

**City of Durham**

At a Meeting of **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in the Mayor's Chamber, Town Hall, on Monday, 27<sup>th</sup> October, 2008, at 5.30 p.m.

**Present:** Councillor Hopgood (in the Chair)  
and Councillors Colledge, Howarth, McDonnell, Mitchell, Rae, Robinson, Simpson, Turnbull,  
Walton, Wilkes and Wilkinson

**Also Present:** Councillors Cowper, Dickie, Kellett, Kinghorn, Marsden, Pitts, Reynolds, D. Smith,  
MJA Smith, Stoddart, Southwell, Thomson and Young.

The Executive Director was in attendance also.

**242. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Carr, Kelly, Robinson

**243. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held Monday, 15<sup>th</sup> September were confirmed as a correct record.

**244. CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS**

The Chair advised the Committee that the County Durham Joint Scrutiny Network had not met since the last Scrutiny Meeting and was not sure whether they would meet again.

The Chair reminded Members that the last Scrutiny Panel meetings would take place in November and reports would go to the Scrutiny Committee scheduled for December and to Cabinet in January 2009, from there scrutiny reports will be sent to Durham County Council Overview and Scrutiny to be distributed to the relevant work streams.

**245. SWIMMING POOL COSTS**

The Chair welcomed the Leader of the Council, Portfolio Holders for Finance and Leisure & Culture and the Executive Director who had been invited to take questions on costs relating to the new Swimming Pool.

Councillor Kellett asked the assembled guests why a 25% overspend had not been reported to Council.

The Leader responded that there had been various presentations all the way through the project and that some members had asked questions at the time and some had not, but all meetings had been well documented and reminded Members that this was in fact a Durham Villages Regeneration Company (DVRC) project and not a City of Durham project and that the Labour Group had a representative on the board of DVRC – Councillor Bell. The Leader went on to advise that the people of Durham were impressed by the development.

Councillor Southwell read out to the Committee a Personal Legal Statement concerning the laws on the tort of slander and libel.

Councillor Kellett asked why the Portfolio Holder for Finance had not attended a Policy Scrutiny Panel meeting.

The Chair reminded Councillor Kellett that Policy Scrutiny Panel had not had the Swimming Pool allocated to them as a topic and therefore it was not within the remit of Policy Scrutiny Panel to scrutinise as such and the Portfolio Holder for Finance was never asked to attend the Panel meeting. The Swimming Pool had only ever been discussed at Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Mitchell stated that the Monitoring Officer should be in attendance if legal statements were to be read out as no impartial legal advice could be given.

The Executive Director advised that Councillor Southwell's statement was nothing to do with the City of Durham Council it was a personal statement.

Councillor Mitchell stated that in his opinion this (the legal statement) was not appropriate to be given to a scrutiny meeting.

The Executive Director advised Members that Swimming Pool project had not been a City of Durham project and that it was a DVRC project and that DVRC is a wholly independent company. Cabinet had appointed a steering group specifically for design purposes and that there had never been a 25% overspend.

A base budget of £11million had been agreed then the project went out to consultation with 13 or 14 groups, a wish list was generated from the consultation meetings this was then taken to DVRC and priced. Some of the items on the wish list were various upgrades to the project, a hinged floating floor, artistic commission and etched windows factored into the project. It was then reported to Cabinet that the budget had increased to £12.5 million, the project was put out to tender. The Executive Director reminded Members that DVRC had a 100% risk of the project there was no risk to City of Durham Council. A tender was selected which was reported to Cabinet giving full financial breakdown including a full contingency. Negotiations were not complete with planners and additional provisional sums were added to the budget. Members should be aware that the City of Durham Council had never built something like this before. The Project Officer presented to the Board three changes to the original plan:-

1. The increase in the costs of world metal
2. The Second artistic project – The Needles Sculpture
3. Mezzanine Café

With these addition changes the project was still within budget if the contract had started to move outside of the budget this would have been reported to Cabinet.

The project was £80,000 within budget and £2/300, 000 within surplus. The banked land values were all reported to Cabinet

Councillor Kellett advised that he had gained the information through Freedom of Information which stated that there was a combined net land value of £11 million therefore there was involvement by the City of Durham. Also the working group consisted of all Liberal Democrat Councillors. The £11 million at the start of the project had altered to £13.4 an increase of 26% over budget from the original document how much land was sold off in the villages.

The Leader of the Council replied that some of the land from the villages was sold but the bulk came from the sale of Byland Lodge and suggested that similar to the Marks and Spencer TV advert this was not just any pool this was a Lib Dem Pool.

Councillor Turnbull stated that the pool was the tax payers of Durham Swimming Pool.

The Chair reminded all Members present that this was a Scrutiny Committee and as such was non political.

The Executive Director advised Members that there was no involvement from the City Council that land Transfers to DVRC had been agreed by Cabinet and the City Council had agreed every land transfer. The document reporting an £11 million budget was published in 2005, the new position of £12.6 million was reported in 2006.

Councillor Mitchell asked for clarity between the steering group and DVRC design and build project. The steering group had an important role as design increases would suggest additional costs. Also should the steering group not reflect the political balance of the Council?

The Executive Director advised that he had been the key link between the steering group and DVRC and that there was not a plethora of design issues – most of the design issues the steering group discussed were connected with design of hand dryers, tiles etc., The Mezzanine café was

originally marked as a storage area and the difference in the figures fell into the contingency. If the design steering group ever breached the limit this would have been reported.

Portfolio Holder for Finance advised that Labour group was asked for where they would put the swimming pool but no answers were received. There was fair play all the way through.

