

EXECUTIVE

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Consett on Monday 6 December 2004 at 4.30 pm.

PRESENT

Councillor A. Watson, Chair

Councillors C.D. Christer, J. Huntley, O. Johnson,
D.G. Llewellyn, M.J. Malone and A. Taylor

IN ATTENDANCE

Councillors J. Pickersgill, W.J. Tyrie and G Barker, Audit Manager.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor W Armstrong.

82. REVIEW OF SCRUTINY BOARD DEBATE

A list of items discussed at Scrutiny Board was presented, the Chair advised that the comments would be referred to as each agenda item was discussed.

83. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Executive held 8 November 2004 be agreed as a correct record.

84. MATTERS ARISING

Councillor Huntley requested an update regarding Minute Number 78, Temporary Relocation of Psychiatric Intensive Care Services from Durham City to Darlington. In response the Director of Corporate, Admin and Policy advised that following the last Executive meeting he had written to the Priority Trust requesting clarification regarding the conditions the Health Scrutiny Panel had requested. The Priority Trust had responded with a holding response, if a full response was not received shortly, the Director would re-write and ask for confirmation of the requested conditions.

85. AUDIT AND INSPECTION PLAN 2004/2005

The Chair introduced G Barker of District Audit who proceeded to present the report on the Audit and Inspection Plan 2004/2005 for the Council, as developed by the Audit Commission. The report also requested agreement to the associated fee of £132,103 (£102,948 for Audit / Inspection and £29,155 for grant claim certification) for this work.

Each year the Council is externally audited and inspected. The plan had been jointly developed with the Audit Commission and if approved, would result in an overall reduction in the Council's audit and inspection costs of £12,775 compared to 2003/2004. This reduction was a result of the risk based approach to audit planning taken by the Audit Commission, which basically means the more a Council improves, the less risks they face and the amount of inspection / audit required reduces.

In conclusion G Barker advised that the Best Value Performance Plan had been given an unqualified opinion. He also advised that he would no longer be Derwentside's Auditor and District Audit would advise us of his replacement in the near future. He thanked the Members and Officers of the Council for the respect and good working relationship that had had enjoyed while working with the Council.

Councillor Watson thanked G Barker for presenting the report and commented that Officers and Members were very satisfied with the unqualified opinion. He also requested that congratulations be recorded to both District Audit and the Council's Officers for achieving the significant reduction in fees.

Option: Whether to accept, reject or amend the Audit Plan

RESOLVED: That the Audit and Inspection Plan 2004/2005 be approved, the financial provision for which had been made within the Council's 2004/2005 budget.

Reason: To comply with statute.

86. FESTIVALS

Councillor Taylor presented a report which had been considered by the Strong Communities Scrutiny Panel on 12 October 2004 and Members were also asked to consider the recommendations of the Scrutiny Panel as contained in the minutes of the aforementioned meeting.

Scrutiny Board had raised concerns and suggested that a detailed agreement was required with Northern Recording on future commitment to the Stanley Blues Festival before any decision was taken.

Councillor Watson reminded Members that the Strong Communities Scrutiny Panel had been charged with looking at options for the future of festivals. He

also commented that the offer from Northern Recording was an opportunity for the future of the Stanley Blues Festival.

Options: Whether to agree, reject or amend the recommendations of the Strong Communities Scrutiny Panel regarding Festivals.

RESOLVED: That Members agree in principle to outsource the Stanley Blues Festival and allow officers to continue to negotiate a single legacy payment with Northern Recording, subject to a commitment to sustain the festival in future years and a detailed financial agreement which will be reported as part of the budget process for next financial year.

Reason: To sustain the Stanley Blues Festival in future years.

87. CORPORATE COMMUNITY SAFETY PLAN

Councillor Christer presented the report, which advised of the Council's activities in tackling crime and disorder in the district during the year 2003/04 using the key performance indicators identified in the corporate Community Safety Plan.

