

EXECUTIVE

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Consett on 24th July 2006 at 4.30 pm.

PRESENT

Councillor A. Watson, Chair

Councillors W. Armstrong, C.D. Christer, J.Huntley, O.Johnson, D.G. Llewellyn and M. Malone.

IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor W. Tyrie.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor A. Taylor

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chair advised that Councillor A. Taylor was now out of hospital and all at the meeting wished her a speedy recovery.

The Chair advised the following changes to the order of the Agenda:
Item 6 – View Lane Park, Stanley would be taken in the public part of the agenda after Item 4. Item 9 would be taken after Item 7.

28. 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. A copy of the notes of the Board meeting held 21st July are attached for information (Appendix 'A').

29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with provisions of Section 94 of the Local Government Act 1972 and Standing Order Number 33 the following declarations were made:

Councillor C. Christer declared an interest in Items 5, 8 and 9 on the Agenda.
Councillor D. Llewellyn declared in interest in Items 5, 8 and 9 on the Agenda.

30. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held 10th July were agreed as a correct record:

Matters Arising

(i) Minute Number 17 – The Craghead Area Development Framework

Since the last meeting of the Executive some community concern over the Council's interim proposals contained within the bid for funding had been created as a consequence of mis-reporting in the press and the lack of awareness of the issues by ward councillors. Whilst ward councillors and others had been invited to the three consultation events held in advance of the bid document being produced, these issues needed clarity, particularly with regard to demolition. As a result the Executive decided to forward a letter to all residents in the affected wards explaining the nature of the bid and the potential for small scale demolition.

The Executive also wanted to record that all the Ward Councillors had been invited to participate in this process and some had attended steering group meetings.

(ii) Minute Number 21: Equipped Play Area Strategy

Since the last meeting some confusion had arisen over this issue and this needed to be clarified. At its meeting on the 10th July, the Executive had decided that a further report would be provided to Executive identifying the potential cost of providing equipped play areas comparable with those which had already been provided by the Council as part of the Play Area Strategy, enabling Executive at a future meeting to identify budget levels and ensure effective procurement. It had not been the intention to allocate £40,000 to each play area.

31. YOUTH ENGAGEMENT BEACON YEAR – REQUEST FOR CONTINUED SUPPORT FOR THE SPICETACULAR AND YOUTH BUS PROJECT

Councillor Watson presented the report which sought approval for continued funding for the SPICETACULAR and Youth Bus projects during this Beacon Year for Youth Engagement. As outlined in the report both projects had been successful in securing substantial external resources, and in the case of the SPICETACULAR project, these were in excess of the target set by Executive in June 2005. It was recognised that the projects should be subject to a full and comprehensive evaluation, therefore, the report also recommended that an element of the Beacon Dissemination funding, which the Council secured as a consequence of the Beacon Award, should be utilised to carry out this analysis. The findings of the evaluation could then be used to not only disseminate lessons to other authorities, but also allow Members and partner agencies to take a considered long term approach to the project.

Councillor Malone commented that budget bids had already been through the recognised process and was concerned that pressure was now being placed on Executive Members to approve the bid. He expressed the view that there was a need to re-examine how the bids had been constructed as there had been little support through the established process and that there was already pressure on the General Fund Reserves. Overall, he was concerned that there was little evidence of evaluation of the projects to enable Members to determine whether the projects were value for money. Although there was some empirical evidence for the SPICETACULAR project provided by the support of local schools. He recognised that a Beacon Status had been achieved for the Youth Projects however, he believed that an independent evaluation of the scheme was needed to enable Members to take a considered view as to whether they considered it appropriate to continue funding these projects in the future.

The Director of Finance advised that the bid was not to mainstream either the projects, he also advised that there would be associated financial costs if the projects were not to continue.

