

City of Durham

At a Meeting of **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in the Studio, Gala Theatre, on Thursday, 6th December, 2007 at 5.30 p.m.

Present: Councillor Howarth (in the Chair)
and Councillors Colledge, Freeman, Mitchell, Simpson and Wolstenholme.

Also Present: Councillor Kellett

398. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Hopgood, McDonnell, Moderate, Robinson and Walton.

399. MINUTES

Minutes of the Meeting of 25th October, 2007, were confirmed as a correct record subject to the inclusion of Councillor Freeman being added to the list of Councillors present.

400. CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

The Chair informed Members that Members who queried Portfolio Holder Decisions at the meeting held on 25th October had received a reply

The Chair informed Members that a meeting of County Durham Overview and Scrutiny Member Network was due to take place on Friday, 7th December, 2007, looking at public transport.

Also, the Chair informed Members that a meeting of the Scrutiny on Childrens' Trust looking specifically at those children/young adults not in education or training (NEETS) would be taking place. It is hoped that reports from both joint scrutiny projects would be brought to this committee in due course.

401. SCRUTINY PANEL REPORTS

(a) Policy Scrutiny Panel – Scrutiny of Members' online

Members suggested that an additional recommendation should be included in the report stating that all Members receive a copy of an agenda for every meeting of the Council.

Resolved: That subject to the Panel's approval, this recommendation should be included.

(b) Environment Scrutiny Panel – Review of Scrutiny of Recycling, Fly-Tipping & Litterpickers

Resolved: That the report be sent to Cabinet for consideration.

402. CABINET DECISIONS

- 12 November, 2007
- 19 November, 2007
- 28 November, 2007

With regard to the Cabinet meeting held on 28th November, 2007, Members raised the Cabinet decision to end door to door rent collection. Members requested that the issue be addressed of additional community support being put in place to minimise the community impact/social welfare aspect of the ending of door to door rent collection. Members further requested that the Portfolio Holder report to the Committee the impact of this aspect of the report after three months.

403. VERBAL REPORTS OF PANEL CHAIRS

An update was given by each Panel Chair on the progress of their Panel business.

404. FORWARD PLAN

Members suggested that the Kerbside Recycling Contract be scrutinised 6 months after commencement.

Members asked that the Head of Legal & Strategic Services be invited to give a presentation to the Scrutiny Committee on the new Licensing Policy to highlight differences with the previous Policy and why changes were made.

405. DECISIONS TAKEN BY PORTFOLIO HOLDERS SINCE LAST MEETING

In relation to decision number 4, Members requested details relating to time/costs of the respective leases of Mandale Park, Saddler Street and High Street. It was agreed that a written response be requested from the Portfolio Holder.

406. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair and Members of the Committee agreed that a letter be sent to the Leader of the Council asking that Members be issued with a list of correct and updated staff contact details.

Meeting terminated 6.15 p.m.

Chairman

Report of Community Services Scrutiny Committee

Review of the Scrutiny of Council House Repairs

1. Background

1.1 Following the original Scrutiny as part of the Building Services Best Value Improvement Plan in July 2003, this topic has been reviewed by the Panel on a number of occasions. The last review was carried out in November, 2006, when it was recommended to review Council House Repairs following the introduction of the new computer system, and the opportunity for staff to become accustomed to its use.

2. Actions

2.1 The Head of Property Services, Operations Manager, Maintenance Manager and Customer Services Manager attended the Panel's meeting on 7th November, 2007, together with the Portfolio Holder for Communities. Members were advised as to progress made towards meeting the recommendations contained in the last repairs review report.

3. Outcomes

Computer Management System

3.1 A new computerised system was installed in June, 2007, and workmen have been issued with PDA (Personal Digital Assistant). After the initial training the system was working well and it could be monitored at the office as to whether tradesmen are on the road, at a job or on a break. The second phase of the computer system is due for installation early 2008. This part of the system will keep records on types of repairs and use a traffic light system to indicate deviation from targets.

Reporting of Repairs

3.2 All staff using the new system have received training relevant to their field. It was important not to over load with information but to ensure that staff were confident and competent to carry out their jobs. The importance of on going training was stressed by Members. All tenants have been issued with a handbook which details how to report a repair to Customer Services. Customer Services' staff have been highly trained to identify the type of repair and input the details into the system.

3.3 An appointments system has been introduced which allows for tenants' preferences. It is working well.

3.4 Members were reminded that reporting of repairs to Council properties should be carried out through the laid down procedure, which is to report the repair to City Info by telephone. By doing this the City Info staff would record the call on the CRM system to enable Members to receive a follow up of the complaint.

Emergency Call Outs

3.5 Problems had been experienced with tenants using the emergency call out as a method of obtaining out of hours repairs for one reason or another. When repairs are reported the City Info staff ask a number of questions to determine if a repair is an emergency or not, however some tenants abuse the system. Initial discussions suggested that tenants who abuse the emergency call out system should be charged after receiving an initial warning letter. Members agreed that Cabinet and Officers should consider methods of dealing with this problem.

Response and Re-let Times

- 3.6 Half yearly figures for responsive repairs are very encouraging as shown at Appendix A. Northgate has acknowledged the considerable achievement of Property Services mastering the new system in a short time scale while still carrying out their day to day jobs. Members reiterated these congratulations.

4. Recommendations

- 4.1 That on going training be given to staff members as required and their commitment be commended.
- 4.2 That procedures be put in place to deter tenants who persist in using the emergency call out repairs service as an out of hours repairs service including the possibility of charging after a warning has been given..
- 4.3 That Members be reminded that whilst it may be appropriate for them to contact Officers directly to gain information, the reporting of customer repairs should go through the recommended City Info channels.
- 4.4 That the Head of Property Services and The Customer Services Manager and their staff be formally thanked for their efforts in bringing about the improvements noted.

