

EXECUTIVE

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Consett on Monday, 2nd February, 2004 at 4.30 p.m.

Present:

Councillor A. Watson, Chair

Councillors W. Armstrong, Mrs. E.J. Coulson, O. Johnson and M. Malone.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors J. Huntley, D. G. Llewellyn and A. Taylor.

MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held 5 January 2004 were agreed as a correct record.

103. AUDIT 2002/2003 AUDIT AND INSPECTION ANNUAL LETTER

The Chair welcomed to the meeting S. Diggle, Relationship Manager and G. Barker, Audit Manager from the Audit Commission who then proceeded to give a presentation on the Audit and Inspection Annual Letter. In conclusion, G. Barker congratulated the Council on its CPA result and general progress over the year and advised that on the basis of his work:-

- he did not recommend that the Audit Commission should carry out a Best Value Inspection of the Council under Section 10 of the Act.
- He did not recommend that the Secretary of State should give a direction under Section 15 of the Act.

The Chair thanked them for the presentation.

RESOLVED: that the report be received.

104. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2003 LOCAL DISCOUNTS AND EXEMPTIONS

Councillor Coulson presented the report which advised Members of the amendments made by the Local Government Act 2003 to a number of areas of Council Tax legislation. One of the amendments was to allow Billing Authorities to introduce new Discounts and Exemptions and to reduce the statutory ones.

Option: Whether or not to introduce the amendments to changes to Council Tax legislation for:

- (i) discounts for second homes
- (ii) discounts for long term empty properties and
- (iii) locally defined discounts.

RESOLVED: that the Council do not amend the discounts as outlined in the report.

Reasons:

- (1) The amendments allowed in paragraph 2 and 3 of the report look to address specific problems not encountered in Derwentside. In addition, the amount of income generated from these proposals would be marginal with the main beneficiary being the County Council.
- (2) The amendments allowed in Paragraph 4 of the report look to address regular local problems and issues. Any discounts allowed under this scheme must be financed by the District Council. No problems and issues have been identified at this stage.

105. ENTERPRISE PLACE – BUILDING DEVELOPMENT

Councillor Watson presented the report which sought authority for the Council to purchase and then convert a factory building for the specific purpose of establishing a permanent centre for Enterprise Place. Enterprise Place is a unique project that has been established with the aim of enabling young people to learn about entrepreneurial skills and attitudes with the long-term objective of developing a stronger enterprise culture in Derwentside.

Option 1: Negotiate the purchase of a building and carry out conversion works to provide a permanent base for Enterprise Place..

Option 2: Delay the project until Enterprise Place is formed into a limited company and is then in a position to purchase the building and carry out the conversion works itself.

RESOLVED: that the Council negotiate the purchase of a building and carry out conversion works to provide a permanent base for Enterprise Place and carry out the conversion works within the existing approved budget.

Reasons:

- (1) This would enable the project to proceed within the timescale of the approved funding for the project and would give the project a greater chance of success. The risk to the Council is minimal as the property would retain a commercial value and should be capable of being leased back to the market at any stage.
- (2) This will provide the best means of securing the longer-term success of an innovative project that will deliver enormous benefit to local schools and the development of the enterprise curriculum in Derwentside.

106 PROGRESS REPORT ON CCTV MONITORING

Councillor M. Malone presented the report which updated Members on the roll-out of the Council's CCTV initiative, outlined the options available for monitoring the scheme in the future.

Option 1: Extend the Dysart contract.

Option 2: Appointment of External Contractor.

Option 3. In-house provision.

Option 4: Partnership with Chester-le-Street

Councillor Malone highlighted the importance of timing to ensure the CCTV cameras were installed according to the timetable. He also commented that it was essential that once installed the cameras were monitored to ensure they were used as a reliable detection tool. Councillor Watson supported this view and added that the Police needed to ensure that there was operational support to enable them to respond to incidents on CCTV. Councillor Malone advised that the police were arranging education and training to enable Officers to make the most effective use of CCTV. Councillor Watson suggested that once all the cameras were in place the Council issue a press release to publicise the CCTV system.

RESOLVED:

- (1) Further detailed negotiations be carried out with Dysart Ltd. With a view to extending their CCTV monitoring service for the Council on the understanding that the issues set out in Section 4 of the report are addressed as part of this process.
- (2) Should progress not be made with Dysart Ltd. The second option to monitor the Council's CCTV cameras would be through use of an

external contractor based in Consett Police Station.

