

THE DISTRICT COUNCIL OF CHESTER-LE-STREET

Minutes of the proceedings at the meeting of the District Council of Chester-le-Street held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Chester-le-Street on Thursday 25 October 2007 at 6.00pm

PRESENT:

Councillor A Humes (Chairman)

Councillors:

L Armstrong	MD May
JW Barrett	PH May
R Court	PB Nathan
GK Davidson	JM Proud
L Ebbatson	DL Robson
MJ Gollan	M Sekowski
S Greatwich	J Shiell
SA Henig	TJ Smith
AK Holden	D Thompson
D Holding	A Turner
CJ Jukes	F Wilkinson
W Laverick	A Willis

Officers: R Templeman (Chief Executive), T Galloway (Director of Development Services), P. Stephens (Acting Director of Community Services), I Forster (Assistant Chief Executive), M Walker (Head of Regeneration), C Potter (Head of Legal and Democratic Services) and C Turnbull (Democratic Services Officer).

Also in attendance were two members of the public.

73 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors G Armstrong, S Barr, LEW Brown, P Ellis, R Harrison, K Potts, M Potts and SCL Westrip.

74 MINUTES OF MEETING HELD 27 SEPTEMBER 2007

The minutes of the proceedings at the meeting of the District Council held on 27 September 2007 copies of which had previously been circulated, were submitted.

The Council RESOLVED:

"1. That the comment at the end of minute no. 55 be amended to read:

‘(Councillor PH May abstained from voting on the motion as he had not seen a copy of the Statement of Accounts prior to the meeting)’

2. That the minutes as amended be confirmed as a correct record.”

The Chairman proceeded to sign the minutes.

75 WELCOME TO COUNCILLOR L ARMSTRONG

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Lawson Armstrong to his first meeting following his election on 27 September 2007 as a Member for the Chester Central Ward.

76 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.

77 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

There were no Declarations of Interest from Members.

78 REPORT FROM LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

The Leader congratulated everyone who took part in Local Democracy Week (15 -19 October). Events included an equality and diversity event; visits from schools to the Civic Centre; visits to schools; a Big Debate in the Council Chamber; and an activities day for children and young people at the Riverside. In all over 1000 young people were involved.

Thanks were also given to the organisers of the Annual Evening of Achievements and Celebration (24 October). The list of achievements for this year has been remarkable.

The District Council is now the proud recipient of the Investors in People Award and the Leader expressed her appreciation, on behalf of the Council, of the work of everyone involved, in particular the Human Resources team.

The Leader stated that the Council was never one to rest on its laurels, and other awards were in the pipeline. The town had been awarded Fair Trade status and discussions were taking place with partners in the Fair Trade group, without whom the award could not have been achieved.

The Leader then raised a matter arising from the September meeting of the Council regarding Local Government Review.

The Leader advised that at the meeting of Council on 27 September 2007 Members considered a report from the Head of Legal & Democratic Services giving details of two urgent decisions that were made on the 3 September 2007, one of which related to the Judicial Review inaugurated by Durham City Council. Members endorsed the Leader’s action to support the Judicial Review.

It was also agreed that the matter would be brought back to Council following the outcome of a similar Judicial Review being undertaken by Shrewsbury and Atcham and other councils.

The Leader informed the meeting that although the Shrewsbury and Atcham case had been dismissed the council's involved were proceeding to appeal. As a result, Chester-le-Street needed to consider whether it supported the Durham City proposal to seek a stay in the joint challenge in the light of the implications for this Council.

The Chief Executive advised that the September meeting of the Council agreed to a maximum expenditure of £5,000. Total expenditure to date was £7,800 of which the Council's share was approximately £1,000. He further advised that the appeal against the outcome of the Shrewsbury and Atcham case was likely to be held in January 2008 with the outcome being known in March 2008. If the Durham Districts agree to continue the fight after the outcome, the cost of further action would be in the region of £1/2M to the Districts. He added that the Council always had the options of staying with the other Durham Districts or withdrawing from any further action.

The Leader advised there would be no additional cost to the Council in continuing to work with the other Durham Districts for the time being. She gave an assurance that should there be any change or any additional cost, the matter would be referred back to Council.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor PH May, the Leader advised that the other Councils in the County all support continuing with the Judicial Review procedure.

Councillor PB Nathan stated that full details of costs should be provided to Members when a decision is needed by Council on any further expenditure.

Councillor CJ Jukes proposed a motion without notice, seconded by Councillor GK Davidson:

'That this Council endorses the Durham Districts' support for a stay of the judicial review proceedings. Regarding the financial position, this remains as already agreed by Council. However, any further expenditure on this matter would be brought back to Council for a decision.'

