

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, 12 May 2008 at 3.00 pm

PRESENT:

Councillor L Ebbatson (Leader of the Council)

Councillor M Potts, (Portfolio Holder for Health and Well-being)

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

Officers: R Templeman (Chief Executive), I Forster (Director of Corporate Services), C Potter (Head of Legal and Democratic Services), I Herberon (Head of Corporate Finance), J Henderson (Acting Head of Resources Directorate), G Clark (ICT Manager), J Brock (Community Strategy Advisor), M Keenlyside (Environmental Strategy Co-ordinator), L Howley (Chief Environmental Health Officer), J Johns (Economic Development and Tourism Officer), A Stephenson (Executive Assistant) and D Allinson (Democratic Services Assistant)

170. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors S Barr and S A Henig.

171. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD 7 APRIL 2008

RESOLVED: "That the minutes of the meeting held 7 April 2008, copies of which had previously been circulated to Members be agreed as a correct record."

The Leader proceeded to sign the minutes.

172. PUBLIC SPEAKING

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

173. TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received from Members.

174. FORWARD PLAN AND WORK PROGRAMME

The Leader introduced the Forward Plan and Work Programme and reminded Officers that the Forward Plan should run for four months ahead and commented on the lack of items included. The Director of Corporate Services advised that this was a matter that was regularly addressed at Corporate

Management Team and even though there were a number of items included in the Forward Plan these were not key decisions.

It was noted that a report on Communities Facilities Working Group was expected to be presented at this meeting, however the Chief Executive requested that this item be deferred until June 2008 so that the financial implications in the report could be considered further.

The Leader referred to a number of changes within the Work Programme as follows:

Employee Survey Results – Revised date June 2008
Training and Development Plan – Revised date June 2008
Taxi Licensing Policy – Revised date July 2008

The Chief Environmental Health Officer referred to the Taxi Licensing Policy, which he felt would be an extensive piece of work, that involved writing the draft policy for the new Authority for next year. He therefore suggested that he bring this report back to Executive at a later date, which Members agreed.

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

175. EXECUTIVE DECISION TRACKER

Members considered the Decision Tracker and the Leader referred to a number of items that were amended on the Tracker as follows:-

Item 3 – Review of Community facilities

The Leader suggested that the second part of this item be removed from the tracker, as this was now complete. It was also agreed that a new date be added for June 2008.

Item 4 – Report into the review into Leisure Services for Young People

It was agreed that this item be removed from the Tracker and be included as part of the ‘People and Place’ priority under ‘Strengthening Partnerships’.

Item 6 – Update on the Community Resource Centre at Sacriston.

The Chief Executive advised that this building was nearing completion however there were issues to be resolved in relation to the land ownership, exchange and access. He confirmed that discussions were currently underway to hopefully resolve these issues and get the scheme completed as soon as possible.

The Leader advised that in her capacity as Chair of the District Partnership she had requested that the Community Strategy Advisor arrange an umbrella meeting of the Sacriston Community Partnership to invite people from all groups or organisations who were currently active in Sacriston to give an

update on their work. She advised that this invite would be open to everyone in the village.

RESOLVED: "That the Decision Tracker and the amendments be noted."

176. IMPLEMENTING THE TRANSITION PLAN; DEVELOPING 'PEOPLE AND PLACE'

Consideration was given to a report from the Director of Corporate Services on the 'People and Place' priority. The Director of Corporate Services spoke in relation to the report to identify what progress had been made and to seek Members agreement in developing the Action Learning Set Delivery Plan. The Plan and Appendices were discussed.

It was noted that updates on the Delivery Plan would be given as a standing item to the Executive Agenda.

The Leader thanked Ian and the Officers concerned for all the work that had gone into this report.

RESOLVED:

- "1) That the progress to date on implementing the Transition Plan be noted.
- 2) That the high level actions for the 'People and Place' Delivery Plan identified in Appendix 1 be noted.
- 3) That comments on the 'work in progress' People and Place' Delivery Plan as set out in Appendix 2 be noted."

177. NEW POWER TO ESTABLISH PARISH COUNCILS (INCLUDING TOWN COUNCILS)

Consideration was given to a report to raise awareness about the new powers of the Council to establish Parish Councils under Part 4 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and to consider whether or not to recommend that a 'community governance review' should be voluntarily undertaken by the Council at this time.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services spoke in relation to the report which he advised led on from the White Paper that was published in October 2006 which recommended greater local devolution with powers to reorganise Parish Councils at a local level.

