

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON TUESDAY, 14TH FEBRUARY, 2006**

Present: Councillor C. Patching (Chair)

Councillors R. Burnip, P.J. Campbell,
J. Haggan, T. Longstaff, Mrs. S. Mason
and W.R. Peardon

Also present: Councillor D. Myers - Executive Member for E-Government and
Scrutiny Liaison
Councillor R.J. Todd - Executive Member for Health

1. **THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** held on 24th January, 2006, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.

2. **MATTERS ARISING**

**Easington Primary Care Trust - Interim Declaration Against the Core Standards -
(Minute No. 5 refers)**

Mr. Houghton had explained that as part of the final declaration, the PCT could be forwarded a set of specific questions by the Health Care Commission that they would be asked to consider and indicated that they would be sent to the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee for consideration. It was suggested that the Scrutiny Support Manager contact Mr. Houghton for early receipt of the questionnaire for timely consideration.

The Chair explained that a public meeting was to be held on 20th February, 2006 at 6.30 p.m. in Shotton Hall regarding the public consultation on the reconfiguration of the Primary Care Trusts. As affecting Easington District directly, the consultation had two options, a county-wide Primary Care Trust with Darlington or a county-wide Primary Care Trust without Darlington. There was no option for retention of the Easington PCT. If there was support for retention of the Easington PCT then this needed to be addressed at the meeting.

AGREED that:-

- (i) the information given, be noted;
 - (ii) the Scrutiny Support Manager contact Mr. Houghton to enquire when the questionnaire would be received.
2. **THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE** held on 31st January, 2006, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were submitted.

RESOLVED that the information contained within the Minutes, be noted.

3. **PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

There were no members of the public present.

4. PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair explained that as part of the process of holding the Executive to account, Executive Members had been invited to the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee meetings to provide an update on progress in partnership working within their remit. There were currently two Executive Member vacancies, Housing and Corporate Services, which would be filled at the Annual General Meeting of the Council. It was suggested that the two vacancies be noted and their annual reports deferred to the next municipal year.

The Executive Member for Health had been invited to the meeting to update Members on progress in partnership working within his remit.

The Executive Member for Health explained that there had been two major issues which had dominated the health agenda. The decision to reorganise health services within the County and the review of the Council's policy on smoking. He added that in the absence of the Executive Members for Housing and Corporate Services he had been involved in some financial issues albeit on the fringes of the portfolio and not in depth. He explained that he had previous experience as he had been Chair of the Finance and General Purposes Committee for a number of years. He explained that the Council would be setting the Council Tax and the District Council's element would be reasonably satisfactory.

With regard to health, he explained that the reconfiguration of the Easington PCT had dominated the health agenda for the past year. The reconfiguration proposals were now in the formal consultation period and the public were being consulted on different options with regard to the provision of health care services in County Durham. There were two options available and neither option included the retention of the Easington PCT in its current form which was greatly disappointing to everyone. The Easington PCT had indicated that their first preference was for retention of the current working practices, their second preference was for a county-wide Primary Care Trust with local arrangements in place to retain the financial funding for the area.

Of the two options available, the first was for four PCT's covering North Tyneside and Northumberland, South Tyneside and Sunderland, County Durham and Darlington and Teesside. The second option was for 12 Primary Care Trusts, each sharing the same boundaries as the current 10 unitary authorities in the region. A County Durham PCT, Northumberland PCT, 5 PCT's for Tyne & Wear and 5 PCT's for the Tees Valley area including a stand alone Darlington PCT.

There was also changes to the Ambulance Trust Service and the merger of the Strategic Health Authority from three into one although this was not as contentious as the local Primary Care Trusts.

A pre-formal consultation had taken place at Shotton Hall with over 120 attendees. A representative from the Strategic Health Authority had explained the procedures and process and was amazed at the number of public who had attended the meeting and the range of questions posed.

John Cummings M.P. had secured an adjournment debate in the House of Commons specifically relating to the Easington PCT. He had explained the special needs of the Easington area and how they fit into the health care agenda regionally and nationally. The Easington population still had the worst health statistics in a number of issues, e.g. death from heart disease, lung disease etc., and people died at a younger age in the area. The debate had been supported by Kevan Jones, M.P. for North Durham.

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The debate had been excellent and very progressive and a good submission had been made. The Secretary for Health had acknowledged the needs of the Easington area without committing to the outcome.

A public consultation event was to be held on 20th February, 2006 at 6.30 p.m. in Shotton Hall and as many people who could attend should, to put forward their views on the future of the Easington PCT. The Chief Executive of the Strategic Health Authority had promised that the funding for Easington would be retained until March 2007.

The reconfiguration remit was to save £14 million per year in expenditure on administration and bureaucracy and the money would be reinvested into local services. The savings had been projected using the option of four PCT's across the region. If the second option was successful then he felt the savings would not be met.

The Easington PCT was trying to obtain as much new infrastructure as possible and had committed to new health care facilities in Wheatley Hill and Thornley. Arrangements were currently in place to develop the water works site at Easington Colliery and it was hoped that a new health care facility could be provided at the Community Hospital in Peterlee but the site for this was not certain.

The Executive Member for Health explained that St. John's Square in Seaham was a major issue as Durham County Council had not committed to office space within the development and could put the whole project at risk.

The Easington PCT was also in the process of obtaining funding to improve GPs surgeries and a new health centre at South Hetton adjacent to the Community Centre was being built as part of a third party arrangement through Trinity Properties.

With regard to public health, appointed trainers had been placed across the district in local centres to improve dietary habits and prevention of illness.

The Executive Member referred to the review of the Smoking Policy by the District Council and explained that a Committee had been established with representatives of elected Members, Officers and Trade Unions. The Policy would be given a period of consultation and then be approved by the District Council and was proposed to come into effect in May 2006. The changes recommended that there would be a total ban anywhere within the curtilage of the District Council. Staff would only be allowed to smoke in their lunch break but must be off site. The report recommended that staff who worked outside would not be allowed to smoke whilst on duty although this could prove difficult to enforce. Statistics in Easington District had shown that the District was second in the country in terms of the number of people who had stopped smoking and first in the north of England.

The Executive Member for Health explained that a questionnaire had been issued to employees and elected Members and he gave a breakdown of the results.

A Member commented that with regard to the St. John's Square redevelopment, the Seaham Regeneration Panel had been very frustrated that Durham County Council had not committed to the scheme.

The Executive Member for Health explained that the Seaham area was one of the main areas that required a modern health care facility. He explained he had visited the Sunderland Royal Hospital recently and proposals were being displayed for Health

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Care Centres in the Sunderland Borough at a cost of £6.2 million each. The Easington PCT were to visit the Health Care Centres in Sunderland.

A Member commented that 20 years ago the Government closed all the local hospitals and now they were moving back in that direction and providing health care facilities that were closer to the patients. The Executive Member for Health explained that the Health Minister's recent statement had referred to new Community Hospitals.

Discussion ensued around the Seaham Urgent Care Centre and the Executive Member for Health explained that this facility was under-used.

The Chair explained that the Urgent Care Centres were for the clinical benefit of the public. Statistics had shown that there was as a 30% reduction from Easington residents visiting the A & E Department at the University Hospital of Hartlepool.

The Chair thanked the Executive Member for Health for his attendance.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the information given, be noted.
- (ii) the two Executive Member vacancies be noted and deferred to the next municipal year.

JC/PH com/partnerships/060201
22nd February, 2006