

EXECUTIVE

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Consett on Monday, 6th June 2005 at 4.30 pm.

PRESENT

Councillor A. Watson, Chair

Councillors J. Huntley, D.G. Llewellyn, M.J. Malone, A. Taylor and W. Armstrong.

IN ATTENDANCE

Councillors J.I. Agnew and W.J. Tyrie.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors C. Christer and O. Johnson.

6. REVIEW OF SCRUTINY BOARD DEBATE

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

7. MINUTES – 9th MAY 2005

The minutes of the meeting held on 9th May 2005 were agreed as a correct record.

8. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

The Director of Environmental Services referred to Minute Number 158 **(UPDATE ON DANGEROUS HEADSTONES WITHIN CLOSED CHURCHYARDS)** and advised that an initial response had been received from the Diocese requesting that an advertisement be placed in the press. A response and authorisation to proceed was still awaited from the Chancellor of the Diocese.

Councillor Huntley referred to Minute Number 159 **(STEELHAVEN)** and commented that she was concerned over the answer given at the last meeting regarding her specific question about when the decision had been taken on funding for Steelhaven. She had read the minutes of the meetings referred to and had not been satisfied with this information.

In response, the Director of Housing and Capital Works advised he will investigate and provide a written response to Councillor Huntley.

Councillor Malone also referred to Minute Number 159 and raised the response he had received regarding the sprinkler system. He advised that he

could find no evidence in reports or minutes that request for a sprinkler system to be installed at Steelhaven had been discussed. He felt it was an important point that Members should have had the opportunity to debate this issue and decide whether or not to install the system. Discussion took place on the meetings held with the Consultants for the project and the consultation process with the Fire Authority, the Executive Director advised that this raised a series of issues which he would ask the Director of Housing and Capital Works to investigate and produce a written response to Members. The Director of Housing and Capital Works advised that costings for the possible retrospective fit of a sprinkler system were in progress.

9. GARDENING SERVICE – UPDATE, EVALUATION AND FUTURE OPTIONS

Councillor Watson presented the report which reviewed the current gardening service for vulnerable tenants and suggested options for the future of the service.

The comments of Scrutiny Board were considered, these included wishing to see the scheme expanded and suggesting a small/nominal charge for the service. Reference was also made to waiting lists and the need to facilitate services to 300 premises. It was also suggested that this issue be considered by Scrutiny and then Executive. In response, the Director of Housing and Capital Works suggested that a decision to continue the scheme was required, however, Scrutiny would look at best value issues and the likely affect on the tendering process. Councillors had also questioned whether the proposals for a new Housing Company would continue to provide the gardening service and were advised that this could form part of the negotiations in any transfer arrangements. Concerns were raised regarding the exclusion of private sector dwellings. Councillors also commented that the Leadgate Partnership pilot gardening scheme was now coming to an end. Scrutiny Board requested that the Executive confirm continuation of the current scheme for Council tenants as Option 1 in the report.

Councillor Malone commented that he fully supported the report and he would also like to see this service extended to non-Council tenants, he also queried the figures at Paragraph 3.3.1.

In response the District Operations Manager advised that the figures quoted in 3.1 should be amended to read Supervision @ £155x52 ÷ 2. This was to reflect the situation that only one supervisor was required for the two teams.

Councillor Malone also commented on the details in the report and suggested that if the service was to be subject to the tender process he wanted to ensure that the details of what was included in the service, the specification details and the measurement of gardens was carried out accurately.

Councillor Taylor commented that she would like to see the scheme extended to non-Council tenants.

In response, the Executive Director advised that currently the scheme was funded via the Housing Revenue Account and if Members wished to extend

the scheme to the private sector funding would be required from a different source and suggested that a separate debate would be required if Members wished to pursue this issue.

The Director of Finance advised that Members would also need to decide on any charging system for private sector customers and as this may depend on size and type of gardens the system could be complex to administer.

Options:

1. For the service to continue to operate with two permanent gardeners and 2 temporary gardeners (operating during the Summer season).
2. As Option 1 above, but a weekly charge be levied to part fund the service.
3. No longer provide the service.

RESOLVED: that:-

- (1) in the report be accepted (detailed below) and the service continues to be provided at its current level with a waiting list in conjunction with the Leadgate Partnership. The service will be provided free of charge.

