

THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE SERVICE DELIVERY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON MONDAY 27th MARCH, 2006

Present: Councillor D Raine (Chair)

Councillors S Bishop, H High, A J Holmes,
Mrs E Huntington and Mrs A Naylor

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors D J Taylor-Gooby, D Myers and D Chaytor.

2. **THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** held on 6th March, 2006, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.

3. **MATTERS ARISING**

(i) **HRA Housing Business Plan
(Minute number 6(i) refers)**

Councillor Bishop explained that he had received a reply from Norman Hunt who had advised that there had been no meetings regarding Eden Hill since March 2005. There had been a meeting held on 23rd March 2006 but did not involve local Members. This was a concern as the area was high on the deprivation list.

The Scrutiny Support Manager explained that he had contacted N Hunt and the meeting on 23rd March had been an Officer meeting. He would relay Members concerns to him and ask for a response/reasons for the delay and report back to Councillor Bishop.

A Member queried how many homes met the Decent Homes Standard. The Scrutiny Support Manager explained that he would contact officers and circulate a response to all Members of the committee.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the information given, be noted
- (ii) the Scrutiny Support Manager contact officers to ascertain how many homes met the Decent Homes Standard and report back to Members of the Committee.

(ii) **Proposed Closure of Sub Post Offices
(Minute number 11 refers)**

The Scrutiny Support Manager explained that he had circulated copies of the letters sent to the MP's for the area. A response had been received from John Cummings MP but a response was still awaited from the Rt. Hon. Tony Blair.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

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4. **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.

5. **PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

There were no members of the public present.

6. **WORK PROGRAMME ISSUES**

- (i) **Energy Conservation**

Consideration was given to the report of the Energy Conservation Officer which provided information on the progress with the Easington Over-60's Fuel Poverty Scheme and development of the District of Easington Climate Change Action Plan, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Details were given of schemes which assisted vulnerable households within the district:-

- (a) **Easington Over 60's Free Insulation Scheme**

The scheme was launched in February 2005 to provide free home insulation measures for the over-60's age group and it had proved to be very popular with residents to date. More than 1,400 over-60's had been provided with free home insulation measures and £463,118 funding had been secured.

The current scheme was due to end at the end of April 2006. However, due to the popularity of the scheme, an additional funding bid of £350,000 had recently been approved by the NRF Strategic Funding Group to further extend the scheme from 2006 to 2008. The scheme had been extended to additional groups of people to include families with children under the age of 5, the housebound and disabled groups.

- (b) **Climate Change Action Plan**

The draft Climate Change Action Plan was currently on target to be completed by April/May 2006 in compliance with the District of Easington Corporate Performance Plan. Following the completion of the draft Action Plan it would be presented to the Director of Regeneration and Development, Management Team and the LA21 Working Group to agree how to obtain corporate approval.

- (c) **Fuel Poverty Assistant**

Compliance of legislation and workload associated to managing and developing conservation and fuel poverty schemes was becoming increasingly time intensive. To assist with managing these responsibilities, a successful external bid had been placed to provide funding to employ a new post of Fuel Poverty Assistant. The post would assist the Energy Conservation Officer to manage existing fuel poverty schemes and develop new partnership initiatives. The post would be on a two year

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fixed term basis and would be at no additional cost to the existing salary budgets. If the post was successful the exit strategy would aim to mainstream the post.

A Member referred to the extension of the scheme to families with children under 5 and asked if this was for council house properties or private households. The Energy Conservation Officer explained that the Neighbourhood Renewal Funding was for private properties. The Council supplied insulation through the Capital Programme budget and had a rolling programme. He added that he would be delivering presentations and working with partners i.e. Social Services and Primary Care Trust to publicise the scheme. Infopoint would also be used to promote the initiatives as well as local press, radio, leaflets through the door and door-to-door promotions.

A Member asked how a family would qualify for the scheme. The Energy Conservation Officer explained that this had not been determined as yet but could be for families with earnings under £20,000 per year.

The Chair thanked the Energy Conservation Officer for his report.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(ii) Sickness Monitoring

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Personnel which appraised members of the current situation with regard to sickness monitoring across the authority, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The Head of Personnel explained that Members were informed at the meeting of the Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee held in July 2005 that the corporate rate of sickness absence had reduced to 11.3 days per employee in the twelve months to the end of March 2005. Whilst this was partly attributable to the transfer of craft workers to East Durham Homes, Members were assured that the campaign was having a positive effect on the Council's performance.

