

**THE MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL OF EASINGTON  
HELD ON THURSDAY 28TH JUNE, 2007**

Present: Councillor Mrs M Nugent (Chair)

Councillors Mrs M Baird, E Bell, S Bishop, Mrs G Bleasdale, A. Collinson, Mrs EM Connor, R Crute, R Davison, Mrs S Forster, J Haggan, H High, A J Holmes, Mrs A E Laing, T Longstaff, D Maddison, K McGonnell, D Milsom, D Myers, A Napier, Mrs A Naylor, G Patterson, G. Pinkney, B Quinn, Mrs B A Sloan, R Taylor, R J Todd, C Walker, P G Ward and Mrs V M Williams

**1. THE STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2006/2007**

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Finance and Corporate Services on the Statement of Accounts for 2006/2007, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

T Bell, Director of Finance and Corporate Services advised that the Accounts and Audit Regulations issued by Central Government set out the requirements for the production and publication of the Statement of Accounts. They required the statements to be presented to Members for approval by no later than 30 June 2007.

The Statement had been circulated separately with a summary of the Accounts and statutory financial statements for the year ending 31 March 2007.

He advised that the Statement of Accounts had been considered by the Executive on 25 June 2007 and by the Audit Committee on 27 June 2007 as part of their governance role. No material issues had been raised at these meetings and the Executive had agreed in principle to the release of further reserves which would be subject to consultation with Members and further reports. In addition Officers discussed the main issues with the Chair of the Council who was required to 'sign off' the Accounts.

T Bell proceeded to outline the key results for the year, explaining that the General Fund showed an operational surplus of £1.675m, which included a surplus on the base or controllable budget of £615k, a variance of 3.8% when compared to budget. During the year the Council received a further £1.6m of windfall income, the majority of which was reserved to sustain future regeneration in the area. This brought the Council's surplus up to £3.3m. Balances were reviewed in year in order to sustain the Council's financial position and deliver priorities, and this reduced general reserves by just over £2m. The £2m was moved into specific reserves to meet future commitments. The year end balance was £4.1m compared to an anticipated balance of £3.5m.

With regard to the key results in respect of the Housing Revenue Account there was a surplus on the account of £396k mainly as a result of increased rent income but the Council also utilised reserves of £1.9m in the year. Reserves at the year end amounted to around £2.7m.

To conclude, T Bell confirmed that both the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account were stable in the medium term to enable the Council to continue to deliver it's priorities and keep Council Tax increases to a minimum. Reserves and balances had been reviewed to provide the foundations to plan efficiencies without disrupting or cutting services.

**RESOLVED** that the Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2007, be approved, and all those involved be thanked for their efficient management of the budgets and contribution to the preparation of the Statement.

**2. END OF YEAR PERFORMANCE REVIEW/BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN**

Consideration was given to the report of the Principle Corporate Development Officer which gave an overview of the Council's performance during 2006/7, reported on the progress of the Performance Improvement Teams, suggested mechanisms for making improvements in certain areas and sought approval to the publication of the Best Value Performance Plan. A copy of the report had been circulated to each Member.

M Readman, Principle Corporate Development Officer explained that during 2006/2007 the Council had carried out user satisfaction surveys in planning, housing, benefits administration and a general survey covering street cleaning, refuse collection, open spaces, leisure facilities and tackling anti-social behaviour. The results of these were detailed in the report and showed that overall the satisfaction levels of residents had risen since 2003/4. Nationally the Council had performed well. In respect of the satisfaction indicator BVPI 80f relating to benefits which had shown a decline, she advised that this would be looked at in more detail during 2007/8.

With regard to overall performance, a full table of BVPIs was included at Appendix 1. The picture showed a continuing upward trend, however there had been a slight increase in the number of BVPIs that had declined in performance. The Unit had considered the process of target setting to ensure that targets were realistic.

The report also provided details of those indicators in top quartile positioning and compared to the previous three years the Council had almost doubled its number in the top quartile. She added that average performance remained at the same level however the number of BVPIs in the bottom quartile had risen.

A number of areas where service improvements were necessary had been highlighted last year and 8 areas had been given particular attention during 2006/7. The report summarised the action taken and the resulting outcomes for each of these areas. Six of the eight areas had improved, seven had achieved and in most cases significantly exceeded the targets set. This showed that targeting specific BVPIs and focussing effort succeeded.

