



## FORWARD PLAN

In accordance with Regulations 13 and 14 of The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2000, As Amended, details of matters likely to be the subject of key decisions to be made by the City Council in the following 4 month period, commencing on Monday, 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 2006 are set out hereunder. Anyone wishing to make representations to the City Council Cabinet or to the Decision maker about the matter in respect of which the decision is to be made may do so by writing to the Chief Executive, 4 Saddler Street, Durham, DH1 3NZ by no later than Monday, 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 2006.

Topic	Decision Maker	Target Date for Decision to be made	Consultees (if any)	Contacts	Background Documents
Review of High Level Action Plan	*Cabinet	August, 2006	Numerous Consultees	Head of Human Resources Tel: 0191 3018885	To be determined
Durham Visioning	*Cabinet	July, 2006	Numerous Consultees	Head of Cultural Services Tel: 0191 3018800	To be determined
Supporting People/ Value Improvement Programme	*Cabinet	August, 2006	Numerous Consultees	Head of Housing Services Tel: 0191 3018447	To be determined
Capital Strategy Asset Management Plan Medium Term Financial Plan Report	Council	September, 2006	Numerous Consultees	Director of Strategic Resources Tel: 0191 3018595	To be determined
Local Development Framework (LDF) Development Plan Documents (Housing; Heritage; City Centre & Retail & Development Control) Statement of Community Involvement	*Cabinet	July 2006	Numerous Consultees	Head of Planning Services Tel: 01913018701)	To be determined

\***Cabinet Members:** Councillors Bell, Holland, Jackson, Rae, Reynolds, Southwell, Van Zwanenberg, and Woods

**Publication Date:** Monday, 19<sup>th</sup> June, 2006

**Effective Date:** Monday, 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 2006.

Councillor F. Reynolds  
Leader of the Council  
50

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**10 July 2006**  
**DECISIONS TAKEN BY PORTFOLIO MEMBERS**

No.	Portfolio Member	Nature of Decision	Date
1	Councillor Rae	Application received for a Durham City Enterprise Grant of £1,000 as follows:- David Platt T/A Consider it Delivered - £500 Stuart Langley T/A SGL Tiling - £500 Recommend approval of the Grant of £1,000	17.5.06
2	Councillor Holland	Application received for a Durham City Enterprise Grant from Jenny Gibson T/A Gibson Secretarial Services - £500 Recommend approval of the Grant of £500	17.5.06
3	Councillor Wynn	Application for financial assistance from the Northern Regional Brass Band Trust to help fund courses to enable them to carry out its programme for the coming year Recommend refusal of the application	08.5.06
4	Councillor Wynn	Application for financial assistance from the PDSA to enable the organisation to provide free veterinary care to sick and injured animals for pet owners within the DH1-6 area. Recommend to offer a donation of £50	08.5.06
5	Councillor Holland	Application received from Mr & Mrs Swinbank of 28 South Lea, Witton Gilbert to purchase land adjacent to their property for use as garden for their children to play. Recommend the application be approved subject to a reduced area being offered via the normal land application procedure	18.5.06
6	Councillor Reynolds	Application received from Mr Lowery of 45 Coppice Hill, Esh Winning to purchase 33 square metres or thereabouts of land to solve drainage problems which affect his driveway and may affect the foundations of his home. Recommend approval of sale of a strip of land not more than 1 metre wide along the entire length of the common boundary with no. 45 and subject to the usual conditions	19.5.06
7	Councillor Holland	Application received from Ms Rogers of 7 Middle Grove, Brandon to purchase land adjacent to her property for use as additional off-street parking. Recommend approval of sale subject to conditions mentioned.	25.5.06
8	Councillor Holland	Application received from Mr Walker of 163 Canterbury Road, Newton Hall for Right of Vehicular access over Council land to the front of his property for manoeuvrability. Recommend that application be refused	26.5.06

9	Councillor Holland	Application to agree to Head of Planning Services to sign an Agreement with BT to carry out further feasibility into rolling out a Micro Distributed Antennae Network within the City Centre Recommend approval of application	29.5.06
10	Councillor Reynolds & Councillor Southwell	Application received in respect of a Home Loss Payment as a result of the Council compulsorily displacing the applicant from his home (Ref. 301). Recommend approval of a payment of £3,400 minus outstanding rent arrears of £261.72	05.06.06
11	Councillor Woods	Authorisation of temporary closure of the following roads to all vehicles except for emergency vehicles on 1 July 2006 between the hours of 10 a.m. and 5.30 p.m. and 2 July 2006 between the hours of 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. for the Summer Festival Market Place, Saddler Street, North & South Bailey, Palace Green, Owengate, Dun Cow Lane, Bow Lane and Silver Street. Recommend that an order be made in accordance with the provisions of Section 21 of the Town Police Clauses Act 1847 authorising the temporary closure	01.06.06
12	Councillor Woods	Authorisation of temporary closure of the following roads to all vehicles including pedal cyclists on 8 July 2006 between the hours of 7.30 a.m. and 5.00 p.m. to enable the Durham Miners' Gala to take place. Framwellgate Bridge, Market Place, Saddler Street, Owengate, North & South Bailey, Dun Cow Lane, Bow Lane, Silver Street, New Elvet Bridge, Elvet Bridge, Old Elvet, Territorial Lane, Elvet Waterside, New Elvet, Court Lane, Elvet Crescent, Church Street, Whinney Hill, Hallgarth Street between its junction with Church Street/New Elvet and Stockton Road roundabout at Mountjoy, Milburngate between North Road and the access road to Framwellgate Waterside, Crossgate from junction with North Road/Framwellgate Bridge to the junction with South Street, North Road (between its junction with Framwellgate Bridge and North Road Roundabout, between the hours of 8.30 a.m. to 10.00 a.m. and 15.00 to 17.00). Recommend that an order be made in accordance with the provisions of Section 21 of the Town Police Clauses Act 1847 authorising the temporary closure	1.06.06
13	Councillor Woods	Authorisation of temporary closure of the following roads on 2 September 2006 between the hours of 12.30 p.m. and 1.00 p.m. to enable a Procession to take place: Saddler Street, Owengate and Palace Green. Roads to be closed to all vehicles including pedal cyclists. Recommend that an order be made in accordance with the provisions of Section 21 of the Town Police Clauses Act 1847 authorising the temporary closure	1.0.606

14	Councillor Southwell	Application received from Mr & Mrs Hudson of 37 Musgrave Gardens, Gilesgate regarding the granting of a further licence from 17 June 2006 of occupy land for the purpose of private domestic garden. Recommend the granting to Mr & Mrs Hudson of an annual garden licence	5.06.06
15	Councillor Reynolds	Application for financial assistance from County Durham Society of the Blind and Partially Sighted of 1 Church Lane, Durham City to help support its talking newspaper which is circulated free of charge to over 700 blind or partially sighted listeners across County Durham Recommend that a donation of £100 be made to the Society	5.06.06
16	Councillor Reynolds	Application received from Mr Abbott of 2 Foster Avenue, Sherburn Village enquiring if the Council would sell him approx. 38 sq. metres or thereabouts of land on which to build a garage Recommend that subject to contract and certain conditions outlined an area of 38 sq. metres or thereabouts be offered to the applicant on terms to be agreed by the Council Valuer	8.06.06
17	Councillor Southwell	Approval given for the adaptation to the home of a Disabled Person at 29 Aldridge Court, Ushaw Moor at a cost of £4,447 for a curved stairlift	1.06.06
18	Councillor Southwell	Approval given for the adaptation to the home of a Disabled Person at 7 Stackgarth, Brandon at a cost of £4,190.72 for alterations to the toilet	1.06.06
19	Councillor Holland	Application received for a Durham City Enterprise Grant of £500 from Kevin Robinson t/a K & N News Recommend approval of Grant of £500	6.06.06
20	Councillor Southwell	Application received from Mr Seed of 21 Halliday Grove, Langley Moor who has been in occupation of a parcel of Council owned land under Licence and this Licence is due to expire on 28 June 2006. Recommend approval to grant Mr Seed an annual Garden Licence to run from year to year	8.06.06
21	Councillor Rae	Application for SRB6 Improving the Heart of the Villages received from New Brancepeth Primary School & Nursery - £6,750 Software Express Distribution - £1,200 Recommend approval of the Grant	9.06.06
22	Councillor Reynolds	Application received to allow free coach parking in the City Centre for the Summer Festival Weekend (1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> July 2006). Recommend that the application be approved	14.06.06
23	Councillor Rae	Application for a Durham City Enterprise Grant received from Paul Smith t/a Durham Padi Scuba - £500 and Stuart McVeigh t/a S M Sales - £500 Recommend approval of the Grant of £500 each	16.06.06

