

**Community Services Scrutiny Panel**

**2<sup>nd</sup> September, 2008**

**Present:** Councillors Howarth (in the Chair), Cowper, Crooks, Lightley, McDonnell, Mavin, Norman, Robinson, Walton and Young.

**Also Present:** Councillors Kinghorn and Wilkes.

**1. Apologies for Absence**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor D. Smith.

**2. Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> July, 2008, were confirmed as a correct record.

**3. Allocations Policy – Consideration of Draft Report**

The Draft Report on the Allocations Policy had been circulated to Members.

It was considered appropriate to add a recommendation requesting the drawing up of a suitable form for use where applicants wished to appeal the decision to allocate them to a particular band. It was agreed that such a form should only be provided to applicants on request, and in all other cases, requests to appeal would continue to be made in writing.

Subject to the addition of this recommendation, it was agreed that the report be forwarded to the Scrutiny Committee for their consideration.

**4. Graveyards – Review**

The Panel had previously scrutinised closed graveyards and churchyards, the report being approved and adopted by Cabinet in November, 2007.

In view of local government reorganisation it was considered necessary for this topic to be reviewed. A briefing note had been provided by the Technical Support Manager (Environment & Leisure Services) detailing the work of the Streetscene Workstream. The Workstream had not yet considered the issue of churchyard management in any great detail, however it was a statutory duty for local authorities to take on certain responsibilities for churchyards once they had been closed.

The unitary authority would take on these responsibilities from 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2009, and it was therefore agreed that the Panel's previous report on closed churchyards and graveyards should be forwarded to the new authority, and that they be asked to particularly note the work carried out by the Neighbourhood Wardens and Environmental Services and to continue to carry out this work to the current high standards.

A draft report would be brought to the next meeting for Members' consideration.

**5. Any Other Business**

The Chairman advised that the scrutiny of the Playing Pitch Strategy would be the topic of the Meeting to be held on 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2008.

The Meeting terminated at 6.05 pm



## **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL**

#### **REVIEW OF SCRUTINY OF CLOSED CHURCHYARDS**

##### **1. Background**

- 1.1 The Panel had initially scrutinised closed churchyards and graveyards to obtain an overview of the Council's responsibilities.
- 1.2 The subsequent report made five recommendations and was approved and adopted by Cabinet in November, 2007.

##### **2. Actions**

- 2.1 The Council's Technical Support Manager (Environment & Leisure Services) provided the Panel with a briefing note outlining the current situation regarding the new Unitary Authority and workstreams.

##### **3. Outcomes**

- 3.1 The Streetscene workstream has not yet considered the issue of churchyard management, however it is a statutory duty for local authorities to take on certain grounds maintenance responsibilities for churchyards once they are officially closed.
- 3.2 The Unitary Authority will therefore assume responsibility for this function from 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2009.
- 3.3 It is expected that all existing grounds maintenance responsibilities, including headstone inspections will be continued to be carried out with no great change from current policy and practice as this is a statutory responsibility.

##### **4. Recommendations**

- 4.1 That the report and the recommendations of the Scrutiny of Graveyards, October, 2007, be forwarded to the new Unitary Authority and that attention be drawn to the work of neighbourhood wardens and Environmental Services in order that grounds maintenance continues to be carried out to the current high standards.

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## **Community Services Scrutiny Panel**

### **Review of Scrutiny of Playing Pitch Strategy (City of Durham Council's Recreation Grounds)**

#### **1. Background**

- 1.1 The Playing Pitch Strategy was commissioned in July, 2001 by City of Durham Council, Durham County Council and Sport England in order to assess the playing pitch requirements in the District both at that time and over the following five years.
- 1.2 Following a request by Cabinet in January 2005, the Playing Pitch Strategy had been referred to Scrutiny Committee prior to being adopted by Cabinet and the Scrutiny Committee had subsequently referred the Strategy to the Community Services Scrutiny Panel.
- 1.3 The Community Services Scrutiny Panel initially scrutinised the Playing Pitch Strategy from October 2005 to April 2006. During the scrutiny the Panel asked for a site inspection of the Council's recreation grounds this took place March 2006.
- 1.4 In order to carry out this review the Panel arranged another set of site inspections of Council owned recreation grounds in July 2007.

