

THE DISTRICT COUNCIL OF CHESTER-LE-STREET

Report of the meeting of Council held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Newcastle Road, Chester-le-Street, Co Durham, DH3 3UT on Thursday, 29 November 2007 at 6.00 pm

PRESENT:

Councillor A Humes (Chairman)

Councillors

A Turner	W Laverick
G Armstrong	M D May
S Barr	P H May
J W Barrett	P B Nathan
L E W Brown	M Potts
R Court	J M Proud
G K Davidson	D L Robson
Greatwich	M Sekowski
R Harrison	J Shiell
S A Henig	T J Smith
A K Holden	D Thompson
C J Jukes	A Willis

Officers: R Templeman (Chief Executive), L Chambers (Director of Resources), T Galloway (Director of Development Services), J Henderson (Head of Revenues and Benefits), C Potter (Head of Legal and Democratic Services), S Reed (Development and Building Control Manager), P Stephens (Acting Director of Community Services), A Swinney (Head of Organisational Development) and C Turnbull (Democratic Services Officer)

84. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors L Ebbatson, MJ Gollan, D Holding, K Potts, TH Harland, SCL Westrip and F Wilkinson.

85. TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the proceedings at the meeting of the District Council held on 25 October 2007 copies of which had previously been circulated, were submitted.

The Council RESOLVED:

“That the minutes be confirmed as a correct record.”

The Chairman proceeded to sign the minutes.

86. PUBLIC SPEAKING

No requests had been received from members of the public to speak at the meeting in accordance with the Council's agreed policy.

87. TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

88. REPORT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Councillor SA Henig, Deputy Leader, advised of two items he wished to raise in the Leader's absence:

Head of Organisational Development

Councillor Henig advised it was the last meeting of the Council that the Head of Organisational Development would be attending prior to her leaving the Council's employment. On behalf of the Council he thanked her for the work she had done and wished her well for the future.

Local Government Reorganisation

Councillor Henig reported receipt of the second draft Statutory Instrument containing implementation proposals for the new Unitary Council to operate from April 2009, that was expected to go through Parliament in the following two weeks and come into effect in January 2008.

Councillor Henig drew attention to four specific items included in the draft:

- i. Elections for the new Council would be held in May 2008
- ii. An Implementation Executive would be formed to operate until the fourth day after the May 2008 elections. The constitution would be all of the Leaders of the District and Borough Councils in the County plus 10 County Councillors and would, in effect, act as the Executive to formulate an Implementation Plan. Following the election the Executive of the new County Body would take over.
- iii. Overview and Scrutiny referred to in the draft.
- iv. Parish Council elections will be delayed until 2013 to coincide with the new Council elections.

The Chief Executive advised that the new Council to be elected in May 2008 would form the new Unitary Council in April 2009 and the current District and Borough Councils would be abolished at that time. In the lead up to the formation of the new Unitary Council there would be a general duty to co-operate. The Judicial Review to be taken by Shrewsbury and Atcham would be in January 2008 with the outcome being expected in March 2008.

Councillor LEW Brown enquired whether all Councillors elected in May 2008 would serve as the Executive.

The Chief Executive advised that the new Council would establish its own set up to run the political structure and officer structure.

Councillor P Nathan enquired why the Parish Council elections would be delayed when Councillor Henig advised that the draft was not specific but it was usual for Parish Council elections to be linked with principal Council elections.

Councillor W Laverick commented that a large area of the District was not served by a Parish Council and that Parish Councils throughout the County area varied in size. He considered urgent attention should be given to that area.

The Chief Executive advised the matter of stakeholder engagement had been raised at a joint Officers' meeting. He suggested that community views could be obtained to help influence the outcome of the review.

Councillor Henig commented that the questions raised highlight the weakness in the County Council's submission.

89. REPORTS FROM PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

a. Resources and Value for Money

There was no report from Councillor SA Henig

b. Regeneration and Strategic Planning

Councillor CJ Jukes reported on the following matters:

- The switch-on of the Christmas lights in the Town Centre took place on Saturday 24 November.
- He had attended two meetings of the Pelton Fell Neighbourhood Regeneration Panel Board during the last month.
- The Town Centre Master Plan was launched earlier in the day.
- On behalf of the Council he had signed the Filming Friendly Partnership Charter that committed the Council to working in partnership with Northern Film and Media to make the North East a film friendly region. He thanked the Officers and the Chief Executive's team for their involvement.

c. Community Engagement and Partnership

Councillor S Barr reported on the following matters:

- Feedback following the IIP success indicated that the Council had received one of the best scores. He extended congratulations to all concerned.

