

POLICY SCRUTINY PANEL

23rd June, 2008

Present: Councillors Wilkes (in the Chair), Cowper, Kellett, Lightley, McDonnell, Simpson, Walker, and Wolstenholme.

Also Present: Councillors Kelly, D. Smith, Taylor and Turnbull.

Apologies for Absence: Apologies for Absence were received from Cllrs. Simmons, Thompson and Wynn.

Bullet Points from the Meeting held on 28th May, 2008.

- Councillor Robinson had made a request under Any Other Business for an update on the Swimming Pool project. The Chairman had agreed to raise the issue at the next Scrutiny Committee and the request was subsequently forwarded by the Scrutiny Committee to the Leader of the Council.
- Councillor Kellett indicated that he had also requested full financial details of the project and asked that his request to be added to the Bullet Points.
- Subject to the above the Bullet Points from the Meeting held on 28th May, 2008, were approved as a correct record.

Matters Arising

- After further discussion a request was then made by Councillor Kellett and Councillor Taylor for full updated information in relation to the financial position of the Swimming Pool project to be supplied to them in hard copy in advance of the meeting at which the update was to be discussed.
- A further request was made for the Portfolio Holders attendance at the meeting and time for Members to ask questions.
- On behalf of the Panel the Chairman agreed to forward these requests to the Leader of the Council.

BULLET POINTS

DRAFT REPORT – REVIEW OF SICKNESS ABSENCE

- The Panel was presented with the Draft Report of their Review of Sickness Absence.
- Members considered the Draft Report and subject to the recommended review date being brought forward to September, 2008, agreed that the Report be forwarded to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

DRAFT REPORT – UPDATE ON TELEPHONE COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM

- The Panel was presented with the Draft Report of their update on the Telephone Communications System.
- It was noted that problems seemed to be continuing in relation to the unavailability of staff to respond to telephone calls and to Voicemail messages not being responded to.

- Members were reminded that their previously requested instruction to all staff to respond to Voicemail messages within twenty four hours had been carried out.
- It was agreed therefore that the necessary amendments and additions be made to the Draft Report and Recommendations to reflect these ongoing problems.
- It was further agreed that subject to the requested amendments and additions being made the Report be forwarded to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

PROPOSED REVIEW – “WORKING WITH PARISH COUNCILS”

- The Panel considered reviewing the “Working with Parish Councils” report which had been deferred by Cabinet in September, 2007, pending the outcome of unitary status developments.
- The original report was submitted by the Policy Scrutiny Panel, however this had been prior to the May 2007 elections and therefore the Panel had been largely made up of different Councillors from the current membership.
- The Panel agreed to look again at the Report in order to establish what, if any, practical measures of assistance the Panel may be able to recommend the new Durham County Council give to Parish Councils in light of Local Government Reorganisation, the possibility of devolution of powers and future developments in community governance.
- It was agreed that the original Report be circulated to Panel Members for the next meeting.
- Members were also informed that the Executive Officer of the County Durham Association of Local Councils had indicated his availability to attend the Panel Meeting in September.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- On a related issue some discussion took place on the availability of funding to Parish Councils for Parish Plans.
- A request had been made to the Leader of the Council through the Scrutiny Committee for a list of the Parishes which had received funding for Parish Plans and the criteria under which the funding had been given.
- Members also queried whether the City Council had written to all the Parish Councils within its area advising them that the funding was available.
- On behalf of the Panel the Chairman agreed to ask the Leader if this had been done.

The Meeting Terminated at 6.25pm