

EXECUTIVE

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Consett on 2nd April 2007 at 4.30 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor A Watson (Chairman)

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

IN ATTENDANCE

Councillors D Bennett, W Stelling and W J Tyrie.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors W Armstrong and J Huntley.

140. 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 Scrutiny Board meeting held 30th March 2007 are attached for information (Appendix 'A').

141. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

142. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held 12th March 2007 be agreed as a correct record.

143. “ELLIE” THE YOUTH BUS EVALUATION AND FUNDING 2007 – 2008

Councillor A Taylor presented the report which informed Members of the results of the Youth Bus evaluation and sought approval for continued funding from Usable General Fund Reserves.

Over the last few years, through various community appraisals as well as youth consultations, there had been clear evidence of the “lack of things to do” for young people in Derwentside (a picture similar to that across County Durham). The overall number of young people attendances on the Youth Bus was a clear indication of this need. In the period March 2005 – February 2007 the Youth Bus had over 14,000 attendances and all wards in Derwentside had benefited, to a greater or lesser extent from its presence.

Councillor Taylor advised that due to the nature of its mobile provision and the targeting of “hard to reach “ young people the Youth Bus mainly contributes to Corporate Objectives CS.2 “addressing anti-social behaviour” and C.5 “ensure that the Council’s services are fully accessible....regardless of race, age,geography”. In addition she advised that there are other corporate objectives (both priority and non-priority) to which the Bus makes a positive contribution for example, objectives L1, EX1, C1 and H2.

An independent evaluation was undertaken ERS Consultants the main points summary points in the evaluation report were:

- *“The project is extremely well regarded, in high demand from stakeholders and young people, and is delivering good work across the District. The popularity of the Bus with young people consulted is clear and also evidenced by a growing free membership scheme;*
- *All respondents praised the commitment, enthusiasm and skill of the Bus staff, particularly with regard to their relationship with the Bus users. The quality of activities provided was also highly commended;*
- *Responses from young people demonstrate the value of the Bus and the activity provided, both in terms of immediate and short term impacts (things to do, evening activities) and also few but important examples of distance travelled by some young people (self-reported change in behaviour)”.*

To date the Youth Bus had been funded on a yearly basis, thereby resulting in uncertainty both amongst its staff , as well as partner organisations who were already making plans to use the Bus in the future. Also young people were concerned as to whether the Bus would return in their area.

Following completion of the evaluation it was now possible for the Council and its partners to give consideration to the question of whether the Bus should be mainstreamed (or not) into their targets. Unfortunately given the stage on the budget process, this was not possible for 2007/08 and Members were requested to consider use of the Council’s General Fund Reserves for the forthcoming

financial year with a view that the review's findings were incorporated for consideration into mainstream budget cycles for 2008/09 onwards.

In considering the report Members were asked to give due regard to the timing of the request for additional funds and the amount of usable balances currently available.

Councillor Taylor advised that she had received numerous supporting letters and e-mail for the project from Members of the Council, in particular she highlighted the comments from Councillor B Armstrong who had advised that the Hamsteels Estate had no provision for youth services and that there are 30 to 35 young people from that area who regularly wait to use Youth Bus.

Members were advised that since the despatch of the report it had been confirmed that £10,000 of funding had been agreed for the Youth Bus project from the Children's Fund, therefore the figure requested from the General Fund was now reduced to between £18,000 and £23,000.

Councillor Watson advised that he had also received telephone calls and e-mails from Councillors who had praised the good work carried out by the project and who were in favour of the project continuing. He further advised that the project was based on best practice and had the support of the Police and the Health Authority.

Councillor Llewellyn commented that the provision of youth services was a Durham County Council responsibility however, there was no direct funding for this project from Durham County Council. He commented that in his opinion Durham County Council were abdicating their responsibility for youth services in the area.

Councillor Malone commented that he had also been over-whelmed by the spontaneous support for the project by Members however, he was concerned that Members were now being asked to consider this project outside the agreed budget process. He advised that the youth bus project should be part of the agreed budget process for the next financial year.

He also commented that the same situation had occurred during the last financial year and that Officers had been requested to carry-out a value for money review of the youth bus e.g. the possibility of the share of the resource of the bus with other service areas such as the MARC vehicle.

The Chairman referred Members to the notes of Scrutiny Board held 30th March 2007.

Options:

1. To fund the Youth Bus.
2. Not fund the Youth Bus
3. Fund the Youth Bus part-time.

RESOLVED:

1. That option 1 on the report be agreed - that the Council commits funding for 2007/08 from General Reserves provided the amount of funding is amended to £23,000 and that longer term funding is considered as part of the 2008/09 budget process.

Reasons:

- 1 The independent review of the Youth Bus was very positive. It showed that the bus was a well used resource which provided a holistic service to children and young people and that both young people and partner agencies value it.

144. EXCLUSION

RESOLVED: That on the motion of Councillor M Malone seconded by Councillor Christer 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).

145. ASSET MANAGEMENT – PROPERTY REVIEW – GRAZING LAND PORTFOLIO

Councillor Watson presented the report which advised that at a meeting of the Executive held on 7th June 2004 a report setting out a Programme for the Review of the Council's Land and Property Holdings had been considered and approved by Members. This report concerned the review undertaken in relation to the Council's Grazing Portfolio and set out options for consideration and direction.

Councillor Johnson raised questions regarding some of the figures relating to rents. In response the Divisional Head of Land and Property advised that the review had highlighted some anomalies in relation to rents being paid and these were now being addressed.

Councillor Lewellyn raised questions regarding potential for development of the surplus sites. In response the Divisional Head of Land and Property advised that planning advice had been taken on these issues and also covenants will be added wherever necessary.

Members were asked to note that the disposal process would be held in abeyance to allow for rent increases to be implemented. In the majority of cases this was to be completed in the near future, however, those lettings which had Agricultural Tenancy status may take sometime.

The Chairman referred Members to the notes of Scrutiny Board held 30th March 2007.

Options:

1. Retain the Portfolio.
2. Declare the sites referred to in Appendix B (xiv) as surplus to requirements and advertise on the open market inviting bids on one of the following basis:
 - As a single package of sites.
 - As individual sites.
 - As individual sites, but giving existing tenants the opportunity to acquire the sites before they are advertised on the open market.

RESOLVED:

1. That the part of the grazing portfolio which was required for future or current service provision, or has development potential be retained.
2. That the part of the portfolio as identified in the report which are not being held for current or future service provision, be declared surplus.
3. That initially the surplus site be offered to existing occupiers however, those sites where disposals cannot be agreed be advertised on the open market.
4. That the disposal process be commenced as soon as rental increases are implemented.

Reasons:

1. This demonstrates good Asset Management practice.
2. This gives occupiers a chance to acquire sites they may have occupied for many years.
3. This affords the opportunity for the Council to obtain the best possible consideration from the disposal of its assets.
4. The recommendations were supported by the Learning Scrutiny Panel at its meeting on 6th March 2007.

CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. Councillor Taylor advised that Eleanor Seed (Young Peoples Officer) was leaving the authority and she wanted to record her personal thanks to Eleanor for the work on the Youth Bus and to wish her good luck in her new job.
2. Councillor Watson advised that this was the last meeting of the Executive for the current municipal year. He wanted to place on record his thanks to Officers for their advice and support over the year.

CONCLUSION OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 4.58 p.m.