- Continuous Progress Improvement
- Performance and Improvement
- Audit Commission Direction of Travel
- Community Engagement and Neighbourhood Development
- 360% Appraisal and Member Development
- Member Training Programme
- Anti Poverty Working Group
- Review of ICT Strategy
- Introduction of modern.gov report, agenda and minute system in Democratic Services.
- E gov Partnership meeting
- Best wishes to the Communications and Public Relations Manger for a speedy recovery

d. Neighbourhood Services

There was no report from Councillor SCL Westrip.

e. Health and Wellbeing

Councillor M Potts reported on the following matters:

- Careline call-out services was back in-house
- Healthy Horizons Programme
- New Leaf Project
- Communities for Health Grant
- Crime in Chester-le-Street – Criminal damage was the most reported.
- She had been nominated to attend the 'Fresh' Conference

90. QUESTIONS TO LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

There were no questions for the Leader or Portfolio Holders.

91. TO ACCEPT THE REPORT OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE HELD ON 4 OCTOBER 2007

The Council RESOLVED:

“That the report of the meeting of the Audit Committee held 4 October 2007, copies of which had previously been circulated, be accepted.”

92. REPORT OF APPOINTMENTS PANEL HELD 8 NOVEMBER 2007

Prior to consideration of the item, the Head of Revenues and Benefits left the meeting.

The report of the Appointments Panel held 8 November 2007 that gave consideration to changes to the senior management structure of the Council

and made recommendations thereon, was submitted, copies of which had previously been circulated.

Councillor SA Henig introduced the item and spoke in support of the recommendations.

Councillor S Barr proposed, seconded by Councillor L Armstrong, that the recommendations be approved.

The Council RESOLVED:

“1. That the revised responsibilities and designation of Director of Corporate Services and the appointment of the Assistant Chief Executive to the position, be approved.

2. That the appointment of the current Deputy 151 Officer to the position of 151 Officer and the appointment of a new Deputy 151 Officer, be approved.

3. That the Chief Executive be authorised to continue with the appointment process for the acting up arrangements in the Resources Directorate and Regeneration Section.

4. That part of the savings (with a ceiling of £50,000 in any one year) be specifically earmarked for the Chief Executive to use as appropriate to procure specialist expertise that may be necessary to support the Council over the following 12 to 18 months. The use of the fund to be subject to agreement with the Leader/Deputy Leader of the Council.

5. That the net annual revenue savings to be generated by the new arrangements be utilised to address budget pressures in 2007/8 and 2008/9.”

The Chief Executive advised that following an interview process the following acting up arrangements would operate with immediate effect:

- Acting Head of Resources – Jayne Henderson
- 151 Officer – Ian Herberson
- Acting Manager for Regeneration – Leila Dawson
- The Corporate Management Team to meet with the Corporate Support Team on a monthly basis.

93. REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS/POLLING PLACES/POLLING STATIONS

Consideration was given to the report of the Electoral Arrangements Advisory Group held 8 November 2007 that undertook a review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations, and made recommendations as detailed on the schedule circulated with the report.

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report and advised that following consideration of comments received during the consultation period, an additional Polling Station located in the Communal Room at Lambourne Close, Bournmoor was recommended. He further advised of the recommendation to amalgamate Polling Districts Z1 and Z2 to create Polling District Z.

Councillor PH May commented that the Rickleton area in the North Lodge Ward previously had a Polling Station located in a Mobile Unit and queried why the recommendations did not include this provision.

The Democratic Services Officer advised that a Mobile Unit had previously been sited in the car park area at Washington Hospital but that space was no longer available and efforts to secure a suitable alternative location had been unsuccessful.

Councillor JW Barrett proposed, seconded by Councillor L Armstrong, that the recommendations of the Advisory Group be approved.

The Council RESOLVED:

“1. That the review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations undertaken by the Electoral Arrangements Advisory Group be supported.

2. That the schedule detailing Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations following the review, incorporating a new Polling Station in the Communal Room at Lambourne Close, Bournmoor, and the amalgamation of Polling Districts Z1 and Z2 to form Polling District Z, be agreed.”

