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Michael Laing Chief Executive

11th December 2007

Dear Councillor,

I hereby give you Notice that a Special Meeting of the **POLICY AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE** will be held in the **COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC CENTRE, CROOK** on **WEDNESDAY 19th DECEMBER 2007** at **4:30 P.M.**

AGENDA

Page No.

1. Apologies for absence
2. Declarations Of Interest

Members are invited to declare any personal and/or prejudicial interest in matters appearing on the agenda and the nature of their interest.

Members should use either of the following declarations:

Personal Interest – to be used where a Member will be remaining and participating on the debate and any vote:

I have a personal interest in agenda item (...) regarding the report on (...) because I am (...)

Personal and Prejudicial Interest – to be used where a Member will be withdrawing from the room for that item:

I have a personal and prejudicial interest in agenda item (...) regarding the report on (...) because I am (...)

Officers are also invited to declare any interest in any matters appearing on the agenda.

NOTE: Members are requested to complete the enclosed declarations form and, after declaring interests verbally, to hand the form in to the Committee Administrator.

3. To consider the options available to the Council in relation to the 1 - 4

potential transfer of Innovation House.

4. To consider individual capital schemes in the 2007/08 capital programme. 5 - 9
5. To consider the future of the Newgate Centre. 10 - 11
6. To consider the improvement of neighbourhood arrangements. 12 - 21
7. To consider staff terms and conditions.* 22 - 27
8. To consider such other items of business which, by reason of special circumstances so specified, the Chairman of the meeting is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency.

*It is likely that item 7 will be taken in the closed part of the meeting in accordance with paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information)(Variation) Order 2006.

Yours faithfully



Chief Executive

Members of this Committee: Councillors Mrs Burn, Ferguson, Gale, Grogan, Hayton, Henry, Kay, Kingston, Mews, Mowbray, Murphy*, Miss Ord, Perkins, Mrs Pinkney, Mrs Seabury*, Stonehouse and Zair.

*ex-officio, non-voting capacity.

Chair: Councillor Stonehouse

Deputy Chair: Councillor Kay

TO: All other Members of the Council for information
Management Team

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FORM

NAME AND DATE OF COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM NUMBER	NATURE OF INTEREST AND REASONS	PRINT NAME	SIGNATURE



SPECIAL POLICY & STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

19 DECEMBER 2007

Report of the Strategic Director for Environment and Regeneration **CAPITAL ASSETS – INNOVATION HOUSE**

purpose of the report

To consider the options available to the Council in relation to the potential transfer of Innovation House.

background

1. On 13th November 2007, Committee agreed in principle to the transfer of Innovation House to the Wear Valley and Teesdale Enterprise Agency.
2. Innovation House on South Church Enterprise Park was developed by the Council to provide office based accommodation for new SME's (small to medium-sized enterprise) and as a focal point for business support services to both occupants and the wider business community. The latter is provided by the Wear Valley and Teesdale Enterprise Agency who, through a Service Level Agreement, provide on-site management of the facility for the Council. The facility was developed with grant contributions from ONE NorthEast and ERDF
3. The Council receives income from rents and levies a service charge on tenants for on-site services. Recently a new extension has been completed and made available to the market. A detailed Marketing programme of the centre is currently being implemented. There is a slight loss anticipated for this financial year due to the recent opening of phase 2 and a higher vacancy rate expected until the marketing programme is effective.

transfer

4. Innovation House provides a valuable service to the business community of the district. Its transfer to the Agency accords with the requirements of the Quirk report and would assist the Enterprise Agency to secure this service to the business community for the foreseeable future.

options

5. There are three alternative ownership/management arrangements for the centre.

- Long term SLA with income secured – the Council, or its successor would retain ownership and through a long-term and financially supported (through dedication of rental income) service level agreement provide the agency with security of tenure and management responsibility.
- Lease – the Council or its successor would retain ownership and grant a formal long-term lease to the Agency.
- Ownership transfer – ownership would transfer to the Agency.