On the motion being put, all Members voted in favour and the Council RESOLVED:

"That this Council endorses the Durham Districts' support for a stay of the judicial review proceedings. Regarding the financial position, this remains as already agreed by Council. However, any further expenditure on this matter would be brought back to Council for a decision."

79 REPORTS FROM PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

a. Resources and Value for Money

Councillor SA Henig reported on the following:

Comprehensive Spending Review

The Government announced the Comprehensive Spending Review, that provides expected levels of expenditure over the next three years. The Local Government Association described the 1% increase for local government as the 'toughest settlement for a decade' and there was no doubt that budget exercises, which have never been easy for this authority, will continue to be extremely difficult for this and any successor authorities, particularly given the additional resources needed for an ageing society. Exactly how much in additional government resource will come to Chester-le-Street for 2008-9 will be known by early December.

He added that a further aspect of CSR 2007 was an increased target for efficiency savings. The Gershon report already required the Council to make 2.5% efficiencies per year (half cashable) and this will now increase to 3%, all of which should be cashable. Even the Department for Communities and Local Government recognised the challenge as 'substantial' and it places even more importance on procurement. This Council had already made substantial progress in this area under the direction of the Head of Corporate Procurement, Darren Knowd, and this would need to continue. To this end, Darren had made a presentation earlier in the week to an informal meeting of the Executive, which included the next steps to be taken, including better collaborative working sub-regionally.

Revenues and Benefits news

Councillor Henig said he was delighted that the Revenues and Benefits team continued to prosper, as recognised by the large number of awards picked up at the Evening of Achievement. He expressed his and the Council's continued thanks for their efforts, work that is unstinting and often unsung.

He advised that the Council was one of only four local authorities nationally who had agreed to take part in a Benefits Service pilot inspection, and Chester-le-Street was the only Council to allow its report to be publicised. This had generated substantial publicity at the recent Institute of Revenues Rating & Valuation Conference that is attended by managers from across the Country. Two other developments in Revenues and Benefits were the piloting of a voice risk analysis system for fraudulent claims of benefit (in partnership with Sedgefield, Durham City and Derwentside), with funding from the Department of Work and Pensions; and secondly, the Revenues Team had embarked upon an exercise to determine that residents with a single person discount had genuine entitlement to it. The Team had written to more than 5,000 residents and received approximately 2,500 replies.

Councillor Henig stated that this was an outstanding action on the Council's Improvement Plan stemming from the Inspection Report and was an approach recommended as best practice by the Audit Commission.

b. Regeneration and Strategic Planning

Councillor CJ Jukes reported on the following matters:

- Work was continuing on a range of projects across the District
- He attended the launch of the SME Concordat with Officers and a senior representative of the business community and signed the Concordat on behalf of the Council. He advised that the SME Concordat was a key element of the Council's Procurement Strategy.
- He attended a meeting of the Pelton Fell Neighbourhood Regeneration Panel Board
- He advised that Martin Walker, Head of Regeneration, was leaving the Council to take up a new post. He expressed his thanks to Martin, and his team, for delivering some key milestones, and wished him well for the future.

c. Community Engagement and Partnership

There was no report from Councillor S Barr.

d. Neighbourhood Services

There was no report from Councillor SCL Westrip.

e. Health and Wellbeing

There was no report from Councillor M Potts.

80 QUESTIONS TO LEADER AND PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

Councillor PB Nathan submitted the following questions to Councillor CJ Jukes, Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Strategic Planning: -

- i. How much did the District Council spend on regeneration (a) in the last financial year and (b) over the last 3 financial years, in each of the following areas: (1) Edmondsley Parish (2) Sacriston (3) Plawsworth (4) Nettleworth (5) Kimblesworth (6) Grange Villa?
- ii. How much did the District Council spend on regeneration in Edmondsley, broken down into both direct funding and indirect funding to organisations in Edmondsley, (a) in the last financial year and (b) in the last three financial years?

Councillor Jukes stated that in response to the questions it was essential to stress that as with all services in the Council, and in keeping with the 'One Team' approach the Council has developed, the Regeneration Service had its budget allocated on the basis of agreed priorities across the District rather than to specific areas.

There were, however, some specifically area-based initiatives in Chester-le-Street District, in particular through Single Housing Investment Pot (SHIP) funding. SHIP was a single housing capital pot, comprising funding streams for local authorities and registered social landlords. He was pleased to be able to remind Council that, due to the quality of the Labour Council's bid, this District secured 50% of all available SHIP2 funding for the whole County, and that the Edmondsley and Waldrige Ward was one of the main beneficiaries.