Councillor Johnson agreed with the comments of Councillor Malone, he then raised questions regarding the reference at paragraph 5.3 in the report regarding the scope for greater use of the bus by other elements of the council and the potential for greater collaboration with other authorities. In response the Director of Corporate Administration and Policy advised that a full programme of events had been arranged for the bus during the school summer holidays and that the remainder of the year it was utilised approximately 4 days per week. However, he advised that requests had been received from other departments regarding use of the bus and these could be considered, but there would be personnel implication given the need for training prior to additional employees being allowed to drive the bus.

He advised that in addition to working on the bus, there was a number of office based administration, planning / organising duties associated with providing the youth bus which took up the remainder of the workers time. As for the potential for joint work, the Director explained that similar bus schemes operated in Chester-le-Street and Durham, both of which have similar funding issues to the Derwentside scheme. Consequently, it was considered that the potential to share costs for a joint scheme should be examined alongside the evaluation report.

Councillor Huntley concurred with the comments of Councillors Malone and Johnson on this issue. It was recognised that these projects had received a significant amount of praise from community and partners, however, there was a need for an independent evaluation of the projects in order to validate their contribution to the Corporate Plan and to avoid dispute with regard to their merit in future years when resource allocation decisions are needed as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan review. Following discussion it was suggested that Scrutiny be requested to lead on the evaluation process and also that further reports be provided for scrutiny in the autumn cycle of meetings reviewing performance and value for money criteria.

The Chair referred Members to the notes of Scrutiny Board held 21st July (attached as Appendix 'A')

Options: Whether to agree, amend or reject the proposals in the report for funding of the SPICETACULAR and Youth Bus projects.

RESOLVED:

1. That the funding for the SPICETAULAR and Youth Bus projects as set out in Sections 3 and 4 of the report be agreed.
2. That an evaluation of the SPICETACULAR and Youth Bus projects be led by Scrutiny.

Reasons:

1. To support the Council's approach to engaging children and young people.
2. To ensure that Members have an overview of these projects and their current contributions to both the council and our stakeholders' service activities.

32. VIEW LANE PARK, STANLEY

Councillor J Huntley presented the report which sought Members views in respect of a proposed disposal of land forming part of the public open space

situate at View Lane Park, Stanley. She advised that the conclusions to the report be deleted and that the issue be a one for Member decision.

The report detailed representations received as a result of the statutory consultation process a summary of which is given below:

- 359 name petition objecting to the loss of the park had been received – (of these 6 had no address and 6 did not live in Stanley),
- 8 other objection letters were also received.
- 51 letters of support were received (44 of these supporters came from Stanley and 6 have no address)

Councillor Huntley then referred to a mis-leading statement which had appeared in the local press regarding the proposals and she also commented that many of the letters in support had mentioned that the proposals were for a residential care home for people with Autism and she requested that officers clarify this issue. In response the Executive Director advised that the sale of the land would clearly state that the proposal was for a health care unit for adults with learning difficulties including Autism.

Councillor Huntley made reference to the disposal price being reduced by abnormal costs. The Divisional Head of Land and Property advised that this was standard for an option of this nature and that Mistal Homes would be carrying out site investigations to assess the suitability of the site for the development proposed. If as a result of their investigations, abnormal ground conditions were discovered, which meant their costs of development would increase ,then further negotiations would be undertaken to assess whether a reduction in purchase price was warranted".

Discussion took place regarding the Capital Receipt for the sale and it was noted that this would form part of the Council's Capital Programme. Officers would be instructed to work up costs for improvements to the park to ensure that the programme of works would not exceed the Capital Receipt.

Councillor Huntley asked questions on how extensive the search had been for lottery funding and in response the Acting Head of Leisure advised that a funding bid for View Lane Park was submitted in 2003 to the Liveability Fund, administered by the then Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. This was a joint bid with Sedgefield Borough Council and Teesdale District Council for some £3.1 million split between the three authorities. This bid was unsuccessful, but it did recommend a potential submission to the Heritage Lottery Fund. A number of approaches were made to the Heritage Lottery Fund including a meeting with them on site. They had advised, however, that the perceived heritage value of the park did not merit a full feasibility study as funding was extremely unlikely, and that any subsequent application was likely to fail. Councillor Lewellyn asked whether officers would try again for lottery funding in response the Head of

Leisure advised that there were a limited number of funds for ground work and less opportunities for local authority's to apply. There was always the possibility that Heritage lottery would change the criteria and there may be opportunities for funding in future.

