

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL OF EASINGTON  
HELD ON THURSDAY 5 MARCH 2009**

Present: Councillor R. Taylor (Chair)

Councillors E. Bell, S. Bishop,  
Mrs. G. Bleasdale, A. Burnip, R. Burnip,  
A. Collinson, R. Crute, R. Davison,  
Mrs. J. Freak, J. Haggan, H. High, G. Johnson,  
T. Longstaff, Mrs. S. Mason, D. Milsom,  
D. Myers, G. Patterson, G. Pinkney,  
F. Shaw, Mrs. B.A. Sloan, D.J. Taylor-Gooby,  
R.J. Todd, T. Unsworth and C. Walker.

1. **THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE DISTRICT COUNCIL OF EASINGTON** held on 5 February 2009 a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.
2. **ANNUAL AUDIT AND INSPECTION LETTER 2007/2008**

The Chair welcomed C. Waddell, District Auditor from the Audit Commission who was in attendance to discuss the District of Easington's Annual Audit and Inspection Letter for 2007/2008. A copy of the Letter had been circulated to each Member.

C. Waddell explained that this was the last Annual Audit and Inspection Letter before the District of Easington ceased to exist on 31 March 2009. He stated that the key messages arising from the Letter were positive and that it was a very good report which was a tribute to all Members and Officers involved, particularly in the light of local government reorganisation. The Council had managed to maintain and improve services for residents whilst contributing towards the development of the new unitary Council at the same time.

The Council had marked its final year with some impressive achievements and good progress had been made on improving services in line with the priorities set out in the Transitional Plan. It was pleasing to note that 67% of performance indicators had improved in the last year which was well above the average range for all district authorities.

Housing remained a recognised area for improvement but this was being actively tackled by East Durham Homes with support from the Council and overall housing services were generally improving. It was hoped that the housing re-inspection to be carried out in June 2009 would confirm the improvements made. The new management arrangements and a further housing inspection to be carried out in June 2009 would hopefully confirm this.

He continued that in this period of significant change and uncertainty the Council had continued to maintain and in some cases strengthen its arrangements for preparing its accounts and ensuring value for money. An unqualified opinion had been issued on the Council's accounts, together with an unqualified value for money conclusion and an improved use of resources assessment.

## District Council of Easington - 5 March 2009

C. Waddell advised that this Letter included the latest assessment on the Council's performance under the CPA framework including the Direction of Travel report and the results of any inspections carried out by the Audit Commission under Section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999.

To conclude, he stated that audit and Inspection work was impossible without the co-operation of Officers and Members and in the time he had worked with Easington, the Council maintained a positive and constructive approach to this work. He conveyed best wishes to Members and staff for the future.

J. Johnson, Chief Executive, referred Members to the self-assessment submitted to Council for consideration in January 2009. It was pleasing that the Audit and Inspection Letter confirmed the Council's own assessment of how it had performed, and the improvements and achievements that had been made.

The Deputy Leader of the Council reiterated this adding that it was also pleasing that the Council had managed to maintain continuous improvement since it had been awarded 'excellent' status in 2004, particularly in view of the significant changes the Council faced in the move towards unitary status.

**RESOLVED** that the information given be noted, and the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter for 2007/2008, be received.

### 3. **LEISURE CONNECTION LIMITED**

M. Grinstead, Easington Contract Manager was in attendance to provide an overview of Leisure Connection Limited's performance over the last year, and to give details of the Annual Plan for 2009/2010.

M. Grinstead stated that since the leisure service had been transferred on 17 March 2003, a reduction in the Management Fee and rates over this period had resulted in an overall saving of £1.9m.

Since 2003 Peterlee Leisure Centre had experienced a significant increase in customer visits although the economic downturn did have an effect towards the end of 2008. However visits had risen again in January and February of 2009. With regard to Seaham Leisure Centre, customer visits had increased year on year since 2003 but had remained the same for 2008/9. Overall for the two centres combined customer visits had increased by 55 % over six years.

M Grinstead outlined achievements made over the last year, which included a capital investment of £250,000 into the health and fitness facilities. The company had received 70% accreditation in Quest and a total of 490,711 visits had been made to the leisure centres. There were now over 4,500 leisure saver card members, standards had been revised at Seaham and 4,000 free swims and 3,790 free school visits had been arranged.

