

POLICY SCRUTINY PANEL

21st July, 2008.

Present: Councillors Cowper, Freeman, Kellett, Simmons, Simpson, Walker, Wolstenholme and Wynn.

Also Present: Councillors Bell, Carr, Marsden, Moderate, Plews, Robinson, D. Smith, Stoddart, Taylor and Turnbull.

County Councillor Williams.

In the absence of the Chairman the Vice Chairman, Councillor Freeman, took the Chair.

Apologies for Absence: Apologies for Absence were received from Cllrs. Lightley, McDonnell, Martin and Wilkes.

Bullet Points from the Meeting held on 23rd June, 2008.

The Bullet Points from the Meeting held on 23rd June, 2008, were confirmed as a correct record.

Matters Arising

Councillor Kellett expressed his disappointment and dissatisfaction that no response had been received to the request previously made by himself and Cllr. Taylor for details of the funding and financial outturn of the Swimming Pool project and the attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Finance to respond to relevant questions.

Members were reminded that it was not within the remit of the Policy Scrutiny Panel to Scrutinise the above as the Swimming Pool project had not been allocated to the Panel. Matters relating to the Swimming Pool project had been considered by the Scrutiny Committee

A suggestion was made that a Special Scrutiny Committee be arranged in August, 2008, specifically to consider the above and the Portfolio Holder for Finance be requested to attend the meeting to respond to Members' questions. The Chairman agreed that the possibility and practicalities of arranging such a meeting would be looked at.

An alternative suggestion was put that Cllr. Kellett submit his questions in written form to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and the Portfolio Holder be requested to respond in writing direct to Cllr. Kellett.

Responding to information given out at Scrutiny Committee on 14th July, 2008, Cllr. Bell advised the Panel that although he sat on the DVRC, he had had no access to the reports of the monthly meetings of the Swimming Pool Steering Group which had been constituted by Cabinet.

BULLET POINTS

REVIEW – “WORKING WITH PARISH COUNCILS”

- At the last meeting the Panel had agreed to review their previous Report on “Working with Parish Councils”. The Report had been circulated to Panel Members.
- It was noted that previous suggestions for formal agreements between Parish Councils and Principal Councils had largely come to nothing.
- Members also discussed the issues surrounding Quality Council Status and resource issues, particularly for the smaller Parish Councils.
- It was at the moment unclear as to the future relationship between Parish Councils and the Unitary Council and it was considered that the issue of Devolved Powers to Parish Councils must in the future be fully supported by adequate funding.
- The Unitary Council's proposals for promoting Councillors as leaders in their own Communities were also at present vague and in need of development and it was suggested that some communities in smaller parishes would only benefit from the new arrangements after formalised partnership working arrangements between their Parish Councils were adopted.
- It was noted that the Boundary Commission was currently carrying out a consultation exercise on existing electoral boundaries. This may well impact on Parish Councils in the future.
- A suggestion was made that consideration also be given to the original County Council Submission document in relation to their future plans for Parish Councils.
- The amount of consultation with Parish Representatives previously carried out by the County Council was queried and County Councillor Williams advised the Panel that consultation events had indeed taken place and had been attended by large numbers of Parish Representatives.
- Members were reminded that the Executive Officer of the County Durham Association of Local Councils had offered either to submit a report to the September meeting of the Policy Scrutiny Panel or to attend at a later date.
- It was agreed to re-schedule the September meeting of the Panel to Monday, 29th September, 2008, in order to accommodate his presence at the Meeting.
- It was further agreed that Members submit their questions, via the Senior Democratic Support Officer, to the Executive Officer of CDALC, to assist him in framing his report for the meeting.

The Meeting Terminated at 6.05pm