considerations

6. As Innovation House was developed with grant funding, it is necessary to consult with the funding agencies to determine whether any grant aid would be repayable. Financial assistance was given through ERDF and ONE North East's Single Programme. The grant conditions include:
 - "Assets wholly or partially funded by grant are disposed of during their economic life; in this event, the proceeds or an appropriate part of them may be required to be repaid to the Secretary of State" (ERDF); and
 - "The Sub-Regional Partnership shall retain a right of lien over all capital assets funded in whole or part by the SRP as part of the project for a period of 5 years from the date of the final payment of the grant or until consent to sell any capital asset is given by the SRP. Such consent may be made conditional upon the refund to the SRP of the whole or a proportionate part of the proceeds of the sale of the asset (as the SRP shall in its absolute discretion determine) less any necessary sale expenses" (Single Programme)
7. The financial implications of transfer, in relation to grant conditions applied by funding agencies, will be the subject to further discussion with the funding agencies. However, as a result of the above grant conditions, it is considered that outright sale, with receipt would incur grant repayment. It is proposed that lease of the centre be further explored. A draft Heads of Terms is put forward below.

Transfer of Innovation House Draft Heads of Terms

Landlord	WVDC
Tenant	Wear Valley and Teesdale Enterprise Agency
Lease Term	99 years, from ****
Premium	Nil
Rent	1 peppercorn, if demanded
Use	The use of the centre as described for business use and for the delivery of public sector business support to existing and new small and medium size

	enterprises (SMEs) in the Wear Valley district area.
Alienation & sub-let	Prohibited but with reasonable consent
Insurance	Tenant
Maintenance	Tenant – exterior and interior
Break	On dissolution of tenant or 1 year by tenant only
Alterations	Prohibited but with reasonable consent

8. It is proposed to discuss the suggested draft terms of lease formally with the Enterprise Agency, and funding bodies.

transfer of capital assets - legal implications

9. The Council has powers under the Local Government Act 1972 to dispose of land in any manner they wish, including sale of their freehold interest, granting a lease or assigning any unexpired term on a lease, and the granting of easements. The only constraint is that a disposal must be for the best consideration reasonably obtainable, unless the Secretary of State consents to the disposal. The Secretary of State has issued a General Disposal Consent (circular 06/03) which provides a general consent to the disposal of land at an undervalue provided that –

- (a) the undervalue is not more than £2 million pounds , and
- (b) the transfer promotes the well-being objectives (environment, economic or social well-being).

The Council would need to get the assets valued by the District Valuer, prior to entering into any agreement to transfer the ownership of assets.

10. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 contains provisions restricting the disposal of assets by authorities who are subject to local government reorganisation. There is a power under the Act for the minister to make an order requiring consent to disposal to be obtained from a person specified in the order. The Act has only recently received royal assent and no orders (or draft orders) have been produced relating to the disposal of assets. Whilst the Council will be affected by this regime, it is impossible to assess at this stage whether the transfer proposed in this report will require consent. In the circumstances, it is suggested that members make decisions on the transfer outlined above. Should the legal position change and consent be required at the time of disposal, a further report can be brought back to members at that time, if necessary.

conclusion

11. The capital asset transfer of Innovation House outlined above will promote the Council's objectives in relation to community and economy. It will provide a valuable support to the Enterprise Agency, ensuring the future of this vital service for the business community. The transfer is within the spirit of the Quirk Report and accord with the Council's policies and objectives.
12. Further discussion is required with the Agency Board and with the funding bodies before a final decision is taken on the appropriate way forward. The draft Heads of Terms for a possible lease arrangement are identified to form the basis for discussion. The approval of the principle of transfer will give officers and partners the necessary security to engage in meaningful negotiations.