Councillor Watson advised that a letter of objection had been received from Councillor K Howe, Havannah Ward. Councillor Watson commented that the letter also contained comments which may be considered by a future Development Control Committee. He therefore declared an interest, left the meeting and took no part in the decision made.

Prior to the letter being read out the Executive Director advised Members not to comment on any Development Control Issues contained in the letter.

Councillor Malone proceeded to read aloud an objection letter from Councillor K Howe, omitting references to planning matters.

The Solicitor then advised Members of the issues they should consider including whether or not the open space was required for that purpose bearing in mind the existing provision within that area and the district. Councillor Malone questioned whether there was a recognised scientific formula to base this decision on. It was noted that £420,000 is being invested in the Oakey site in Stanley and that a large open space existed on the Kings Head site and that other recreational space existed such as the Memorial Park in South Moor. In addition the Director of Environmental Services and the Head of Leisure advised that in their professional opinion there was sufficient open space in the Stanley area.

Members were referred to the notes of Scrutiny Board held 21st July (attached as Appendix 'A')

Options: Whether to agree or reject the proposal in the report to dispose of the site.

RESOLVED:

That the proposal to proceed with a disposal of public open space to facilitate the development of an Adult Health Care Unit at View Lane Park, Stanley be agreed.

Reasons:

1. In order to access funds to make improvements to View Lane Park.
2. Based on the professional advice given by the Director of Environmental Services and the Head of Leisure that adequate open space existed in the District.

On the motion of Councillor W. Armstrong, seconded by Councillor M. Malone that under Section 100(A) 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 3 of the Local Government Act 1972 (As Amended).

Councillor A Watson returned to the meeting at this point.

In accordance with the provisions of Section 94 of the Local Government Act 1972 and Standing Order Number 33, Councillors C. Christer and D. Llewellyn declared an interest in Items 5 and 9 on the Agenda, left the meeting and took no part in the discussion or decision made on the following two items.

33. LSVT TO DERWENTSIDE HOMES – PROGRESS REPORT

Councillor M Malone presented the report which updated Members on the progress towards transfer of the Council's housing stock to Derwentside Homes. The transfer of the Housing stock represented a major challenge to the organisation generally. A significant amount of work had already been undertaken but there was still much to do if the transfer date of 4th December 2006 was to be achieved.

The transfer should establish a framework by which the promises made to tenants in the offer document could be delivered but should also aid the overall development and regeneration of the District through the benefits afforded from VAT shelter and future right to buy receipts shared with Derwentside Homes. The report was a progress report but also asked for confirmation to the approach that needed to be taken as negotiations through to transfer progress.

The Chair referred Members to the notes of Scrutiny Board held 21st July (attached as Appendix 'A')

Options: Whether to agree, amend or reject the proposals in the report regarding the approach taken regarding the negotiation process for the LSVT.

RESOLVED:

1. That the progress and the issues regarding progress towards the LSVT of the authorities housing stock to Derwentside Homes be noted.

2. That the approaches adopted for the negotiation process as detailed in the report be agreed regarding:
 - a) Assets to transfer (as detailed in paragraph 3.6 and 3.7 of the report)
 - b) That the financial impact should be minimised and the General Fund outcome should be cost neutral, if possible.
 - c) That the authority should approach the VAT shelter arrangements with a view to receiving 50% of the proceeds.
 - d) That a Right to Buy sharing arrangement will need to be agreed.
 - e) That the position with regard to the officer delegations outlined in paragraphs 3.57 and 3.58 be confirmed.

Reason: This will allow for the negotiations to proceed with a view to the authority looking to benefit from the partnership and financial opportunities created by the transfer.

34. REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S RETAINED HOUSING SERVICE POST TRANSFER

Councillor Malone presented the report which provided an overview of the key findings of a formal review of the Council's housing service and makes a number of recommendations aimed at ensuring that the Council continues to adequately discharge its statutory and strategic housing functions post transfer.

