

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
SERVICE DELIVERY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON MONDAY, 23RD JANUARY, 2006**

Present: Councillor D. Raine (Chair)
Councillors S. Bishop, H. High, A.J. Holmes,
Mrs. A. Naylor, D.J. Taylor-Gooby and
C. Walker

Also present: Councillor D. Myers - Executive Member for E-Government and
Scrutiny Liaison
Councillor J. Goodwin - Executive Member for Community and
Culture
Mr. Otterwell - Resident
Mr. M. Grinstead - Leisure Connections

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors D. Chaytor, Mrs. E. Huntington and R. Crute.

2. THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING held on 3rd January, 2006, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.

3. THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE held on 10th January, 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

The Chair welcomed Mr. Otterwell, a resident of Easington Colliery, to the meeting.

Mr. Otterwell explained that his concern was relating to a suggestion that had been made at the Residents' Association a number of years ago regarding the large open-spaced area in Browning Street being replaced by on-street parking/hardstandings.

In 2003, Russell Morgan from the Resource Centre in Easington Colliery had invited residents to put forward environmental improvement schemes as part of the Neighbourhood Pathfinder Initiative. He explained that he had written to Mr. Morgan with his suggestion who had advised that this was a brilliant idea. Mr. Morgan later informed him that it was not within the remit of the pathfinder to carry out such works but would pass the suggestion on to an officer at the District Council.

Mr. Otterwell explained that he had received a letter from an officer at the Council Offices which stated that the works were scheduled in the budget for 2003/4. A further letter was then received from the same officer explaining that the works had been removed from the list as the funding was required elsewhere. Mr. Otterwell explained that he had asked if the works would be placed on the following year's budget. The next letter he received was from a different officer from the Council explaining that it was not within her remit and she would pass the suggestion on to the relevant officer. He explained that he then received a letter from Helen Clarke

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explaining that the suggestion would be looked at at a future date when funding was available.

Mr. Otterwell explained that he received a circular from the Resource Centre in November 2005 asking residents for ideas for environmental improvements. Once again he replied with the suggestion of on-street parking and attended a meeting on 1st December 2005 when he was informed that the Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder could not carry out this type of work.

The Head of Housing Strategy explained that he had researched the history of the suggestion and explained that the Council had been aware of the request from September 2003. Mr. Otterwell had received a letter from officers in his section explaining that the proposals had been noted but funding was not available as the Council's priority was for demolition of properties in the 'B' streets but could be considered in future once the master planning exercise was finalised.

The Chair explained that there had been some funding for Environmental Improvements a number of years ago. Some of the 'B' Streets did have parking bays installed but unfortunately the funding did not run to all of the 'B' streets.

The Head of Housing Strategy explained that highways issues sometimes fell within the remit of both Durham County Council and the District Council. Replies to Mr. Otterwell had focussed on the fact that no resources were available in District Council budgets. He suggested that he could contact Durham County Council to ascertain if a solution/funding could be obtained.

Mr. Otterwell queried the timetable for progression of the demolition of the 'B' streets area as the properties were regularly subjected to vandalism. The Head of Housing Strategy explained that the District Council Engineers had advised that they had gone out to tender which were due back on 3rd February, 2006. It was anticipated being on site 20th - 27th February but the time to complete the works was dependent on what was found on site. He could not give a cast iron guarantee when works would be completed. Landscaping works were scheduled to be completed in April 2006.

Mr. Otterwell asked if there were any timescales for when rebuilding would commence to replace the housing and if any Housing Associations were interested in building in Easington Colliery.

The Head of Housing Strategy explained that both private developers and Housing Associations had been approached and were both keen to develop in Easington Colliery. The District Council was keen to complete the demolition but would still continue to talk to private developers and RSL's regarding future development in Easington Colliery.

The Head of Regeneration and Partnerships explained that funding needed to be secured. A consultation had been held the previous year with residents and the master plan was currently being changed to reflect the community issues that had been raised, although he did not want to raise aspirations. Any future works would depend on how successful the District Council were at gaining funding.

