

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, 27 March 2008 at 6.00 pm

PRESENT:

Councillor A Humes (Chairman)

Councillors

A Turner	W Laverick
L Armstrong	M D May
S Barr	P H May
L E W Brown	P B Nathan
R Court	D L Robson
G K Davidson	M Sekowski
L Ebbatson	J Shiell
P Ellis	T J Smith
M Gollan	D Thompson
S Greatwich	S C L Westrip
R Harrison	F Wilkinson
S A Henig	A Willis
D M Holding	

Officers: R Templeman (Chief Executive), I Forster (Director of Corporate Services), T Galloway (Director of Development Services), J Henderson (Acting Head of Resources Directorate), I Herberson (Head of Corporate Finance), C Potter (Head of Legal and Democratic Services) and C Turnbull (Democratic Services Officer)

Also in attendance were Sarah Diggle (Relationship Manager), Steve Nicklin (District Auditor) and 3 members of the public.

159. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors G Armstrong, JW Barrett, C Jukes, K Potts, M Potts and JM Proud.

160. TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD 28 FEBRUARY 2008

The minutes of the proceedings at the meeting of the District Council held on 28 February 2008 copies of which had previously been circulated, were submitted.

The Council RESOLVED:

“That subject to the list of persons in attendance at the meeting being amended to include Councillor L Armstrong and two members of the public, the minutes be confirmed as a correct record.”

Councillor PH May abstained from voting as he was not present at the previous meeting.

The Chairman proceeded to sign the minutes.

161. 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.

162. TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

163. REPORT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

The Leader, Councillor L Ebbatson, advised that the key decisions taken by the Executive on 3 March 2008 had been circulated.

Local Government Review Update

The Leader advised of the following matters relating to LGR:

Mark Lloyd had left Durham County Council and John Richardson was the Acting Chief Executive.

Judicial Review: The Law Lords had found in favour of the Government and no further action was proposed on the part of the Durham Districts.

Boundary Committee: A letter had been sent to the Chair of the Electoral Commission containing arguments against 2010 elections as they would be disruptive to the smooth transition to new unitary authority.

Outcomes of Implementation Executive meeting (March):

- Induction programme for councillors (to go before Member Development Group of County and District Councillors in March);
- First Council Meeting will be held on 23 May 2008

Trade Union Engagement: Following on from previously agreed framework the Trade Unions (GMB, UNISON, Unite and UCATT) asked for 13 seats at the Consultative Forum which was agreed. The Members side would comprise 8 Councillors from Interim Executive, 5 from the County and 3 from

Districts (Agnes Armstrong, Alan Napier and Alex Watson) and would meet in March.

Launch Events: Arranged for March 10, 11,12 at Lumley Castle, Auckland Castle and Shotton Hall. Councillor Henig attended on behalf of Chester-le-Street District Council.

'Business as Usual' decision making process for Districts over the next 12 months: It had been agreed to issue a general consent under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act in respect of:

- disposals of land and entry into contracts identified in District Council budgets 2008/9;
- the completion of all disposals of land to which District Council contractually committed prior to March 2008;
- all disposals of land approved in District Council budgets prior to 2008/9 where no contractual commitment currently exists and
- all disposals of land where the value of the land concerned is less than £250k (not treated as cumulative).

Delegation of powers had been given to the County Treasurer to approve anything outside of these consents.

The way forward

The Leader advised that Item 9 on the agenda, the Transition Plan, was built around obligations to the new authority and, more importantly, obligation to the people of Chester-le-Street. The Plan reflected a new single corporate priority – People and Place – with four component parts – Partnerships for the Future; Town Centre Development; Strengthening Partnerships and Neighbourhoods. Resources had been put aside in the budget to support the initiatives. The Leader stressed that in the short space of time available the Council must ensure that it works as effectively and efficiently as possible to deliver the objectives. When it comes to the Action Plan the Council will be looking to build on its strengths and seek new ways of working together. The Action Plan was expected to focus on facilitating clear leadership, flexibility and adaptability at all levels and in this way the Council could not only meet the recommendations of the Audit Commission but also secure future employment opportunities, a strong local economy, enhanced community capacity and social cohesion, and ultimately healthy local democracy. Not a bad legacy.

The Leader made reference to newspaper coverage of debt levels that indicated the people of Chester le Street had the highest in the UK. She advised that on closer inspection the report's authors had stated the population as 114,000 and included Stanley, Craghead, Shotley Bridge, Consett, Crookhall, Edmundbyers and Blanchland among others. The postcodes initially sent to the Council as the basis for the report actually related to Chesterfield in Derbyshire.

The Leader reminded Members of the open invitation to join in 'It's a Knock Out', a fun-day arranged by the Council with and for people with disabilities, to be held on Saturday 5 April 2008.