RECOMMENDED	It is recommended that Committee approve in principal the transfer of Innovation House and to enter into formal discussion with the Wear Valley and Teesdale Enterprise Agency Board and with funding bodies to facilitate transfer
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Officer responsible for the report

Gary Ridley
Strategic Director
Resource Management
Ext 227

Authors of the report

Robert M Hope, Anna Barker



SPECIAL POLICY AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

19 DECEMBER 2007

Report of the Strategic Director for Resource Management **2007 CAPITAL PROGRAMME SCHEMES**

purpose of the report

1. To seek Member agreement on individual capital schemes in the 2007/08 capital programme and also to seek an in principle decision to include £6.5m in the capital programme for the redevelopment of Woodhouse Close Leisure Centre.

background

2. Members will recall that the following sums were included in the 2007/08 capital programme, in September 2007:
 - Community Transport £0.2m.
 - Community Capital £0.5m.
 - Small Village Enhancement £0.6m.
 - Youth/Sport Provision £0.3m.
3. Members were invited to submit capital schemes for consideration, to be funded from the above amounts. A number of these schemes (up to £60,000 each in value) were considered and agreed at a Special Policy and Strategic Development Committee on 13 November 2007.
4. This report seeks to consider those remaining schemes above £60,000. Each scheme is considered in turn.
5. In relation to Woodhouse Close Leisure Centre, Members will be aware that this has been included in the latest capital strategy and has been the subject of ongoing discussions with other stakeholders.

individual schemes

Countdown and Leeholme Partnership Transport

The Partnership has requested £100,000 to purchase a bus to enhance its existing vehicle fleet which is now nearing the end of its useful life. The bus will enable local individuals and organisations to take advantage of a local service which currently does not exist. There are no planning issues involved and the Partnership has stated that they have the revenue resources in place to fund its running costs. This type of scheme supports the Council's well being objectives.

It is **RECOMMENDED** that this scheme be agreed.

Tees Walk Community Centre

The Coundon and Leeholme Partnership have requested £166,000 to carry out physical improvements to the Tees Walk Community Centre.

At present the Centre is used to provide a focal point for the community in terms of:

- Operating as a small call centre.
- Facilitating various meetings e.g. Partnership/NRF/ALMO.
- Acting as a youth drop in centre/other community use.
- Used as a base for the community transport scheme.

The intended improvements are:

- To develop a community kitchen.
- Disability Discrimination Act enhancements
- General refurbishment.

The total scheme costs are £266,000 of which the Partnership has secured other funding of £100,000 resulting in the request for £166,000. The Partnership has stated that they have the revenue resources in place to fund the increased running costs of the centre. Planning permission has already been granted and the proposal has been subject to local consultation which proved favourable.

If agreed, the enhanced community centre will enable an increased range of services to be delivered including:

- Healthy eating/hospitality centre.
- Enterprise centre to stimulate local job creation.
- Improved capacity to facilitate existing/new community based activity.

This scheme supports the Council's economic and well being objectives.

It is **RECOMMENDED** that this scheme be agreed.

SLAM/Youth Provision, Willington

SLAM has requested up to £250,000 to improve the Spectrum Leisure Centre as follows:

- Sports Hall lighting
- Sport Hall equipment
- Sports Hall floor
- New Reception area
- New Community Cafe area
- Refurbishment of dance studio
- Refurbishment of changing rooms

- **Decoration.**

At present SLAM has been unable to secure other funding. This will enable SLAM to provide a range of services to local individuals e.g. fitness and health. SLAM has confirmed that the running costs associated with Spectrum can be met from within expected fee income. The majority of fee income is based upon developing a gym membership of 200 people per annum paying £21 per month. This in turn is based around a consultant's report which predicted that 400 members per annum being prepared to pay £21 per month. By basing income on 50% of the consultants' figures, this conservative approach is considered reasonable.

If agreed, work could commence in January 2008.

This scheme supports health and well being objectives.

It is **RECOMMENDED** that this scheme be agreed.

George Pit Building, Witton Park

Committee has previously agreed in principle to transfer this building over to a local village hall association. The estimated cost of refurbishing the building is approx £140,000 rising to approx £230,000 for a new building. The village hall association have confirmed that they will fund the ongoing revenue costs of the building.

