

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 29 June 2006 at 6.00pm

PRESENT:

Councillor R Harrison (Chairman)

Councillors:

C Carr	G Armstrong
JM Proud	W Laverick
JW Barrett	GAN Kerr
SCL Westrip	A Willis
LEW Brown	A Humes
DS Meek	JJ Evans
S Barr	DA Rands
IS Smith	C Jukes
GK Davidson	P Ellis
M Gollan	SA Henig
D Holding	

Officers; R Templeman (Chief Executive), C Potter (Head of Legal and Democratic Services), A Swinney (Head of Organisational Development), L Chambers (Director of Resources), I Herberson (Finance and Accountancy Manager), J Elder (Risk and Financial Services Manager), I Forster (Assistant Chief Executive), J Brock (Community Strategy Advisor), T Galloway (Director of Development Services), P Stephens (Head of Housing Services), I Broughton (Director of Community Services) and C Turnbull (Democratic Services Officer).

The Chairman thanked his predecessor, Councillor A Turner, and Members for their support.

22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors L Ebbatson, TH Harland, AK Holden, PH May, R Richardson, D Robson, D Stoker, A Turner, M Potts, K Potts and S Gollan

23 MINUTES OF ANNUAL MEETING HELD 25 MAY 2006

The minutes of the proceedings at the Annual Meeting of the District Council held 25 May 2006 copies of which had previously been circulated to each Member, 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 correct record.

24 WELCOME TO COUNCILLOR D A RAND

The Chairman formally welcomed Councillor Rand to her first meeting and on behalf of the Council extended congratulations on her success in the by-election in the Pelton Ward on 15 July 2006.

The Council RESOLVED:

“That Councillor Rand be appointed to serve on the following Committees: -

Planning Committee
Green Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel
Personnel Committee
Electoral Arrangements Advisory Group.”

25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

26 REPORT OF AUDIT COMMITTEE HELD 26 APRIL 2006

The Council RESOLVED:

“That the report of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 26 April 2006 copies of which had previously been circulated, be accepted.”

27 REPORT OF SPECIAL AUDIT COMMITTEE HELD 18 MAY 2006

The Council RESOLVED:

“That the report of the Special Meeting of the Audit Committee held on 18 May 2006 copies of which had previously been circulated, be accepted.”

28 KEY DECISIONS

In the absence of the Leader, Councillor SA Henig, Deputy Leader, advised that the Executive at a meeting on 5 June 2006 had taken key decisions on the following matters: -

- Regeneration of Priority Villages
- Planned Maintenance Programme 2006/2007
- Write off of debts

29 REPORTS FROM PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

(a) Finance and Leisure

Councillor SA Henig reported on the following:

Free Swim Pilot:

A grant of £35,000 was successfully obtained by Leisure Services from the Children's Fund towards enabling the provision of more activities for young people. A major element of the work is a 3 month free swimming pilot for all children under 16 at the Leisure Centre, the aim of the pilot is to see whether admission charges are a real barrier towards young people swimming on a more regular basis. The pilot started on Saturday 17 June and the results from the first week show a 40% increase in the number of junior admissions compared to the same week last year. We will be analysing the figures to see if those trends continue.

Dreamspace:

'Dreamspace', a large scale inflatable sculpture (5m high with a footprint 50m x 50m) is to be based at Riverside for 9 days from 22 July to 30 July as part of a 3 venue national tour, the other venues being Liverpool and London. This tour has been mainly funded by a £60,000 grant from Arts Council England with each venue providing a small amount of funding as well.

It is hoped that it will be a major visitor attraction for Riverside during its stay and attract high levels of interest from local, regional and national press. Based upon figures from previous similar events it is anticipated that 250 visitors per day will use the structure. There is an admission charge of £5 for adults and £3 for concessions that is collected and retained by the artist.