Option 1: For the service to continue to operate as it is at present, with two permanent gardeners and two temporary gardeners (operating during the summer season). Work to be carried out to as many properties as is possible within capacity and with the assistance of the Leadgate Partnership who will carry out works to properties in their area. The service is provided free to all those qualifying and the waiting list maintained in date order and new applicants accepted onto the service when spaces become available.

- (2) A tendering process be instigated regarding the provision of the service in future years.

Reasons:

- (1) The service is provided in-line with the Housing Management Service Objectives:
 - To provide support services to those who are vulnerable. To ensure high quality tenancy management with improved estates environment.
- (2) And the Corporate Aims and Objectives to:-
 - “Provide attractive sustainable environment” and “improve support services to older people”.

10. SPICE SMARTCARD REWARDS SCHEME

Councillor Taylor presented the report which sought approval for the extension of the Spice Smartcard Rewards Scheme for the schools listed in Appendix II and subject to County Council financial support for the three years of the extended pilot. The original SPICE Smartcard rewards scheme was a pilot which ran for the school year 2003-2004. Fifteen schools had

participated in NRF targeted areas and three thousand school children were given smartcards as part of a reward scheme to improve attendance, attainment and healthy eating.

Councillor Taylor advised that first year funding from the LEA was confirmed. At present, the Council had received a verbal commitment from the LEA Chief Inspector that he would try to identify the funds for years 2 and 3.

Councillor Watson expressed his disappointment that Durham County Council had not yet confirmed in writing their long-term commitment to the project and a formal request had been made to the County Council's Chief Executive seeking such an assurance.

Councillor Huntley commented that she was also disappointed that Durham County Council and the PCT had not confirmed any funding for the project.

Considerable debate took place on whether the Council could afford to fund the project without the support of the County Council and other partners. The Director of Corporate Administration and Policy advised that the proposals in the report were for the 31 schools in the report only. It was pointed out that there would also be additional cost implications if other schools wished to join the project.

Following the debate Councillors suggested a fourth option that the District Council fund the scheme for Year 1 of the project and if written commitment to the project does not come from Durham County Council the scheme will end at Summer 2006.

Options:

- (1) Not to continue the project.
- (2) Whether to roll out the project to the 31 schools with District Council money for three years, irrespective of whether funding is secured for year 2 and 3 from other partner organisations.
- (3) Implement the initiative to the 31 schools who have confirmed their participation and their commitment to contribute £2 per pupil per year as part funding for the initiative, subject to Durham County Council funding for Years 2 and 3 of the scheme.
- (4) The District Council fund the SPICE Smartcard Rewards Scheme for Year 1 of the project and if written commitment to the project does not come from Durham County Council the scheme will end at Summer 2006.

RESOLVED: that:-

- (1) the District Council fund the SPICE Smartcard Rewards Scheme for Year 1 of the project and if written commitment to the project does not come from Durham County Council the scheme will end at Summer 2006.

Reason: Unless commitment for funding is received from Durham County Council, the District Council does not have the

financial resources to fund the three years of the extended pilot.

11. CORPORATE PLAN 2005-2006 – 1ST DRAFT

Councillor Armstrong presented the report which requested that the Executive consider the first draft of the Council's Corporate Plan for 2005-2006. The importance of the Corporate Plan is a prerequisite in undergoing successful inspections, audits and other relevant external examinations.

Options: Whether to reject, amend or agree the first draft of the Council's Corporate Plan for 2005-2006.

RESOLVED: that the report on the Corporate Plan 2005-2006 be noted.

Reason: The importance of having a Corporate Plan has been embedded in the Council's culture and guides the Council's thinking, policy development, budgeting and management of performance.

RESOLVED: on the motion of Councillor W Armstrong seconded by Councillor D.G. 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 Paragraphs 1, 5, 7, 8 and 9 of schedule 12(A) of the Local Government Act 1972.

12. CONTINUED DEVELOPMENT OF THE PAINT ONLY PARTNERSHIPS

Councillor Armstrong presented the report which sought approval for the continued development of the existing external decoration "Paint Only Partnerships". It was proposed that the Partnerships would be extended for one further year, i.e. 2005-2006 with the current partners.

Councillor Malone raised the issue of the affect of the proposals in the report on issues such as LSVT and Gershon. He suggested that in future all reports include a 'priority box' or type of standard template which advised Members on how the report would impact on issues such as LSVT and Gershon.

The Director of Finance advised that the proposals in the report were considered the best route at this point in time and he was satisfied that the suspension of Financial Regulations would be a valid option in this instance. It would also enable the results of the LSVT process to be known prior to the process of going through the tender procedure.

