

THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE SERVICE DELIVERY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON MONDAY 27 JUNE 2005

Present: Councillor D Raine (Chair)
Councillors S Bishop, D Chaytor,
A J Holmes, Mrs E Huntington, Mrs A Naylor,
D J Taylor-Gooby and C Walker

Also Present: Councillor D Myers – Executive Member
for E-Government and Scrutiny Liaison
Councillor C Reynolds – Executive Member
for Housing

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor H High and T Taylor.

2 THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING held on 6 June 2005, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.

3 THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE held on 14 June 2005, 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 WORK PROGRAMME ISSUES

(i) Planning and Building Control – Quarterly Performance Report

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Planning and Building Control Services which provided information on the performance of the Planning and Building Control Services Unit, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The Head of Planning and Building Control Services gave details of the performance of each of the teams within his unit.

• **Building Control**

A succession plan had now been implemented, one member of staff had retired and other appointments had taken up their posts. Training was being given to staff to ensure that they were familiar with the implications of the Part P Building Regulations that were introduced in January 2005.

- **Development Control**

Part time consultancy support had been procured to improve performance in handling larger planning applications. One member of staff was on an extended notice period at no cost to the Council pending an application for early retirement.

With regard to the planning delivery grant, BVPIs needed to be closely monitored because performance on major and minor applications was now low in relation to historic performance. Improvements were being put in place to raise future performance and would be formalised in an improvement action plan.

- **Development Plans**

The Development Plan team remained severely under resourced although a Senior Planner was transferred to the area of work in June to help resolve the situation. A further post would be advertised shortly. Policy support was still provided to assist key regeneration initiatives including Seaham Colliery and Murton Colliery as well as the development of the Regional Spatial Strategy.

- **Engineering and Countryside**

The Tree Officer took up post in June and arrangements were in place to formalise appropriate working procedure with the help of the Health and Safety Officer. The appointment had allowed the Countryside Officer to focus on pressing countryside issues and £20,000 of extra funding had been secured to implement the Magical Meadows Fund. Levels of vibration white finger were still being investigated as the impact on highways staff were fully assessed.

Procurement of a new planning and building control IT system was well advanced and progress would be reported more fully in future.

Details of achievements and non-achievements in the Service Plan, Best Value Performance Indicators, strategy documents, risk management action plans and other tasks and targets were detailed in Appendix 1.

A Member referred to Development Plans and the Regional Spatial Strategy and the impact they would have on the regeneration of villages. G Reed explained that the draft Regional Spatial Strategy would be available for consultation shortly. He had suggested that a panel be established to run alongside the Development Control and Regulatory Panel that would deal with policy issues.

A Member asked if there were any plans to create extra posts in enforcement. He had reported a complaint recently and been advised that there was a huge backlog of work and any additional work could not be investigated. G Reed explained that there was a huge backlog in the enforcement section and he would be formulating some proposals for improvement. At the moment the work of the enforcement section needed to be prioritised.

The Chair thanked the Head of Planning and Building Control Services for his report.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

6 ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND LICENSING UNIT PERFORMANCE REPORT

Consideration was given to the report of the Environmental Health and Licensing Manager which provided details of the performance of the Environmental Health and Licensing Unit, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The work of the Environmental Health and Licensing Unit was divided according to teams and the report provided individual details:-

(i) Commercial Enforcement Team

Details were given of food safety and infectious disease control, food premises inspection, complaints relating to food safety or food premises, cases of food related infectious disease and outbreaks of infectious disease, health and safety at work enforcement, pollution control, authorised process inspections, assessment of local air quality, investigation of pollution and noise complaints and contaminated land assessment;

(ii) Licensing Team

The Licensing Team administered licenses and enforced standards regarding taxis, public entertainments, lotteries and amusements and businesses involving animals.

A customer satisfaction survey of applicants for all taxi licences was carried out on a rolling basis, the results of which were outlined in the report.