Elton John Concert and One Day International at Riverside:

Durham County Cricket Ground hosted these two major events during June, both attracted over 15,000 spectators and were a big success. The Riverside Team, supported by staff from across the Council, managed the car parking arrangements on both occasions, with over 2,500 cars being accommodated each day. The parking charge had been increased this year from £5 to £8 and other than a small number of visitors who complained no significant adverse reaction was recorded. There had been some delays in getting cars off the events arena on the north side of the site after the Elton John Concert, these problems were addressed and rectified with the Police prior to the Cricket International which ran more smoothly.

Flood Defence at Riverside:

The final phase of flood defence works at Riverside is due to start in mid July and be completed by mid September. This work is being carried out by the

Environment Agency and is designed to protect the parks residential estate from flooding

(b) Environment

There was no report from Councillor AK Holden

(c) Regeneration

Councillor C Jukes reported on the following matters: -

- Meeting of Pelton Fell Partnership Board. Progress was being made on a number of fronts and he was confident in being able to take action points and milestones forward.
- Grange Villa Community Regeneration Project Group. A visit was made to Blyth Valley Council on 23 June.
- Local Strategic Partnership. A meeting of the Policy Group was held on 20 June. The Action Plan was progressing at quite a pace.
- Regeneration Strategy Open Day on 7 June was well attended. Positive feedback had been received and further meetings were to be arranged.
- Town Centre. This is a key project and a flagship partnership for the Council .
- The Executive in June approved priority funding for SHIP projects.

(d) Housing and Community Safety

Decent Homes:

Councillor IS Smith advised that the Director of Community Services and herself went to London on 7th June 2006 to meet the Minister who announced the final bidding round for the Decent Homes Programme. Applications for the 2006 Housing Transfer Programme will need to be submitted by 31 July 2006. The Minister advised that the Government has increased by 30% in real terms, the amount of money being spent directly by local authorities on refurbishing and improving Council houses. This year it is about £1,100 per home compared with spend equivalent of £800 in 1997, and over 90 local councils are able to make all their homes decent as a result of this investment. The Minister went on to say the Decent Homes Programme has resulted in much greater tenant involvement in decision making about their homes and also there will be no 4th option for Councils.

Tenant Conference:

The Tenant Conference took place on 27th June 2006 and was attended by 280 tenants, exceeding expectations. She thanked those Members who attended and gave special thanks to the staff who worked so hard in organising the event. Results were very positive from tenants with two thirds voting for a standalone not for profit organisation. The ultimate decision will rest with the Council and it is anticipated being submitted to the July meeting.

The recruitment process for the Shadow Board had commenced with the selection of Council Members already having taken place. An open day for tenants was held the previous evening that was well attended and another sessions will be held on Monday 3 July. The closing date for tenant applications is Friday 7 July 2006. The results will be known in time for the July Council Meeting.

(e) Personnel and Communications

Councillor SCL Westrip reported on the following:

Member Development – Chairing Skills – Members Charter.

HR Policies Update:

- Dismissal and Disciplinary Policy and Procedure on Agenda tonight
- Managing Performance Policy in draft
- Revisions made to Equality Policy in relation to recruitment and employment
- Revisions made to competency framework
- Redundancy and Management of Change Policies been revised and are in draft for consultation
- Amendments to PDP Scheme are being rolled out

Single Status:

- Progressing well in relation to having all posts scale 3 and below evaluated by the end of September in line with single status and equal pay.
- Job Analyst has started with the Council
- All Managers and staff affected have attended briefings
- Trade Union representatives from GMB have been trained and are now actively involved in the process
- A pilot of posts have been job evaluated using the NJC scheme
- Interviews for all other posts to commence next week
- All actions on target

OD Programme:

- Action Learning Sets to be completed by 30 June 2006
- Presentation days on 26 and 27 July 2006
- New group of Inspirers to be trained shortly
- Further assessment days for all Managers in September
- Final day and forward planning in mid October 2006

Employee Survey:

