

THE DISTRICT COUNCIL OF CHESTER-LE-STREET

Report of the meeting of Executive held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Newcastle Road, Chester-le-Street, Co Durham, DH3 3UT on Monday, 7 January 2008 at 3.00 pm

PRESENT:

Councillor L Ebbatson (Leader of the Council)

Councillor S A Henig, (Portfolio Holder for Resources and Value for Money)

Councillor C J Jukes, (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Strategic Planning)

Councillor S C L Westrip, (Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services)

Officers: R Templeman (Chief Executive), T Galloway (Director of Development Services), C Potter (Head of Legal and Democratic Services), P Stephens (Acting Director of Community Services), I Herberson (Head of Corporate Finance), L Dawson (Acting Head of Regeneration), J Lulic (Community Development Manager), J Elder (Risk and Financial Services Manager), A Stephenson (Executive Assistant), D Allinson (Democratic Services Assistant) and K Fletcher (Democratic Services Assistant)

111. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors M Potts and S Barr.

The Leader advised that Karen Fletcher, Democratic Services Assistant would be leaving the authority this month to take up employment with Gateshead Council. The Leader, on behalf of the Executive thanked Karen for her work over the years and wished her well for the future.

112. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

It was proposed and seconded that the minutes of the previous meeting be agreed.

RESOLVED: "That the minutes of the meeting held 3 December 2007, copies of which had previously been circulated to Members be agreed as a correct record."

The Leader proceeded to sign the minutes.

113. PUBLIC SPEAKING

There were no questions or representations received from members of the public.

114. TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received from Members.

115. FORWARD PLAN AND WORK PROGRAMME

The Leader introduced the Forward Plan and Work Programme.

Members agreed that the report regarding the Sacriston Area Development Framework be deferred until the February meeting of the Executive and that reports for the Housing Strategy and the Review into Environmental Enforcement be deferred until the March meeting of the Executive.

It was also agreed that the report into the Demand Responsive Bus Services be removed from the Forward Plan but be incorporated into a report regarding Concessionary Travel Scheme at a later date.

RESOLVED: "That the Forward Plan and Work Programme be noted and updated accordingly."

116. EXECUTIVE DECISION TRACKER

Members considered the Decision Tracker and were updated on the progress on a number of developments including: Neighbourhood Management; Land Matters; and Communities Facilities Working Group.

The Community Development Manager updated the Executive with regard to the work of the Communities Facilities Working Group. He advised of consultations which had taken place and the proposed three stages for the review into Community Facilities. He advised of the Membership of the Working Group and confirmed it had now created terms of reference and a vision to take the review forward.

The Community Development Manager advised that it was the intention to present a final report to the Executive in May 2008 for the review of Community Facilities although there may be some implications due to local government review and also a change in council priorities.

The Director of Development Services referred to Neighbourhood Management and confirmed that the Council was now working closely with the communities in Waldrige Village to produce an action plan that will identify areas for improvement delivery.

The Leader advised of her concern regarding the time it had taken to reach the current stage and the Director of Development Services advised of problems with partners in helping to deliver the scheme. He also confirmed that the District Council were acting on areas of the Action Plan that it could take forward.

It was agreed that Item 9 be removed from the Decision Tracker and new progress dates were agreed for Items 13, 14, 15 and 16.

RESOLVED: "That the Decision Tracker be noted, amended and updated accordingly."

117. LEISURE OPTIONS REVIEW

Consideration was given to a report from the Director of Development Services regarding Phase 2 of the Leisure Options Review.

Copies of the report were tabled at the meeting.

The Director of Development Services referred to section 5 of the report and updated Members with regard to the background of the review and options appraisal of Leisure Services.

He confirmed that phase one of the review was completed however phase two had been delayed due to stock transfer and also local government review. He advised that it would be highly unlikely that phase two of the review would be completed and implemented before the April 2009 time frame when the Council is dissolved.

It was proposed and seconded that the recommendation to the report be agreed.

RESOLVED: "That in the light of Local Government restructuring and the proposed dissolution of Chester-le-Street District Council in April 2009, Members agreed not to progress Phase 2 of the Leisure Options Review."

118. CORPORATE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

Consideration was given to a report from the Acting Head of Resources Directorate providing progress on the Action Plan to improve the Council's governance arrangements.

The Risk and Financial Services Manager confirmed that the Council had reviewed its current governance arrangements against the new CIPFA/SOLACE framework in October 2007 and that an action plan had been devised by the Corporate Governance Steering Group to address areas for improvement.

He also confirmed that a new draft code of governance had been developed and that a recent report to the Audit Committee included a recommendation of how to best produce the annual governance statement.

The Risk and Financial Services Manager suggested that further updates of the review of Corporate Governance Framework could be included within the Corporate Performance report. Members agreed to this.

It was proposed and seconded that the recommendations to the report be agreed.