The project will need to be subject to planning permission for a new building. Also that the local association have carried out community consultation which indicates support for the proposals and shows that local activities are varied and cover all age ranges.

RECOMMENDED that the scheme be agreed.

Visitor Centre and public toilet to the rear of Escomb Church

A request has come forward to build a visitor centre on the car park on the above location as a means of improving tourism. An informal discussion with English Heritage regarding the site has been held, although a formal planning process would need to be gone through. Local individuals have held informal discussions with English Heritage.

The estimated cost of this is approximately £130,000 (£100,000 for the visitor centre and £30,000 for the toilet). The request also includes a request for the Council to draw up the necessary plans. At present it is not clear if planning permission will be given, nor who will pay for the ongoing running costs of this scheme. The Director of Environment and Regeneration is of the opinion that the proposal to build a visitor centre at Escomb would be a sensitive planning matter in view of the status of Escomb Church. English Heritage would have to be involved and would be looking for something exceptional in terms of design and materials. A higher than normal budget would have to be set aside to ensure a building of appropriate quality could be built.

Given the issues highlighted above it is **RECOMMENDED** that this scheme not be agreed at this point in time.

Four Clocks, Bishop Auckland

A request has been received from the Four Clocks for £67,000 to carry out the following:

- Linking the Four Clocks to the adjoining Bradbury Centre.
- Toilets for the severely disabled.
- Insulation to the Wesley Room.
- Installation of a second door entry system into the reception area.
- Installation of an external electricity supply.

A number of organisations make use of the Four Clocks (including the CAB and ourselves).

It is **RECOMMENDED** that the scheme is agreed.

Roddymoor Village Hall

This building is owned by British Coal and is leased to a group of local individuals. I understand that local use is limited at present.

The building is in such a condition that refurbishment would not produce any long term benefits and that demolition and rebuild is the only viable option. This is estimated to cost approx. £200,000. At present it is not clear who will fund the ongoing revenue costs of this scheme.

Given the issues highlighted above it is **RECOMMENDED** that this scheme not be agreed at this point in time until further information is obtained to clarify the above issues.

Stanley Village Hall

A request to extend the above building, to house gym facilities. The request is for £100,000 plus the use of Section 106 monies. At present, however, it is not clear how much the scheme would cost or what other funding sources are available. It is also not clear who will pay for the ongoing revenue costs of the building.

Given the issues highlighted above it is **RECOMMENDED** that this scheme not be agreed at this point in time until further information is obtained to clarify the above issues.

woodhouse close

6. Members will be aware that Woodhouse Close is an ageing leisure facility which is expensive to run and is also in need of capital works. The Council's Capital Strategy has identified the need for additional investment totalling approximately

£6.5m and it is proposed to seek an in principle decision for this to be included within the current capital programme to enable progress to be made.

legal implications

7. There are no legal implications arising from this report and the Council has the powers to proceed with these schemes.

financial implications

8. In relation to the individual schemes above, the above schemes are affordable from the sums originally agreed by Members in September 2007. However, there are no sums available to support ongoing revenue costs of these schemes.
9. In relation to Woodhouse Close Leisure Centre, this is affordable from the overall capital resources currently held by the Council.

delivery of schemes

10. This is a key risk facing the successful delivery of these schemes. This risk can be mitigated by the recruitment of a temporary resource, funded from the overall capital allocation, to deliver all agreed schemes. The level and nature of Council involvement will be assessed on scheme by scheme basis.

conclusion

11. The above schemes relate to corporate objectives as indicated in the report and will also provide assets and opportunities for local individuals and organisations to take advantage of.

RECOMMENDED that Members agree:

- (i) The individual schemes as proposed above.
- (ii) In principle to include £6.5m within the current capital programme for the redevelopment of Woodhouse Close Leisure Complex.

