

THE DISTRICT COUNCIL OF CHESTER-LE-STREET

Report of the meeting of the Council held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Newcastle Road, Chester-le-Street, Co Durham, DH3 3UT on Thursday, 18 September 2008 at 6.00 pm

PRESENT:

Councillor D Thompson (Chairman)

Councillors

G Armstrong	D M Holding
S Barr	W Laverick
J W Barrett	M D May
R Court	P H May
G K Davidson	J M Proud
L Ebbatson	M Sekowski
M Gollan	J Shiell
S Greatwich	T J Smith
T H Harland	S C L Westrip
R Harrison	A Willis
A K Holden	

Officers: R Templeman (Chief Executive), I Forster (Director of Corporate Services), T Galloway (Director of Development Services), N Tzamarias (Assistant Director of Development Services), C Potter (Head of Legal and Democratic Services), G MacCallam (Environmental Services Manager), S Reed (Development and Building Control Manager) and C Turnbull (Democratic Services Officer)

There was one member of the public present.

43. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors LEW Brown, SA Henig, A Humes, CJ Jukes, P Nathan, K Potts, M Potts, D Robson, A Turner, and F Wilkinson.

44. TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD 24 JULY 2008

The minutes of the proceedings at the meeting of the District Council held on 24 July 2008 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.

45. 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.

46. TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

Councillors AK Holden and SCL Westrip declared personal interests in item no. 8 on the agenda regarding the appointment of a representative to serve on the Board of Cestria Community Housing Association.

47. REPORT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

The Leader, Councillor L Ebbatson advised that there were no key decisions in August and two in September and details had been circulated to Members.

Members were asked to note a Special Council Meeting would be held on 30 September 2008 to receive the audited accounts. Additional agenda items would include an update on Local Government Reorganisation and responses to the current Boundary Committee consultation on the size of the new authority.

The Leader then introduced a debate on the current Policing green paper 'From the Neighbourhood to the National' produced by the Home Office. A briefing paper had been circulated with the Council agenda papers.

The ensuing discussion indicated that, while there was much to recommend the green paper, such as the proposals relating to performance management, Members of the Council were concerned about those proposals that affected the delivery of neighbourhood policing and accountability.

- There was no support for directly elected representatives to the CDRP. It was felt that this would undermine the vital role of locally elected Councillors to represent and act as advocates for local people on crime and disorder issues that were important to them (the local community). In addition the proposal threatened successful partnership working, built up over many years, whereby the Council and police act together to resolve local issues.
- Concerns were also expressed about the maintenance of links between communities and the CDRPs if they were too large. In an authority the size of County Durham (almost 500,000 people with proposed 14 Area Action Partnerships specifically designed to address local issues and two Basic Command Units) there was a real fear of dislocation between the impetus for the police to deal with community safety issues at a neighbourhood level, for example, and the impetus to deal with those issues which had a higher national media profile.

Combining the resources of the Basic Command Unit and the Community Safety Fund would potentially exacerbate this problem.

- In terms of neighbourhood policing, Councillors wanted to see the current gap between strategic policy and local delivery addressed more effectively. It was felt the proposals did not address this (see above). The continuing support for PCSOs and the link to locally agreed standards was welcomed. However this should not be to the detriment of the role of the PC who had a vital role to play in building strong and confident communities.
- Community cohesion was an important aspect of the work of local Councillors and Councils. The Council would welcome more positive action from the government on integration. Education about people who might be vulnerable to exclusion as a result of non-criminal activities e.g. mental health issues, should be explicitly stated as a priority for the police.

Traffic-related issues ranked high in local Councillors' case-work. The current arrangements and green paper proposals, with the focus on CDRPs, effectively excluded traffic divisions. It was felt that traffic-related crime should be brought into neighbourhood policing arrangements with particular relevance to the 'national pledge to guarantee to the public key service standards'.

A response to the green paper, incorporating the issues raised, would be sent to the Home Office by the deadline of 10 October 2008.

48. REPORTS FROM PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

a. Neighbourhood Services

Councillor SCL Westrip reported on the following items: -

Leisure Services

A grant of £200,000 from the Big Lottery Fund had been received and the contract to install five ball courts across the District awarded to Wicksteed Playscapes. The official 'removal of the first soils' ceremony would be held at Moorfoot Avenue Play area on Monday 22 September 2008 at 2.00pm and all five ball courts should be completed by the end on 2008. The ball courts would be located at: -

Edmondsley Play Ground
The Brooms, Ouston
Millennium Green, Great Lumley
Kimbleworth and Nettlesworth
Moorfoot Avenue, Chester-le-Street

The Riverside site received Northumbria in Bloom Gold Awards for The Riverside Park and for the Best Conservation Project for the wildlife area and meadow. To gain a gold award required a score of 85% or over so credit was due to staff involved from the Leisure Services and the Environmental Services teams.