He advised that in the previous three years, £223,465 of SHIP2 and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) funding had been won for projects in Edmondsley (including £100,000 in the current year). The funding had gone towards bringing private sector homes up to the Decent Homes Standard.

Almost one million pounds - £836,767 – of SHIP2 funding had gone into Sacriston (including £786,767 in the current year), to bring private sector homes up to the decent homes standard, environmental works, the new Community Centre, which he was delighted to see being built, and the development, with the community, of an Area Development Framework (ADF) which could lead to many more millions of pounds of investment.

Grange Villa was the main beneficiary of the Council's SHIP1 programme, and had also secured ERDF funding. This support amounted to £1,352,345 (including £857,104 in the last financial year). The funding enabled the development of a highly successful community-led Enterprise Centre in the village, environmental improvements on Front Street, and bringing private sector homes up to the decent homes standard.

Councillor Jukes referred to the Council's Regeneration Strategy, which received wide endorsement from the District Local Strategic Partnership. As an integral part of that Strategy there were identified regeneration corridors, and regeneration work with local residents was progressing across the whole spectrum of regeneration, including, for example, the development of a business plan to enable Edmondsley to become carbon-neutral, the development of a conservation area appraisal to preserve the character of Plawsworth Village, the provision of youth work for Grange Villa, Kimblesworth, and Nettlesworth, and the installation of CCTV in villages such as Sacriston.

Councillor Jukes announced that potentially another £500,000 of further SHIP financing was available for spending in our regeneration corridors.

In summary he emphasized to Council that the regeneration figures referred to, and indeed the whole of the Regeneration Service, were an essential part of the Council's CPA re-inspection which graded this Labour Council as the

most improved Council in the country. Indeed the projects referred to were also an integral part of the extremely positive inspection comments that were received as part of the countywide inspection of regeneration.

Councillor Jukes emphasized, and made no apologies for saying it, that the approach of this Labour Council to regeneration had been, and would continue to be, about focusing on priorities to enable strong and sustainable communities, being non-parochial in approach and also taking a common sense and essentially non-tribal political approach to regenerating our communities.

Councillor TJ Smith entered the meeting at 6.28pm

81 POLITICAL BALANCE REVIEW

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Legal and Democratic Services on a review of political representation arrangements following the election of Councillor Lawson Armstrong and receipt of his notice of intention to join the Labour Group on the Council.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services spoke to the report.

Councillor L Ebbatson proposed, seconded by Councillor D Holding, that the recommendations in the report be approved.

The Council RESOLVED:

“1. That the Council notes the review of the representation of the different political groups.

2. That those arrangements regarding political balance and the disapplication of the political balance arrangements and the allocation of seats which existed immediately prior to this latest duty to review the representation of the different political groups be reinstated with no change in existing appointments other than that Councillor Lawson Armstrong is appointed to serve on those vacant seats allocated to the Labour Group.”

82 COMMON SEAL

The Council RESOLVED:

“ That the action of the Officer in affixing the Common Seal of the Council to the following documents be confirmed:

Nominations Agreement relating to land at Phase 2b, Pelton Fell
Transfer relating to land and buildings at Pelton Fell
Deed of Release in duplicate relating to 28 Whitehill Crescent, Pelton Fell
Transfer in duplicate relating to 49 The Avenue, Chester-le-Street

Transfer in duplicate relating to land to front of 5 Wear Crescent
Form DS1 in respect of 62 Jacques Terrace, Chester-le-Street
Lease in duplicate relating to Unit 14 Stella Gill Industrial Estate
Temporary Road Closure Order in respect of Remembrance Parade, 10.00am
to 10.45am
Temporary Road Closure Order in respect of Remembrance Parade, 11.30am
to 12.30pm”

83 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

- Fund raising night on Saturday 24 November 2007 at Sacriston Workingmen's Club
- Civic Carol Service on Wednesday 19 December 2007 at Perkinsville Methodist Church
- Visit by 80 German children from Kamp-Lintfort. Thanks were conveyed to the Assistant Chief Executive for the arrangements and to Councillor Keith Davidson for hosting 5 children and providing entertainment at the social evening.
- Civic Reception for Durham County Cricket Club. The Chairman thanked everyone who was involved in organising the event and the Regeneration Team for having the vision to include the 'Arch' in the redevelopment of the market area.

The meeting terminated at 6.33pm