Options:

- (1) Require the works to be tendered.
- (2) Seek authorisation to suspend Financial Regulations as allowed under the Council's Standing Orders and to extend the contract until 31 March 2006.

RESOLVED: that:-

- (1) Authorisation be granted to suspend Financial Regulations as allowed under the Council's Standing Orders and to extend the contract until 31 March 2006.

Reason: This would allow full consideration to be given to the development of existing partnerships, to provide the foundation on which to build future partnerships, the implementation of efficiency savings and any changes arising from the transfer of the Council's Housing Stock.

**13 DERWENTSIDE CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU –
FUTURE FUNDING**

Councillor Watson presented the report which advised of a review of the annual revenue contribution to the Derwentside Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) as part of the 2005/06 budget setting process. The report outlined the results of that review and asked Members to determine whether to retain a contribution to CAB within the General Fund budget and if so, the level and terms which should be attached to this contribution. `

Scrutiny Board had requested the opportunity to look at the operation of CAB and the Executive Director had advised that the report recommended future service requirements, performance management, SLA's etc would be issues for Scrutiny, this could include presentation by CAB to the Scrutiny Panel.

Options:

- (1) Seek to terminate the Council's funding contribution.
- (2) Maintain a contribution to CAB at the current level.
- (3) Maintain a contribution to CAB at the current level and require further consideration to be given to development of a funding and service-level agreement.
- (4) Increase the funding contribution to CAB.

RESOLVED: that:-

- (1) The Council maintain a contribution to CAB at the current level and require further consideration to be given to development of a funding and service-level agreement.

Reasons: To enable CAB to continue to operate with a set level of Council contribution whilst, at the same time, allow for consideration to be given to issues of:-

- future service and funding requirements;
- performance measurement;
- funding sources and efficiency options; and
- the potential for a longer-term funding agreement.

14. SUSTAINING BEACON SERVICES FOR NEW BUSINESSES

Councillor Llewellyn presented the report which set out proposals to mainstream and sustain services that were key to the Council being awarded Beacon Status for Supporting New Businesses. Derwentside is one of only four authorities that had been awarded Beacon Status for Supporting New Businesses. The award recognised that a high priority continues to be given to the creation/development of good quality businesses and jobs in Derwentside within both the Derwentside Economic Development Strategy and the Council's Corporate Plan.

Options:-

1. To maintain the fixed-term nature of the Emerge Project and the Economic Development Marketing Officer post.
2. To mainstream the Emerge Project and the Economic Development Marketing Officer post.

RESOLVED: that:-

- (1) Option 2 in the report be agreed:-

To mainstream the Emerge Project and the Economic Development Marketing Officer post and that:

- (2) The post of Emerge Business Start-up Advisor be added to the Council's permanent establishment;
- (3) The current Financial Incentives budget is increased by £36,000 per annum; and
- (4) The post of Economic Development Marketing Officer be added to the Council's permanent establishment.

Reasons:

- (1) Enable the sustainability of the:
 - Successful Beacon-recognised pilot projects;
 - Increased levels of investment enquiries being generated;
 - Increased levels of new business start-ups and job creation being achieved; and
 - Improved letting rate of new business units.
- (2) To enable the Council to be in a position to successfully plan, develop and let the next phases of modern business property within the District.

15 MECHANICAL AND ELECTRICAL MAINTENANCE CONTRACT

Councillor Huntley presented the report which related to the Mechanical and Electrical Maintenance Contract for the Council's Public Buildings, Sheltered Housing and Neighbourhood Housing Offices.

Options:

- (1) Allow the tender to be advertised in its current format to commence with effect from 1 October 2005.
- (2) Suspend Financial Regulations as allowed under the Councils Standing Orders to extend the contract until 31 March 2006.

Councillor Malone raised a general point regarding contracts and suggested that to give Members plenty of opportunity to make decisions on options for renewal of contracts, officers produce a matrix listing the Council's contracts, date commenced and date the contract ends.

RESOLVED; that the Council's Financial Regulations are suspended to allow the existing Mechanical and Electrical Maintenance Contract with Norstead to be extended until 31st March 2006.

Reasons:

- (1) Allows the Council the opportunity to implement efficiency savings as required under the Governments efficiency targets.
- (2) It enables further consideration of the organisational changes facing the Council.
- (3) It ensures that the market is fully tested.
- (4) The Director of Finance was satisfied that this would be a valid option in this instance.

CONCLUSION OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 6.40 pm

Chair.