Officer responsible for the report

Gary Ridley
Strategic Director for
Resource Management
Ext 227

Authors of the report

Gary Ridley
Strategic Director for
Resource Management
Ext 227

REGENERATION COMMITTEE

19th December 2007

Report of the Strategic Director for Environment and Regeneration
NEWGATE CENTRE BISHOP AUCKLAND

purpose of the report

1. To seek members agreement to discuss with the owners of the Newgate Centre, the future of the Centre.

background

2. The Council own the leasehold of the Newgate Centre car park. Ravenhill Estates Ltd own the building and the main shopping centre. Ravenhill have applications to improve the retail and car parking offer of the existing centre and to plan for an extension of the shopping centre into an area occupied by the bus station.
3. In order to pursue both developments, Raven hill have enquired about purchasing both Council's stake in the car park and acquiring the Council's leaseholding in the bus station.
4. The redevelopment of the Newgate Centre is a critical element of the Red Box Master Plan proposals for the town centre. The plan clearly identifies the opportunity for expansion of retail floor space into and including the redevelopment and enhancement of the bus station. The indication that Ravenhill are seeking to develop there ideas is to be welcomed. Expansion would require the purchase of Council owned land.
5. Ravenhill also propose to improve the internal retail space within the existing centre. This could involve using some of the first floor car parking space at the Newgate Centre entrance for retail space, and replacing car parking capacity at the rear of this level. Whilst this will not loose car parking capacity, Ravenhill have expressed a preference for control of the car park to enable their development plans to be more easily implemented. The car park currently provides an income for the Council.

conclusion

6. The development aspirations of Ravenhill Estates are to be enclosed.
7. Members are requested to give authority to officers to enter formal discussions with Ravenhill on their basis. Such discussions will be without prejudice and will involve the District Valuer.

RECOMMENDED

- 1 That members give officers authority to discuss future proposals, without prejudice, for the Newgate Centre with Ravenhill Estates.

Officer responsible for the report

Gary Ridley
Strategic Director for Resource
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Ext 227

Author of the report

Robert Hope
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Ext 264



SPECIAL POLICY AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

19 DECEMBER 2007

Report of the Chief Executive

VALUING COMMUNITIES – IMPROVING OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD ARRANGEMENTS

purpose of the report

The purpose of this report is –

- to inform Committee of the policy background to improved neighbourhood arrangements;
- to seek a decision on the geographic boundaries for neighbourhood arrangements;
- to agree the Council's vision and broad principles for neighbourhood working; and
- to seek permission to carry out further work including a Councillors Seminar on neighbourhood arrangements.

background

- 1 Since 2006 the Council has been reviewing the way it works in neighbourhoods. Funding was made available through the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and the General Fund to improve our neighbourhood arrangements. Since 2006 two important changes have occurred.
- 2 First the County Council's Unitary bid has proposed the creation of three Area Action Partnerships for Wear Valley. These are a variety of neighbourhood arrangements. These will cover Crook and Willington, Bishop Auckland and Weardale.
- 3 Second the Council has appointed staff and prepared to implement the decisions Councillors will be asked to take in this Committee. A summary of the current staffing is attached at Annex 1.
- 4 The next step is to consider the geographical boundaries of the neighbourhood areas.

neighbourhood boundaries

- 5 The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) considered this matter in November. An overwhelming view did not emerge. In general terms the LSP preferred 3 or 6 neighbourhood areas. Those that preferred 6 asked if, for major issues – crime, health, economy – the neighbourhoods could be 'grouped up' into 3 areas.

6 Committee is asked to consider the ‘best fit’ geographical boundaries for the introduction of neighbourhood arrangements from options set out at Annex 2.