- Reports have been to CMT with recommendations for progressing and a report will be going to Executive in August
- 17 of the 23 having shown an improvement from last year
- An Action plan is being worked on with the inspirers

Investors In People:

- As part of the IRP, one of the key projects is to work towards IIP, with a view to being ready to be assessed against the standard by the end of the year
- One of the Action Learning Sets has been tasked with benchmarking the Council against the standard. This has now been done and an action plan has been put in place to address any shortfalls. 40% of the actions have already been completed ahead of schedule and the action plan is 100% on target

Competency Frameworks:

- Managers competency frameworks have now been developed and issued to all Managers through briefing sessions
- All Managers have now assessed themselves against the competencies and submitted any training and development needs.

30 QUESTIONS TO EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

(a) Councillor JJ Evans advised on a degree of resistance to the car parking charges for the Elton John Concert and requested that the reasons for the level of charges be made available in the future.

Councillor SA Henig commented that few complaints had been received over the level of car park charges but more about the problems of disbursement of vehicles after the concert. He advised that the Council's budget process included an amount of £100,000 from car parking charges at special events, and the charges imposed was not out of line with other on site parking.

The Chief Executive advised that the Director of Development Services was to have a meeting with representatives of the County Cricket Club to formulate an events strategy. He added that Officers were looking at a commercial strategy for use of Box 13 at Riverside.

(b) Councillor LEW Brown enquired of the income from car parking charges at the Elton John Concert and the Cricket One Day International.

The Director of Resources advised that parking fees income for the Elton John Concert was £15,000 but the information in relation to the Cricket International was not to hand. She agreed to provide the Member with the information.

31 ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICE INSPECTION JUDGEMENT

Consideration was given to a report from the Assistant Chief Executive, which advised of the result of the Environmental Service Inspection, by the Audit Commission. The assessment came to the view that the service was a good service with promising prospects of improvement.

The Council RESOLVED:

“1 That receipt of the Audit Commissions Report as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be acknowledged.

2 That the achievement of the service be acknowledged communicated and celebrated.

3 That thanks and appreciation for the staff involved in the delivery of the service be recorded.

4 That the service develop an Improvement Plan to address the recommendations and areas for improvement identified in the judgement, in accordance with proposals in the 2006/2007 Corporate Plan.”

31 APPOINTMENT OF ADDITIONAL PARISH REPRESENTATIVE ON THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Legal and Democratic Services advising that following an invitation to all Parish Councils in the District, two nominations were received for the additional Parish Council representative on the Standards Committee.

The Chairman of the Council drew lots to choose the successful nomination.

The Council RESOLVED:

“That Councillor Mrs Gill Stephenson, nominated by Great Lumley Parish Council, be appointed as additional Parish Council representative on the Standards Committee.”

32 DRAFT GAMBLING ACT 2005 STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

Consideration was given to a report from the Acting Team Leader (Environmental Health) regarding a draft statement of principles developed to implement the requirements of the Gambling Act 2005 and requesting Members to formally adopt a version suitable for public consultation.

The Council RESOLVED:

“That subject to check for typing errors, the version of Draft Statement of Principles for the Gambling Act 2005 appended to the report, be agreed for the public consultation process.”

33 DISCIPLINARY AND DISMISSAL POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Organisational Development seeking approval to revisions to the Council’s Disciplinary and Dismissal Policy and Procedure.

The Council RESOLVED:

“That the revised Disciplinary and Dismissal Policy and Procedure as detailed in the appendix to the report, be approved.”

Councillor DS Meek and the Head of Organisational Development left the meeting at 6.48pm

34 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS FOR 2005/2006

Consideration was given to a report from the Director of Resources seeking approval to the 2005/2006 Statement of Accounts.

Councillor C Carr advised that in accordance with the CIPFA Guidance on Audit Committees in Local Government and their own terms of reference, the Council’s Audit Committee met on Tuesday 27 June 2006 to review the 2005/2006 financial statements.

