

POLICY SCRUTINY PANEL

5th September, 2006, at 5.30pm

Present: Councillor Simmons (in the Chair) and Councillors Cowper, Freeman, Gibbon, Gill, Hepplewhite, Norman, Pitts, Syer, Walker and Wynn.

Also Present: Councillors Dickie, Kellett, Lightley, Marsden, McDonnell, Moderate, Robinson, Smith, Stoddart and Turnbull.

Apologies for Absence: Apologies for Absence were received from Cllr. Leake.

Bullet Points from the Meeting held on 4th July, 2006

The Bullet Points from the Meeting held on 4th July, 2006, were approved as a correct record.

BULLET POINTS

Working with Parish Councils

- Mr. Steve Ragg, Executive Officer of the County Durham Association of Local Councils, was in attendance and gave Members a comprehensive briefing on current issues surrounding Joint Charters, "Quality Council" status and Support for Parish Councils.
- A supporting handout had also been prepared, which was circulated to Members, and Mr. Ragg responded to Members' questions throughout the Meeting.

Charters

- Mr. Ragg outlined to Members the legislative background to Charters and the latest developments within County Durham.
- The contents of a Charter were looked at in detail and covered the following topics:

Sustainability	Standards Committee
Local Community Life	Delegating Responsibility
Local Governance	for Service Provision
Consultation	Financial Arrangements
Information and Complaints	Planning and Practical Support

NB Cllr. Gill left the Meeting at 6.03pm

Quality Council Status

- Panel Members were also given an introduction and background to the "Quality Council" initiative.
- Mr. Ragg went on to outline the requirements of, and the perceived benefits to Local Councils following the achievement of Quality Council Status.
- It was pointed out that the incorporation of a Local Council into a Joint Charter need not be dependant upon the Local Council's achievement of Quality Council Status.

- It was also pointed out that the achievement of Quality Council Status by Local Councils provided additional benefits to Principal Authorities as well as to the local community itself.
- Panel Members were then briefed on the seven Quality Criteria necessary for Local Councils to achieve before qualifying as a Quality Council, these related to the following areas:

Electoral Mandate	Annual Report
Qualified Clerk	Accountability
Council Meetings	Code of Conduct
Communications	

NB Cllrs. McDonnell and Smith left at 6.19pm

It was noted that most of these qualifying criteria were mandatory, some were partly discretionary.

- The Accreditation Process was also described to Members.

NB Cllrs Pitts, Norman and Freeman left the Meeting at 6.25pm

General Support Issues

Charters

- Members were informed that Principal Authorities could support Local Councils by involving them in discussions or negotiations regarding the possible formation of a Charter.
- Principal Authorities could also take the lead in developing the Charter.
- In turn the County Association of Local Authorities would encourage Local Councils to participate fully in the formulation of a Charter.
- The County Association would also continue joint work with the Parish Councils to seek the re-establishment of the Durham City Association of Local Councils.

Quality Status

- Principal Authorities could support and encourage Local Councils to participate in the Quality Status process.
- Principal Authorities could also consider offering practical assistance to Local Councils in relation to facilitating the use of available resources.
- Specific assistance would be offered by the County Association in relation to the training of Clerks and further general assistance would be offered in relation to the achievement of the other Quality Criteria.

NB Cllr Robinson left the Meeting at 6.32pm

NB Cllrs Lightley, Turnbull, Moderate and Wynn left the Meeting at 6.35pm

- On behalf of the Policy Scrutiny Panel, the Chairman thanked Mr. Ragg for a comprehensive and informative briefing.
- It was agreed that for the next Panel Meeting, copies of the DC&LG Model Charter be circulated to Members, with the Agenda.
- A copy of the Easington Tripartite Charter would also be circulated.

- Members were reminded that at the next Panel Meeting, Ann Armstrong, Corporate Policy Officer with Durham County Council, would be in attendance to discuss the County Council's perspective in relation to Joint Charters.
- A Schedule indicating Panel Business to December '06 was also circulated for the information of Members.

The Meeting terminated at 6.37pm