

Meeting of the **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE** of the Teesdale District
Council held at Teesdale House, Galgate, Barnard Castle on
MONDAY 10 MARCH 2008 AT 2.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor R Betton **CHAIR**

COUNCILLORS:

PM Charlton	JM Salter
JH Fergus	KW Stansfield
GK Robinson	EM Walton
O Hedley	

Also in attendance: Councillor AJ Cooke
Councillor P Ryman
Mr D Kinch (co-opted member of Overview & Scrutiny
Committee)

Officers in Attendance:

P Wilding	Interim Deputy Chief Executive
R Bowles	Assistant Chief Executive
J Kellett	Chief Finance Officer
M Dennis	Chief Governance Officer (Monitoring Officer)
T Watson	Director of Regeneration
G Robinson	Democratic Services Officer

171 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

The Chairman announced that he had been asked to consider an urgent item of business - a staffing matter - in the exempt part of the agenda.

172 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor GK Robinson declared a prejudicial interest in Item 9: Teesdale Listens (Minute 179), as a member of Lynesack and Softley Parish Council; Councillors KW Stansfield, EM Walton and PM Charlton declared personal interests in Item 7: Regional Spatial Strategy Final Consultation (Minute 177) and Item 11: HECA Annual Report (Minute 181), as Members of Teesdale Housing Association.

173 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on 11 February 2008 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

174 PROPOSED POST OFFICE CLOSURES

The Director of Regeneration introduced a report to members regarding the proposed post office closures in Teesdale and then introduced Matt Silcock and Gillian Alstead from Post Office Ltd. Mr Silcock gave members a verbal presentation on the background information and processes involved so far,

and explained the rationale under which the six Post Offices proposed for closure had been put forward. The criteria used were the size of the branch, the number of customers, the profitability and the distance to the nearest Post Office. Within rural areas it was proposed that 95% of the population live within 3 miles of a Post Office. Members discussed alternative means of providing the service, including a mobile service in rural areas and the possibility of the local authority supporting the service, as was being considered in at least one county area.

RESOLVED:

That the Director of Regeneration in consultation with the Lead Member for Regeneration be authorised to submit a response taking into account the views and concerns raised by members to the Post Office closure proposals.

175 BEST VALUE REGENERATION INSPECTION

The Lead Member for Regeneration, Councillor JH Fergus, presented a report which informed members of the outcome of the Best Value Inspection of Regeneration. The Government has placed a duty of best value on local authorities to deliver services to clear standards, of cost and quality; by the most economic, efficient and effective means available. Authorities must demonstrate to local people that they are achieving continuous improvement in all of their services. The Economic Regeneration service was inspected and assessed in 2007; the service was given two out of a possible three stars – a ‘good service’. A number of recommended action points were highlighted in the report.

RESOLVED:

That the report be accepted and the action points recommended be implemented.

176 CONSULTATION ON COUNTY DURHAM ECONOMIC STRATEGY

The Lead Member for Regeneration, Councillor JH Fergus, presented a report which informed members on the consultation draft of the County Durham Economic Strategy 2008-2013, “Building our Future”, which had been circulated for comment. The draft strategy sets out a long-term plan for the economy and the actions needed to achieve its objectives and to raise productivity levels. The report highlighted the issues particularly pertinent to Teesdale, and the need for sufficient priority to be given to address specific rural needs. Responses had been required to the consultation by 7 March, and the officers had submitted a response, along the lines now indicated.

RESOLVED:

That the action taken by the Director of Regeneration in responding, as now detailed, to the County Durham Economic Partnership be endorsed.

177 REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY: FINAL CONSULTATION

The Lead Member for Regeneration, Councillor JH Fergus, presented a report seeking members’ views on the implications for Teesdale of the Further Proposed Changes to the Regional Spatial Strategy. The Regional Spatial Strategy sets out a long-term strategy for spatial development in the North East to 2021. Once approved, the Regional Spatial Strategy, together

with the Local Development Framework, will become the statutory development plan for the District/Unitary Council. A recommended response was submitted for members' consideration. The report also highlighted the current position in relation to housing allocations: members were also asked to consider an additional amendment, in relation to Sustainable Construction

RESOLVED:

That the response to the Regional Spatial Strategy further proposed changes as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, together with the additional amendment now agreed, be approved for submission to the Government.