Community Services Scrutiny Panel
November 2007



FORWARD PLAN

In accordance with Regulations 13 and 14 of The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2000, As Amended, details of matters likely to be the subject of key decisions to be made by the City Council in the following 4 month period, commencing on Wednesday 2nd January, 2008, are set out hereunder. Anyone wishing to make representations to the City Council Cabinet or to the Decision maker about the matter in respect of which the decision is to be made may do so by writing to the Chief Executive, 17 Claypath, Durham City, DH1 1RH by no later than Wednesday 2nd January, 2008.

Topic	Decision Maker	Target Date for Decision to be made	Consultees (if any)	Contacts	Background Documents
Sustainable Development Policy	* Cabinet	January, 2008	Numerous Consultees	Head of Environmental Services Tel: 0191 3018684	Corporate Performance Plan Strategic Risk Register Environmental Services Business Plan UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy
Waste Collection Policy	* Cabinet	March, 2008	Numerous Consultees	Head of Environmental Services Tel: 0191 3018684	Corporate Performance Plan Strategic Risk Register Environmental Services Business Plan Waste Strategy for England 2007

***Cabinet Members:** Councillors Bell, Dickie, Jackson, Pitts, Rae, Reynolds, Southwell, Thomson, van Zwanenberg & Woods

Publication Date: Wednesday, 19th December, 2007.

Effective Date: Wednesday 2nd January, 2008.

Councillor F. Reynolds
Leader of the Council
Forward Plan No. 68

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
25 January 2008
DECISIONS TAKEN BY PORTFOLIO MEMBERS

No	Portfolio Member	Nature of Decision	Date
1	Councillor Reynolds (Cultural Services)	To agree to place an order with Powderhall Bronze Ltd to cast a bronze sculpture 'The Journey' from moulds taken from a wooden sculpture housed on Lindisfarne Island at a cost of £140,000 and which will take approximately 7 months to complete. Recommendation to commission Powderhall Bronze Ltd to collect original, cast bronze facsimile and transport and install the sculpture 'The Journey' in Millennium Square. The money is to be supplied by the Journey Statue Charitable Trust	12/12/07
2	Councillor Reynolds	Award of a grant of £5,000 to Langley Moor & Brandon Salvation Army from the Flourishing Communities (Small Grants) Fund for the development of a community garden space adjacent to the family play centre. Recommendation that a grant of £5,000 be awarded subject to condition that a grant of £2,500 is received from CDENT, funds of £3,545 are secured from other sources, the work is completed by 31 March 2008, the building is open to the public by 30 May 2008 and payment is made by 30 June 2008.	13/12/07
3	Councillor Reynolds	Award of a grant of £1,400 to Esh Winning Residents' Group from the Flourishing Communities (Small Grants) Fund for the renovation of 2 war memorials in front of the Woodland Road Aged Miners' Bungalows and Community Centre Recommendation that the grant of £1,400 be awarded on condition that the work is completed and payment is made by 30 June 2008	13/12/07
4	Councillor Reynolds	Award of a grant of £5,000 to Quarrington Hill Community Association Banner Group from the Flourishing Communities (Small Grants) Fund for the repair and conservation of the 1961 East Hetton (Miners') Banner, currently housed at Cassop Primary School Recommendation that the grant be awarded on condition that work is completed by July 2008 and that payment is made by August 2008.	13/12/07
5	Councillor Reynolds	Award of a grant of £2,100 to Brandon Bowls Club from the Flourishing Communities (Small Grants) Fund for the purchase and installation of an irrigation system and the replacement of the front & back boards at Brandon Bowling Green Recommendation that the award be granted to Brandon Bowling Green on condition that the work is completed and the grant be paid by 31 March 2008 and that the Club seek and obtain the necessary agreement of Environmental Services to	13/12/07

		the proposed works and the contractor who will undertake them.	
6	Councillor Reynolds	Award of a grant of £4,950 to Nevilles Cross Community Association from the Flourishing Communities (Small Grants) Fund to commission a feasibility study for the provision of a community building on a possible site adjacent to Nevilles Cross Primary School or an extension to the School itself. Recommendation that the award be granted on condition that the Feasibility Study is completed by 20.4.2008 and that payment of the grant is made by 30 June 2008	13/12/07
7	Councillor Van Zwanenberg (Planning)	To consider and approve the Annual Monitoring Report (2006/7) for the City of Durham Local Development Framework for submission to the Government Office for North East by 31 Dec 2007. Recommended that approval be given and subsequently reported to Cabinet for information.	17.12.07
8	Councillor Van Zwanenberg (Planning)	To approve increased costs incurred by Edaw in preparing a design brief for the former ice rink site. Increased costs are attributable to increased costs required to accommodate stakeholder involvement and re-drafting of technical material associated with the responses of key consultees. Recommended that that the total cost of the commission should be approved at a figure not to exceed the revised amount of £29,950	17.12.07
9	Councillor Reynolds	Award of grant of £5,000 to Allington House Community Association from the Flourishing Community (small grants) fund for the production of a full condition survey and dilapidation report and evaluation on condition that the survey and report be completed and the grant paid by 31 March 2008. Recommended to award a grant of £5,000.	20.12.07
10	Councillor Reynolds (Legal)	To confirm action taken in making an allowance to the buyer of land between nos. 44 and 47 Front Street Witton Gilbert for the cost of defective title indemnity insurance in order to facilitate site disposal and development. Recommendation that the action taken be confirmed.	5.1.08