

**Minutes  
Environment Scrutiny Panel**

**18 June 2008  
5.30 p.m.  
Mayor's Chamber, Town Hall**

**Present:** Councillors Simpson (in the Chair), Carr, Colledge, Crooks, Martin, Mavin, Mitchell and Turnbull.

**Also in Attendance:** Councillors Cowper and Wilkes.

Andrew Jackson – Technical Support Manager  
Belinda Snow – Senior Neighbourhood Warden

**1. Apologies**

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Kelly, Rae, Wilkinson, Wolstenholme and Wynn.

**2. Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 May 2008**

2.1 Subject to an amendment (as set out below in bold) to paragraph 3.3 the Minutes of the meeting held 21 May 2008 were confirmed as a true record.

*"It was noted by Members that wherever possible, Council vehicles had been fitted with Continuous Regeneration Traps (CRT) in order to re-burn exhaust gases in order to reduce particulate size. This in turn leads to improved figures relating to emissions. Unfortunately, some of the smaller Fleet vehicles cannot utilise this technology as the system requires an engine temperature over 90°C. It was also noted that whilst this leads to emissions of only 0.03 kg/l of CO<sub>2</sub>, **refuse** vehicles on average only have a fuel economy of 4 miles per gallon (mpg). Members were informed that there are savings made by the fitting of these traps as there is a rebate on vehicle duty, though this is not applicable to the smaller vans within the Fleet. The minutes of the meeting held 21 May 2008 were confirmed as a true record."*

**3. Scrutiny Topic – Review – Neighbourhood Wardens**

3.1 The City of Durham's Technical Support Manager, Andrew Jackson and Senior Neighbourhood Warden, Belinda Snow were in attendance to give an update to regarding the City of Durham's Neighbourhood Warden (NW) service. A briefing paper was circulated to Members outlining details of the service (attached at Appendix A).

3.2 It was explained to Members that the primary focus of the City Council's NWs was that of environmental enforcement and education; together with associated low level anti-social behaviour.

- 3.3 When the City of Durham scheme was set up in July 2003, there were initially 3 NWs, but this was increased to 6, one NW per operational area. In addition, 2 years ago the post of Senior Neighbourhood Warden (SNW) was created to provide front line supervision and co-ordination to ensure consistency of service across the District
- 3.4 The NW service, and individual NWs are accredited under the Durham Constabulary Community Safety Accreditation Scheme which gives NWs additional powers. One of the most useful being the ability to request a name and address from residents in order to issue Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs). Also NWs have the power to confiscate alcohol from those under 18 years old and cigarettes from those under 16 years old.
- 3.5 The NWs have an established their "brand" within the District and are easily identifiable by their distinctive Smart cars. Residents use the NWs as a mobile "on-stop-shop" for issues and NWs can often deal with situations and problems whilst out within their area. However, in cases where matters cannot be resolved on the spot, NWs can pass on information to the relevant people, either within the Authority, at the County Council or to the Police or other relevant organisations. NWs also attend Parish Council meetings where appropriate and are present at Neighbourhood Consultations as required.
- 3.6 A folder containing press cuttings relating to the various successful campaigns carried out by the NWs was circulated for Members' information. It was noted that many of the successes were in respect of environment issues such as the various campaigns to reduce littering, specifically chewing gum and cigarette butts, and campaigns to reduce dog fouling.
- 3.7 Members were given information relating to how the NWs work closely with the Street Scene Team Leaders that share the same operational areas. This enables actions to be taken quickly and efficiently.
- 3.8 It was noted that the main Partner Organisation to the NWs was Durham Constabulary. It was for this reason that it was felt necessary to invest in the "Airwaves" communication system and so far this investment has proven sound, with many incidents being dealt with far quicker as there is constant and reliable communication between NWs and the Police.
- 3.9 Members were informed that to further enhance working in partnership, NWs and other frontline services meet with the Police on a fortnightly basis so that areas of concern are identified and targeted effectively. NWs also attend Crime and Disorder Partnership meetings, Neighbourhood Forum meetings and Beat Officer surgeries to ensure that they are up to speed with local issues.
- 3.10 NWs have undertaken training in conjunction with the Police, on topics such as problem solving and information gathering / evidence collection.
- 3.11 NWs attend schools within the District to help educate young people regarding issues relating to the environment and taking pride in their community.
- 3.12 Members were reminded of the many successful campaigns that have been conducted by the NWs such as those on litter and graffiti. There have also been schemes such as the Streetsafe Initiative and the provision of skatepark facilities in conjunction with the Durham Skate and Bike Partnership.