178 'WALKERS ARE WELCOME' SCHEME

The Lead Member for Regeneration, Councillor JH Fergus, presented a report which informed members of the 'Walkers are Welcome' application which is part of a national initiative to raise the profile of great places to walk in Britain. In order to achieve 'Walkers are Welcome' status, an application needs to be made to the governing body. Any application requires formal endorsement from the local council. A local group had been set up to progress the initiative and to prepare an application. Support from the Town and Parish Councils and Durham County Council's Countryside Group is being sought.

RESOLVED:

That the Council endorse the principle of the submission of the 'Walkers are Welcome' application, subject to approval of the application going forward.

179 'TEESDALE LISTENS'

The Leader of the Council, Councillor R Betton, provided members with a summary of Teesdale Listens visits to date and funding allocated, and presented a further application for funding, submitted by Lynesack and Softley Parish Council

RESOLVED:

(1) That the progress of Teesdale Listens to date be noted.

(2) That a contribution of £5000 from the Community Improvement Fund to Lynesack and Softley Parish Council towards the cost of providing a playing field at Butterknowle be approved, the contribution being dependent on the other contributions notified to date being realised.

(Councillor GK Robinson left the meeting during the consideration of the above item).

180 PEOPLE STRATEGY

The Lead Member for Improvement, Councillor J Salter, presented a report seeking approval of the revised People Strategy, which now incorporated the Workforce Development Plan, HR Service Plan and the Annual Training Plan. The strategy is designed to identify key management and organisational development activities, particularly over the next year in the run up to Local Government Reorganisation. The strategy will support and enable the effective delivery of the Corporate Plan.

RESOLVED:

That the Strategy be approved

181 HECA ANNUAL REPORT

The Lead Member for Housing, Councillor PM Charlton, presented a report informing members of the annual progress made in reducing energy usage and carbon dioxide emissions in domestic housing in the District of Teesdale. The Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 (HECA) places a duty on the authority to provide an annual progress report. The report requires local authorities to achieve a 30% improvement in energy efficiency within 15 years or by the year 2010. The authority needs to achieve an average annual improvement of 2.58% in the next four years if it is to reach the Governments target of 30%.

RESOLVED:

(1) That the progress made to date in energy efficiency improvements be noted.

(2) That increased efforts be made to:

(a) continue to develop opportunities in the private sector for the take up of energy efficient measures

(b) expand upon the progress made in the energy efficiency programme and in developing partnerships with neighbouring authorities and other agencies.

(c) promote the development of alternative energy opportunities and encouraging the take up of renewable installations where possible.

182 DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF POLICY

The Lead Member for Resources, Councillor Gk Robinson, presented a report seeking approval of the revised discretionary rate relief policy. Under section 47 of the Local Government Act 1988 the Council has discretionary powers to grant rate relief, in addition to the statutory mandatory relief that is available, to charities and other organisations of prescribed types. The Council agreed a new policy for considering applications for discretionary rate relief on 15 January 2007. This policy allowed discretionary relief to be granted to village halls for 20% of the liability only as most village halls are registered as charities and are therefore entitled to 80% mandatory relief. However, from 23 April 2007, only charities with gross annual income exceeding £5000 can register with the Charities Commission. This change means that those village halls, and potentially other small charitable organisations, are now not able to register. To avoid these organisations being disadvantaged because of their size, it is proposed that the policy is amended, so that village halls that cannot register as charities receive 100% discretionary rate relief.

RESOLVED:

That the revised discretionary rate relief policy be approved.

183 MORTGAGE INTEREST RATE

The Lead Member for Resources, Councillor GK Robinson, presented a report seeking approval of the local average rate for the six months from 1 April 2008 to 30 September 2008. The Council is required to review its mortgage interest rate at six monthly intervals. The Council currently has four mortgage loans outstanding totalling £15,449.72 at 31 January 2008 which are repayable at variable rates of interest. The final loan is expected to be redeemed in 2015 unless repaid early. The cost of borrowing for the period 1 October 2007 to 31 March 2008 was estimated at 5.1% and the average local rate was therefore set at 5.35%. This was lower than the Standard National Rate which became 6.89% with effect from 12 February 2007 and the Standard National Rate was therefore applied. It is anticipated that the cost of the Council's external borrowing will reduce to 4.3% for the next six months, resulting in an average local rate of 4.55%. The Standard National rate currently remains at 6.89%; as this is higher than the average local rate it will be applicable for this period.