24	Councillor Rae	Application for a Durham City Enterprise Grant received from Angela Hanson t/a Hands on Beauty - £500 Recommend approval of the Grant	16.06.06
25	Councillor Holland	Application received from Mr Brown of Fold Cottage, Witton Gilbert enquiring whether the Council would consider leasing him land adjacent to his property for use as additional garden. Recommend that the application be approved subject to the usual conditions	16.06.06
26	Councillor Holland	Application received from Chris Smith t/a Chris Smith Personal Training for a Durham City Enterprise Grant of £500 Recommend approval of the Grant	19.06.06
27	Councillor Holland	Application received from Paul Balmont t/a Option C Community Interest Company - £500 Geoffrey Gilpin t/a Exmoor Drystone Walling - £500 Steve Argument t/a Durham District Decoration - £500 Recommend approval that only Steve Argument t/a Durham District Decoration be given grant of £500	19.06.06
28	Councillor Reynolds	Application received to allow free coach parking in the City Centre for the Christmas Festival Weekend (2 & 3 December 2006). Recommend approval of application	13.06.06
29	Councillor Reynolds	Application received from Mrs Flowers of 68 Edge Court enquiring whether the Council would consider leasing to her the land adjacent to her property for garden use only. Mrs Flowers already leases an area adjacent to her property and wishes to lease the remainder. Recommend refusal of the application.	19.06.06
30	Councillor Reynolds	Application received from Mr Brummitt on behalf of his mother, Mrs McDonald, who rents council property at 19 Ramona Avenue, Kelloe to rent land for use as additional garden on which to place a greenhouse. Recommend refusal of application	26.6.06

**Report of Economic Scrutiny Panel**

**SRB 6**

**1. Background**

- 1.1 The Economic Scrutiny Panel was tasked with scrutinising SRB 6 (Single Regeneration Budget). The Council has been a successful SRB partner for the past three years, competing for funds with other local authorities within the district.
- 1.2 An audit of social and economic needs in the rural villages was carried out in 1998 for City of Durham. 12 communities were identified where regeneration activity should be targeted. The 12 Villages are :- Bearpark; Brandon; Ushaw Moor; New Brancepeth; Esh Winning; West Rainton; Sherburn Hill; Ludworth; Cassop; Bowburn; Quarrington Hill and Kelloe.
- 1.3 The Durham Coalfield was one of the biggest in the UK; however by 2000 all of the Durham mines have been closed, with a loss of over 100,000 jobs.

**2 Aims and Objectives**

2.1 It was the objective of the Panel to discover the following:-

- What lessons have been learned
- How are spending levels controlled
- How are relationships with stakeholders developed
- How are grants allocated
- What monitoring provisions are in place

**3. Findings**

- 3.1 The Panel discovered that although the general feedback from SRB projects was good Members who did not represent an SRB area were not familiar with the activities carried out under the umbrella of SRB.
- 3.2 The City of Durham's Community and Economic Development Manager provided information for members on recent programmes and gave background information on what had been achieved in previous years.
- 3.3 The SRB Programme Manager from the County Council gave members an insight into the structure behind the programmes, monitoring techniques and evaluation processes involved. The Programme Manager explained the direction of funding from government level down to project level and that the procedures used at County level are still be in place at district level.
- 3.4 Professor Robinson of University Of Durham is currently working on an evaluation on SRB and was invited to attend a panel meeting. Professor Robinson informed Members that over the course of several years 40 programmes had been evaluated. Some of the programmes were complicated

and diverse, very often programmes were good on the ground. Professor Robinson commented that Community Development was good.

- 3.5 That targets had been met and exceeded in most of the programmes supported by City of Durham.
- 3.6 Members had been informed that projects need to evolve as they develop therefore changes in procedures may be required.
- 3.7 The Panel indicated that the success of SRB should receive more publicity. To enable future applicants with awareness of pitfalls and successes of the project.
- 3.8 The 12 Villages representative informed the panel of a situation that had developed between the 12 Villages and the City of Durham. Following a restructure of the establishment of the City of Durham the post of co-ordinator was absorbed into the establishment.

#### **4. Recommendations**

- 4.1 That the success of SRB be publicised both internally and externally throughout the organisation.
- 4.2 That future application procedures are clearly monitored and guidance is issued to applicants.
- 4.3 That there is uniform approval across district.
- 4.4 That Members were content with the governance arrangements between Central Government, One North East, County Council and City of Durham Council.
- 4.5 That awareness was raised about the subjective nature of projects and the difficulty in quantifying success.
- 4.6 That future funding is publicised at an early stage.
- 4.7 That a review date of the topic be given once a date has been set for the evaluation of the outcomes, which is being carried out by University of Durham.

## **REPORT OF THE ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL**

### **SCRUTINY OF RECYCLING WITHIN THE CITY OF DURHAM AREA**

The Panel was tasked with reviewing the Council's approach to Recycling.

#### **1. BACKGROUND**

The City of Durham was the pilot Authority for the "Kerb-It" Recycling Scheme in the County and the Panel wished to see how the scheme was progressing and whether there was anything the Authority could do to increase its already high recycling rate.

#### **2. AIMS**

It was the remit of the Panel to consider the issue of Recycling and to see if current practise was felt to be working well in the City of Durham area. Also to see if any further ideas could be generated to help increase the uptake of recycling by Residents of the District.

#### **3. ACTIONS**

From the various panel meetings and submissions from the relevant Officers and Organisations, the following information was obtained:

##### **3.1 Overview**

###### **3.1.1 Kerb-It**

In 2000, the City of Durham was the pilot Authority for what was to become the "Kerb-It" scheme that has since been adopted by four of the seven District Councils within County Durham. This allowed for the expansion of the City of Durham pilot, with the remaining 12,000 households being issued with the kerbside recycling boxes. The percentage of waste recycled was initially 3% in 2000, 10% in 2003, with the current figure being around 20%, which is above the set targets (18% by 2006).

The Local Public Service Agreement (LSPA) funding was linked to achievement of a stretched target for recycling and composting. Also funding has been secured by joint working and also from DEFRA. New targets from DEFRA and the County Council's new Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for County Durham (to be finalised) would need to be considered to ensure the City of Durham's own strategies and procedures were aligned for maximum benefit.

###### **3.1.2 Promotion**

Various methods of promotion of recycling have been tried in the City of Durham, such as radio, posters, events (such as Prize Draws similar to those being currently operated by Easington District Council) and advertisements on buses etc. but they have all proved to have little impact upon the uptake and rate of recycling.

One method that registered a dramatic increase in uptake was the placement of a sticker on to the wheelie bins of Residents which gave details of the "Kerb-It" scheme and collection times. Within 3 weeks of these stickers being placed, there were 3,000 requests for "Kerb-It" boxes. There was tonnage increase of 17%, with the overall recycling rate increasing from 17% to 20%.



### **3.2 Responsibility for Service**

There are clear divisions for the varying responsibilities regarding recycling between the County and District Council as set out below:

<b>County</b>	<b>Districts</b>
Strategic Sites	Household Waste Collection
Household Waste Disposal	Kerbside Recycling
Recycling Centres	Supermarket Recycling Points
Treatment of waste	

### **3.3 Bulky Collections Service**

The Council's free bulky items collection service collects a large number of items which has increased significantly since the County Council introducing a permit system at their Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRCs). At present, in excess of 15,000 bulky items are collected per annum, with over 3,000 white goods per annum on top of this figure. Many other Authorities charge for bulky collections and this may be necessary and will be looked within the Environment Services Business Plan. It therefore could be beneficial to identify and involve a relevant Partner company to help reduce the cost of collections for the City of Durham.

### **3.4 Links to Fly-tipping**

There is a noticeable increase in waste in the City Centre at the end of term-time not only from students but also from landlords carrying out refurbishment. There is a code of conduct (Memo of Understanding) between the University and Landlords within Durham regarding this amongst other issue. If the waste is not disposed of correctly, then it can become wind-blown and spread out across an area, giving the impression of fly-tipping having taken place.