The Council aimed to have 52% of indicators in the top quartile by March 2010 and Appendix 2 gave details of those indicators that would be driven forward.

For 2007/2008 it was proposed to focus on the following eight areas for specific attention:-

BVPI 156 Buildings accessible to people with a disability  
BVPI 82a and b % of and total tonnage of household waste recycled  
BVPI 84 Kgs of household waste collected  
BVPI 109a, b and c Turnaround time for planning applications (major, minor and other)  
BVPI 66b Council tenants with more than 7 weeks of rent arrears  
BVPI 66c Council tenants in areas with notices seeking possession  
BVPI 212 Average re-let times for Council-owned homes  
Satisfaction indicator relating to the overall benefits service.

M Readman outlined performance in relation to local PIs. Appendix 3 provided a full list of these indicators and their performance.

With regard to the Corporate Plan, she explained that the 2004/2005 Corporate Performance Plan Priority Delivery Plan contained 144 targets, the majority of which had been achieved. Appendix 4 provided a full list of the targets and performance.

In accordance with the Local Government Act 1999, the Council had a duty to prepare and publish an annual Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP). The content, timing and

scope of the Plan was prescribed within a guidance document from the ODPM, although the requirements were reduced for good and excellent authorities. As the information required for the BVPP was contained within the report which must be published by 30 June 2007, it was recommended that it be used as the basis for the publication of this Year's Plan.

**RESOLVED** that

- (a) the information on performance against BVPIs, Local PIs and the Corporate Plan, be noted;
- (b) the eight areas identified be made the focus of Performance Improvement Teams and their progress be monitored and reported back to Management Team, Executive and Audit Committee on a quarterly basis;
- (c) the report be used as the basis of the publication of the Best Value Performance Plan

### **3. PROPOSALS FOR A SINGLE COUNCIL FOR COUNTY DURHAM**

Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Executive which advised of the work of the Council in responding to the Government's consultation on the proposal to establish a single unitary council for County Durham. It also set out the Government's intended next steps and timescale in considering the responses to the consultation which closed on 22 June 2007. A copy of the report had been circulated to each Member.

J Johnson, Chief Executive reported that at the full Council meeting on 25 April 2007 she had been granted authority, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to lead a team of Officers to prepare a formal response to the proposals to establish a single unitary authority for County Durham and to incur appropriate expenditure in the collation of stakeholders views on the proposals.

A series of actions had been undertaken to ensure that this Council was able to respond effectively to the Government's consultation, reflecting the views of the people and stakeholders of the District of Easington, details of which were set out in the report.

The Durham Districts had commissioned Electoral Reform Services, the specialist balloting arm of the Electoral Reform Society, to undertake a full referendum across all countywide electors.

The results of the referendum showed that with a turnout of 40%, almost 120,000 voted for Option A, to retain and improve the two tier arrangement. Only around 37,000 voted for Option B, the establishment of a single unitary council for County Durham.

In the District of Easington, almost 43% of electors used their vote, with a massive 83.8% preferring to retain and improve the existing arrangements of district and county councils.

Details of individual results across all the Durham Districts showed that electors in all 7 Districts issued a resounding 'NO' to a single council for County Durham.

In addition to the referendum the views of local stakeholder groups were sought, of which almost 250 out of 300 responses were opposed to a single council for County Durham. Details were set out in the report.

The collective response of the Durham District and Borough Councils was completed and submitted by the deadline date of 22 June 2007. The response assessed the County Council's proposal against each of the five tests laid down by the Government.

**Extraordinary District Council of Easington – 28 June, 2007**

It also included independent financial analysis carried out by Prof. Chisholm of Cambridge University and an assessment of the neighbourhood model undertaken by the Tavistock Institute.

The response provided substantial and independent evidence that the proposal was not affordable, was not supported, would lead to inertia in leadership, would not empower neighbourhoods and would lead to service disruption and a ‘one size fits all’ approach dealing inadequately with the needs of diverse communities.

The Government intended to announce decisions on which of the proposals would proceed to implementation at the end of July 2007.

Following discussion it was **RESOLVED** that the actions of the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, in responding to the consultation proposing a single council for County Durham, be endorsed and all those involved in preparing the response be thanked for their efforts.

**CERTIFIED TRUE RECORD**

CHAIR .....

DATE .....

JE/PH/COM/DIST/070702  
10 July 2007