The driving range at Roseberry Grange Golf Complex had been badly damaged by fire but staff managed to re-open half of the bays following a safety inspection.

Environmental Services

The Council's Cleaner Safer Greener agenda recognised that the quality of people's experience of public spaces had a major impact on their quality of life, and the Council's aim was to ensure that green spaces were developed and managed to the highest possible standard in partnership with the communities. Success in achieving two Green Flags coupled with successes in Northumbria in Bloom clearly demonstrated that the Council's green spaces were improving year on year.

The Northumbria in Bloom successes were:

- Two Gold Medal Awards for Riverside Park for overall quality and innovative wildlife conservation projects, and a Gold Medal Award to Newker Junior School for the innovation and high quality improvements and learning opportunities to pupils using the school grounds.
- Two Silver Medal Awards for the overall environmental quality and standards across the whole of the District. A Silver Medal Award also went to Waldrige Parish Council for the contribution of local people in improving their local area using creative designs in front gardens and high quality overall standards.
- A Bronze Medal Award went to the village of Ouston for the partnership work that had been undertaken by local schools, residents, a local conservation group, the Parish Council and the District Council.

Planning Services

The Annual Member District Tour of high profile development sites that had been before the Planning Committee was held the previous evening.

Amended proposals had been submitted by Persimmon Homes for the proposed development at Newfield Farm that included a reduction in the number of homes together with a suite of improved community offers that would be addressed by a Section 106 Agreement. A public consultation event on the amended proposals would be arranged in the village.

Arrangements were being made with the Mobile Phone Operators Association to host their annual future roll-out plan meeting in Chester-le-Street. All Members would be invited to attend the meeting.

b. Community Engagement and Partnerships

Councillor M Sekowski reported on the following: -

Youth Council

Steady progress was being made. Visits were to be made to the Heads of all four Comprehensive Schools to seek their support and approaches would be made to various youth organisations such as Youth groups, Connexions and the Youth Engagement Service. Nomination forms would be sought from the school pupils and youths.

Once the level of interest was established, a presentation would be given to schools. The SPICE Team from Derwentside would assist and would help generate more interest among pupils and youth groups. An incentive package such as an outward bound weekend would be offered to attract youngsters into the project.

As well as help from the Derwentside team, additional help from a Youth Worker had been organised and she would commence the following week. The aim was to engage young people and encourage them to put forward their own ideas.

Partnership For Futures

The overarching objective of the Partnership was to harness and extend the collective efforts of the District's business and educational communities to ensure that local people are matched with local jobs.

Some of the core aims included:

- Connecting employers, various support agencies, prospective employees and trainees.
- Improving links between employers and educational establishments, in order to influence the curriculum to match the needs of local employers.
- Formulating innovative projects to respond to the needs of employers.
- Helping employers to maximise the effectiveness of their workforces by improving recruitment methods.

Councillor Sekowski was pleased to report there was an excellent spirit of co-operation between the members of the Group that consisted of representatives from:

Chester-le-Street and Durham Enterprise Agency
Beamish Museum
New College, Durham
The Hermitage School

Durham County Cricket Club
Ambic Ltd.

The blend of expertise was fast developing into a very positive force towards providing the area with a sound, sustainable, competitive economic base.

The Partnership would play a vital part in planning the workforce of the area by assessing and implementing specific training projects to meet the needs of employers.

It would ensure that the future workforce was able to meet the skills required by local employers. This was particularly vital in the context of global economic difficulties where survival of the fittest economies would depend on flexible and skilled workforces able to meet ever changing market demands.

The Partnership was in the process of appointing an Executive Director to lead the initiative forward. A first round of interviews had been held from which four candidates would receive final interviews on 25 September.

Given the core aims, the qualities required for the job included:

- A strategic overview and vision and a hands on approach at a practical level.
- A knowledge and experience of engaging with business organisations.
- An ability to develop workforce development planning.
- Experience in engaging and co-operating with a variety of partners such as educational establishments.

An exciting development was a formal link between The Hermitage and Park View Schools, New College Durham and AMBIC Ltd.

The role of the schools would be:

- To select between 10 and 15 students from each school to access the study programmes on offer.
- To ensure that the pupils selected had the correct entry requirements to work in an industry based placement.

