

POLICY SCRUTINY PANEL

6th October, 2008

Present: Councillor Wilkes (in the Chair) and Councillors Cowper, Kellett, Lightley, McDonnell, Simmons, Walker and Wynn.

Also Present: Councillors Kelly, Marsden, Robinson and Stoddart.

Apologies for Absence: Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors Freeman, Martin, Simpson and Wolstenholme.

Bullet Points from the Meeting held on 21st July, 2008

The Bullet Points from the Meeting of the 21st July, 2008, were confirmed as a true record.

BULLET POINTS

REVIEW – “WORKING WITH PARISH COUNCILS”

- At the previous Panel Meeting Members had considered a Policy Scrutiny Panel Report on “Working with Parish Councils”. Members had also requested the attendance at their next meeting of the Executive Officer of the County Durham Association of Local Councils.
- The Executive Officer, Steve Ragg, was therefore in attendance and briefed Members on current developments from the Associations viewpoint in relation to Parish Councils.
- Members were informed that the Association had brought together a working group of Parish Clerks of which at least three were from Parishes within the City of Durham area, to look at future developments.
- Topics being considered included Governance Arrangements, Standards Issues, Charter Development, and the possible role of Parish Councils in the AAP'S. It was the intention to submit their findings to the CDALC Executive Committee of local Elected Members before forwarding them to the County Council.
- It was also hoped to establish a small number of Pilot Schemes for Service Devolution to Parishes, perhaps to carry out certain Horticultural, Street Naming and Planning services. A business case for this was under development.
- It was accepted that there were certain issues which continued to be problematic but which would need to be resolved, such as Double Taxation, Rationalisation of Precepts, Duplication/Amalgamation of Functions etc. and constructive future communication between tiers of Local Government would be critical.
- The issue of parishing current unparished areas was ongoing. As well as part of the City of Durham area, Chester-le-Street and Crook had commenced consultations over a Parish/Town Council.
- Some larger Parish/Town Councils were currently engaged in their own regeneration work. Chilton was carrying out Street Cleaning, Ferryhill was considering Town Centre issues and Great Aycliffe was carrying out horticultural services.

NB Cllr. Simmons left the Meeting at 6.00pm

- Future involvement of Parish Councils in AAP's was being considered, however definitive boundaries for the AAP's had not yet been agreed, therefore it was not known how individual Parishes would "sit" within the AAP Framework.
- There was the possibility of smaller Parish Councils coming together in "clusters" to share their resources in order to resolve common individual issues. Suggestions had also been made in relation to the possibility of larger Parish/Town Councils supporting smaller ones.
- It was also noted that the findings of the current Boundary Commission study would eventually be submitted to the Electoral Committee and may impact in the future on Parish/Town Councils.
- Members were informed that the County Council had made finance available to Parish Councils for expenses in relation to training for Parish Clerks and the publication of newsletters etc.

NB Cllr. Robinson left the Meeting at 6.15pm

- The attainment of Quality Status by Parish/Town Councils was a major issue and Members were informed that CDALC had made financial assistance available to local councils to assist in the necessary training of Clerks and Councillors. It was noted that Brandon and Byshttles Parish Council had just attained Quality Status.
- It was also noted that the City Council had made finance available to Parish Councils within its area in relation to the production of Parish Plans.
- The Chairman thanked the Executive Officer for his attendance and it was agreed that based upon the discussions a Draft Report with Recommendations would be drawn up for submission to the November meeting of the Policy Scrutiny Panel.

The Meeting Terminated at 6.25pm