- 3.13 The Technical Support Manager and Senior Neighbourhood Warden were keen for the City of Durham model of NWs to be carried through to the new Unitary Authority as they felt that there was evidence to show that the methods currently employed were effective in tackling environmental education and enforcement; and associated low level anti-social behaviour.
- 3.14 Members were appreciative of the excellent work already undertaken by the NWs and expressed their support that the service should continue through the Local Government Reorganisation process.
- 3.15 The Panel asked whether NWs were *required* to attend Parish Council meetings, as some Members noted they had not been aware of NWs at their particular Parish meetings. The Senior Neighbourhood Warden explained that the attendance at Parish meetings was usually by invitation by the Parish, and that no NWs had refused to attend when asked. Some Panel Members added that they had regular NW representation at their Parish meetings and found that for many issues the NW could bring resolution quicker than the Police.
- 3.16 Members queried figures on the briefing paper relating to number of incidents relating to dog fouling in comparison to the number of FPNs being issued. Members were informed that this was due to the fact that it can be difficult to gather conclusive evidence in these types of cases and that FPNs cannot be issued without this evidence.
- 3.17 Members queried the 24 hour turnaround as regards removal of graffiti from public buildings. Members specifically asked why this only applied to “public” buildings. Officers explained that in the cases where the graffiti is offensive / racist etc., it is removed regardless of location. Officers noted that the main factor as regards graffiti removal is cost, with any work to remove graffiti from private property requiring the identity of the owner to be ascertained, issued with a disclaimer as regards any potential damage resulting from the graffiti removal, and then for an invoice for the costs being send to the owner. Some Councillors wondered whether it perhaps would be more efficient to simply clean up graffiti as and when required as the cost of carrying out the work (approximately £50 per incident) appeared to be broadly comparable with the average cost for a company, such as a Local Authority, to raise and process an invoice to recharge for the service. The Officers agreed that whilst the costs appeared to be comparable but that this did not take into account the fact that there are not dedicated Staff for the removal of graffiti. The relevant Environment & Leisure Services Staff are trained in the use of the graffiti removal equipment and personal protective equipment (PPE) required, but graffiti removal is but one task amongst many for these staff. Some Members agreed and recalled that in the past a large amount of staff time was taken up when the Council operated “graffiti gangs”. Members therefore wondered if, as in the past, they could be assistance in this regard from volunteer groups or from people on probation (via the Probation Service). Officers noted that unfortunately, the additional costs in administration time regarding risk assessments, the provision of additional PPE and all the relevant health & safety issues, render such voluntary schemes non-cost effective.
- 3.18 Officers informed Members that the City of Durham had a resource of an “anti-graffiti varnish” that could be applied to certain painted surfaces, and that the Council would be willing to look at requests for this product in cases where there had been repeated incidents of graffiti.

- 3.19 Members noted that the current number of NWs was in fact 4 with the Senior Neighbourhood Warden in addition, noting one NW had left the Authority and another was on Maternity Leave. The Senior Neighbourhood Warden explained that there was no real issue in relation to maintaining coverage across the District at this time. The Senior Neighbourhood Warden and Technical Support Manager explained however that whilst cover was in place, it would only be feasible to maintain this cover in the short term. Accordingly, Members were keen to ask whether a recommendation to appoint additional NWs would be helpful. Both the Technical Support Manager and the Senior Neighbourhood Warden agreed that *in principle* this indeed would be helpful, that in practise it could prove difficult in the current transitional period prior to the new Unitary Authority coming into effect.
- 3.20 Members queried the levels of provision of “Wardens” in neighbouring Authorities. Officers informed Members that Easington District Council operated with 21 “Street Wardens” and that Sedgefield Borough Council operated with 18 Wardens. However, it was noted that these Wardens differed from the City of Durham’s NWs in that their main focus appeared to be that of tackling anti-social behaviour akin to a Police Community Support Officer.
- 3.21 Members asked Officers what the current levels of fines were as set out by the FPNs issued by NWs. Officers informed Members that they were £50 for incidents of dog fouling and £80 for littering. However, if there was a Dog Control Order in place across the District there would be scope to raise the level of the fine. However, due to Local Government Reorganisation it was considered that it would be more efficient to wait until the new Unitary Authority comes into effect so that the Dog Control Order can be easily brought in across the whole County under a single Order. Officers noted as an aside that free bags for dog Owners to use in disposing of their dog’s waste were available from Cityinfo centres and from certain shops and Post Offices across the District. It was noted that no village was without a supply.
- 3.22 The Chair thanked the Technical Support Manager and the Senior Neighbourhood Warden on behalf of the Panel for their informative briefing paper and thorough answers to Members’ questions.

## **5. Any Other Business**

- 5.1 No further issues were raised for discussion.

## **6. Actions for the Next Meeting**

- 6.1 To consider draft Review Reports on the Topics of Sustainable Procurement Policy, Carbon Emissions from the Council’s Fleet of Vehicles and Neighbourhood Wardens.

The Meeting terminated at 6.30 p.m.