

**Minutes
Environment Scrutiny Panel**

**23 July 2008
5.30 p.m.
Guildhall, Town Hall**

Present: Councillors Simpson (in the Chair), Carr, Colledge, Crooks, Mavin, Rae, Turnbull, Wilkinson and Wynn.

Also in Attendance: Councillors Bell, Howarth, Robinson, Simmons, D.Smith, Wilkes and Young.

1. Apologies

- 1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Kelly, Martin and Wolstenholme.

2. Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 June 2008

- 2.1 Subject to amendments as set out below, the Minutes of the meeting held 16 June 2008 were confirmed as a true record.

“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.

3.5 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.

3.7 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.

3.11 NWs attend schools within the District to help educate young people regarding issues relating to the environment and taking pride in their community.

3.13 *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.*”

3a. Draft Scrutiny Report – Sustainable Procurement Policy & Carbon Emissions from the Council’s Fleet of Vehicles

3a.1 Members considered the draft Report on the topics of Sustainable Procurement and Carbon Emissions from the Council’s Fleet of Vehicles. Members suggested an addition to the first recommendation such that it would now read as follows:

“1. The Panel endorse the work undertaken by the City of Durham Council in relation to both Sustainable Procurement (as set out in its Procurement Strategy 2007-2010) and in relation to minimising carbon emissions from the Council’s fleet of vehicles. Accordingly, the Panel urge the new Durham Unitary Authority to adopt a similar approach in relation to both of these areas and would consider the work undertaken by the City of Durham via the appropriate Unitary Authority Workstreams.”

Subject to this amendment, the Panel agreed that the Report be forwarded to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

3a.2 Members were informed that “Climate Change” was an issue high on the Transitional Scrutiny agenda at the new Durham Unitary Council. Members agreed that the work undertaken by the Panel in relation to the preview Scrutiny Topic of Climate Change and these two additional related topics should be passed on, via the appropriate channels, for consideration by the Unitary Authority.

3b. Draft Scrutiny Report – Review – Neighbourhood Wardens

3b.1 Members were asked to consider some suggested amendments from the Council’s Technical Support Manager. These amendments had been suggested in the interest of clarity. The Panel agreed the amendments as set out below.

3.1 (para1)

“The primary focus of the City of Durham Neighbourhood Warden Scheme is that of environmental enforcement and education together with associated low level anti-social behaviour. The Wardens work in close partnership with other responsible organisations such as the Police.”

3.2 (para1)

“Initially, the City of Durham scheme had 3 Neighbourhood Wardens, but this has now increased to 6 to provide a Warden for each operational area of the District. In addition, the post of Senior Neighbourhood Warden was created to provide a front line supervisory / co-ordinating role and to ensure consistency of service / implementation of policy across the District.”

3.2 (para2)

“Neighbourhood Wardens are accredited under the Durham Constabulary Community Safety Accreditation Scheme. Accreditation gives certain additional powers granted by the Chief Constable. These include the right to request a name and address from a person in order to issue a Fixed Penalty Notice, and the power to confiscate alcohol from those under the age of 18 and tobacco products from those under the age of 16.”

3.2 (para3)

“The City Council invested in the Police “Airwaves” radio communication system and this enables many incidents to be dealt with quickly as there is a constant, reliable connection between Neighbourhood Wardens and the Police.”

3.3 (para2)

“To further enhance working together, the Neighbourhood Wardens and other frontline Council services meet with the Police on a fortnightly basis and together areas of concern are identified so that resources are targeted effectively. Neighbourhood Wardens also attend the Crime and Disorder Partnership meetings, Neighbourhood Forum meetings, Beat Officer surgeries and Parish Council meetings in order to keep up to speed with, and feedback on, local issues.”

3.3 (para3)

“Neighbourhood Wardens also attend schools within the District to help educate young people on issues relating to the environment / taking pride in their community. This is considered an important role within the Wardens job remit.”

- 3b.2 In addition to the suggested amendments, Members felt that there should be a rewording of section 4 to include reference to the additional work the Members felt NWs had taken on due to both their greater visibility out in the district and also due to work required in relation to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The Panel agreed the amendments as set out below.

4.1 (all paras)

“By working closely with the Street Scene Team Leaders for their area, Neighbourhood Wardens are able to get positive action on issues so that problems are resolved quickly and efficiently.

Many successful campaigns have been conducted by the Neighbourhood Wardens including campaigns to reduce littering (including chewing gum), in

preventing graffiti, Streetsafe Initiatives, reducing incidents of dog fouling, and in helping to bring about the provision of skatepark facilities in several areas of the District in conjunction with the Durham Skate and Bike Partnership (Durham Police, City of Durham and Investors in Children).

Currently there are 6 Neighbourhood Wardens and a Senior Neighbourhood Warden. However there is no additional provision to cover for holidays, long-term sickness or maternity leave. In such circumstances the Senior Neighbourhood Warden, with assistance from the rest of the team, provides cover. However this does, at times, severely stretch the resources of the Service. This is evidenced by the experience of elected Members who, in working with their Neighbourhood Wardens, perceive an increase in the workload of the Wardens. Neighbourhood Wardens can receive a high volume of calls and queries direct as they have mobile phone provided by the City Council. Also, in preparing to move to Unitary Local Government in April 2009, further additional work may be required of the service.

Members agreed that, whilst perhaps ideally there should be two Wardens per operational area, any recommendation by Members to appoint additional Neighbourhood Wardens, or to provide assistance from other City of Durham staff, could prove difficult to carry out as spending during the transitional period leading up to the new Unitary Authority is limited by the agreed "Transitional Plan" and the usual budgetary constraints."

4.2 (para1)

"Officers from the Neighbourhood Warden service feel that evidence gathered to date shows that the methods currently being employed by the current Neighbourhood Warden Scheme are highly effective in dealing with environmental education and enforcement; and associated low level anti-social behaviour issues (Higher levels of anti-social behaviour / crime being more effectively dealt with by the Police."

- 3b.3 Whilst the Panel agreed with the draft recommendation included in the report, Members felt that there should be an additional recommendation that made reference to strengthening the service by the City of Durham, rather than simply to recommend that the new Unitary Authority take this onboard. It was hoped that this further recommendation would help to build up the NW service, possibly by transferring / seconding existing City of Durham staff to help, prior to the new Authority coming into effect in April 2009. Accordingly, the recommendations were amended by the Panel as set out below.

- "1. The Panel recognises the many achievements of the City of Durham's Neighbourhood Warden service and recommends that the City of Durham take action to strengthen and maintain the frontline services within the City of Durham's operational areas, in particular the Neighbourhood Wardens and Street Scene Team Leaders. The Panel also acknowledges that the visible success in the City of Durham district can be attributed to a focus on tackling issues primarily through environmental enforcement and education, carried out by well trained and highly motivated Officers.*
- 2. The Panel urges the new Durham Unitary Authority to maintain the high level of service provision achieved in this area and continue to strengthen the service in the future."*

3b.4 The Chair thanked Members for their constructive comments and noted that, subject to the amendments made by Members, the reports would be sent on to the Scrutiny Committee accordingly.

4. Any Other Business

4.1 No further issues were raised for discussion.

5. Actions for the Next Meeting

5.1 To consider the topic of the Council's Kerbside Recycling Scheme, with Officers from the City of Durham, Greencycle and the University of Durham to be invited to attend.

The Meeting terminated at 6.25 p.m.