Within the City of Durham area, there has not been an appreciable increase in the number of incidents of fly-tipping since the introduction of the permit scheme for tipping at HWRCs. However, there has been a pronounced increase in the number of requests for the removal of bulky items (see 3.3 above).

### **3.5 Green Waste Bins**

Due to the County Council reviewing it's Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for County Durham, it may be that the green waste collections as currently operated could be made superfluous if household waste is sent for digestion which can provide useful by-products and can prove effective (via other sorting processes) at extracting the various recyclable materials.

### **3.6 Types of Recyclable Material**

Currently the "Kerb-It" scheme allows for the recycling of paper, glass and cans. Other bulky materials such as cardboard and plastics are not collected due to their inherent volume to weight ratio, requiring a large vehicle to remove a small tonnage of recyclable waste. Also the returns for the recycling of these types are poor in both monetary terms and in helping to meet percentage tonnage recycling targets. It should be noted that the types of waste chosen for the "Kerb-It" scheme were such to ensure that the Councils involved could meet the various targets as set by DEFRA.

### **3.7 County Council - Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for County Durham**

#### **3.7.1 Review of Countywide Waste Strategy**

The new Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for County Durham is being developed in conjunction with the District Councils and indeed the City of Durham's Environment Services Manager is a part of the team. The existing waste strategy was published in 2002 and was developed in conjunction with the Environment Agency, the District Authorities including Darlington Borough Council. The current strategy is funded by review funds from DEFRA, and is to be completed by the end of March 2006.

The current waste disposal contract with Premier Waste is for the period up to 2008, when this would need to be re-tendered.

#### **3.7.2 Waste Minimisation**

There are 4 options as regards measures for waste minimisation, following what is known as the "waste hierarchy".

- To minimise waste at the point of production – though this more for central government to shape on a whole. Waste minimisation at the output is measured by Performance Indicator BV84 which has been reduced for the County. The HWRCs have had a role to play in this matter, as has the new permit system that is in place.
- Recycling / Composting – As well as the "Kerb-It" and "Green Box" recycling schemes operated by the District Councils, the HWRCs provide facilities for recycling as does the Landfill Site at Coxhoe. In addition there is the Aerobic Digester at Thornley Crossings Industrial Estate, near Shotton Colliery, that processes waste to sift out useful metals and plastics and digest the remaining waste. To cope with municipal waste, a treatment plant with approximately ten times the capacity of the Thornley Crossings facility would be required. It therefore maybe more sensible to have many smaller scale plants in local communities which also cuts down on transport costs.
- Treatment of residual waste – via various methods including mechanical biological treatment such as Anaerobic Digestion which produces waste gas that can be used to fuel the treatment process. Also thermal treatment (modern terminology for incineration) where waste energy can be collected and utilised / recovered. To this end, DEFRA awarded £15,000 towards carrying out a Health Impact Review. Technologies that may be utilised in the future include aerobic and anaerobic digestion, thermal treatment, autoclaving (to reclaim useful material), gasification and pyrolysis. The latter option however, is not yet shown to be effective for treating municipal waste.

Incineration is a very good approach that unfortunately has low public opinion based on old technological models. Unfortunately, any proposed incinerator could potentially take between 8-10 years to come on-line, and the nearest (at Billingham) is already operating a waiting list, as they are at capacity already.

- Landfill – This is considered the last option within the waste hierarchy and is undertaken if other options are not feasible. Currently within the County, there are only 2 landfill sites, one at Todhills, Bishop Auckland in Wear Valley District and the other at the Coxhoe Joint Stocks site in City of Durham. Both are scheduled to come to the end of the current operational permits in March 2007, with Todhills site being retired. The Coxhoe site however, still has large capacity and a planning permission until 2040, though a new permit from the Environment Agency would need to be granted. This is currently in the balance, as the Coxhoe site may require a large investment to line the site to prevent groundwater from potentially becoming contaminated. This could lead to a situation whereby the County would have no landfill sites of its own, and therefore would have to rely on Contractors providing sites, possibly outside of the County, leading to increased costs associated with transportation. If such a permit for operation at Coxhoe is granted, the requisite liner would too increase costs in this regard. Combined with an increase in Landfill Tax, the cost of landfill could potentially jump from £35 per ton to £75-100 per ton. As Premier Waste have a landfill site at Blaydon, and are contracted until 2008, they could take waste to landfill at this site however, this could only be a temporary solution.

### **3.8 Reuse and Refurbishment**

#### **3.8.1 Bulky Items for Reuse**

The term “Bulky Items” refers to items such as fridges, cookers and furniture. Whilst fridges must be disposed of correctly to ensure no chemicals are released during disposal, furniture currently goes to landfill.

As furniture is currently sent to landfill the only suitable vehicle is a conventional refuse collection vehicle. It may be that furniture reuse companies could be contacted to see whether they wished to collect the furniture (subject to the quality, condition fire regulation compliance etc.)

Liverpool City Council run a successful furniture/white goods recycling and reuse system in conjunction with partner companies such as “Bulky Bob’s”. Apprentices are utilised, and therefore not only do many items become refurbished (and are sold at a sufficient price to recoup the costs involved, though not a profit), but also a number of educational targets are met.

#### **3.8.2 County Durham Furniture Forum**

This Forum was in place until 2 years ago when it ceased operating. Durham County Council suggested to the District Councils to revive the forum and this was agreed. The County proposed to be the facilitators for the first few meetings until the Forum was fully operational. This Forum will hopefully provide solutions to help divert furniture from the waste stream for reuse and recycling.

### **3.9 Looking to the Future**

In the near future it will be possible to extract useful energy from waste and that therefore waste should be looked at as a resource and not a by-product. There are examples in Sweden that have shown that communities can provide much of the material and energy they require by reuse, recycling and through energy production from waste.

#### **4. OUTCOMES**

The Panel discussed the information gathered on the topic and noted the following:-

The cost for stickers placed on wheelie bins to promote recycling was £3,000 which represents extremely good value for money. It is thought that an annual sticker campaign would be an excellent method of proven promotion for the "Kerb-It" scheme.

An alternative to including cardboard and plastics within the "Kerb-It" scheme would be to provide suitable recycle "bins" at prominent sites (such a supermarket car parks) to allow for member of the public to recycle these materials in addition. Such large recycling bins are currently being sourced for this purpose.

If the City of Durham was to provide an additional vehicle for the purpose of collecting the reusable furniture there would be an associated cost of the purchase of the vehicle and the associated running costs. These costs could not be recouped by the resale of the collected goods (at this time) and therefore the existing procedure should be adhered to. Also as the refuse vehicles are used for household wheelie bin collections only 4 days out of 5, the use of the vehicles on the "spare" day is cost effective as the vehicles are already in place, with only the cost of fuel being required.

The Environmental Services Manager is scheduled to attend Liverpool City Council to look into the possibility of implementing similar schemes within the City of Durham area, albeit on a smaller scale.

The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 is a piece of legislation which covers a wide range of issues which the Environment & Leisure Services Department deal with. There may be an opportunity to use new or extended powers set out within this Act in connection with Recycling. However, it must be ascertained whether any new approach is suitable for the City of Durham and aligns with any approach taken by Durham County Council.

#### **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Panel identified that the subject of Recycling (and that of increasing the rate of recycling) within the City of Durham area is not only intrinsically linked to the County Council and their Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for County Durham, but also with the education of the public as to the opportunities to recycle and reuse.

Therefore the following recommendations are made:-

1. That the kerb it scheme be promoted by an annual sticker placed on the household waste bins, stating refuse collection times, including details of the kerb-it scheme and relevant contact details at the City of Durham to find out more information regarding recycling.
2. That Residents are made aware of the other options regarding recycling (besides Kerb-It) available within the district i.e. recycling points available within supermarket car parks, facilities available at the County Council Household Waste and Recycling Centres, furniture reuse / refurbishment, home composting and the minimisation of the amount of an individuals own of waste in order to change peoples behaviour towards more environmentally friendly practices e.g. reusing sturdy shopping bags rather than taking plastic carrier bags from supermarkets, buying products that are packaged with relatively easily recyclable materials such as glass and tin.