The review focussed on:

- The suitability and changes in accounting policies and treatments
- Judgements made by Officers in preparing the accounts
- Significant adjustments and material weaknesses in internal control

The Audit Committee sought and received assurance from the Director of Resources, Finance and Accountancy Manager and Risk and Financial Services Manager on:

- Plans to address departmental overspend
- Adequacy of the levels of reserves, including Housing Revenue Account Reserves and the Insurance Fund.
- Budget management procedures for 2006/2007 including processes for reporting financial performance to Overview and Scrutiny Panels
- Action plans in place to manage the trading deficits from Selby Cottage and the outdoor market including the setting of realistic income budgets for 2006/2007
- The carry forward of Capital Programme underspend and that the full revenue implication of capital schemes was taken into account in the

budget setting process i.e. Town Centre Renaissance and culvert works

- Revenue collection and recovery levels
- An explanation was provided on the contingent liabilities and the financial implications for the Council if these issues materialise

Councillor Carr added that the Audit Committee would wish to record their appreciation and congratulations to the Director of Resources, the Finance and Accountancy Management and the Risk and Financial Services Manager on the successful completion of the 2005/2006 accounts, and the frank, honest and helpful way in which they addressed Audit Committee questions.

Councillor SA Henig, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, thanked all staff involved in closing the accounts.

The Council RESOLVED:

“1 That the Statement of Accounts for 2005/2006 be approved, subject to audit.

2 That capital financing for 2005/2006 be determined as detailed in the report.

3 That delegated authority be granted to the Director of Resources, in consultation with the lead Member for Finance, to make any amendments to the Statement which are not material.”

35 STATEMENT OF INTERNAL CONTROL

Consideration was given to a report from the Director of Resources seeking approval to the Statement of Internal Control for 2005/2006.

Councillor Carr advised that the Council’s Audit Committee on 27 June 2006 received the 2005/2006 financial statement also reviewed the Statement of Internal Control.

The Audit Committee sought and received assurance from the Director of Resources and the Risk and Financial Services Manager on:

- An Action Plan to address the significant internal control issues raised in the Statement

The Council RESOLVED:

“That the Statement of Internal Control be approved, subject to audit.”

36 THE UPDATED SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

Consideration was given to a report from the Assistant Chief Executive seeking approval of the updated Sustainable Community Strategy.

The Council RESOLVED:

“1 That the Sustainable Community Strategy for Chester-le-Street, updated for 2006-2016, as detailed on the appendix to the report, be approved.

2 That the integration of strategy priorities into the corporate planning process be supported.

3 That the Officer raise with the Chairman of the Group the matter now raised on Priority 7 relating to mental health.”

37 INFORMATION BOOKLET

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

Minutes of Executive held 5 June 2006
Report of Overview and Scrutiny Management Board held 6 June 2006
Report of Licensing Committee held 7 June 2006
Report of Licensing Statutory Committee held 7 June 2006
Report of Special Licensing Statutory Committee held 13 June 2006
Report of Green Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel held 21 June 2006
Information Bulletin – Human Resources Team
Monthly Planning delegated decisions

The Council RESOLVED:

“That the contents of the Information Booklet be noted.”

38 COMMON SEAL

The Council RESOLVED:

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

Transfer in duplicate relating to 58 Lavender Gardens, Sacriston
Transfer in duplicate relating to land north of 15 Newcastle Road, Chester-le-Street
Transfer in duplicate relating to 12 Myrtles, South Pelaw, Chester-le-Street
Transfer in duplicate relating to land at Cartmel Court, Chester-le-Street”

39 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 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.”

40 APPOINTMENT OF HEAD OF PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Consideration was given to a report from the Director of Community Services seeking approval to the amended financial implications of the organisational changes approved by Council in February 2006.

The Council RESOLVED:

“That the annual additional costs for the Head of Planning and Environmental Health, as detailed in the report, to be funded for the first three years from the Planning Delivery Grant, be approved.”

The meeting terminated at 7.07pm