In conclusion, the Leader reported that Chester-le-Street came first in the Improvement Category of the ShiNE awards, the North East Local Government Award Ceremony. Overall there were over 200 entries and the event itself was very successful. The Leader extended congratulations to all concerned.

164. REPORTS FROM PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

a. Resources and Value for Money

There was no report from Councillor SA Henig.

b. Regeneration and Strategic Planning

There was no report from Councillor CJ Jukes.

c. Community Engagement and Partnerships

There was no report from Councillor S Barr.

d. Neighbourhood Services

Councillor SCL Westrip reported on the following items:

Leisure

- Inclusion of Riverside facilities in the official 2012 Olympic guide as a training venue for outdoor athletics.
- National training plan for swimming
- Positive Futures Programme – three projects
- Riverside:
 1. Environmental Workshops to celebrate Halloween
 2. Funding secured for an interpretation panel for the new wildflower meadow
 3. New compost area to allow green waste to be recycled
- Youth Dance Group

Environmental Health

- Peer Review Exercise for all Durham Districts' food teams
- Food Hygiene Training for local volunteers
- Safety and Health Awareness Day
- Air Quality Monitoring Programme

Planning

- Public consultation events at Newfield and Waldrige
- Planning Delivery Grant

Environmental Services

- Training in hedge laying
- Environmental enforcement – 8 cases of fly-tipping being considered for prosecution. 5 Fixed Penalty Notices for dog fouling, 5 for littering and 15 for fly-tipping
- Car Parking – over 800 excess charge notices issued in current financial year to 31 January 2008. 10 successful prosecutions for non-payment of parking fines
- Recycling – new scheme introduced from 1 April 2008
- Graffiti – 139 reports in current financial year
- Northumbria in Bloom 2008
- Waldrige Village Action Plan

e. Health and Well-Being

There was no report from Councillor M Potts.

165. QUESTIONS TO LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

There were no questions to the Leader or Executive Members.

166. ANNUAL AUDIT AND INSPECTION LETTER

Consideration was given to a report from the Director of Corporate Services that advised of the recent publication by the Audit Commission of their Annual Audit and Inspection Letter for Chester-le-Street.

The Director of Corporate Services introduced the report and advised that Sarah Diggle, Relationship Manager, and Steve Nicklin, District Auditor, would speak on the item.

Ms Diggle said she was proud of the Council's progress, proud of her involvement with the Council, adding that the pace of the improvement was impressive. She drew attention to the Key Messages and Action Needed by the Council as detailed in the Inspection Letter, and advised that the Direction of Travel and improvement against other Councils was impressive. There were still areas for improvement but she accepted they were being addressed. She stated that the Most Improved Council Award was well deserved.

Mr Nicklin spoke on the content of the Inspection Letter and highlighted the step improvement in 4 out of the 5 elements. He made reference to the key actions needed to further strengthen arrangements and advised these should be looked at in the context of the impending local government reorganisation.

The Leader thanked Ms Diggle and Mr Nicklin for all their hard work and independent judgement. She expressed her thanks to Ms Diggle for all her support and good grace, and extended best wishes for a well-earned retirement. To Mr Nicklin who was moving to another area, the Leader expressed her thanks for his help and guidance and wished him well for the future.

Councillor L Ebbatson proposed, seconded by Councillor GK Davidson, that the recommendations in the report be agreed.

The Council RESOLVED:

- “1. That the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter be received and welcomed.
2. That the Key Messages detailed in the Inspection Letter be noted.
3. That the Key Messages and recommendations in the Inspection Letter be built into the Council’s Corporate Improvement Plan.”

Ms Diggle and Mr Nicklin left the meeting at 6.46pm

167. TRANSITION PLAN

Consideration was given to a report from the Director of Corporate Services seeking approval to the Transition Plan attached to the report.

The Director of Corporate Services advised that the Transition Plan incorporated a review of the Corporate Plan 2007/2010 and took account of the 2008/2009 budget process. It set out the Council’s new single priority of ‘People and Place’ and included the Council’s Corporate Improvement Plan.

Councillor L Ebbatson proposed, seconded by Councillor GK Davidson, that the recommendation in the report be agreed.

The Council RESOLVED:

“That the Transition Plan be adopted as the Council’s strategic planning document for 2008/2009.”

168. DATA QUALITY

Consideration was given to a report from the Director of Corporate Services seeking approval to a revised Data Quality Policy and Data Quality Strategy Action Plan.

Councillor R Harrison proposed, seconded by Councillor L Armstrong, that the recommendations in the report be approved.

The Council RESOLVED:

- “1. That the revised Data Quality Policy be approved.
2. That the revised Data Quality Strategy Action Plan be approved.”

169. CORRESPONDENCE

There were no items of correspondence.

170. CONFERENCES

There were no invitations to attend conferences.

171. 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:

Temporary Road Closure Order in respect of Good Friday march.
Transfer in duplicate relating to land at North Lodge, Chester-le-Street”

The meeting terminated at 6.57 pm