RESOLVED:

(1) The average local rate of 4.55% be approved for the period 1 April 2008 to 30 September 2008.

(2) The interest rate for mortgages be set at the Standard National Rate of 6.89% for that period.

184 FINANCIAL POSITION OVERVIEW

The Lead Member for Resources, Councillor GK Robinson, presented a report updating members on the position of the Medium Term Financial Plan to 31 January 2008. The expected position identified through budget monitoring as at 31 January for 2007/08 is a deficit of £52,095, (£60,863 at 30 November), a projected overspend of £17,329 against the approved budget deficit of £34,766. There were 7 vacancies contributing towards the vacancy factor by January (7 in November), and an appointment at a lower than expected grade. The total saving achieved from temporary vacancies to 31 January and from permanent vacancies for the full year was the budgeted figure of £93,000.

RESOLVED:

That current position in respect of the Medium Term Financial Plan be noted.

185 LOCAL PETITIONS & CALLS FOR ACTION CONSULTATION

The Lead Member for Improvement, Councillor J Salter presented a report informing members of the consultation paper issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government, which outlines the Government's proposals, initially announced within the White Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' in 2006, to place local authorities under a duty to respond to petitions, and also outlines situations in which the 'Councillor Call for Action' can be used. The consultation proposals build upon the legal framework laid down in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The proposals had been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which has expressed broad support; that committee's views were included in the report.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the proposals contained within the consultation paper be noted
(2) That a response, along the lines of the views expressed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, in paragraph 5.3 of the report, be made to the consultation.

186 PLANNING APPLICATION VALIDATION REQUIREMENTS: LOCAL CHECKLIST

The Lead Member for Environment, Councillor O Hedley, presented a report seeking approval for the Planning Application Validation Checklist. The Government intends to introduce a new standard electronic application form for applications for planning permission made under the Town and Country Planning system and Listed Building and Conservation Area consent regimes. Previously local authorities could design their own planning application forms, leading to a degree of variation between authorities. Alongside the new standard form, to support its use, the Government is also introducing new information requirements for the validation of planning applications, by local planning authorities. The Government intends to amend the Town and Country (General Development Procedure) Order 1995 (the GDPO) to introduce a mandatory standard application form and associated information requirements for validation of applications from 6 April 2008. Teesdale District Council now used the standard national planning application form, though until 6 April 2008 will not seek to reject applications on old forms.

RESOLVED:

That the proposed validation checklist be approved and its use in the validation of planning applications with immediate effect be endorsed.

187 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the current forward plan

RESOLVED:

That the forward plan be noted.

188 TO CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION

'That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business (Minutes 189 and 190,) on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as detailed in paragraphs 3 and 1,2,3 respectively of Part 1, Schedule 12A of the said Act.'

189 'JADES' FITNESS SUITE

The Lead Member for Health and Safer Communities, Councillor KW Stansfield presented a report on the management options, including the financial implications of each, for Jades Fitness Suite at Teesdale Leisure Centre. The current contractual arrangement is due to expire on 14 April 2008.

RESOLVED:

That option 1 be approved subject to the satisfactory overview of the legal aspects of the contract.

(The Interim Deputy Chief Executive left the meeting whilst the following matter was considered).

190 INTERIM DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Leader of the Council, Councillor R Betton, reported that further to minute 167 (11 February 2008), and following discussions involving the Chief Executive and the political group leaders, agreement had been reached with the Interim Deputy Chief Executive over an extension to his contract with the Council covering the period 1 June 2008 to 30 November 2008. The Chief Finance Officer was satisfied with the financial implications of the agreement.

RESOLVED:

That the agreement be endorsed and that a detailed report, to enable this matter to be placed on formal record, be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

The meeting closed at 3pm

CHAIRMAN