

THE DISTRICT COUNCIL OF CHESTER-LE-STREET

Report of the Special Meeting of Council held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Newcastle Road, Chester-le-Street, Co Durham, DH3 3UT on Tuesday, 30 September 2008 at 6.15 pm

PRESENT:

Councillor D Thompson (Chairman)

Councillors

G Armstrong	A Humes
L Armstrong	C J Jukes
S Barr	M D May
J W Barrett	P B Nathan
G K Davidson	M Sekowski
L Ebbatson	J Shiell
S Greatwich	T J Smith
A K Holden	S C L Westrip

Officers: R Templeman (Chief Executive), I Forster (Director of Corporate Services), N Tzamarias (Assistant Director of Development Services), I Herberon (Head of Corporate Finance), C Potter (Head of Legal and Democratic Services), S High (Leisure Services Manager) and C Turnbull (Democratic Services Officer)

There were two members of the public present.

62. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors LEW Brown, R Court, M Gollan, R Harrison, SA Henig, DM Holding, W Laverick, PH May, K Potts, M Potts, JM Proud, DL Robson, A Turner, F Wilkinson and A Willis.

63. TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

64. LEADER'S UPDATE

Local Government Review Update

Councillor L Ebbatson, Leader of the Council, gave an overview of the current position in relation to the actions being taken and decisions being made in relation to the formation of the Unitary Council, with particular reference to the following areas: -

- Political involvement in the process

- The work of the Joint Implementation Team and Workstreams
- Officer appointments and process for recruitment
- The Council 'Blueprint'
- Next stages

Councillor Ebbatson advised that the principle issues for the Council over the following 5 months would be: -

- Maintaining service standards within the District
- Delivery of People and Places priority actions
- Supporting staff at a time of significant change
- Preparing the 'handing over the baton' work to convey best practice in the work with our community, their priorities and aspirations for the future.

Councillor P Nathan asked whether any decision had been made on the future operation of the planning service.

The Leader advised that the Strategic Team had already amalgamated.

The Chief Executive advised that development control would remain with Districts until vesting day. Pre work on standard formats and consistency of approach was being undertaken. Consideration of devolution of planning decisions and other key decisions was yet to be made by the Cabinet of the County Council.

The Leader accepted that the local element of planning was a concern and advised that the Executive Assistant was investigating with other unitary authorities as to how they dealt with devolution of planning.

Councillor SCL Westrip commented that in the absence of Area Action Partnerships local Parish Councils would be able to submit comments on planning applications.

Councillor Nathan expressed his concern that decisions had not been taken by the County Council.

The Chief Executive stated that the timing of decisions by the County Council was for the Chief Executive and Cabinet to decide. He advised that the County Council had a list of 'must have' key decisions to be made by vesting day. Progress was being made on software consolidation, uniform charging policies and strategies.

Councillor Westrip referred to the document circulated containing the results of public consultation about Area Action Partnerships and expressed concern that the Partnerships would not follow District boundaries.

The Leader indicated she would be happy to include any comments in a response to the political leaders of the County Council.

Councillor Nathan enquired whether the County Council's budgetary proposals were available and whether they reflected the savings indicated in the bid.

The Chief Executive advised that the County Council was collating all of the information from the Districts on budgets and balances. He confirmed that the County Treasurer had reassured Leaders that the savings were achievable.

Councillor M May enquired whether the Council Tax would be decided before vesting day.

The Chief Executive advised that information and consultation on the budget would be the responsibility of the County Council.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the Council would continue to provide services up to vesting day. He advised that additional workloads because of local government review was putting a strain on staff but confirmed that services would continue to be provided to the public.

New Council Size

Councillor Westrip advised that the Boundary Committee had indicated it would not welcome any proposals for new Town or Parish Councils whilst it was undertaking a review of electoral boundaries for the Unitary Council. Currently there were 126 County Councillors but the Boundary Committee would prefer a lesser number. He advised that the Boundary Committee had indicated it would accept multi Member wards. He confirmed that there was cross party support at the County Council for a membership of not less than 126.

65. USE OF EARMARKED RESERVES 2007/2008

This item was withdrawn.

66. TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2007/2008

This item was withdrawn.

67. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE REPORT

This item was withdrawn.

68. STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2007/2008

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Corporate Finance advising that the audit of the 2007/2008 accounts was still ongoing and proposing an amended timetable and way forward for approval of the accounts.

The Head of Corporate Finance explained in detail the reasons for the delay in the audit as outlined in the report.

The Leader advised having met with the District Auditor on the matter and confirmed that the Auditor was comfortable with the revised timetable and that there would be no legal implications to the Council. She stressed that it was important the revised timetable was adhered to.

The Leader thanked the Head of Corporate Finance and his staff for their work on the audit.

Councillor SCL Westrip proposed, seconded by Councillor GK Davidson, that the draft resolution circulated be approved.

The Council RESOLVED:

“1. That, notwithstanding the Scheme of Delegation to Other Committees in Part 3D and notwithstanding the Financial Regulations in Part 4F of the Council’s Constitution, the Audit Committee be delegated, under Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972, the responsibility and the power to consider and to determine whether or not to formally accept and approve, with or without amendment, the Council’s accounts for the year 2007/2008 and be delegated any incidental powers relating thereto.

2. That the Chairman of the Audit Committee in the event of any such approval shall sign and date the said accounts and duly complete the letter of representation.

3. That any resulting decision made by the Audit Committee be reported back to the Council for information at the next suitable meeting of the Council.”

Councillor P Nathan abstained from voting on the motion.

The Leader advised that the Audit Committee would meet during week ending 17 October 2008 and would be open for all Members to attend. Agenda papers for the Audit Committee meeting would be sent to all Members of the Council.

Councillor A Humes left the meeting at 7.10pm

69. SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY ALLOWANCE - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Consideration was given to report from the Head of Legal and Democratic Services regarding the payment of a special responsibility allowance to the Vice Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced the report.

Councillor G Armstrong advised that the Vice Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was leading a Task and Finish Group and continuing his role previously undertaken as Chairman of a Scrutiny Panel.

Councillor G Armstrong proposed, seconded by Councillor JW Barrett, that the recommendation in the report be approved.

The Council RESOLVED:

“1. That the responsibilities and/or duties being asked of and undertaken by the Vice Chairman of the new enlarged single Overview and Scrutiny Committee are such as to attract the payment of a Special Responsibility Allowance.

2. That the Vice Chairman, Councillor D Holding, be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance of £2,173.57 per annum for so long as he discharges those responsibilities and/or duties, with immediate effect.”

The meeting terminated at 7.13 pm

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