

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON TUESDAY 13 SEPTEMBER 2005**

Present: Councillor A Burnip (Chair)
Councillors A Collinson, Mrs E M Connor,
C Patching, R Taylor and
P G Ward

Also Present: Councillor D Myers – Executive Member for
E-Government and Scrutiny Liaison

Apologies: Councillor Mrs S Mason

1 **THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** held on 19 July 2005, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.

2 **THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE** held on 30 August 2005, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, was submitted.

RESOLVED that the information contained within the Minutes, be noted.

3 **PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

There were no members of the public present.

4 **COMMUNICATION AND PUBLICITY**

There was nothing to report.

5 **COMMUNITY CENTRES**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Asset and Property Management which gave an update on the development of a Property Strategy for community centres throughout the district.

Members were advised that significant progress had been achieved in relation to the collation of base information to inform the Property Strategy.

Building surveying consultants had been engaged to undertake full condition, mechanical and electrical surveys on all seven community centres across the district. With the exception of Parkside the surveys had identified that significant expenditure was required to bring the properties back into good condition. A summary of the expenditure was detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.

It was explained that as the majority of the buildings were pre-war and showed signs of physical and functional obsolescence, it was considered prudent to await the completion of the suitability and sufficiency surveys before incurring additional expenditure.

The outstanding surveys were scheduled to be completed by the end of October 2005 at which time the Head of Asset and Property Management, in Liaison with the Head of Regeneration and Community Development would be in a position to develop a Strategy which combined the property information with current use and future demand assessments together with information on the availability of other facilities. Decisions regarding improvement, redevelopment or closure would be brought forward for further consideration at that time.

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Whilst considering the condition surveys for the centres, the Asset and Property Management and Economic and Community Development Teams had worked to progress the refurbishment of Wheatley Hill Community Centre, which was considered an excellent illustration of how an asset could be retained and be almost self sufficient whilst providing an invaluable service to the community.

Wheatley Hill Community Centre was well established and offered an extensive range of services. The Association themselves had secured funding in excess of 1.3M over a six year period.

Members were advised that complex legal negotiations were almost resolved and would result in the formalisation of a lease between the Council and Wheatley Hill Community Association for a period of 25 years. The creation of the lease had enabled the Regeneration and Development Unit to assist the Association in securing community funding in excess of £300,000. Negotiations were currently underway regarding the disposal of part of the community centre site in order to raise capital to enable the works to be completed.

Whilst the centre at Wheatley Hill was a success, it had illustrated the complexity of points of law surrounding the centres and the need to liaise closely with the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation and the Charities Commission. As a consequence of this scheme the Council had learnt invaluable lessons in partnership working with the associations.

It was essential that the suitability and sufficiency surveys were completed on all centres to enable the Asset and Property Manager to create a Community Centre Service Plan which would determine the current position, expected costs and recommendations of each centre on an individual basis.

Once recommendations were agreed, all centres would be placed on standardised lease agreements, which clearly defined responsibilities and liability.

It was acknowledged that the Council needed to provide an improved level of support to Community Associations to assist them in achieving their objectives, particularly where the refurbishment of buildings were being undertaken involving applications for funding. It may be appropriate to develop a multi-disciplinary action team within the Council to facilitate a package of services to ensure the successful implementation of service development at the centres and this proposal would be reviewed as part of the evaluation process.

In 2005/2006 the Council had a budget of £18,500 for major repair works and £9,500 for minor repair works. Although, the year one costs identified were in excess of this, the existing budget had enabled the emergency works identified in the reports to be carried out. Once a final assessment had been made and an action plan developed, it would be necessary, in conjunction with the Head of Economic and Community Development, to submit a programme of bids for funding to facilitate identified schemes.

As no current policy existed in relation to community centres, there was a need for full option appraisals to be undertaken once the key property review information was available.

Councillor C Patching made reference to the costs outlined in Appendix 1 and queried if they reflected the projected costs for 15 years and were the works for Wheatley Hill Community Centre discounted due to the ongoing works. D Clarke confirmed that the costs outlined were projected over 15 years and the costs in relation to Wheatley Hill Community Centre were discounted due to the ongoing works.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted and a detailed service plan relating to community centres be considered following the completion of the suitability and sustainable surveys.

6 DISPOSAL OF INDUSTRIAL PORTFOLIO

Consideration was given to a briefing note prepared by M Kipling, Senior Regeneration Officer, which provided details of how monies raised from the sale of the industrial portfolio had been allocated throughout the district.

Members were advised that at a special meeting of the Economic Development Committee held in March 1998 consideration was given to the proposed disposal of the Council's Industrial Portfolio. The report contained recommendations relating to the terms of the sale, the repayment of debt and the treatment of the capital receipts.

It was the intention of the Council to achieve a position which would enable 100% of the capital receipt to be used for regeneration purposes.

At a further meeting held in December 1998 approval was granted to use £1.25M towards a new road and land acquisitions in Seaham and £0.4M towards improvements at the Hackworth Road depot. Approval was also sought to commit £2.1M to regeneration schemes in the villages in the remainder of the district as part of a rolling programme. The Council confirmed its commitment to spend the capital receipts generated by the sale of the industrial portfolio on regeneration projects in the district.

With reference to the £2.1M to assist regeneration in the remainder of the district it was agreed that £1.4M be allocated with £200,000 being awarded to each of the following settlements: -

Deaf Hill, Haswell, Shotton, South Hetton, Thornley, Wheatley Hill and Wingate.

This money combined with external funding would be used to undertake regeneration initiatives with projects being identified by the Local Regeneration Partnerships.

The remaining £700,000 was to be used as a flexible response budget to provide match funding to access other challenge funds to assist worthwhile regeneration initiatives and/or projects in other targeted wards or underwrite schemes where secured funding might otherwise be lost without the intervention of financial assistance from the Council.

M Kipling outlined details of where the money had been spent and explained that some of the partnerships were still to expend their full allocation. Councillor C Patching expressed concern at the slow pace at which the money was being spent and it was further explained that some of the balance had been earmarked for schemes but had not yet been released.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.