#### **2. Findings**

- 2.1 The Panel visited several recreation grounds in March 2006 and further site inspections were carried out in July 2007.
- 2.2 The Panel found that the recommendations following the site inspections in March 2006 had been carried out. Window frames to the front of the sun lounge at Esh Winning recreation ground had been replaced. The changing rooms at Bearpark recreational ground had greatly improved.
- 2.3 Following the site inspections it was noted that the signage at some of the recreation grounds was either in need of updating or lacking.
- 2.4 Drainage was found to be a problem on some recreational grounds. The Technical Support Manager advised that a survey would need to be carried out to determine the current problems and how they can be remedied.

#### **3. Recommendations**

##### **General**

- 3.1 That the recommendations with regard to the promotion of each sport, as made in the City of Durham Playing Pitch Strategy and approved by Cabinet, should be actively pursued to further develop pitches and facilities for participants of both sexes, across the full age range.

- 3.2 That through City Council initiatives and communication with partners, encouragement should be given to incorporate playing pitches into cohesive community provision that reflects both local and District needs.

#### City Council Pitches

- 3.3 That all playing pitches in City of Durham ownership are retained for recreational use.
- 3.4 That in accordance with the conclusions in the Playing Pitch Strategy, the availability, condition and maintenance of all City of Durham pitches should continue to be monitored and reviewed.
- 3.5 That in accordance with current practice, where a pitch is under-used, reasons should be carefully analysed and measures to improve take-up considered, taking a flexible approach to supply and demand.

#### Changing Facilities

- 3.6 That particular attention is given to increasing availability and improving facilities for female players as and when the need arises.
- 3.7 That increased community engagement is pursued to extend the use and concept of ownership/ responsibility for premises.
- 3.8 That facilities be regularly inspected and appropriately maintained.
- 3.9 That notices be posted stating expectations of appropriate use.
- 3.10 That in accordance with present practice user clubs be asked to either remove all sports gear at the end of their season or arrange acceptable storage with the Council.

#### Maintenance and Drainage

- 3.11 That funds be allocated to undertake a survey to investigate problems with drainage and to carry out necessary works to alleviate the problems over a 5 year period. The estimated cost of the drainage survey is £5,000 and it is suggested that a further £10,000 be allocated each year to improve drainage.

#### Playing Pitch Signage

- 3.12 That funds be allocated for playing pitch signs and changing room notices, separate from Pride in Durham initiative, over a 5 year period. It is important for members of the public to know that the recreation grounds are owned and maintained by the City of Durham. The average cost for each sign including installation is £1,000. The estimated cost of installing signage at 5 facilities each year is £10,000. Alternatives need to be investigated including an in-house option.

## Working with other Organisations

- 3.13 The Panel urges continued and supportive working with partners to fulfil and secure playing pitch needs throughout the District and to maximise participation in sports activities i.e. co-operation with organisations such as Sports Governing Bodies, Durham County Council/Schools, Durham University, and Private Clubs. To that end, the Panel makes the following recommendations:-

### a). Durham County Council/ Schools

- 3.14 That the City Council maintains close communication with County Council Officers, particularly the Schools Sports Partnership Manager, to explore ways of extending links, shared use and sports promotion.
- 3.15 That the Council seeks to further involve schools in the development of Community Hubs, either centred around existing Leisure Centres or schools in areas without such a Centre. The move to Extend School Day Timetables opens up opportunities for this and scope for partnership in provision of activities and tackling transport needs.

### b). Durham University

- 3.16 That further research be made into recruitment and training of more sports coaches; this work to be across the City Council, County Council, School Sports Partnership and University. Joint funding bids could be considered.
- 3.17 That the Durham City News be used to recruit more potential sports coaches and attract suitably qualified coaches, who may not currently be actively involved, back into coaching.

### c). Private Clubs

- 3.18 That encouragement be given to clubs that currently use City Council pitches and facilities, and that where appropriate, new joint initiatives be considered.

## Additional Recommendations

- 3.19 That the Community Services Scrutiny Panel reviews the Playing Pitch Strategy in July 2008

