

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON THURSDAY, 30TH MARCH, 2006**

Present: Councillor R. Burnip (Chair)

Councillors P.J Campbell, J. Haggan,
B. Joyce, W.R. Peardon, Mrs. B.A. Sloan
and R.G. Wharrier

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors C. Patching, T. Longstaff and Mrs. S. Mason.

2. THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING held on 7th March, 2006, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.

3. THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE held on 14th March, 2006, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were submitted.

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

4. PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

There were no members of the public present.

5. EASINGTON PRIMARY CARE TRUST - FINAL DECLARATION AGAINST THE CORE STANDARDS

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Health Governance which updated Members on progress made with the Final Declaration Against the Core Standards, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

M. Houghton explained that a final report on the declaration would be considered by the PCT Board on 14th April. The Board's approved final declaration would be submitted electronically to the Healthcare Commission before 4th May, 2006.

Appendix 1 to the report provided details of Easington PCT's compliance against the core standards. The information would be incorporated into the electronic declaration form when available on the Healthcare Commission's website.

The report gave details of the elements that were to be included in the final declaration. Three of the core standards did not form part of the assessment within the final declaration. A separate assessment for those was undertaken elsewhere in the Healthcare Commission's overall assessment process.

Easington PCT had declared compliance with 23 of the 24 core standards at the interim declaration stage. A significant lapse was declared against not meeting one element of the core standards C4b - medical devices management. Reasons why the

Partnerships Scrutiny Committee - 30th March, 2006

standard was not met and the action plan included in the interim declaration was detailed in the report.

M. Houghton explained that the Healthcare Commission's regional team visited Easington PCT on 14th February, 2006 to review the approach to the core standards and interim declaration submitted in October 2005. The PCT had not been part of the 10% of PCT's randomly selected for a visit or the 10% of PCT's that required a selective inspection visit. The visit was part of the Healthcare Commission's follow up in local engagement work which was intended to develop a shared understanding of what constituted satisfactory performance in meeting the core standards.

It was explained that in October 2006 the Healthcare Commission would give the PCT a rating similar to that in Local Government CPA of excellent, good, poor or weak. He added that Easington PCT were expected to achieve "good" or "excellent".

The Scrutiny Support Manager explained that on behalf of the Partnership Scrutiny Committee he would ensure that a formal response was forwarded to Easington PCT to ensure the Committee's comments were incorporate in the final declaration.

The Chair thanked Mr. Houghton for his attendance.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

6. LOCAL COUNCIL CHARTER FOR EASINGTON

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Community Services which sought Members' views on a draft Local Council Charter for Easington involving the District of Easington Council, Town and Parish Councils and Durham County Council, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The Director of Community Services explained that the Local Council Charter set out how a principal local authority and Parish Councils would work in partnership together. The importance of Town and Parish Councils in local democracy and service delivery was recognised.

The approach taken at Easington was to discuss the development of a single tripartite Charter that would be agreed by the District Council, Durham County Council and all participating Town and Parish Councils in the District. This avoided the need for each Parish Council to have separate Charters with each of the principal authorities and furthermore a single universal Charter helped to ensure that for each Parish or Town Council, the underlying principles of the relationship were on an equitable basis.

It was explained that the OPDM model had been used as a basis of discussion. As a result of constructive debate, a number of improvements were made for example relating to cognisance of parish plans, collaboration relating to elections, standards committees, financial arrangements and frequency of review. The end result was a Charter that was not only consistent with the national framework but had also included the expression of local priorities.

The tripartite approach was relatively uncommon and if successful could be utilised as an example of good practice in the rest of County Durham and elsewhere.

The Local Charter proposed for Easington was attached in Appendix 1 and had briefly covered introduction, local governments, consultation, information and complaints, standards committee, devolving services, financial arrangements, planning and

Partnerships Scrutiny Committee - 30th March, 2006

practical support. The title for the Charter had been mistyped and should read 'Local Council Charter for Easington'.

The Director of Community Services explained that the Charter was not an end in itself and should be used to build on the strong relationships that already existed. There was scope for further collaboration in the areas of procurement where combined purchasing power could result in savings and greater collaboration with grounds maintenance, extending the existing good practice of collaboration to a wider number of Parish Councils. Subject to Members views, there may be a role for Scrutiny to Monitor the effectiveness of the Charter over the next few years.

A Member queried what the financial cost would be to Town and Parish Councils. The Director of Community Services explained that the Charter did not set out any details for financial arrangements and the Charter itself would not cost Parish and Town Councils at all. There would be no financial commitment other than sharing information.

A Member queried how the Charter would differ from what was already in place with collaborative working between the District Council and Parish and Town Councils. The Director of Community Services explained it would build on the relationships that already exist, and provide a formal commitment to communication, consultation and collaboration. A White Paper would be published at the end of June regarding the future of local government, which would emphasise the importance of Councils acting strategically but also providing good neighbourhood management at a local level. Development of this Charter was likely to be consistent with this theme of "double devolution".

A Member explained that he felt there was a role for scrutiny and would like to see an annual report back to the Committee. The Director of Community Services explained that this dovetailed with point 31 of the Charter which stated that the Charter would be jointly monitored by the Principal Authorities and the Town and Parish Councils on an annual basis and would inform a formal review of the Charter every five years.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the information given be noted;
- (ii) a report be considered in 12 months time on the review and monitoring of the Local Charter.

JC/PH com/partnership/060401
3rd April, 2006