

Minutes

Community Service Scrutiny Panel

3rd July, 2007

Present: Councillors Howarth (in the Chair) Crooks, Laverick, Lightley, Mavin, Norman, Robinson, D Smith, Taylor and Young

Also Present: Councillor Marsden,
Peter Lee – Street Scene Technical Officer,
Michael Hurlow – Heritage & Design Manager

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors Moderate and Walton

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5th June 2007 were confirmed as a correct record.

3. Scrutiny of Graveyards

The Street Scene Technical Officer and Heritage & Design Manager were in attendance for discussions.

Members asked about biodiversity areas of graveyards and were concerned that this was properly communicated to the public rather than allowing the perception that the graveyards were being left untidy and overgrown.

However, the Street Scene Manager informed Members that consideration had to be given to health and safety issues, maintenance and appearance, and that biodiversity sites do not lend themselves to some situations.

Members asked if the Council liaised with the Parochial Church Councils about leaving graveyards as biodiversity sites. The Heritage and Design Manager advised the Panel that the Dioceses were happy with the state of the graveyards.

The Panel decided that it should be recommended in the report that the present maintenance procedures and communication links with PCCs be continued.

It was also agreed that a copy of the Scrutiny Report should be sent to each PCC for information.

The Heritage and Design Manager provided Members with a comprehensive and exclusive list of War Graves in closed cemeteries and confirmed that there are 182 registered war graves within the 23 closed burial grounds that the City of Durham had responsibility to maintain.

The Panel were advised that there were no new figures available for the numbers of headstones requiring repairs and maintenance as repair are continually being updated. However, the Heritage and Design Manager

informed Members that one full inspection had recently been completed of all closed graveyards that the City of Durham were responsible and that fewer numbers of reports were coming through and that there was enough in the estimated budget to carry out the repairs that were required. It was brought to Members attention that if costs increase then the numbers of repairs would need to reduce.

Members were informed that there had been problems with walls of cemeteries and that this was a common problem area. Notably, at Brandon there had been a problem with subsidence due to old mining works which had prohibited access. It is this type of repairs that could increase maintenance costs in the future rather than those to headstones.

The Chair asked if the Heritage and Design Manager could make contact with a member of the dioceses and invite them to the September Panel Meeting. This was agreed.

The Chair thanked the Heritage and Design Manager and the Street Scene Technical Officer for their attendance and their invaluable input to the discussions.

4. Council Garages – Chairman’s Update

The Chair informed Members that she had had a meeting with The Housing Manager and that the situation with the inspections of Council garages had improved slightly. (As Members will recall Cabinet through out the recommendation that the Garages be inspected twice per year as there were no resources to implement this.)

Some inspection of unusable damaged garages had been carried out with a view to repair and reletting.

The Housing Manager had asked the Chair to inform Members that it would be helpful if they could report any problems of misuse, anti social behaviour or indeed any other associated problems to the relevant Housing Officer and ask that the problems be presented at the zonal meetings. If need be the Tenancy Enforcement Officer could then be involved.

Councillor Taylor stated that he was disappointed that the biannual inspections could not take place but would work with Officers. He also asked if Members could be kept informed of zonal meetings and if they could receive relevant updates.

The Chairman proposed that a short statement should be prepared for Cabinet. This would include a recommendation of the above procedure for reporting unacceptable use of council garages and also members’ request for more feedback and input into zonal meetings.

5 Any Other Business

The Chair reminded Members that a site inspection of the Playing Pitches would take place on Tuesday 24 July, 2007 and that the bus would pick up at 9.30 a.m. from Dragonville. An additional Panel meeting had been arranged for Tuesday 30 July, 2007 at Broomside Lane Communal Hall to discuss the site inspection and review the Playing Pitch Strategy Report of April 2006.

The Chair asked that a copy of that report be sent out to all present Panel Member to include a list of sites visited.

A list of the work programme up to March 2008 was distributed to Members for their information.

Councillor Robinson advised Members that the new application form for housing was 24 pages in length and people needed help to complete the form or they may be deterred from completing it.

The Meeting terminated at 6.30 p.m.