- (3) A further report be presented to Executive prior to the agreement of any contract, with a detailed breakdown of costs attributable to the project.

Reasons:

- (1) This is a low risk option with a contractor that has already successfully operated CCTV for the Council for the last 7 years and the costs detailed in Appendix A are the lowest of the 4 options. However, it was acknowledged that further work was required to determine the terms of a revised contract as well as the detailed transitional costs associated with a move to a single system.

107. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: on the motion of Councillor W. Armstrong seconded by Councillor E.J. Coulson that under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972: the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12(A) of the Act (as amended).

Not for publication by virtue of Paragraph 1.

108. BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT COMPLEX – FUTURE OPERATION

Councillor Watson presented the report which sought agreement to modify the operation and marketing of the Council's Business Development Complex, following the completion of a third Business Centre at Consett Business Park.

Option: 1: To operate the extended Business Development Complex without extended staff roles/capacity. The Council has contractual obligations to:

- Operate the new Business Centre and
- Deliver office support services to existing tenants.

Option: 2: To extend staff roles/capacity to meet the operating requirements of an extended Business Development Complex.

RESOLVED that Option 2 be agreed, to extend staff roles/capacity to meet the operating requirements of an extended Business Development Complex.

Reason:

This will provide the best means of maintaining/improving services to meet the operating needs of the extended Business Development Complex and the generation of investment and jobs within Derwentside.

109 2004 - 2005 GENERAL FUND DRAFT BUDGET

Not for publication by virtue of Paragraph 8.

Councillor Watson presented the report, the purpose of which was to inform Members of progress in developing the General Fund Budget for 2004 – 2005. This included consideration of all additional bids and details of proposals designed to reduce the base budget to the required level, in particular, he highlighted the recommendations in the report regarding contributions to the Citizens Advice Bureau and Parish Precepts.

Turning to the situation regarding Festivals, Councillor Watson proposed an additional Option for Members to consider, whether or not to reserve money from balances for Stanley Blues and Allensford Festivals. The Executive Director advised that Scrutiny Board had raised questions regarding whether there was Council support of the continuation of Festivals within Derwentside. He reminded Members that Scrutiny had requested that a Festivals Working Group be formed to investigate avenues of funding for Festivals and Members agreed that they wished the Working Group to continue to look for opportunities to minimise the Festivals budget.

Councillor Malone was concerned that the savings highlighted in the report may not materialise. In response, the Director of Finance advised that the figures used were based on current and forecast trends. However, checking systems will be put in place to ensure Councillors can monitor and control the situation.

Option 1: Whether or not to agree to the recommendations in the report designed to reduce the base budget to the required level.

Option 2: Whether or not to agree to reserve £25,000 for Stanley Blues Festival and £25,000 for Allensford Festival from balances.

RESOLVED: that:-

- (1) Members agree the acceptance of the recommended additional bids totalling £726,660 as per Appendix 2.
- (2) Members confirmed the funding of contributions to the Citizens Advice Bureau and Parish Precepts as follows:-
 - To fund the contribution to CAB (£50,000) from the Corporate Development Reserve for 2004 – 2005 to allow a longer term strategy to be considered for future years.
 - To fund the contribution to Parish Precepts (£24,000) from general reserves for 2004 – 2005 whilst the longer term positions for 2005 – 2006 and beyond is considered.
- (3) The strategy to reduce the base budget using the strategy summarised on Appendix 3 be confirmed.
- (4) Confirm that the Executive Director may use extended delegated powers in managing the workforce to ensure that the £100,000 salary savings does not impact on services, and that operational integrity is maintained.
- (5) That £25,000 be reserved from balances for Stanley Blues Festival and £25,000 from balances for the Allensford Festival.

Reasons:

The Local Government Act 2003 requires an authority's Chief Finance Officer to make a report to the authority when it is considering its budget and Council Tax. The report must deal with the robustness of the estimates and the adequacy of the reserves allowed for in the budget proposals, so Members will have authoritative advice available to them when they make their decision.

CONCLUSION OF MEETING

The Meeting closed at 5.25 p.m.

Chair.