3. That the provision of a free collection service for bulky items be maintained, subject to further information regarding the on-going viability of these collections being obtained. This recommendation could then be reviewed accordingly by Members.
4. That there is greater communication between the City of Durham, Student Landlords and the University of Durham as regards the extra volumes of waste created at the ends of terms and semesters when students move out and landlords maybe n the process of redecoration and refurbishment. There may be an opportunity via the newly revived County Durham Furniture Forum to set up links that would benefit both landlords (cheap furniture) and Local Authorities (a diversion of the furniture from the waste stream) and to the University (good PR for students is few and far between!).
5. That the City of Durham's align their plans for the green waste collection with the County Council Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for County Durham to ensure that there is no conflict and unnecessary expenditure of resources.
6. That the possibility of increasing the number of types of waste that can be collected via Kerb-It is investigated to determine whether:
  - a. The public wish to see cardboard and plastic to be included.
  - b. Whether the inclusion of these types of low density, bulky items can be collected at a sufficiently cost effective means to justify their inclusion.
  - c. Whether including these types of material could help to increase recycling rates as a percentage across the district to meet future targets or whether they would not yield sufficient percentages relative to the resources required.
7. That the City of Durham takes full advantage of any opportunities to help shape any new contracts for the provision of the recycling within the District (currently Premier Waste) that may be included within the County Council's Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for County Durham. Also to ensure the City of Durham is prepared to utilise any facilities that the County Council may provide for disposal / treatment of waste in the future in order to minimise the amount of waste sent to landfill.
8. That the City of Durham supports the Reuse and Refurbishment of furniture and white goods wherever possible within the constraints of limited resources, whether that be by the instigation of schemes similar to those ran in Liverpool, or that is not thought to be viable, by support of the Durham County Furniture Forum.
9. That the Council looks to utilise within its own working practices the best systems to ensure as much non-confidential waste is recycled as possible and that waste is treated wherever possible as a potential resource rather than a by-product of function.
10. That the City of Durham's Environmental Services Department research how best to implement any requisite legislation on Recycling contained within the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005.

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**REPORT OF THE POLICY SCRUTINY PANEL**

**SCRUTINY OF THE TELEPHONE COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM**

**1. BACKGROUND**

Concern had been expressed that certain problems were evident regarding the length of time taken to respond to telephone calls and with the subsequent communication with relevant Officers including the utilisation of the Voicemail facility.

**2. AIMS**

To ensure that the Council's Telephone Communications, both external and internal, are effective and efficient.

To ensure a positive image of the Council is given through the remit of its Communications and the effectiveness of its "First Contact".

**3. ACTIONS**

**3.1 Initial Consideration**

A Planning Document was prepared in order to scope the parameters of this Scrutiny. The Planning Document is attached at Appendix A.

Copies of the Council's Customer Care Handbook, under revision, was circulated to Members as background information.

**3.2 Overview**

Members requested that relevant Officers be invited to attend the Panel to give an overview of the current Telephone Communications System. Subsequently, the Head of Community Services, The Head of HR and the Customer Services Manager attended the Panel and responded to the general concerns of Members.

**3.3 Comparison to other systems**

Members also requested that a comparison be sought between the Telephone System employed by City of Durham and systems used in other organisations. It was agreed that a selection of differing organisations be requested for details of their systems and be invited to attend a Meeting of the Policy Scrutiny Panel.

Subsequently, requests and invitations were issued to Derwentside District Council, Northumbrian Water and Three Rivers Housing Association. Only Derwentside District Council responded to the request for information, which was forwarded to Panel Members. No response to the invitation to attend the Panel was received.

### **3.4 Detailed Consideration**

The Head of Community Services and the Customer Services Manager subsequently responded to specific questions from Members, which had been identified on standard Questioning Plans and forwarded to Officers, prior to the Panel Meeting. Officers also produced comprehensive information for Panel Members, including the response times to telephone calls which could now be automatically logged by the system. It was the intention that the statistics be produced on an ongoing basis as an indicator of current performance and as a target against which improvement can be measured.

Other information submitted at the request of Members included:

- Description as to how calls are received and routed
- Current number of posts and available staff on establishment in relation to Call Handling and how they were allocated to the 4 Call Groupings
- Number of calls received and identified "Hot-Spots"
- Details of the process of "Call-Logging" and the query tracking procedure
- What Performance Indicators have been set and what is performance against them

Members considered that particular attention should be given to the following areas:

- Monitoring of Response Times
- Customer Consultation/Feedback
- Utilisation of Voicemail Facility

The Head of Community Services, the Head of HR and the Customer Services Manager subsequently again attended the Panel for specific discussions on these issues.

## **4. OUTCOMES**

### **4.1 Telephone System**

The current system was purchased following a six months process and a Tendering Procedure in accordance with current EU Requirements. Five firms had submitted tenders on the basis of the Council's detailed specification and the contract was awarded to Seimens.

The System cost £225,000, with an ongoing annual cost of £37,000 excluding call charges. The system had already shown good cost savings.

Members were informed that as the system could be configured exactly to the Council's needs, in effect, it worked exactly the way we wanted it to. Any difficulties experienced were likely to be due to Call Management problems.

### **4.2 Functional Call Groupings**

Calls were grouped into 4 Function Groups (Refuse, Repairs, Revs/Bens, Cityinfo).

Certain areas were clearly more intense than others. More routine "Quick-Fix" calls were routed away from these areas. There could also be difficulty with certain peaks and troughs for calls eg Monday mornings and procedures were in place to ensure sufficient staff cover was available at these times.

A queuing system was in place and callers were informed of this. There was a 4 minute delay before calls were routed to Voicemail with a future target of 2 minutes. However, Members were informed that almost 80% of all calls were responded to at first contact.

The number of calls and the call response times were monitored on an ongoing basis.

### **4.3 Staffing**

Members were informed that key staff were still undergoing long term training, and existing vacancies were being filled. However pressure was being experienced due to a neighbouring Authority actively recruiting trained Customer Services staff.

### **4.4 Consistency of Responses**

This was also a concern, with the experience of Members being that some Departments/Services responded promptly and efficiently to queries but others less so. It was apparent that the Best Practice set out in the Customer Care Handbook was not being applied consistently across the Authority.

### **4.5 Benchmarking**

No Benchmarking had been carried out against other organisations, however Members were informed that it was the intention to eventually compare against "Beacon" Authorities.

Currently, standards were compared at meetings of a Partnership Group.

### **4.6 Monitoring of Response Times**

Members agreed that the monitoring of response times be further developed and continued, though it was noted that a framework of targets or indicators against which to measure performance was not yet in place.

The Head of Community Services was requested to return to the July meeting of the Policy Scrutiny Panel and provide Members with figures for the call response times for March, April, May and June, 2006.

### **4.7 Customer Consultation/Feedback**

Feedback was sought via a face to face Satisfaction Survey from Cityinfo desks. A total of 188 questionnaires had been returned between October 2005 and March 2006, indicating a satisfaction rating of 80%.

This did not however, relate specifically to the Telephone Communications System, although some follow up satisfaction sampling in this regard is currently carried out.



It was acknowledged that further Consultation/Feedback was needed with regard to the Telephone Communications System to further inform the development of the system.

#### **4.8 Utilisation of Voicemail Facility**

Members were informed that there was no written procedure in relation to how staff should deal with Voicemail messages and that it was incumbent upon Managers to ensure their staff responded appropriately to them.

Again, it was apparent that this was inconsistent across the Authority and specific Service areas were identified by Members, where they had encountered particular problems. It was considered that a "Good Practice Guide" would be beneficial.

Members also queried whether the Key Contacts Directory was complete, as there appeared to be out of date contact details contained within it and suggested that an audit of the Directory be carried out as soon as possible in order to identify and remove incorrect information, with the addition of a simple alphabetical list of staff and their contact details.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That an audit of the Key Contacts Directory be carried out as soon as possible in order to identify and remove out of date contact information.
2. That regular reviews of the Key Contacts Directory be undertaken to ensure accurate information for Members is maintained.
3. That an alphabetical list of staff and their contact details be incorporated into the Key Contacts Directory.
4. That a "Good Practice Guide" in relation to responding to telephone calls and the utilisation of Voicemail be drawn up and issued to staff and that this be incorporated into the revised Customer Care Handbook. The Good Practice set out in the Guide to be reinforced to staff through OMT.
5. That the possibility of the automatic diversion of calls to Mobile numbers, where this is appropriate, be investigated.
6. That further Public Consultation be developed and carried out by Community Services, in relation to the Telephone Communications System, and that progress be reported back to this Panel in due course.
7. That specific targets for call response times be set and incorporated into a framework against which performance and progress can be measured.
8. That progress on these issues be reviewed by the Policy Scrutiny Panel in six months time.