For their part, New College would:

- Deliver the training and qualifications
- The potential courses would include:

NVQ level 1 and 2 in partnership with Ambic Ltd covering electrical, mechanical and manufacturing modules. (14-16 year olds).

Young Apprenticeship in Engineering, in association with the Engineering Employers Federation. Also for 14-16 year olds and would include 50 days of work placement over 2 years. Students would spend half a day a week at New College.

Diploma in Engineering for 14-19 year olds.

Ambic Ltd_ would provide industry based workshops for students to learn manufacturing skills. Offer 20-30 placements of 14-16 year old pupils from the two schools. Provide potential employment opportunities for students from the schools and the college.

Hanlon Skills Register

A software package designed to help organisations match jobseekers with specific skills to vacancies and training opportunities. The Register was used across the internet and allowed organisations to manage a virtual labour market that linked together jobseekers, employers, training providers and funders.

A number of organisations in the District had expressed an interest in the scheme and a Hanlon Skills Register Group had been set up. The Economic Development and Tourism Officer was the Council's representative on the Group.

The scheme was managed by the Tyne and Wear City Region Employment Consortium who allocated £13,000 to the District to support the purchase of software licences and any hardware and administration costs. A consultant from the Consortium would visit interested organisations to explain the benefits of the system.

c. Regeneration and Strategic Planning

There was no report from Councillor CJ Jukes.

d. Resources and Value for Money

There was no report from Councillor L Armstrong.

49. QUESTIONS TO LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

Councillor PH May asked whether the Council had introduced any regulations or taken any action to prevent a re-occurrence of the incident at Riverside Park.

The Director of Development Services advised having arranged a meeting with the Environment Agency, Northumbrian Water, Police and County Council. Staff were looking at protocols that would allow for quicker response and for closing the park.

Prior to consideration of the following item Councillor AK Holden left the meeting.

50. CESTRIA BOARD - COUNCIL REPRESENTATION TO THE BOARD

Councillor L Ebbatson advised that a replacement was required for Councillor D Robson who had resigned as a representative of the Council of the Board of Cestria Community Housing Association.

Councillor Ebbatson proposed, seconded by Councillor S Barr, that Councillor D Thompson be appointed.

The Council RESOLVED:

“That Councillor D Thompson be appointed to replace Councillor D Robson as a representative of the Council on the Board of Cestria Community Housing Association.”

Councillors R Court and A Willis voted against the motion.

Councillor AK Holden returned to the meeting.

51. REPORT OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE HELD 3 JULY 2008

The Council RESOLVED:

“That the report of the meeting of the Audit Committee held 3 July 2008 copies of which had previously been circulated, be accepted.”

Councillor R Court abstained from voting.

52. PROPOSAL TO CHARGE FOR DISCHARGE OF PLANNING CONDITIONS

Consideration was given to a report from the Director of Development Services advising of new powers contained in the Town and Country Planning (Applications and Deemed Applications) Fees (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2008 and to seeking adoption of those powers.

Councillor SCL Westrip introduced the report.

Development and Building Control Manager spoke to the report and advised that in the interests of customer care, Officers had consulted with members of the Planning Services Team’s Development Forum and comments received were attached as an appendix to the report.

Councillor SCL Westrip proposed, seconded by Councillor R Harrison, that the recommendation in the report be approved.

The Council RESOLVED:

“That the advice contained in the Town and Country Planning (Applications and Deemed Applications) Fees (Amendment) Regulations 2008 be adopted and the nationally applicable fee of £25 for conditions attached to a domestic (householder) application and £85 for conditions attached to all other forms of planning consent, be introduced.”

53. EARLY INTEGRATION OF THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK FUNCTION

Consideration was given to a report from the Regeneration and Strategic Planning Manager regarding the early integration of the Local Development Framework function.

The Chief Executive introduced the report.

Councillor R Harrison proposed, seconded by Councillor TH Harland, that the recommendations in the report be agreed.

The Council RESOLVED:

“1. That work cease on the production of the Chester-le-Street Local Development Framework.

2. That the early integration of the Local Development Framework function, the creation of an Interim Team and the interim appointment of a Strategic Planning Manager be noted and supported.”

54. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE POLICIES

Consideration was given to a report from the Director of Development Services seeking approval to the introduction of a suite of Children and Young People policies and related guidance.

Councillor SDCL Westrip introduced the report and the Assistant Director of Development Services spoke on the contents of the report.