The scope of the review was broad but included an appraisal of the advantages and disadvantages of future options for the delivery of homelessness and housing advice and allocations services; to consider the best structure for the future delivery of services and to consider and make arrangements in relation to a number of practical issues to ensure a smooth transfer and effective joint working between the Council and Derwentside Homes pre and post transfer.

Councillor Malone commented that it was important the way the new Housing Service was to be delivered and in his opinion the Seminar which had been presented to Members had needed a different approach.

The Chair referred Members to the notes of Scrutiny Board held 21st July (attached as Appendix 'A')

Options: Whether to agree, amend or reject the recommendations in the report.

RESOLVED: That the following be agreed:

1. The homelessness and housing advice services be retained in house.

Reason: This is consistent with the findings of desktop research, comparisons with other local authorities, and accords with the preferences of service users and other stakeholders.

2. A formal review of the More than a Roof project should be undertaken in February 2007.

Reason: This will ensure that the Council is able to select the best future delivery option to ensure a high quality, value for money service that assists in the meeting of the aims and objectives within Derwentside Homelessness Strategy.

3. The statutory and strategic allocations services should be retained in-house.

Reason: This is consistent with the findings of desktop research, comparisons with other local authorities, and accords with the preferences of service users and other stakeholders.

4. A project should be established by July 2006 involving the Strategic and Supported Housing Manager, the Systems Integration Manager (responsible for the Council's Careline and One Stop Shop services), a senior officer from Environmental Services (in respect of private sector housing functions), the portfolio holder responsible for strategic housing services, and senior officers from Finance and Human Resources Divisions. It is recommended that the Project Team develop a comprehensive SMART action plan covering all staffing, structural and operational and performance issues. The Project Team should report progress to the Executive Director.

5. That the Executive Director's existing delegated powers be confirmed to approve the project plan. The Project Team should devise a three year improvement plan for April 2007 to April 2010 that should be presented to members' for approval in February 2007. The improvement plan should include a review of interim arrangements to take place in 12 to 18 months time. Approval of these recommendations will result in the delivery of an efficient "fit for purpose" service, and will ensure that all necessary arrangements are implemented to ensure a smooth transfer.

6. That three full time temporary posts of an Administration Officer, Homelessness Officer, and Temporary Emergency Accommodation Officer are funded up until the point of transfer. It is recommended that these posts should be considered for permanent inclusion as part of the retained establishment following transfer.

Reason: This will ensure that the Council has adequate capacity to discharge its statutory duties both pre and post transfer, and ensure that the Council fulfils its duty of care towards staff.

7. That the job share hours of one officer performing in the post of Housing Strategy Research Officer are increased to full time hours until the point of transfer. The cost of this recommendation is £4,640.00 based on an estimate that this arrangement will be required for three months.

Reason: This is to ensure that the Council has adequate capacity to implement the actions stemming from this review, and to ensure continued progress

on the implementation of a pro-active and preventative homelessness service.

8. That one core team with strengthened links to other Directorates be established. This core team should be responsible for housing strategy, policy and the assessment of housing need; the housing enabling role; private sector housing; homelessness and housing advice; the Supporting People strategic and commissioning role; and strategic allocations duties. It is recommended that One Stop Shop have operational responsibilities allocations and homelessness duties.

9. That the administration of housing benefit should remain in the Council's Finance Directorate. It is recommended that stronger inter-departmental links are established with planning, and with the Corporate Administration and Policy Directorate in respect of community consultation and involvement; and that senior officers from the housing team become more involved with Derwentside Crime and Disorder Partnership.

Reason: This will raise the profile of the housing service and maximise its effectiveness.

10. That as an interim arrangement the Executive Director should have overall responsibility for the retained housing service for 12 to 18 months, at which stage a review of future arrangements should be undertaken.

Reason: This will provide the service with strong leadership and provide an officer "housing champion" on the Council's Corporate Management Team.