RESOLVED:

- “1 That the progress on the Action Plan to ensure the Council meets the requirements of the new governance framework be noted.
- 2 That the Corporate Governance Steering Group be responsible for the on-going development, implementation and monitoring of the detailed action plan.
- 3 That further updates on the review of the Corporate Governance Framework be included in the quarterly Corporate Performance reports considered by the Executive.”

119. 2008/09 GENERAL FUND BUDGETARY PROJECTIONS

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Corporate Finance to advise of the 2008/09 General Fund revenue budget projections and to seek views on potential growth areas and savings proposals.

The Head of Corporate Finance updated Members on the content of the report which included resources that would be available dependant upon the Council Tax rate set for 2008/09; areas of unavoidable growth; and the potential budget gap. He also highlighted the potential impact that the rise in utility charges could have on the budget.

The Head of Corporate Finance advised that managers had been requested to identify possible areas of savings, copies of which were circulated at the meeting and discussed.

It was confirmed that the Overview and Scrutiny Panels would consider the budgets within their remits and that a Special Meeting of the Executive would be held on 18 February 2008 to consider budget proposals.

The Leader highlighted the importance of open communication during the budget process.

It was proposed and seconded that the recommendations to the report be agreed.

RESOLVED:

- “1 That the provisional finance settlement as detailed in section 5 of the report be noted.
- 2 That the budget projections and available resources for next year as detailed in sections 6 and 7 of the report be noted.

- 3 That the savings identified in section 9.2 of the report were considered.
- 4 That a Special Meeting of the Executive be held on Monday 18 February 2008 to consider the budget.”

120. 2008/09 GENERAL FUND CAPITAL PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Corporate Finance to advise of the current capital programme commitments and the resources that are expected to be available to fund new schemes in 2008/09.

The Head of Corporate Finance advised that section 6 of the report detailed schemes which had been approved for the current year but remain unreleased.

He confirmed that a meeting of the Capital Working Group would be held during January to look at existing commitments and that managers would be given the opportunity to attend to discuss priorities for next year.

It was proposed and seconded that the recommendation to the report be agreed.

RESOLVED: “That the resources expected to be available to fund existing and new capital programme schemes were noted.”

121. REVIEW OF MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Corporate Finance to update on the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

The Head of Corporate Services introduced the report and advised that the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy incorporated the effect of the 2006/07 outturn, the provisional 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11 settlements and the impact of housing stock transfer.

It was proposed and seconded that the recommendation to the report be agreed.

RESOLVED: “That the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy be approved.”

122. SACRISTON AREA DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

RESOLVED: “This item be deferred until the February meeting of the Executive.”

123. REFERRALS FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANELS

There were no referrals from the Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

124. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS. TO RESOLVE:

RESOLVED: "That in accordance with Regulation 21(1)(b) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information) Regulations 2000, the public and press be excluded during the transaction of the following business because it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972."

125. REGENERATION QUARTERLY REPORT

Consideration was given to a report from the Acting Head of Regeneration providing details of progress in delivery of the regeneration strategy from 1 October 2007 to 31 December 2007.

The Acting Head of Regeneration updated Members on a number of achievements during the last quarter.

Revised plans for the Heart of the Village Pelton Fell were circulated at the meeting for information, however, the Acting Head of Regeneration advised that they had not been considered by the Neighbourhood Regeneration Partnership.

The Acting Head of Regeneration made reference to the consultation process for the Tourism Strategy and Action Plan which would end in January and advised of the intention to present the Strategy to the March meeting of the Executive.

It was proposed and seconded that the recommendation to the report be agreed.

RESOLVED: "That progress on the regeneration projects as set out in the Regeneration Projects Quarterly Report, as set out in Appendix 1 (capital projects) and Appendix 2 (regeneration strategy) be noted."

126. DRURY HOUSES

Consideration was given to a report from the Acting Director of Community Services to inform the Executive of issues related to Drury Houses within the District.

The Acting Director of Community Services updated Members on the background of Drury houses and the current position statement of houses within the District.

Discussion took place on how best to notify tenants and owner/occupiers of the potential problems to their properties. It was also highlighted that the

Council need to be able to provide clear answers and details of support that is available to tenants and owner/occupiers.

It was proposed and seconded that the recommendations to the report be noted.

RESOLVED:

- “1 That the contents of the report be noted.
- 2 That appropriate steps be taken to discuss with home owners and tenants the findings of reports in relation to potential remedial action that may be needed.”

127. WRITE-OFF OF IRRECOVERABLE DEBT

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Corporate Finance seeking approval to write-off irrecoverable debts.

The Head of Corporate Finance advised that all possible action had been taken in attempt to recover the debts and confirmed that the write-off of the debts would have no impact on revenue budgets.

It was proposed and seconded that the recommendations to the report be agreed.

RESOLVED:

- “1 That the write-off of the debts detailed in section 5.3 of the report be authorised.
- 2 That it be noted that the NDR bad debts of £21,568.37 be charged to the non-domestic rating pool and £19,357.43 be written off against the provision of bad debts.”

The meeting terminated at 4.55 pm