The Council's policy for liquor licensing was adopted in January 2005 in accordance with the statutory timescales. A targeted information education programme had been undertaken involving anyone who would be affected by the result in changes. 174 applications had been received out of the 500 who needed to apply before August. Final warning letters were to be sent advising that anyone operating after November 2005 without a licence would be in breach of the Licensing Act provisions;

(iii) Environmental Enforcement Team

The roll out of the Street Wardens across the whole of the district had been finalised however recruitment and retention of staff remained a constant problem. This had caused some operational difficulties. Joint patrols of the DVLA enforcement team had resulted in 249 untaxed vehicles being removed from the street since 1 April.

During 2004/5, 117 spot fines were issued for dog fouling which exceeded the previous year's performance and performance was on track to exceed that figure again this year. Increasing numbers of spot fines for littering and fly tipping were being issued and a programme increasing the numbers of waste bins by at least 100 had been completed;

(iv) **Environmental Strategy Team**

The Environmental Strategy function was split for the Environmental Enforcement function to create two separate teams in August 2004, however, it had not been possible to fill the post of Environmental Services Manager (Strategy) that was created to manage the team despite two rounds of advertising and interviews. Options for this post were now being considered.

Members had previously expressed their dissatisfaction with the number of choices on the Envirocall phone number. The system had now been improved and there were only four choices.

Details of achievements and non-achievements for the Service Plan, Best Value Performance Indicators and strategy documents were detailed at Appendix 1.

The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager referred to the recycling target and explained that the target had been set at 10% and the Council had achieved 13.6% but this needed to improve to 18%. The Council were using an educational approach rather than enforcement to encourage people to use the black boxes for recycling. A re-launch campaign was currently ongoing and new boxes would be given to any resident that required one. It was explained that at present 31% of residents used the Kerb It Scheme although other Councils had between 40 and 50% take up.

A Member asked if the blue bins that were used for garden waste would be extended to the rest of the district. The Director of Community Services explained that the green waste recycling would be reviewed early Autumn. It was currently a 34 week scheme that ended in November and a decision would be required whether the scheme should be expanded.

Discussion ensued regarding ways to encourage residents to recycle. Recently the District Council had supported residents to resist a landfill site in Wingate and it was suggested that this could be used as a way of encouraging people to recycle. Recycling should be fully publicised in the press as well as Infopoint.

The Director of Community Services explained that thank you leaflets would be given to residents using the black boxes and sorry leaflets to those who didn't. A bid had been submitted to DEFRA for a pledge scheme that was based in schools. Schools with the highest number of pledges from parents would receive prizes for their school.

A Member enquired if the enforcement team worked on a weekend as there had been a number of broken bottles and rubbish on the A1086 between the Catholic Church and the crossroads in Horden. The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager explained that the Environmental Wardens worked Monday to Friday 8.30 am – 5.00 pm but did work additional hours when areas were being targeted.

The Chair explained that a lot of villages suffered the same problem and asked if there was any record of people who were fined for littering on a weekend. It was requested that statistics be reported back to the committee.

The Chair thanked the Director of Community Services and the Environmental Health and Licensing Manager for their report.

RESOLVED that statistics on the number of fines given on a weekend be reported back to the committee.

7 HOUSING BUSINESS PLAN

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Member for Housing which gave details of progress achieved with the Housing Business Plan, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Members were advised that the work was ongoing to update the plan to achieve a fit for purpose rating. At a meeting of the Executive held in December, approval was given to review the make up and remit of the Business Plan Working Group and agree the revised Business Plan targets. Appendix 1 to the report detailed the achievements made towards the new Business Plan targets.

Reference was made to the targets related to monitor the reduction of stock, housing needs survey and stock condition, availability of funding sources, production of capital programme for the next five years, work in conjunction with construction partners to meet the decent homes target by 2010, reduction in the number of non-lettable voids, work with East Durham Homes to help achieve the 3 star rating, develop a 60/40 planned to responsive repairs system, review lettings policies and introduce choice based letting system and produce a resident involvement strategy and tenants compact.

The Chair thanked the Principal Policy Officer for his report.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.