11. That the three-year improvement plan presented to members for approval in February 2007 should include proposals to re-name the service.

Reason: This will result in the public and stakeholders having a clearer understanding of the purpose of the service.

12. In the short term that the core housing team be co-located in the Council Offices located in Front Street in Stanley. The three year improvement plan should contain longer term accommodation plans for joint accommodation with health and social care and health partners.

Reason: This will ensure that services are accessible to the public, provide staff with the sense of being part of a team, and assist with performance management.

13. That a joint performance management framework be established between the housing service and the One Stop Service in respect of allocations and homelessness and housing advice services performed by both teams.

Reason: This will assist in the provision of a seamless service where all staff are working towards the same vision, aims and objectives for the service, and enable more effective performance management.

14. That the Project Team establish a range of sub-groups involving senior and frontline staff both those who will be retained and those transferring to Derwentside Homes, and monitor their progress in order to ensure that clear arrangements are established in relation to a number of operational issues, notably:

- Post transfer arrangements for the management of temporary emergency accommodation (currently there are five Council properties used for this purpose and future management arrangements for these need to be clarified). Other arrangements for provision of temporary emergency accommodation by Derwentside Homes need to be formalised
- Provision of an emergency homelessness out of hours service
- Joint working arrangements in relation to anti-social behaviour issues
- Establishing operational budgets and arrangements for effective budgetary control
- Joint arrangements for effective monitoring of floating support services provided by external providers
- Arrangements for the smooth transfer of the furnished tenancy scheme from the strategic housing team to Derwentside Homes
- Financial and administrative arrangements for Supporting People services
- Nominations agreements and other joint working arrangements in respect of allocations. This should involve the establishment of an appeals process for dealing with disputes and information sharing protocols. This sub-group should also consider Derwentside Homes involvement in the joint protocol for homeless 16 and 17 year olds.
- Staff accommodation issues and addressing quality of public facilities
- IT issues (it is recommended that in the short term the Council continues to use the homelessness module of the Orchard system for homelessness recording and reporting purposes, but as there have been some problems experienced with this system that the service improvement plan should incorporate an early review of IT issues)
- General information sharing requirements other than those covered by nominations information sharing protocols and housing benefit information sharing protocols
- Arrangements for the administration of mobility schemes (MoveUK)
- Arrangements for tenant consultation and involvement (the Council has a duty to ensure that Derwentside Homes is delivering on its promises to its tenants)
- Arrangements for effective administration of Housing Benefit (a working group has already been established to explore this issue and this work should continue)
- A publicity and training group (to ensure that the public, members staff and other stakeholders are aware of the respective roles and responsibilities of both organisations in relation to housing services)
- An aids and adaptations group to ensure that the Council is clear about Derwentside Homes arrangements and budgets for carrying out aids and adaptations for their tenants, so that the Council is

able to assess potential impact of increased pressure on the Disabled Facilities Grant budget

- Any other necessary joint working arrangements.

Reason: This will ensure that a smooth transfer takes place and that effective joint working arrangements between the Council and Derwentside Homes are in place post transfer.

15. That the lead officers for LSVT and the retained housing service meet on a regular basis pre-transfer and openly discuss and share information in order to ensure that the future plans of their respective organisations are complementary, wherever this is possible and practicable.

Reason: This is a pro-active approach to prevent potential problems occurring post transfer that could have been avoided.

16. That the main transfer contract specifies clear monitor and review requirements and specifies responsible named lead officers from both organisations that have the overall remit for contract monitoring. It is also recommended that data requirements are specified.

Reason: Experience shows that the likelihood of long term effective joint working is increased where arrangements are formalised and clearly specified. The Council will require housing information from Derwentside Homes to ensure that it has a good understanding of housing needs.

17. That operational service levels agreements and protocols are established stemming from the work of the operational sub-groups.

Reason: This will ensure that staff from both organisations are aware of their respective roles and responsibilities and increase the likelihood of effective joint working post transfer.