The Leader advised that it was about helping the community at large to decide what was the most effective form of local government for them. She advised that there were a number of issues that required further clarification which included the status of the corporate government review in light of the boundary committee review of electoral arrangements of County Durham and the scale and cost of a corporate government review that would need to be discussed with Durham County Council.

The Leader thanked the Head of Legal and Democratic Services for the report which she felt was very informative.

RESOLVED:

- “1. That the new powers to establish parish councils be noted.
2. That clarification be sought and discussions be undertaken with Durham County Council on the status, cost and scale of a corporate governance review taking into consideration the Boundary Committee for England’s proposed review of local authority electoral arrangement, prior to a further report being presented to the Executive to determine how progress can be made.”

178. REVIEW OF MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Corporate Resources to advise the Executive of the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy.

The Director of Corporate Finance advised that this report had been produced to update Members on the decisions taken on 20 February 2008 on the 08/09 budget and also to take into account the implications of the ‘business as usual’ decision making process in the Local Government Review.

He drew Members attention to page 89 of the report in relation to the Local Government Review process and referred to the fact that Durham County Council had considered our budget summary and had given general consent with regard to revenue and capital plans for which specific finance had been provided within the budget. This would allow spending within the existing budget, however if there was something outside the existing budget, consent would have to be granted from the County Treasurer.

He advised that the County Treasurer had emphasised to the Improvement Executive the onus these arrangements would place on him as the Section 151 Officer and the Chief Executive to bring their attention to any proposals outside the budget.

The Leader informed Members that Councillor Henig would be standing down from his position as Portfolio Holder for Finance.

RESOLVED: “That the Executive considered and approved the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy.”

179. DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT'S REVISED POLICY

Consideration was given to a report to inform Members of the changes to the Disabled Facilities Grants Regime (DFGs) recently introduced by the Government following a major review of the Disabled Facilities Grant programme.

The Chief Environmental Health Officer spoke in relation to the report and explained that the Disabled Facilities Grants Regime was a statutory scheme that provided financial assistance to adapt houses for elderly and infirm people to allow them to continue living there which had operated effectively for over 10 years.

He outlined the principal changes in the report, which were summarised in Section 1.2 and advised that the changes would affect the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy, which would need to be reported to the Council Meeting.

The Leader queried whether there were any similar schemes that had been carried out in the past and whether the charges were recoverable.

The Chief Environmental Health Officer referred to the Discretionary Repairs Assistance Scheme and explained that this was a repayable loan scheme twinned to this scheme, which worked quite effectively with no operational problems.

RESOLVED:

- “(i) That the report and changes to the Disabled Facilities Grant programme be noted.
- (ii) That it be agreed to amend and incorporate the changes into the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy, which was agreed by the Council on 24 November 2005 and reviewed by Executive on 1st October 2007.
- (iii) That it be agreed to place a charge against adapted properties of owner occupiers where the cost of the Disabled Facilities Grant exceeds £5,000 limited to a maximum charge of £10,000 with charges lasting for a maximum of 10 years.
- (iv) That it be agreed that the Director of Development Services has the discretion to waive a charge where the placement of a charge may cause hardship or where due to the sensitivities of a case a charge should be waived and that any appeal against the Director’s decision to be determined by the Executive whose decision will be final.”

180. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH NHS LIFE CHECK ROLL OUT

Consideration was given to a report from the Director of Development Services to provide members with details of the Life check programme and associated funding to roll out the programme across the District.

Councillor Westrip advised that this was an online resource that was designed to offer advice and support on key areas of health and that there was no cost to be incurred in providing the service. The funding that had been given would be used to roll out the scheme and promote the service to parents and carers of young babies and young people aged 12-15.

The Leader suggested that Councillor Westrip look into the evaluation process to ensure that Members receive feedback on the success of the programme.

RESOLVED: "That it be recommended that delegated responsibility be granted to the Communities for Health Sub Group to produce a programme of activity to support the rollout of the Life check programme and the programme when drafted be brought back to the Executive for approval."

181. COMMUNITIES FOR HEALTH PROJECT

Consideration was given to a report from the Director of Development Services to provide members with details of the Communities for Health Grant aid for 2008-2009 and proposed areas of expenditure.

Councillor Westrip spoke in relation to the report and advised of the grant that had been given to support the existing schemes that were in place, extend the temporary contract for the year and use the remainder of the grant to further the work with the Mind project.

RESOLVED: "That approval be granted for the proposed expenditure of the additional Communities for Health grant allowing the continuation of the health trainer programme and the mental health awareness programme for another year."

The meeting terminated at 4.05 pm