7 In reaching a decision Committee may wish to consider those boundaries which -

- build on existing commitments to engage more effectively within our communities;
- has the potential to empower local people, by giving them the rights, responsibilities, resources and capacity to improve local services;
- give areas choice about the services provided locally, in some cases giving them direct responsibility for the provision of local services;
- build and sustain the capacity of Ward Councillors to undertake their community leadership role;
- dovetail with Council and partners arrangements for service delivery and strategic leadership, but avoids developing “silos” (inflexible, self serving delivery mechanisms);
- extend neighbourhood/area management, perhaps by providing a single contact officer within the Council to negotiate with service providers; and
- are efficient, proportionate and funded through the effective use of existing resources

8 Committee may also want to consider the following information -

- The District is 195 square miles with a mixture of both rural and urban, with an increasing population of some 62,000. However, the majority of the population lives in the more urban eastern part of the district, which includes Bishop Auckland and Crook.
- The following provides a brief ward by ward break-down (based on the 2001 census):

	<u>Population</u>	<u>Hectares</u>	<u>Density</u>
Bishop Auckland Town	2,764	435	6.35
Cockton Hill	4,603	146	3.17
Henknowle	3,874	80	48.42
Woodhouse Close	4,816	149	32.32
Coundon	4,316	1417	3.04
Dene Valley	2,806	415	6.76
Escomb	3,323	669	4.96
West Auckland	4,347	479	9.07
Crook North	1,635	467	3.50
Crook South	4,662	220	21.19

Howden-le-Wear	1,493	569	2.62
Wheatbottom	2,937	437	6.72
Hunwick	1,533	1197	1.28
Willington Central	5,383	1353	3.97
Willington West	1,244	299	4.16
St. John's Chapel	1,432	10,356	0.13
Stanhope	3,375	20,521	0.16
Tow Law and Stanley	3,828	8,862	0.43
Wolsingham and Witton-le-Wear	2,968	2,373	1.25

- There are currently eight Parish Councils in the District. Over 65% of residents live in parish areas.

the policy context

9 Greater emphasis is being given by the Government to the development of neighbourhood arrangements. The main publications contain the Government's policies in this area:-

- ODPM publication 'The future of local government: Developing a 10 Year Vision' (the Government's long term local government strategy – placing people at the centre of public services)
- ODPM publication 'Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter' as part of its local government strategy
- ODPM publication 'Vibrant Local Leadership' to provide effective community leadership.
- The inclusion in the CPA from 2005 of the investigation of how effectively Councils and their partners understand their communities and take into account their diverse needs when setting priorities and delivering services. This has been followed through in the Government's proposed replacement for CPA – Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). If anything CAA gives a greater emphasis outcomes for neighbourhoods
- The emphasis placed on neighbourhood in the proposed Comprehensive Area Assessment system
- Local Area Agreements
- ODPM publication 'Empowerment and the Deal for Devolution: Speech by Rt Hon David Milliband MP Minister of Communities and Local Government'
- Lyons Inquiry into Local Government – letter of 8 May 2006 from Michael Lyons
- DCLG White Paper "Strong and prosperous communities"
- Recent guidance on the new Working Neighbourhoods Fund, the replacement for the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, focuses on outcomes for neighbourhoods and working in localities

10 In order to secure the effectiveness of neighbourhood arrangements it is very important that their purpose is clearly defined and their activities embedded within Council and partner structures and processes. Important too is the question of leadership.

a new leadership role for local authorities

11 As part of the Government's new agenda, local authorities and their Councillors are to play a pivotal leadership role in the community, taking on a different set of responsibilities. Local authorities will become enablers for the community; champions of the area and shape the services around the needs of the citizen.

12 'Vibrant Leadership' (ODPM 2005) advocates two key roles for Councillors in the neighbourhood agenda – community advocate and community leader. The role of the community advocate includes:-

- speaking up for, and on behalf of, individuals and groups;
- encouraging residents to engage and participate;
- participating in plan making and planning decisions; and
- communicating residents' concerns to the Council and to other providers, eg. the Police

whilst the role of community leader includes:-

- stimulating local organisations and individuals to take up opportunities to express their views;
- representing local level concerns and perspectives;
- maintaining a link between the users and the providers of services;
- encouraging the community to organise for themselves;
- working with other community leaders in the voluntary, community and business sectors;
- offering vision and direction to local groups, and building support for that vision;
- brokering agreements between different interests and partners; and
- contributing as an effective partner in neighbourhood arrangements, including those that deliver delegated functions.