Scrutiny Board had requested that the Director of Housing and Capital Works to investigate reports of recent visits to tenants in relation to gas and electrical inspections by sub-contractors without arranging prior appointments and without producing identification.

Option: Whether or not to develop the Plan as detailed in the report.

RESOLVED: That the report is noted and the Plan be developed as indicated in the report.

Reasons:

1. The Council has a statutory duty under S.17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to examine all its functions to identify how they can contribute to reducing crime and disorder.
2. To contribute effectively to the Council's corporate aim of working with others to make Derwentside a safer place in which to live and work.
3. To ensure that the process accords with the Council's corporate and performance management framework.
4. To address identified weaknesses in monitoring both the performance of the strategy at a corporate level, and the council's response to its obligations under S.17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

88. STANLEY TOWN CENTRE – CORE RETAIL AREA STUDY UPDATE

Councillor Llewellyn presented the report which provided an update on the Stanley Core Retail Area study (CRA) commissioned in August 2003 with Consultants RPS and DTZ Peda.

Scrutiny Board had commented that the plan attached as Appendix B to the report was for indicative purposes only and that acceptance of the proposals did not commit the Council to any funding at this stage.

Options:

1. Accept the paper and its defined agenda for change. Therefore allowing for the Council to adopt the report into appropriate planning policies and giving permission for a phased plan to be put in place, which gives the best chance for achieving change in Stanley CRA.
2. Reject the report and feedback at this stage and ask for further consultation to take place before any further action is taken.

RESOLVED: That the paper and its defined agenda for change be approved allowing for the Council to adopt the report into appropriate planning policies and giving permission for a phased plan to be put in place, which gives the best chance for achieving change in Stanley CRA.

Reason: To progress the regeneration of Stanley Town Centre within agreed timescales.

89. COURT COSTS

Councillor Huntley presented the report which sought Member's approval to increase the amount of court costs for obtaining a liability order for unpaid Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates from £30.70 to £35.00 from 1 April 2005. It was noted that the costs were last increased in 1997. In order to review the level of court costs and come to an acceptable amount, contact was made with neighbouring Councils in Durham, the average level for court costs for all six councils was £36.83.

Option: Whether or not to increase court costs as detailed in the report.

RESOLVED: That the court costs be increased from £30.70 to £35.00 from 1 April 2005.

Reasons:

1. It was anticipated that increasing the impact of court costs would further encourage payment of amounts outstanding as part of the overall approach to increasing collection rates. It will also contribute to the costs currently incurred by the authority in collating information and pursuing collection of taxes.

90. COUNTY WIDE COMMISSIONING, DECISION MAKING AND ADMINISTRATION ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE SUPPORTING PEOPLE PROGRAMME

Councillor Christer presented the report which made recommendations for approval of the proposed commissioning, decision making and administration arrangements for the Durham and Districts Supporting People Partnership as detailed in the County Durham and Districts Supporting People Partnership “Framework for commissioning, decision making and administration” document.

Scrutiny Board had in accepting the proposals believed that the framework outlined to be unwieldy and bureaucratic.

Councillor Huntley commented that she was disappointed that most of the new projects under this programme had not been sustained and she wished to convey this disappointment to the ODPM. The Supported Housing Manager advised that a Cross Commissioning Body meeting was being held the following day and these concerns would be reported.

Options: Whether to accept, reject or amend the proposed framework.

RESOLVED:

1. That the commissioning, decision making and administration arrangements as detailed in the document “County Durham and District Supporting People Partnership Framework for Commissioning, Decision Making and Administration” be approved.
2. That the Durham and District Supporting People Partnership robustly review the proposed arrangements and ensure that concerns raised in section 4.2 of the report are fully addressed.
3. That named representatives should attend Commissioning Body, Core Strategy Group and Cross Authority Members Group meetings and that named deputies should also be identified to ensure attendance at all meetings.
4. That performance of the programme, as well as any partner agency concerns, should be raised at the Chief Officer Group.