The improvement from 13.1 days per employee to 11.3 days could be solely attributable to the Council work force. This represented a 14% reduction in the sickness rate and were the best annual figures that the Council had achieved so far.

The twelve month period to the end of January 2006 showed an even further improvement, the corporate sickness rate now stood at 9.18 days per employee per annum and the corporate target for 2005/06 was 10 days per employee per annum.

The Head of Personnel explained that an updated league table was produced at Appendix A and illustrated the number of days lost to sickness per employee per unit and was listed in order from best to worst.

East Durham Homes sickness statistics had also shown a significant improvement, the overall sickness rate had reduced from 17.4 days per employee per annum as at 1st April 2004 to 15.8 days at 1st April 2005 which in turn represented a 9% reduction. The latest figures

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available showed that the sickness rate was now 13.43 days per employee per annum.

The Head of Personnel Services explained that he had been informed that Members had requested information on the types of sickness i.e. colds, flu, back problems. He explained that he did not have the figures to hand but would circulate them to Members.

A Member commented that the statistics had proven that sickness and attendance could be managed and queried if East Durham Homes were managing attendance and sickness in a similar way to the District of Easington.

The Head of Personnel Services explained that he was not entirely convinced that all managers at East Durham Homes were achieving the monthly monitors and the more time managers put in the better rates would be achieved. He added that private sector craft workers sickness figures ran at 6-7% and a lot more work needed to be done.

The Head of Personnel Services explained that the Council were looking to set a target of 9.5 days for the following year. One day of sickness per employee amounted to £100,000 lost for the District of Easington and East Durham Homes combined.

The Head of Personnel Services explained that he had produced a league table for East Durham Homes and it was up to Directors and senior managers to ensure that procedures for managing sickness were carried out.

The Chair thanked the Head of Personnel Services for his report.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

7. ANY ADDITIONAL URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

In accordance with the Local Government Act, 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, Section 100B(4)(b) the Chair, following consultation with the Proper Officer, agreed that following items of business, not shown on the Agenda, be considered as a matter of urgency.

8. CONCESSIONARY FARES (AOB)

The Chair explained that there had been a number of queries from Members regarding how the concessionary fares changes would operate and be publicised.

The Revenues Manager circulated a provisional list of venues but was subject to industrial action taking place although unions had to give up to 7 days notice.

The Revenues Manager explained that all concessionary passes needed to be completed by 31st May 2006. Existing pass holders would be able to use their existing pass up till the end of May to obtain free travel to any of the venues.

All concessionary pass holders would be receiving a letter inviting them to a venue close to their homes. This would be supplemented with posters in clubs, post offices, shops and anywhere Members thought was suitable 7 – 10 days prior to the particular venue. The Communications and Marketing

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Manager was also co-ordinating articles towards the end of that week to explain the procedure. He added that he had hoped to be using Building 9 as this was suitable for disabled access but East Durham Homes were behind schedule in moving to their new premises so Building 5 would be utilised until Building 9 came available.

There had been a delay in the production of the leaflet and this had been due to a change from a half fare system to a totally free system and it was hoped that the leaflets would be produced by the end of the month. Since June 2004, the Council had been taking digital photographs for concessionary passes and those photographs could be used to create a new card for the 2,000 people they had on their database. If the Council could not produce a card from the photograph then they would be invited to a venue. Should there be any problems with equipment on the day, a photograph would be taken, a card produced and posted out.

A Member queried if it would not be of help if members of the public brought their own photograph. The Revenues Manager explained that some other local authorities had asked the public to send in their own photographs but it was hoped that members of the public would come along to a venue. If not, this was an option that could be utilised.

A Member queried if there would be free travel across boundaries. The Revenues Manager explained that whatever the public had received for half fare would now be free.

A Member queried how new applications would be dealt with. The Revenues Manager explained that he would prefer new applications to come to the Council Offices but would not turn anyone away from the venues.

The Chair thanked the Revenues Manager for his attendance.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

9. CLOSED CHURCHYARDS (AOB)

A Member queried where in the process the report on closed churchyards was at present. The Scrutiny Support Manager explained that a draft policy had been agreed by the Services Delivery Scrutiny Committee and referred to Management Team. Management Team had asked the Environmental Health and Licensing Manager to look at the report further. He added that he had spoken to the Environmental Health and Licensing Manager and requested information as to where the report was in the process.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.