CITY OF DURHAM

SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

2005 – 2006

# **SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2005/2006**

## **Introduction**

During 2005/2006, City of Durham Council continued to develop its Scrutiny process and build on the success of previous years. Improvements were made possible by both the continued investment in enhanced administrative support, provision of guidance and encouragement by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and the involvement of all political parties.

## **Background**

In October 2004 a survey was carried out with Members to identify the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the Council's Scrutiny processes. The survey identified both processes considered to be robust and those which, in the opinion of Members, were weak and required attention.

In May, 2005, the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee directed Democratic Support Staff to explore possible measures that could be introduced to meet the concerns of Members and which would form the basis of an improvement plan.

The year has subsequently seen significant developments in Scrutiny at the City of Durham with Scrutiny Members being involved in a development initiative which included specific Scrutiny Workshops as part of the Council's Member Development Programme.

The Workshops were facilitated in conjunction with Democratic Support Staff and the IDeA and resulted in suggested improvements to the Scrutiny Function outlined below.

Now that a genuine aspiration and intent, seeking ongoing improvement to the Scrutiny Function, has been initiated, it is the intention that over the coming years, further expectations for improvement will be met.

## **Democratic Support**

April, 2005 saw the implementation of a major restructure of the Council. One result of this was the establishment of a new Democratic Support Team and Officers from the Team were allocated, as part of their duties, to support the Scrutiny Committee and Scrutiny Panels.

This has led to more structured support for the Scrutiny Function in general and Democratic Support Officers have been fully involved in developments pursued in conjunction with the IDeA.

However, with the continuing development of Scrutiny at the City of Durham and with the possibility of Legislation leading to increased responsibilities for Scrutiny, Members will continue to monitor the situation with regard to Officer support.

## **Training**

As part of the Council's Member Development Programme, a series of Workshops were held during September, 2005, in conjunction with the IDeA, specifically in relation to Scrutiny Members. The first session included a "Scrutiny Health Check" at which Members discussed and recorded perceived strengths and weaknesses within the Scrutiny process.

The second session focussed on the skills needed for Chairs and Vice Chairs and the final session, which was also attended by members of OMT, was based around a Draft Improvement Plan, prepared from the perceived strengths and weaknesses identified in the first session.

## **IMPROVEMENTS TO THE SCRUTINY PROCESS**

Following the final Scrutiny Workshop it was agreed that a Scrutiny Improvement Plan, based upon the findings of Members, be developed.

A "Balanced Scorecard" evaluation had been prepared, which identified four areas of Scrutiny activity; Process, Challenge, Community and Delivery. The Balanced Scorecard evaluation highlighted improvements needed in each area, under the three central issues of increasing the Profile of Scrutiny, the establishment of a Budget for Scrutiny and the Ownership of the Scrutiny process by Members.

A number of measures which needed to be taken to achieve overall improvement were identified from each of the Balanced Scorecard areas.

From the Balanced Scorecard Evaluation, a series of actions were identified, in the form of 20 individual projects. Five projects were identified from each Balanced Scorecard area. The reasons for each project and their required outcomes were also identified.

A time limit was given to each project, from those which were already ongoing, to those scheduled for completion by April 2007. It was clear that the differing nature of the projects would require differing timescales.

The 20 projects identified were incorporated into a Scrutiny Action Plan for delivery. The Plan set out the individual project numbers and description, to whom responsibility for the individual projects had been assigned and the target date for delivery.

Following subsequent discussions with the IDeA, it was identified that priority should be given to the development and production of a "Scrutiny Handbook", defining the roles of Members and Officers involved in Scrutiny and describing the overall Scrutiny process at City of Durham, and to the development and implementation of a structured mechanism for liaison with and feedback from Cabinet.

The Scrutiny Handbook has been completed and will be issued to Members as a Guide and a Courtesy.

## **FUTURE PLANS**

In addition to the internal improvements sought and outlined above, Members will also monitor the progress of current proposed Legislation.

Possible developments contained within the Local Government White Paper and in the Criminal Justice Bill specifically with regard to the Government's "Respect Agenda" may lead to new powers, increased responsibility and an extension of the remit of Scrutiny.

Clearly, this situation will be monitored closely.

## **OTHER DEVELOPMENTS**

Over the past year Scrutiny at City of Durham has attempted to involve an increased number of Partner Agencies in individual Scrutiny studies.

Witnesses have included, in addition to the Council's own Officers, Officers from other Local Authorities and external Agencies and from Professor Fred Robinson from St. Chad's College, University of Durham, in relation to the Scrutiny of SRB6. This has had a positive effect on the

Scrutiny studies in that they have been informed from a variety of areas of expertise. It is the intention to expand our inter-agency working, including, wherever possible or relevant, working directly with neighbouring Authorities.

It is also the intention to pro-actively seek out involvement from the general public and Community Groups and where possible to target specific groups who may have a particular interest in a specific Scrutiny Study.

To this end, Democratic Services Officers are working with Officers from the Community Development Section in the establishment of a database of Community Groups, Consultancy Groups etc, specifically for the purpose of identifying possible potential partners in future Scrutiny studies.

## **PROGRESS**

The Scrutiny Action Plan, as previously mentioned is ongoing, and the intention is that wherever possible, all individual projects contained within it will be completed by April, 2007.

The differing nature of the projects identified has allowed progress to be made swiftly on some and these have been completed and are in place. The majority are currently being progressed and will be completed in accordance with the Action Plan and the Democratic Services Business Plan.

An update of the Scrutiny Action Plan, showing the current status of the individual projects is attached at Appendix A.

# REPORTS OF SCRUTINY PANELS

# **REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC SCRUTINY PANEL**

## **Membership for 2005/2006**

**Councillors Hopgood, Colledge, Cowper, Gill, Graham, McDonnell, Pape, Rochford, Shaw, Simmons, Simpson, and Stoddard and Thomson**

## **BACKGROUND**

There have been changes in the Chairmanship of Economic Scrutiny Panel this municipal year. Councillor Pape took over the Chair of Scrutiny Committee in May 2005 when Councillor Lightley (the previous Chair), became Mayor.

In October, 2005, Councillor Pape became Vice Chair of the panel, thus allowing the previous Vice Chair, Councillor Hopgood to become panel Chair.

The Panel have undertaken two scrutiny topics this municipal year, the first was Leisure Services – 5 Year Plan, but because of the large amount of information and the diverse area of the topic it was sub-divided into four main areas. The headings of the sub-divisions were as follows, Stocktake, How we work with young people, Accessibility and Exercise Referrals.

The Panel started to scrutinise SRB 6 in February, 2006 looking at what has been accomplished through SRB programmes.

## **LEISURE SERVICES 5 YEAR PLAN**

The panel looked at The Leisure Services 5 Year Plan, and decided that due to the scale of the scrutiny it would be beneficial to tackle the topic in four main stages, Stocktake, Provision for Young People, Accessibility and Exercise Referrals. The Panel invited the Leisure Services Manager to give information on the current facilities provided by the sports centres and their value for money. Also, the Community Safety Officer for the Authority attended several meetings to give information relating to 'hotspots' of anti social behaviour throughout the district. A guest speaker from Durham Chester le Street Lifestyle Initiative attended a meeting and answered the Panels questions relating to exercise referrals.

The Panel made eight recommendations to this scrutiny;

- That the Council operated Sports Centres continue as main hubs for the development of various leisure activities. Leisure Services continue to make the provision of facilities and activities more accessible and at reasonable rates.
- That other community assets identified from the stock-take are communicated to members of the public. That the use of communal halls and community centres are actively encouraged as centres of delivery and to take activities offered in Sports centres out into the community where possible.
- That there is a greater synergy between Leisure Services and Community Safety to provide up to date information on 'hotspot' areas and develop positive communications and programmes for interaction with young people.
- That Community Development carry out a consultation to determine the types of activities requested the possible venues and the frequency of activities.
- That time be given for the recommendations put forward by the Head of Environment & Leisure Services in the Lifestyle Initiative to be put into practice.