Mr. Otterwell thanked the District Council for his invitation to the meeting.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

5. POLICY DEVELOPMENT

(i) Environmental Policy Monitoring Arrangements to Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee

The Sustainability Officer explained that the first year review of the Environmental Policy had been completed and there had been some differences between service teams.

Details were given of the Environmental Policy monitoring arrangements and it was explained that the Environmental Champions monitored their area formally once per month. There was to be a quarterly performance report and an annual performance report to Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair thanked the Sustainability Officer for her report.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

6. WORK PROGRAMME ISSUES

(i) Democratic Services and Administration - Performance Report

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Democratic Services and Administration which updated Members on the performance of the Democratic Services and Administration Unit, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The Head of Democratic Services and Administration gave a brief summary of the work of the unit which included Scrutiny, Licensing Committees, Member Training and Development, E-Government, Risk Management, Electoral Registration and Land Charges Searches.

The Head of Democratic Services and Administration explained that a final report from the Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government in respect of work undertaken by them relating to scrutiny development within the Council had been received and presented to the relevant Committees.

It was explained that the non-target performance for the 2nd and 3rd quarter of the Land Charges Searches was as a direct result of the late receipt of information from the Planning and Building Control Unit. This was as a consequence of problems encountered because of the implementation of the new Planning and Building Control IT system. This, together with capacity problems, had caused decline in performance and staff had been unable to return the information within the required time period. Measures relating to resources and IT improvements were being put in place to help resolve the situation.

The reception area to the main building was currently being staffed by members of the unit's administration team who provided a 'meet and greet' facility following the transfer of the three reception staff to the Customer Service Centre.

The Head of Democratic Services and Administration explained that effective sickness monitoring continued to be carried out in the unit. Sickness levels at

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the end of December 2005 were 3.8 days lost per member of staff compared to 10.2 at December 2004.

With regard to non-achievements it was explained that there had been some slippage in Member Training and Development, Risk Management, Best Value Review of Support Services, implementation of Performance Management across the unit and Community Participation and Engagement.

The Executive Member for E-Government and Scrutiny Liaison congratulated the Head of Democratic Services and Administration and his staff on the progress made regarding E-Government.

The Executive Member for E-Government and Scrutiny Liaison referred to Member Training and explained that all future training would have Members of the same skill level working together.

The Scrutiny Support Manager explained that he had received a question via e-mail from Councillor Chaytor. Councillor Chaytor had queried using e-government to table questions to committees of the Council and asked if there was a process/safeguard that existed or if questions were accepted at the discretion of the Chair. Councillor Chaytor had explained that if the Council was trying to encourage more public participation, then the Constitution needed to take consideration of this issue. It was explained that this issue needed to be considered by officers and investigated further.

The Chair thanked the Head of Democratic Services and Administration for his report.

RESOLVED that

- (i) the information given, be noted.
 - (ii) questions to Committee by e-mail and the impact on the District Council's Constitution be investigated further by Officers.
- (ii) **Regeneration and Partnerships Unit - Quarterly Performance Report**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Regeneration and Partnerships which gave details of performance of the Regeneration and Partnerships Unit, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Details of the Unit's performance from 1st April, 2005 to the end of quarter 2 (30th September, 2005) was outlined in Appendix 1 to the report. Not all information was available for quarter 1 of 2005/6 although it should be noted as much recent information was included in the report to highlight progress made since 1st April, 2005 that was available. Progress, achievements and non-achievements were fully detailed in the appendices attached to the report.

The Head of Regeneration and Partnerships explained that the development and delivery of the Local Government Liveability Pilot and the introduction of the ODPM's brownfield land pilot had been recent developments. The recent NRF allocation had been made to the District and the team were currently establishing a process for its allocation for the 2006/8 period. The LSP had agreed that neighbourhoods in north Peterlee, predominantly Edenhill and Acre Rigg were put forward as a target area. This process was currently being negotiated for the period 2006-2010.