13 Essentially, the Councillor is seen as a conduit for information from the Council to communities and vice versa. For many Councillors this may seem self evident. If local leadership is one end of the process, public participation is connected at the other.

citizen engagement

14 The Lyons Inquiry identifies the key advantages of making decisions locally as "the ability to use local knowledge, to engage the public and support co-production, to convene and join up public services across different providers and sectors and to innovate and test new approaches".

15 The ODPM document 'Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter' sets out its belief that Councils and their partners need to develop innovative neighbourhood arrangements in order to meet the twin challenges of:

- securing sustainable improvements in public services; and
- re-engaging local people with the institutions of government.

16 The DCLG White Paper “Strong and prosperous communities” encourages Councils to enable people to shape and choose those services they use on a personal basis and to work closely with citizens and communities. They propose to:-

- **extend choice in local services** by enabling people to have more control of the services they use on an individual basis;
- **give local people more say in running local services** by reforming the best value regime to ensure that local authorities and other best value authorities inform, consult, involve and devolve to local citizens and communities, where appropriate;
- **encourage authorities to provide local people with prompt information on the quality and performance of local services** so that they can judge how effective the public authorities for their area are;
- **give people a new right to an answer when they put forward suggestions or demand action from their local authorities** by strengthening the role of local councillors through an expanded Community Call for Action and providing them with small budgets to deal with local priorities; and
- **improve the development and co-ordination of support for citizens, community groups and local authorities.**

the council’s vision for neighbourhood arrangements

17 In seeking to foster a good working relationship with its communities, the Council wishes to engage more with local people, listen to their views and to empower them to make a difference in their locality. The Ward Councillor is central to this vision. Therefore, by introducing neighbourhood arrangements hereafter called Area Partnerships, the Council would be seeking to:-

- increase participation;
- ensure the continuous improvement of Council services and improve the co-ordination of services at a local level;
- establish a closer relationship with its customers (from inspections);
- encourage openness and transparency; and
- create community leadership opportunities for Councillors

establishing shared principles

- 18 The following principles seem appropriate:
- (a) Area Partnerships will need to be inclusive, representative and accountable with agreed standards of conduct.
 - (b) Every community within the District of Wear Valley should have an Area Partnership to represent its views. Meetings of that assembly should be open to all and publicised widely.
 - (c) The Council should, working with others, pay the cost of any selection/recruitment and help to make sure vacancies are openly advertised.
 - (d) Area Partnerships should be able to comment on and in some cases share responsibility for locally provided services. The Council will seek to give more duties and responsibilities to these local assemblies.
 - (e) The system for allocating any funds to Area Partnerships should be seen as equitable so that overall the system of local taxation should be seen to be reasonable and fair.
 - (f) Everyone should have equal opportunity to influence the decisions of Wear Valley District Council, other public bodies and their Area Partnerships.
 - (g) Everyone should have equal access to information on services provided by their Area Partnerships. This information should detail the cost and performance of those services.
 - (h) Everyone should have access to a local complaints procedure, which works effectively.
- 19 In looking at what form of devolved area arrangements it would be sensible for Wear Valley, to adopt some principles.
- 20 From this perspective Area Partnerships can be seen as a key component of the modernising agenda.

further work

- 21 Assuming Committee approves the geographic boundaries and principles, further work is needed on –
- The composition of Area Partnerships;
 - Joint working with Town and Parish Councils and community groups;
 - Co-ordinating existing arrangements;
 - Joint working with 2D and the Community Network; and

- The extent of the work of Area Partnerships with regard to service monitoring, commissioning and finance.

22 It is proposed to hold a Councillors Seminar on these matters and carry out community consultation following that.

equality and diversity

23 The Council values and respects the diversity of the community it serves. The creation of area arrangements will help to:-

- provide a range of appropriate mechanisms and consultation methods to enable diverse communities to be involved with the Council;
- target resources at communities facing disadvantage and discrimination;
- develop and improve community cohesion; and
- develop effective working relationships with the diverse communities in the District.