18. That a formal nomination agreement be established with Derwentside Homes by October 2006. This will enable the Council to adequately discharge its statutory allocations and homelessness duties. It is also recommended that a high nomination entitlement figure be set in the short term to reflect current housing market conditions.

Reason: This is absolutely crucial as homelessness levels continue to rise, and as Derwentside Homes is by far the largest provider of social housing within the District.

19. That a clear vision is established for the service as well as effective governance and leadership arrangements, and that the Project Team prioritises fully addressing these issues both pre-transfer and at an early stage within the three-year improvement plan. This will include ensuring effective member involvement in priority setting and performance monitoring. It is also recommended that there is one SMART Service Plan for strategic housing services that is effectively aligned with the Corporate Plan.

20. That the Council gives a clear commitment to establishing a medium term financial plan for the delivery of strategic housing services. This needs to prioritise the provision of affordable housing, and the delivery of regeneration and renewal programmes within the private sector and assess resource allocations as appropriate.

Reason: This is to ensure that the government's decent homes standard is achieved by 2010, and that the objective within the community plan of delivering sustainable communities is met.

Councillor D. Llewellyn and C. Christer returned to the meeting at this point.

35. DERWENTSIDE LEISURE LIMITED (DLL) – PROGRESS REPORT

Councillor Watson presented the report which updated Members in relation to difficulties facing Derwentside Leisure Limited. The report set out the work undertaken to date and presented the position on the sustainability of Derwentside Leisure Limited.

Councillor Malone commented that in order to avoid mis-information he wanted to see follow up reports, on a more frequent basis giving details such as trends and improvements. Following discussion it was suggested that the position in relation to the DLL be reported through the appropriate Scrutiny Panel (Strong Communities) to feature at each meeting until further direction from the Executive.

The Chair referred Members to the notes of Scrutiny Board held 21st July (attached as Appendix 'A').

Options: Whether to agree, amend or reject the proposals in the report regarding Derwentside Leisure Limited.

RESOLVED:

1. No additional funding over the existing grant agreement be provided to Derwentside Leisure Limited at this point.
2. Derwentside Leisure Limited seek to implement the efficiency initiatives in Section 3.2 of the report.
3. Derwentside Leisure Limited be requested to continue to develop and implement efficiency initiatives.
4. Members of the Working Group continue to monitor the financial position of Derwentside Leisure.
5. Derwentside Leisure Limited to provide detailed information relating to their ongoing sustainability in 2007/08.
6. That Derwentside Leisure Limited produce a report for the appropriate Scrutiny Panel (Strong Communities) to feature at each meeting until further direction from the Executive.

Reason: In order to help to ensure the sustainability of Derwentside Leisure Limited.

In accordance with the provisions of Section 94 of the Local Government Act 1972 and Standing Order Number 33, Councillors C. Christer and D. Llewellyn declared an interest in Item 9 on the Agenda, left the meeting and took no part in the discussion or decision made.

36. SUPPORTING PEOPLE – PROPOSALS FOR PROVISION OF COMMUNITY ALARMS IN DERWENTSIDE

Councillor W. Armstrong presented the report which advised Members of the latest developments in relation to the Value Improvement Project (VIP) and the subsequent tender and to consider the approach for the Council's Community Alarms Services known in Derwentside as Careline.

The Chair referred Members to the notes of Scrutiny Board held 21st July (attached as Appendix 'A').

Options: Whether to agree, amend or reject the proposals to submit a tender for the service.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Council submits a bid for its own service only.
2. Sub-contract out the Control Centre function either by the OJEU tender process or partnership with a neighbouring local authority if successful in winning the tender.
3. That a cost taking account of inflation – subsidy remains at fixed level is submitted in response to the tender.
4. It is confirmed that the Executive Director uses his existing delegated powers in conjunction with the Leaders Office and the Portfolio Holder to submit the tender.

Reason: If the Council is successful in bidding for its own service then the current standards of quality would continue and any changes would be in the control of the Council. This will enable the Council to meet stated objectives within its Corporate Plan Housing Strategy and Derwentside Community Plan.

CONCLUSION OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 6.28 p.m.