Councillor L Ebbatson requested that Section 4.5 of the Safeguarding Children Policy include a proviso that only Council owned equipment be used when photographs and video recordings of children are taken.

The Council RESOLVED:

“1. That the suite of Children and Youth People policies and related guidance with the inclusion of the addition to Section 4.5 of the Safeguarding Children Policy to ensure that only Council owned equipment is used when photographs and video recordings of children are taken, be approved.

2. That the Assistant Director of Development Services be designated as the officer for Safeguarding Children within the District, to be the primary point of contact and advice in any Child Protection matters pertaining to the Council and its activities.”

55. CORRESPONDENCE

There were no items of correspondence.

56. CONFERENCES

There were no invitations to attend conferences.

57. 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: -

Transfer in duplicate relating to land at Fleece Terrace, Edmondsley.

Form DS1 in relation to 14 Gray Avenue, Chester-le-Street.

Transfer in duplicate relating to land at the rear of 52 Holly Crescent, Sacriston

Deed in respect of the Deed of Trust in duplicate between the County Council of Durham and Chester-le-Street District Council in relation to Park View Community School.

Form DS1 in relation to 97 The Oval, Ouston.”

58. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS. TO RESOLVE:

The Council RESOLVED:

“That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the Public and Press be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.”

At this point, Councillors R Harrison, J Shiell and T Smith left the meeting.

59. OFFICE OF SURVEILLANCE COMMISSIONERS INSPECTION REPORT OF 2008 AND COUNCIL POLICY ON COVERT SURVEILLANCE AND COVERT HUMAN INTELLIGENCE SOURCES.

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Legal and Democratic Services appending a statutory report issued by the Office of Surveillance Commissioners and seeking approval to a policy on Covert Surveillance and Covert Human Intelligence Sources.

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

Councillor TH Harland proposed, seconded by Councillor AK Holden, that the recommendations in the report be approved.

The Council RESOLVED:

“1. That the statutory report from the Office of Surveillance Commissioners be noted and the recommendations contained therein be accepted and implemented.

2. That the policy on Covert Surveillance and Covert Human Intelligence Sources be approved.”

Prior to consideration of the following item The Chief Executive left the meeting.

60. PROPOSED EARLY RETIREMENT AND VOLUNTARY REDUNDANCY OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE.

Consideration was given to a report from the Director of Corporate Services setting out a business case for the early retirement and voluntary redundancy of the Chief Executive.

The Director of Corporate Services spoke in detail to the report. He advised that the Performance Committee had initially considered and supported the recommendations in the appendix to the report subject to consultations with the District Auditor and the County Council and the seeking of independent professional advice on the contents of the report. He reported that the consultations had been undertaken and the contents of the report had been amended to reflect the outcome of the consultations and negotiations.

At this point the Director of Corporate Services and the Director of Development Services left the meeting.

The Leader, Councillor L Ebbatson, thanked the Director of Corporate Services for his conscientiousness, negotiating skills and diligence to details. She stated that performance of the Chief Executive had been excellent. In terms of value for money the recommendations in the report represented a favourable agreement and minimised the risks to the Council.

Councillor SCL Westrip supported the comments of the Leader and advised that the recommendations contained the best possible outcome for the Chief Executive and the taxpayers of the District.

Councillor S Barr paid tribute to the Chief Executive for his loyalty to the Council.

Councillor GK Davidson proposed, seconded by Councillor S Barr, that the recommendations in the report be approved.

The Council RESOLVED:

“1. That the voluntary redundancy and associated early retirement of the Chief Executive on 27 March 2009, the costs of which were detailed in the appendix to the report, be approved.

2. That the basis of the early retirement and voluntary redundancy on 27 March 2009 be the harmonised County Policy approved by the District Council on 24 July 2008 with a statutory redundancy payment and the discretionary addition of 5 added years of pensionable service in accordance with the sliding scale detailed within that Policy.

3. That the terms be subject to a compromise agreement in order to protect the new authority from potential challenges in the future.

4. That at the Council Meeting prior to 27 March 2009 a decision be made on the appointment of Head of Paid Service for the period 27 March 2009 to 31 March 2009.”

Councillors R Court and A Willis voted against the motion.

The Director of Corporate Services returned to the meeting.

61. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman advised there would be a Special Meeting of the Council on Tuesday 30 September 2008 and reminded Members of the following forthcoming events:

- River Cruise at Durham on Sunday 21 September 2008
- Fancy Dress Pub Rally on Thursday 25 September 2008.

The meeting terminated at 7.52 pm