24 To support their leadership role and to provide a greater understanding of equality and diversity related issues, it is recommended that all members of Area Partnerships undertake training on managing diversity.

25 In addition, progress against the Equality Standard, to identify areas where support is required, should be undertaken.

legal Implications

26 The Government's proposals for the development of neighbourhood arrangements raise structural, managerial, operational, democratic and financial issues for the Council and its partners, together with questions concerning local peoples' capacity, interest and opportunity to engage.

27 Amendments will be needed to the roles of the Members and the Council's constitution in any event and it would seem appropriate to include the terms of reference for Area Committees within those amendments.

financial implications

28 Detailed costs can only be determined once arrangements are finalised. However, it is important when giving new powers and responsibilities to Area Partnerships that resources are made available to deliver objectives.

29 Financial implications for the introduction of Area Partnerships in the medium term may include:-

- Cost of management support;
- Area budgets;
- Election costs;

- Capacity building/training;
- Equipment ;
- Printing and advertising;
- Hire of rooms; and
- Consultation and research

hr implications

30 As with financial implications these will be cleared when arrangements are finalised.

community safety implications

31 It is anticipated that Area Partnerships will assist with the overall aims of the CRDP. The Police have said that they will also use the system for consultation

RECOMMENDED

1 Committee:-

- a) Makes a decision on the geographic boundaries of neighbourhood arrangements.
- b) Agrees the Council's vision and broad principles for neighbourhood working.
- c) Gives permission to carry out further work on this subject including a Councillors Seminar

Officer responsible for the report:
Michael Laing
Chief Executive
Ext 368

Author of the report:
Michael Laing

Community Involvement/Neighbourhood Arrangements Team Structure

Community Department

- Community Support Manager
Mark Farren
- Community Involvement Manager
Corinne Gardner
- Community Involvement Officer
Christine Davison
- Community Involvement Apprentice
Alishia Gibson
- Neighbourhood Arrangements Officers
Kevin Armstrong / Stephen Thomas
- Neighbourhood Arrangements Clerk
Emma Walton

Neighbourhood Arrangements Project Funding

- £210,000 in total is available for the Neighbourhood Arrangements Project. This has been allocated through the NRF and funds will cease on 31st March 2008.

Option A – 6 Neighbourhood Areas

Area	Council Ward
Upper Weardeale	St John's Chapel, Stanhope
Lower Weardale	Wolsingham and Witton-le-Wear
Crook	Crook North, Crook South, Howden-le-Wear, Wheatbottom and Helmington Row, Tow Law and Stanley
Willington	Willington Central, Willington West End, Hunwick
Bishop East	Bishop Auckland Town, Cockton Hill, Dene Valley, Coundon
Bishop West	Woodhouse Close, West Auckland, Escomb, Henknowle

Option B – 4 Neighbourhood Areas

Area	Council Ward
Weardale	St John's Chapel, Stanhope, Wolsingham and Witton-le-Wear
Crook and Willington	Crook North, Crook South, Howden-le Wear, Wheatbottom and Helmington Row, Tow Law and Stanley, Willington Central, Willington West End, Hunwick
Bishop East	Bishop Auckland Town, Cockton Hill, Dene Valley, Coundon
Bishop West	Woodhouse Close, West Auckland, Escomb, Henknowle

Option C – 3 Neighbourhood Areas

Area	Council Ward
Weardale	St Johns Chapel, Stanhope, Wolsingham and Witton-le Wear
Crook and Willington	Crook North, Crook South, Howeden-le Wear, Wheatbotton and Helmington Row, Tow Law and Stanley, Willington Central, Willington West End, Hunwick
Bishop Auckland	Bishop Auckland Town, Cockton Hill, Dene Valley, Coundon, Woodhouse Close, West Auckland, Escomb, Henknowle