94. COUNCIL TAX BASE 2008 - 2009

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Revenues and Benefits on the calculation of the Council Tax Base for the financial year 2008/2009.

The Head of Revenues and Benefits and the Director of Resources both spoke to the report.

Councillor P Nathan requested an explanation of the inclusion of 33.1 in the tax base as referred to in paragraph 6.1(c) of the report. The Director of Resources advised that it was a complex matter and she would provide a written explanation to Councillor Nathan.

Councillor R Harrison proposed, seconded by Councillor S Barr, that the recommendations in the report be approved.

The Council RESOLVED:

“1. That the reduction in discount on second homes from 50% to 10% be confirmed.

2. That in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) Regulations 1992, as amended, the amount calculated by Chester-le-Street District Council as its Tax Base for 2008/2009 be 17,086.65.
3. That the inclusion of 33.1 in the Tax Base for the reduction in discount on second homes from 50% to 10% be noted.
4. That the collection rate be set at 98.5%.
5. That it be noted that the 2008/2009 Tax Base does not take account of any reduction in the discount on long term empty properties.”

95. PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING REVIEW

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Planning and Environmental Health on a review of the Council’s Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy.

The Director of Development Services introduced the report.

Councillor PH May enquired how the Council advertised throughout the District the availability of grant funding.

The Director of Development Services advised that the Home Improvement Agency undertook advertising and promotion of the scheme.

Councillor L Armstrong proposed, seconded by Councillor S Barr, that the recommendations in the report be approved.

The Council RESOLVED:

- “1. That the review of the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy be approved.
2. That further capital funding bids for the financial years 2008/9 and 2009/10 be made to the Capital Working Group in order to meet the Council’s target of 70% vulnerable households living in decent homes by 2010.
3. That the amendment to the Waiting List System as detailed in paragraph 5.4 of the report be agreed.
4. That Security Grants be removed from the Policy but their inclusion be reconsidered as part of a future review if an appropriate scheme is developed.
5. That the existing mechanisms for policy review as well as performance standards and monitoring be continued.

6. That Officers be authorised to participate in the development of the Regional Loans Scheme that will be the subject of a future report to Members.”

Councillor P Nathan abstained from voting on the recommendations.

96. CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Planning and Environmental Health seeking approval to the Code of Good Practice for Development Control that sets out principles to guide Members in dealing with planning.

Councillor GK Davidson advised that the Code was a working reference for Planning Committee Members and of general information for all Members.

The Development and Building Control Manager advised that in-house training would be provided for Members in 2008.

Councillor GK Davidson proposed, seconded by Councillor R Harrison, that the recommendation in the report be approved.

The Council RESOLVED:

“That the Code of Good Practice for Development Control be approved.”

97. DISTRICT PLAY STRATEGY

Consideration was given to a report from the Leisure Services Manager seeking approval to a play strategy for the District that would replace the existing play areas strategy.

The Director of Resources introduced and spoke to the report.

Councillor PH May congratulated the Director of Development Services and the Leisure Services Team on production of the strategy and for the new play area provided at Northlands, Chester-le-Street.

Councillor L Armstrong proposed, seconded by Councillor D Robson, that the recommendation in the report be approved.

The Council RESOLVED:

“That the play strategy for the District be approved.”

98. CORRESPONDENCE

There were no items of correspondence.

99. CONFERENCES

There were no invitations to attend Conferences.

100. COMMON SEAL

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that a composite list of documents sealed since the October 2007 meeting of the Council would be reported to the next meeting.

101. CHAIRMANS ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman of the Council, Councillor Allen Humes, made the following announcements:

- Charity Night at Sacriston – Thanks to local Members for the arrangements
- Councillor PH May had advised he would be donating a cheque to the Chairman's Charity appeal in lieu of Christmas cards to all Members.
- The Civic Carol Service would be held on 19 December 2007 at Perkinsville Methodist Church.
- As the next meeting would be the last meeting prior to Christmas a buffet would be available following the meeting.
- Congratulations to the Head of Organisation and Development on her new appointment.

The Chief Executive advised it would be necessary to convene a Special Meeting of the Council during December to deal with Stock Transfer matters.

The meeting terminated at 7.15 pm