It was explained that the service also continued to manage and facilitate large infrastructure, investment and development projects and undertook the lead role for the Council in relation to the Peterlee Master Planning process. Details were also given of Easington Colliery and Horden's Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder and Regeneration Policy for the District.

The Unit had recently progressed work towards achieving Priority Service Outcome GGO2 as part of the e-government agenda. This would enhance community accessibility to information and opportunities. A mailshot/event would be held in February to raise awareness.

The Head of Regeneration and Partnerships explained that the average number of days lost to sickness per employee was currently at 16.47. This was due to two members of staff being in hospital for treatment and it was hoped that this would improve in the next quarter.

Members referred to lobbying regarding the East Coast Railway Link and asked how practical this was. The Head of Regeneration and Partnerships explained that the Council were still continuing to lobby. With regard to the City Regions Regeneration Policy, one of the targets was to increase passenger time and it was now proposed for a fast link down the east coastline. The Council had been arguing that a local service was required that stopped and could be accessed. The Council wanted local services that residents could access.

The Chair thanked the Head of Regeneration and Partnerships for his report.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(iii) **Leisure Centre Partnership Arrangements**

Consideration was given to the report of the Senior Cultural Development Officer which provided Members with a position statement on the operation of the Leisure Centres under the partnership arrangements with Leisure Connection Limited, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The Senior Cultural Development Officer explained that Malcolm Grinstead, Manager of both Peterlee and Seaham Leisure Centres, was in attendance to answer any queries Members may have.

It was explained that monthly monitoring meetings were held with Leisure Connection staff and the Senior Cultural Development Officer to ensure smooth operation of the partnership. In addition, quarterly inspections were undertaken by the Health and Safety Manager to ensure the centres were managed in accordance with health and safety legislation.

The projected savings to the Council that would accrue as a result of the partnership arrangement with Leisure Connection were detailed in the report. The figures were index linked assuming an inflation of 3%.

In accordance with e-government requirements, both Peterlee and Seaham Leisure Centres were to provide an on-line booking facility. This would allow users who were members of the centres to book a range of facilities over the internet. A link would be created from the Council's website to the Leisure Connections site for ease of residents who may visit the Council's site to book

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leisure facilities. The target date to have the system installed and operational was 31st January, 2006.

The updated review of performance indicators developed with Leisure Connections in its annual plan were shown in Appendix 1. An up to date version of Appendix 1 was circulated to Members.

A key performance indicator was to encourage greater use of Peterlee and Seaham Leisure Centres by local schools. It was explained that during the daytime the pool was quiet and the Director of Community Services at the District Council was working with the Leisure Centre Manager to try to attract schools to use the swimming pool.

M. Grinstead explained that between 550 and 600 pupils per week attended the ASA National Plan Swim School.

The Director of Community Services explained that it was very frustrating as some schools bypassed the leisure centre to use inferior learner pools. The issue had been raised with Durham County Council.

M. Grinstead explained that it was interesting to see the level of savings the District Council had managed to accrue and he did not know any other local authority that had managed to achieve this.

M. Grinstead explained that complaints were monitored and the leisure centre tried to be pro-active. Over the last nine months there had been 250,000 visits to Peterlee Leisure Centre and only 45 complaints. He explained that the main complaints were regarding cleanliness in the ladies changing rooms that were very busy at peak times. He explained that he was looking at reallocating resources as there was less space available for ladies than men.

It was explained that the under-utilised times were being targeted. The introduction of a leisure card would allow the leisure centre to target specific groups. The leisure card would have a bar code to enable staff to produce statistics to know where customers had come from.

M. Grinstead explained that he would be attending an ordinary meeting of the Council in March to present to the Council, Leisure Connections' proposed business plan for 2006/7.

The Chair thanked the Senior Cultural Development Officer and Mr. Grinstead for their attendance.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.