- (b) delegated authority be granted to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader, and in accordance with the provisions set out in the Constitution, to incur appropriate expenditure in the collation of stakeholder views on the proposals, and to submit the formal response by 22 June 2007;
- (c) Standing Order 4(A)(ii) be waived to permit contractors to be appointed without obtaining quotations, in view of the urgency to commence the exercise.