- That promotion of programmes offered/available under the umbrella of the Lifestyle Initiative are publicised in Durham City News to raise Exercise Referrals.
- That a representative from Leisure Services continue to participate in PCT partnership meetings relating to exercise referrals
- That a review of the exercise referrals and the continued use of facilities after being referred by a GP take place in due course.

## **SRB 6**

The Panel were tasked with scrutinising Single Regeneration Budget 6 looking at the successes and what lessons could be learned for future. The Economic and Community Development Manager together with the Head of Community Services attended all of the meetings. Panel meetings were also attended by the Chair of SRB, the Secretary of the 12 Villages and a representative from the 12 Villages and also Professor Robinson of St. Chad's College University of Durham.

Professor Robinson has been carrying out an evaluation of SRB; he informed members that over the course of several years 40 programmes had been evaluated. The Panel discovered that targets had been met and exceeded in most programmes supported by the City of Durham.

The Panel made seven recommendations to this scrutiny:-

- That the success of SRB be publicised throughout the organisation
- That future application procedures are clearly monitored and guidance issued to applicants.
- That there is uniform approval across district
- That Members were content with the governance arrangements between Central Government, One North East, County Council and City of Durham Council.
- Awareness was raised about the subjective nature of projects and the difficulty in quantifying success.
- That future funding is publicised at an early stage.
- Outcomes are to be reviewed following the evaluation carried out by University of Durham.

## **LOOKING FORWARD**

The Panel will undertake a number of reviews in the next municipal year on topics which have been scrutinised to check that processes that are in place are adequate for the purpose.

The topics that are due to be reviewed in the next municipal year include;-

- Review of GP Provision (Due to commence June, 2006)



# REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

## Membership for 2005/2006

**Councillors Howarth, Griffin, Hepplewhite, Hopgood, Kinghorn, Moderate, Norman, Robinson, Taylor, Walton, Wolstenholme and Young**

Between 1 April 2005, and 30 April 2006, the Community Services Scrutiny Panel met on 15 occasions and held one site visit.

The topics scrutinised were:-

- The Letting of Council Garages
- Empty Property Strategy
- Playing Pitch Strategy

The Panel also reviewed:-

- Council House Repairs and Re-let Times (September 2005 and March 2006)
- Decent Homes Standard
- Allocations Policy (this review was detailed in the 2004/2005 Annual Scrutiny Report, but was not presented to Cabinet until 9 May 2005)

## THE LETTING OF COUNCIL GARAGES

Scrutiny of this topic was in progress at the time of the Annual Scrutiny Report (2004-2005).

The Letting of Council Garages had been referred to scrutiny because of concerns that some garages were being misused to run businesses or to store unsuitable and hazardous materials.

### The Aims of the Scrutiny followed three strands:-

#### (a) Current Situation

The Panel proposed to investigate the number of garages owned by the City Council; their location across the District; the number of void garages and their locations; the level of rent charges; and importantly, the tenants' use of the garages.

#### (b) Tenancy Agreement and Policy

The Panel wished to examine the Tenancy Agreement and if suitable, to use the findings as a basis for formulating a Policy to govern the letting and use of Council Garages.

#### (c) Future Provision

Members were to consider whether it was necessary to retain all garages in all or some areas of the City, particularly where there were high levels of voids and a lack of demand.

The cost and managing the garages was also to be scrutinised to determine the financial practicalities of letting garages.

## Summary of Actions and Outcomes

Information from Housing Services included the number and locations of City Council garages, rent charges and repair costs. Members concluded that there was a favourable balance between

income and expenditure in relation to Council garages, but that rents and standards of maintenance needed to be regularly reviewed.

Members considered waiting lists and queried the location and numbers of voids. It was discovered that some garages were unsuitable to re-let due to disrepair and/or vandalism and that in other instances, garages were inconveniently situated for prospective tenants.

The Panel looked in detail at the terms of the Tenancy Agreement and agreed that it should be updated to emphasise permitted use of the garage and the Council's right, on giving reasonable notice, to inspect the garage premises.

It was discovered that of a range of other Local Authorities contacted, none had a Policy on Garage Lettings. The Panel agreed that such a Policy was required to regulate the use of garages, and define the responsibilities of both the Authority and garage tenants. Proposals for the Policy content were recommended accordingly.

### **Recommendations**

The Panel recommended that a policy be written regarding the letting and use of Council garages, and that alterations be made to the Tenancy Agreement, specifically relating to the permitted use of the garages.

The report and recommendations were approved and adopted by Cabinet on 3 October 2005.

### **EMPTY PROPERTY STRATEGY** (Scrutiny of the updated document began 14 June 2005)

The Strategy was first presented to Cabinet in May 2004. Because of its relevance to Housing Services, the Community Services Scrutiny Panel requested that it be referred to the Scrutiny Committee prior to it being adopted by Cabinet. The Strategy was allocated to the Community Services Panel but its scrutiny was delayed to allow updating.

On 14th June 2005 the Scrutiny was introduced with a presentation on the revised Empty Properties Strategy given by Officers to all Members of the Council. A sample of questions and answers can be found in the minutes of that meeting. It was agreed that the Strategy and an Outline Action Plan should go to the Community Services Scrutiny Panel.

On 12th July 2005 the Officers who had presented the Strategy answered supplementary questions and went through the Action Plan in some detail. The Panel was satisfied with both documents, recommended that they be referred to Cabinet for adoption, and that progress be reviewed by Scrutiny in October 2006.

On 24th October 2005 Cabinet agreed that the Empty Properties Strategy and Action Plan be formally adopted.

### **PLAYING PITCH STRATEGY** (Scrutiny of the Revised Strategy began on 11 October 2005)

#### **Background**

The Playing Pitch Strategy was referred to Scrutiny prior to its adoption by Cabinet in January 2005. It had been commissioned in 2001 and carried out by outside consultants. An overview of the original document was presented to the Community Services Panel in March 2005, when it was agreed that it should be subject to further consultation with interested parties and come back for scrutiny when updated.

The Panel subsequently reviewed the revised Strategy and agreed that it was appropriate for it to be referred to Cabinet along with Scrutiny Report. Cabinet agreed that the recommendations in the Strategy and the Report be approved and adopted in December 2005.

The Panel was to continue to scrutinise certain aspects, identified in The Playing Pitch Strategy.

## **Aims**

In discussion with the City Council Policy and Regeneration Manager, the Panel reviewed the Revised Strategy and Recommendations. Members concluded that it would be beneficial for the Scrutiny to focus on weaknesses as identified in the SWAT analysis it contained.

These formed the terms of reference for the scrutiny and included:-

- Shared use of pitches
- Trespass, dog fouling, and use of motorcycles on pitches
- Availability of changing facilities
- Condition of pitches (including drainage)
- 

The Panel also wished to open up further dialogue with other agencies about the City Council Strategy and to consider ways in which the Council could best work with them to fulfil and secure playing pitch needs across the District.

Accordingly, there were two main areas of enquiry:-

- Physical problems e.g. drainage, trespass, changing facilities
- Links with other organisations

## **Summary of Actions and Outcomes**

The Scrutiny Panel invited a wide range of witnesses to its meetings. These included a number of City Council Officers who were able to provide evidence of the condition and maintenance of pitches and changing facilities. They also outlined existing links with partner agencies. Additionally, representatives from the County Council, Durham School Sports Partnership, the University of Durham, the Primary Care Trust and local Sports Clubs attended the meetings, joining in discussion and contributing much useful information from a variety of perspectives. Portfolio Holders for Leisure Services also attended.

The Panel made site visits to look at a range of Council Playing Pavilions and Changing Rooms. Facilities were discussed with Officers, on and after the visits, and Comments are attached to the Scrutiny Report.

Throughout the course of the Scrutiny Members established that:

- Some pitches lacked changing facilities and the standard of provision varied markedly across the District. Facilities for females and people with disabilities were poor. Better facilities prompted more considerate use.
- Some pitches had drainage problems which the Council was attempting to address. Some were under used.
- There was a need for increased efforts to deter intrusion on pitches by people, animals and vehicles and to prevent problems such as littering. The use of abusive language by users, during matches, was also a cause for concern.
- There was scope for increased co-operation between the Council and other agencies to promote healthy lifestyles and participation in sports. A shortage of sports coaches was a prime area where joint working could be beneficial.