He continued that partnership working was key to the success of the leisure service. The company hosted national and regional events at its leisure centres and was currently undertaking a re-branding exercise with the launch of a new website. Swimming lessons were now being delivered at Seaham pool.

In terms of customer satisfaction, 52 written complaints had been received in relation to Peterlee Leisure Centre over the year with a satisfaction score of 4.09, and 13 written complaints had been received at Seaham with a customer satisfaction of 4.39. The industry average was 4.28.

In terms of the Annual Plan for 2009/2010 which was developed in partnership with the Council, he outlined the aims for the year. These included achieving 'private sector quality in a public sector environment', establishing a closer working relationship with the new Durham County Council, delivering a successful free scheme for swimming, continuing to work closely with key partners, significant capital investment in bars and catering facilities and a review of the opening times. Key performance indicators within the Plan focussed on health, young people, sports development, older people, community safety, social inclusion, families, participation levels and quality.

He concluded that the Plan was a working document that could be changed to suit the priorities of the new unitary authority.

Following discussion the Easington Contract Manager was thanked for the presentation and it was **RESOLVED** that the information given, be noted.

**4. PROGRESS WITH THE COUNTYWIDE CHOICE BASED LETTINGS SCHEME**

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Member for Housing which gave an update on the implementation of Choice Based Lettings (CBL) across County Durham and sought approval to amend the Council's existing housing allocations policy operated by East Durham Homes, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

It was reported that in June 2006 the Council had agreed to move towards the introduction of a CBL scheme as part of a countywide approach in line with Government targets for all authorities to introduce CBL by 2010. In December 2007 the Council agreed to adopt CBL for housing allocations in the District as a pathfinder for development of the Countywide scheme.

CBL was planned to be introduced across County Durham and would be known as 'Durham Key Options'. The aim of the project was to introduce one housing register and lettings policy for County Durham and to implement Durham Key Options CBL scheme by the summer of 2009.

The policy for County Durham had been developed around the Easington model although further amendments and improvements may be needed prior to its implementation. Details of the lettings policy for County Durham and how the CBL scheme had worked in Easington from April 2008 to January 2009 were outlined in the report.

In advance of the introduction of the countywide policy, minor amendments to Easington's existing Housing Allocations Policy were proposed, details of which were outlined in the report.

**RESOLVED** that the changes to the Council's Housing Allocations Policy outlined in paragraphs 6.2 to 6.7 be approved with effect from 1 April 2009, and progress with the countywide Durham Key Options CBL scheme, be noted.

**5. REPRESENTATIONS ON OUTSIDE BODIES - EAST DURHAM HOMES BOARD**

The Head of Democratic Services and Administration advised that Councillor B. Bates had resigned from his position on East Durham Homes Board and nominations were sought for one member to fill the vacant position. Councillor D.J. Taylor-Gooby conveyed his appreciation to Councillor Bates in recognition of

## District Council of Easington - 5 March 2009

the service he had given in his time as a representative on East Durham Homes Board.

**RESOLVED** that Councillor R.J. Todd be appointed to the vacant position on East Durham Homes Board.

6. **TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 - SECTION 257 - CONFIRMATION OF PUBLIC FOOTPATH STOPPING UP ORDER THE DISTRICT OF EASINGTON, (WOODLANDS AVENUE, WHEATLEY HILL) (NO. 1) PUBLIC PATH STOPPING UP ORDER 2008**

It was reported that the District Council had made the abovementioned Order under Section 257 of the Town and Country Planning Act on 6 November 2008, the effect of which was to stop up and close the footpath adjacent to No. 12 Aged Miners Homes, Woodlands Avenue, Wheatley Hill, on behalf of DAMHA.

One objection to the Order had been received as part of the statutory notice process and an approach was made to the objector by the Council's Governance and Risk Manager on behalf of the Council and Durham Aged Mines Homes to discuss and review the basis of their objection. The objector had recently confirmed that they were happy to withdraw their objection and accordingly the representation had now been withdrawn.

**RESOLVED** that the District of Easington (Woodlands Avenue, Wheatley Hill) (No. 1) Public Path Stopping Up Order 2008 be confirmed as an unopposed Order to come into effect on 5 March 2009, the date of the confirmation of the Order.

7. **TO SEAL DOCUMENTS**

**RESOLVED** that the action taken in affixing the Common Seal to documents numbered 19894 to 19907 as listed in the Council's Seal Register, be endorsed.

JE/CB/COM/DIST/090302  
10 March 2009