Reasons: All partner agencies of the Supporting People Programme. Including Derwentside District Council, have been fully consulted on the development framework. The framework provides clarity in relation to commissioning, decision making and administration of the Programme. The proposals are viewed by partners as practicable within the context of existing local arrangements, and importantly have been formally approved by the Commissioning Body as meeting Central Government requirements.

91. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: on the motion of Councillor Taylor seconded by Councillor Llewellyn 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 Schedule 12(A) of the Local Government Act 1972.

In accordance with the provisions of Section 94 of the Local Government Act 1972 and Standing Order Number 33, Councillor Johnson declared an interest in the following matter, left the Chamber and took no part in the discussion and voting thereon.

92. GROUNDWORK WEST DURHAM: A REQUEST TO CASHFLOW “THE GREENHOUSE” BUSINESS CENTRE

(Not for publication by virtue of Paragraph 1)

Councillor Llewellyn presented the report which requested Members to consider a request from Groundwork West Durham for the Council to provide cash-flow facilities for the construction of “The Greenhouse Business Centre” at Greencroft Industrial Park.

Options:

1. Refuse to provide any cash flow facilities for the Greenhouse project.
2. Provide £300,000 cash flow facility for the full construction period of twelve months as requested for the Greenhouse Project.
3. Provide a staged cash flow facility for the Greenhouse Project from a minimum of £100,000 up to a maximum of £300,000, subject to satisfactory progress of the project.

RESOLVED: That a staged cash flow facility for the Greenhouse Project be agreed from a minimum of £100,000 up to a maximum of £300,000 subject to satisfactory progress of the project and provided:

- All Single Programme and ERDF funding is confirmed;
- An additional £500,000 cash flow facility is confirmed;
- The cash-flow facility from the Council is secured;
- The Council has full access to all contract and financial documentation for the project; and
- The completion of the PCT office lease is confirmed.

Reasons:

1. The Council has an opportunity to help a Partner organisation deliver substantial economic benefit to the area and address a clear corporate objective to provide additional modern business floor space in Derwentside.
2. The refusal to provide a cash flow facility for the project is likely to result in the project not proceeding and the investment being lost to the District.

3. The Council has a clear opportunity to help deliver this investment at a relatively low level of risk and financial burden.

Councillor Johnson returned to the meeting at this point.

93. DISPOSAL OF HOUSING SITES IN LANGLEY PARK TO NOMAD HOUSING GROUP – PHASE 2

(Not for publication by virtue of Paragraph 9)

Councillor Christer presented the report which sought approval for the disposal of 2 housing sites in the Park Close and Esh Hillside area of Langley Park to Nomad Housing Group to enable the provision of 13 units to rent – a mixture of 2, three and four bedroom family houses.

Options:

1. The disposal of building plots in Park Close and Esh Hillside to Nomad Housing Group for redevelopment with 13 units to rent.
2. To dispose of the site for private development

RESOLVED: The disposal of building plots in Park Close and Esh Hillside to Nomad Housing Group for redevelopment with 13 three-bedroom properties as determined by the Valuation Officer - £185,000.

Reasons:

1. By approving this provision of affordable rented accommodation within the Park Close / Esh Hillside area, it enables the future marketing of the adjacent Hilltop View Estate to be earmarked for private development, which will potentially maximise the capital receipt from the sale of the land.
2. This scheme should not be considered in isolation but in the wider context of the Council's role of not only social housing provider, but also that of enabler. This provision of this affordable accommodation will assist with increased demand within the village.
3. This development realises the potential of these sites which have lain in disuse since the 1990's and in so doing meets the council's corporate aims *"that the Council should work with others to make Derwentside . . . a place with strong cohesive communities . . . an attractive sustainable environment"*.

CONCLUSION OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 5.27 p.m.