## Recommendations

These were detailed and addressed many relevant aspects of The Playing Pitch Strategy and City Council Facilities. Reference to the Scrutiny Report is recommended for comprehensive coverage.

However, they encompassed:

<b>City Council Pitches</b>	- current and future use, and monitoring.
<b>Changing Facilities</b>	- short and long-term needs, inspection, raising standards and extending provision.
<b>Maintenance and Drainage</b>	- condition of pitches, need for an action plan for improvement, and availability of appropriate funding.
<b>Code of Conduct on Playing Pitches</b>	- inspection of grounds, improved signage, drafting of a Code of Practice to include conditions of use of pitches and changing rooms.
<b>Working with other Organisations</b>	- building on links with agencies such as Durham County Council and Schools, Durham University, Private Clubs.

There was an overwhelming view among Panel Members that as part of a healthy lifestyle there is a need for people of all ages to have the opportunity and incentive to engage in more physical leisure pursuits. This is particularly important for young people and can encourage community development. We therefore recommended:

- That all playing pitches in City of Durham ownership be retained for recreational use.
- That through City Council initiatives and communication with partners, encouragement should be given to incorporate playing pitches into cohesive provision that reflects local and district needs. This will require that the Playing Pitch Strategy is periodically updated and the use and development of pitches is incorporated into an overall strategy for the leisure use of open spaces.
- That the Community Services Scrutiny Panel reviews progress towards improvements to pitches and facilities, including a site inspection by Members, in March 2007.

The Report and Recommendations were approved and adopted by Cabinet on 17th May 2006.

## REVIEW OF COUNCIL HOUSE REPAIRS - 23rd September 2005

Council House Repairs and the Re-letting of Void Properties had last been scrutinised in September 2004 and January 2005 respectively. Members had expressed concern about delay in the completion of repairs and an increase in re-let times.

On September 23rd 2005 Council Officers and the Portfolio Holder for Housing answered questions submitted before the meeting and taken from the floor. Issues were discussed at some length. Questions and answers are recorded in the minutes.

## Recommendations

- That continued effort is made to improve the operation of the Council Infosystem.
- That the training needs of repair system operators, now and in the future, be satisfactorily addressed.
- We question whether workforce numbers are adequate to meet repair demands. We therefore urge the Council to review staffing quotas in order to improve the service and alleviate potential stress. All efforts need to be made to recruit and retain staff.
- That the acquisition of the most suitable, effective, one code, modern electronic system is progressed as a matter of urgency.
- That the scheduled review of Re-let Times, due in January 2006, be broadened to monitor progress in all relevant aspects of Repairs to Council Properties.

The Report and Recommendations were approved and adopted by Cabinet on 5th December 2005.

### **REVIEW OF COUNCIL HOUSE REPAIRS** including Re-let Times of Void Properties - 15th March 2006

Due to the time scale between Scrutiny Panel approval and presentation of the previous report to Cabinet, further review of Council House Repairs did not take place until 15th March 2006. Council Officers and the Portfolio Holder for Housing advised Panel Members as to progress made on the recommendations in their previous report, and also discussed other problems and possible solutions.

#### **Recommendations**

Recommendations were made regarding staff training, the telephone system, re-let times and the computer management system.

The Report and Recommendations were approved and adopted by Cabinet on 17th May 2006.

### **REVIEW OF DECENT HOMES STANDARD**

The Panel Reviewed the Decent Homes Standard on 15th March 2006 when Members were told that even though the percentage of houses externally assessed as non decent was higher than the Property Services assessment, the Council is still on course to achieve the DHS target set for 2010.

#### **Recommendations**

- That the measures necessary for the Council to achieve its 2010 DHS target be pursued.
- That progress towards the required DHS target is rigorously monitored, continues to be reported at Performance Clinics, and is reviewed again by the Community Services Panel in March/April 2007.

The Report and Recommendations were approved and adopted by Cabinet on 17th May 2006.

The next Scrutiny to be carried out by the Community Services Panel will be into a Housing Report Option to create one additional Gypsy/ Traveller Site in the Durham City District.

On behalf of the Panel, the Chairman and Vice-Chairman wish to thank all Council Officers, Portfolio Holders, and External Witnesses who have contributed to Community Services Scrutiny over the past year. There has been a wide range of input, all of which has been much appreciated.

We are very grateful to the Democratic Support Team for their valuable assistance, with particular thanks to the Panel's Dedicated Officer.

# REPORT OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL SCRUTINY PANEL

## Membership for 2005/2006

Councillors Wolstenholme, Simpson, Carr, Colledge (from April 2006), Davison (until February 2006), Dickie, Graham, Kinghorn, McDonnell, Marsden, Pitts, Simpson, Turnbull and Walton.

## BACKGROUND

The Environment Scrutiny Panel has had a year with a full workload involving the subjects of Biodiversity and Unauthorised Parking on Council Owned Land. The topics ultimately proved larger and more complicated than thought upon first inspection, but as borne out through the Panel Reports, both Topics benefited from the extra attention of Panel Members.

The Chairman and Vice Chairman wish to thank the Members of the Panel and all other Members who have attended the Panel meetings for their contributions which have made the meetings interesting, enjoyable and useful. The input from these Members has enriched the Scrutiny process. They also wish to thank all those Officers of the Council who attended the Meetings and witnesses from external organisations. Lastly, thanks go to the Democratic Support staff for their roles in research, minute taking and the organisation of the meetings.

## BIODIVERSITY

### Aims

It was the remit of the Panel to consider the impact of allowing areas of grassland to grow freely and the affects of this on biodiversity within these sites.

### Actions / Outcomes

Members were informed that vermin do prefer the cover that long grass provides *but only* where a suitable food source was nearby. Therefore, it is the *potential* problems of rubbish and food waste dumping on and around the biodiversity sites (or setting up a biodiversity site near to an existing food source) that are of the most concern.

It was quickly realised that the issue of Biodiversity stretched far beyond the issue of allowing sections of grassed areas to revert to a natural state. The City of Durham had recently created the post of Sustainable Development Manager and a brief presentation was given to Members on the subject of Biodiversity and Sustainable Development. Members were encouraged by the quality of the presentation and the knowledge of the newly appointed Officer. The Sustainable Development Manager has previous experience of working in this role and was confident of taking the City of Durham forward with this wide-ranging, cross-cutting topic.

### Recommendations

The Panel agreed that Biodiversity was a subject that required periodic review and there were the following recommendations made:-

1. Biodiversity should continue.
2. All sites set aside for biodiversity (current sites and proposed sites) should be checked for problems with rats and other vermin.
3. Signs / notice boards should be displayed at all sites explaining the fauna and flora in those areas.

4. That the Environmental Scrutiny Panel revisits the subject of Biodiversity in 12 months or when deemed necessary in the meantime.

## **UNAUTHORISED PARKING ON COUNCIL OWNED LAND**

### **Aims**

It was the remit of the Panel to consider the problems associated with nuisance and unauthorised parking on Council owned sites. These are namely enforcement where vehicles are parked without authorisation, and the provision of additional parking to try to alleviate and prevent such parking problems.

### **Actions / Outcomes**

#### Enforcement

Current procedure involves the City of Durham Neighbourhood Wardens working in conjunction with the Police and other organisations to ensure that offending members of the public are made aware of their nuisance parking, and encouraged to refrain from doing so. If the problems persist, Community Support Officers and Police Officers can issue fixed penalty notices. As a last resort, the Legal Department are then requested to take any appropriate action (more commonly a case of Trespass against a vehicle owner) to protect the Council's interests and recoup any costs incurred regarding reinstatement taken. Prevention is better than cure and it may be possible to provide fencing, landscaping or signage to help prevent parking on a site.

#### Provision of additional parking

Whilst schemes are undertaken, there is no formal system of sorting bids for funding for parking provision schemes. Joint schemes have been undertaken between other Local District Councils and the Durham County Council with some notable success. Members wished to set up a joint Schedule of Works with the County Council, with an Officer with the relevant experience from the City Council being utilised to coordinate funds and put in place the requisite procedures within the City of Durham.

### **Recommendations**

#### Enforcement

1. That the current approach to enforcement is sufficient in the majority of cases, and seems to be the most practical approach given budgetary and workload constraints. It is noted however, that local Members should be contacted as a matter of course prior to any situations escalating beyond a certain level, i.e. letters to whole streets / estates, as this has led to difficulties in the past.
2. That as regards the minority of cases that cannot be resolved easily, the Legal department should look into the possibility of other means by which to bring resolution. This could include methods of increasing the ability to gather quality evidence for prosecutions, the creation of suitable by-laws (and the necessary signage and enforcement methods) and, as a final option, the creation of clamping zones, serviced either by City of Durham staff, or by "contracting out" to an external company. The cost of the necessary signage and initial set-up being set-off against revenue generated from the release fees to produce a cost-neutral scheme.
3. That through an increased public awareness of what constitutes unauthorised or nuisance parking (from a City, County and Police point of view) the problems with such parking could

be reduced and to this end, press releases, notices and articles within the Durham City News publication may aid in having a positive impact on the general public.

#### Provision of additional parking

1. The provision of additional parking needs to be prioritised, co-ordinated and funded jointly between all of the interested parties. These would include the City of Durham, the County Council (in their capacity as Highways Authority), Parish Councils, local City and County Members and all Officers that may have funds available within their budgets. This must be undertaken in plenty of time to allow for funds to be allocated within annual budgets of all the relevant parties and regular joint meetings would be of great value and benefit. The City of Durham would be best represented, in such joint initiatives in this respect, by an Officer from the Council's Property Services Department. The seemingly appropriate Officer would be the City's Senior Engineer. The Panel recognises that this is, of course, subject to workloads and other duties carried out within this Department, but that ultimately such a joint approach and procedure could allow for forward planning of such works creating a more transparent, workable system. In addition, Neighbourhood Wardens have drawn up a list of sites that they have identified as having problems with unauthorised and nuisance parking. Some of these would require additional parking provision others may simply require more active enforcement, this would need to be determined.
2. That a budget of £50,000 be set aside specifically to aid such works, with the mind that such an investment could help secure a similar sum from the Highways Authority. This £50,000 to be divided into £5,000 "blocks" so that more schemes can be instigated, though multiple "blocks" could be accessed for larger schemes. This should ensure a fairer distribution of funds and should have a greater positive impact than ad-hoc allocations from various pots of money that are currently available, though these could still be utilised in conjunction with this specific allocation.

#### **ONGOING TOPICS**

Currently, the Panel are looking at the connected topics of Fly-Tipping, Recycling and Litter Picking. On the topic of Fly-Tipping, a Report of the Environment Scrutiny Panel has been submitted for to Scrutiny Committee for consideration. A Draft Report has been drawn up for consideration by the Environment Scrutiny Panel on the Topic of Recycling. Similarly a Draft Report is to follow for comments of the Environment Scrutiny Panel in due course on the Topic of Litter Picking.

Upon clearing these Topics, having drawn up suitable recommendations and review dates, there are reviews scheduled for the Topics of the Temporary Road Closure Policy and Biodiversity.

A "mini-review" of Unauthorised Parking on Council Owned Land is also scheduled with the purpose of the mini-review being to see how links are being established between the City of Durham and the County Council in this regard. A joint approach to the provision of additional parking should, as previously stated, hopefully enable the most cost-effective provision of additional parking for Residents of the District. Also the joint approach should ensure a fair distribution of schemes, based on a common weighting system for applications for additional parking provision.



## **REPORT OF THE POLICY SCRUTINY PANEL**

### **Membership for 2005/2006**

**Councillors Simmons, Cowper, Freeman, Gibbon, Gill, Hepplewhite, Moderate, Norman, Pitts, Syer, Thomson and Walker.**

### **BACKGROUND**

The Panel began the year with the on-going scrutiny of Sickness Absence

### **SICKNESS ABSENCE**

Subsequent to looking at the Corporate Performance Plan, the Panel gave consideration to the issue of Sickness Absence, specifically the incidence, level and areas of Sickness Absence throughout the Authority. The aims were:

To identify any specific areas of concern, and identify individual causes of absence.

To identify any problems with the effectiveness or the management of the current Sickness Absence Procedures.

To recommend any measures considered necessary to achieve an improvement in Sickness Absence levels.

Members considered in detail the figures in respect of, the ratio of Long/Short Term Sickness, absence by Department and Section, categories and patterns of absence, days lost and comparison with neighbouring Authorities.

The procedures which were in place to monitor and manage Sickness Absence throughout the Authority were also considered in detail. A report containing the findings and recommendations of the Panel, with regard to Sickness Absence was submitted to and agreed by the Scrutiny Committee in September, 2005, and was approved and adopted by Cabinet in October, 2005.

It was agreed that this Scrutiny would be reviewed in 2006.

### **FLOURISHING COMMUNITIES FUND EVALUATION CRITERIA**

In accordance with the wishes of Members of the Policy Panel, Cabinet had referred the Evaluation Criteria back to the Panel for consideration, before formal adoption by the Council.

Members gave detailed consideration to the Evaluation Criteria Document and a number of amendments to the Criteria were suggested. In order to assist the Flourishing Communities Executive Board with its timetable for consideration of bids, a schedule, setting out the suggested amendments was prepared and the subsequent Panel Meeting brought forward to enable further consideration.

In October, 2005, the Scrutiny Committee agreed that the suggested amendments to the Evaluation Criteria be submitted to Cabinet for consideration, before formal adoption of the Evaluation Criteria Document. Cabinet subsequently accepted some but not all of the amendments suggested by the Panel.

## **FLOURISHING COMMUNITIES FUND APPLICATION PROCESS**

The Panel was asked to consider the Applications Procedure in relation to requests for funding from the Flourishing Communities Fund.

Members considered the Applications Process, were advised on support available to Applicants and subsequently suggested amendments both to the format of the Process Flow Chart and to the detailed process information contained within it. The material was subsequently amended, incorporating the suggestions made by the Panel.

The Panel also considered the written material made available for Applicants ie the Application Form and supporting Guidance Notes. Again, Panel Members suggested a number of amendments/additions to the material, for the purpose of increasing clarity, for the benefit of Applicants. The suggested amendments/additions were subsequently incorporated into the final documentation.

The Panel recommended that the amended Application Form and Guidance Notes be issued immediately, in order to progress pending and new applications and a Recommendation was made to the Scrutiny Committee requesting confirmation of this course of action. This was confirmed by the Scrutiny Committee in April, 2006, and the final Report and Recommendations of the Panel were submitted to Cabinet for approval and adoption.

## **TELEPHONE COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM**

This topic was suggested as Members had experienced problems, both of their own, and as reported from members of the public regarding the length of time of responses to telephone calls and voicemail messages.

There were two separate issues to this topic and Members looked at the Telephone System itself and also at the internal procedures for handling call traffic.

Three general areas were identified and considered,

- The monitoring of response times
- Measures to gauge Customer Feedback
- Utilisation of the Voicemail Facility

In due course, a Report would be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee.

## **PARISH COUNCIL RELATIONS**

This topic was allocated to the Panel, by the Scrutiny Committee, in April, 2006, and is currently ongoing.

## **SCRUTINY WORKING GROUPS**

### **Council Procedure Rules Working Party**

The Council Procedure Rules Working Party originally reported their findings to Council in 2005. Their report, however, was referred back for further consideration.

The Working Party has been reconvened and is currently giving the topic further consideration.

## **ADDITIONAL MEETINGS**

### **Swimming Pool Risk Register**

All Councillors were invited to an additional meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, which was held on 17<sup>th</sup>. February, 2006. The Meeting was arranged in response to a request from Members of the Scrutiny Committee for a briefing on the Risk Register and Project Management Methodology in regard to the Swimming Pool project.

The Executive Director attended the Meeting, guided Members through the Risk Register document and responded to queries regarding the overall management of the project.

### **Budgets 2006/2007**

An additional meeting of the Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for and held on the 20<sup>th</sup>. February, 2006 in order to discuss the proposed Annual Budget.

All Councillors were invited to the Meeting, had been issued with blank question forms and were invited to submit written questions to the Director of Strategic Resources, prior to the Meeting.

Members of OMT and Heads of Service were also in attendance.