Councillor Stoddart advised that it was unfair to say all Labour Councillors did not attend as he had attended.

Councillor Howarth stated that she would like to thank the Executive Director for attending and that the changes had been made due to the consultation and this had been reported to Cabinet in 2006.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance stated that Durham 6<sup>th</sup> Form College had had an impact on the project and that squabbling does not help, the Head of Paid Service has said that the project was on budget. DVRC has auditors who would have picked up on irregularities and would investigate anomalies.

Councillor Mitchell asked if the value of land banks could be explained in percentages from what has been sold and how much has been taken from reserves.

The Executive Director explained that £2 million came from City Council; £1.1 million from Competition Line (capital); £250,000 from Sport England; £50,000 from Banks; £250,000 from a small scheme at Back Silver Street. There was a residual amount from the Annand House project which was carried over and the rest came from banked land value.

Councillor Kellett stated that only two lanes were in use for members of the public and it was a public swimming pool.

Portfolio Holder for Leisure & Culture advised Members that at the old swimming pool some groups had the exclusive use of the pool at least at this pool members of the public had two lanes open to them even when other groups were also using the pool. Therefore there is a great deal public use.

Councillor Mitchell asked if the risk on land values is borne by DVRC or the City Council.

The Executive Director informed that all risks are borne by DVRC. That the City Council liability has never altered from £49.00

Councillor Mitchell asked who takes the risks from the revenue.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance advised that the running of the pool is the risk of the City Council just like the Gala Theatre and the other sports centres.

The Chair summed up by stating that the Pool had come in on budget in contingencies set and at no risk to City of Durham. The pool is available to everyone within the District and elsewhere and not just the DH1 3 postcode area. It was agreed by the Committee that all questions had been answered satisfactorily and that the pool was now open and operating and that all financial questions relating to it had been addressed. . She thanked the Leader, Portfolio Holders and Executive Director for attending and answering all the Members questions.

**NOTE: 6.15 p.m. Councillors Dickie, Kinghorn, Pitts, Reynolds, Southwell and Thomson and the Executive Director left the meeting.**

## **246. SCRUTINY PANEL REPORTS**

### **Community Services Scrutiny Panel – Review of Scrutiny of Closed Churchyards**

Copies of the report were circulated with the Agenda papers for Members consideration.

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

#### **247. CABINET DECISIONS**

The Committee noted the Cabinet report and there were no items they wished to discuss.

**NOTE: 6.25 p.m. Councillor Kellett left the meeting.**

#### **248. VERBAL REPORTS OF PANEL CHAIRS**

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

#### **249. FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee considered the Forward Plan No. 78 which had been circulated at the meeting and was effective from 1<sup>st</sup> November, 2008. Members asked if a summary for each item could be given as this would be helpful.

#### **250. DECISIONS TAKEN BY PORTFOLIO HOLDERS SINCE LAST MEETING**

The Committee considered the Portfolio Holder Decisions and noted the report.

#### **251. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business to discuss.

Chair

Meeting terminated 6.30 p.m.

## SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

### REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

#### REVIEW SCRUTINY OF THE PLAYING PITCH STRATEGY

##### 1. Background

- 1.1 The Playing Pitch Strategy was commissioned by the City Council, County Council and Sport England in June, 2001. It was initially carried out by external consultants and subsequently completed by Officers of the Council.
- 1.2 Prior to its adoption by Cabinet, the Strategy had been referred to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration, and they had then passed it to the Community Services Scrutiny Panel.
- 1.3 Promoting the use of Playing Pitches was considered to be of particular importance because of the increased tendency for people to engage in more sedentary pastimes such as watching television and computer activities. Evidence that less physical activity, combined with inappropriate diet, can lead to serious health problems suggested a need for people of all ages to have the opportunity and incentive to engage in more physically active leisure pursuits. Playing pitch sports may also help in combating antisocial behaviour and encouraging community cohesion.
- 1.4 The scrutiny encompassed the views of a wide range of witnesses. In addition to valuable information presented by a number of Durham City Council Officers, meetings also involved Durham County Council's PE Inspector and a Senior Strategy Officer. There was welcomed input from a Primary Care Trust Doctor representing the Health Improvement Group; the Director of Sport of Durham University; the Manager of Durham Schools Sports Partnership; representatives from Durham City Cricket Club and Durham City Football Club; and the Manager of Durham Soccarena.
- 1.5 The Community Services Scrutiny Panel scrutinised the Strategy between October, 2005, and April, 2006, and carried out a site inspection of some of the Council's recreation grounds. This Scrutiny was reviewed in July, 2007, at which time further site inspections had been carried out. Progress was noted and the recommendations were updated.

##### 2. Actions

- 2.1 The Council's Technical Support Manager (Environment & Leisure), Streetscene Technical Officer and Policy and Regeneration Manager attended the Panel's Meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2008.

##### 3. Outcomes

- 3.1 Progress has been made towards implementing many of the recommendations made by the Panel in their last report.
- 3.2 The Active Durham initiative has been set up with the Community Sports Network. Leisure Services is working with local groups at grass roots level and across all age groups. The scheme is Sports Council funded and will therefore continue after LGR.
- 3.3 Pitches are allocated on the basis of two teams per pitch and reminders are sent to users to enquire if they wish to use the pitch the following season to allow supply to be matched to demand. A number of pitches are not marked out as such where there is no demand, but are available if needed.

- 3.4 Adhesive signage has been provided in changing facilities detailing acceptable use and behaviour, and a code of conduct is part of the hire agreement.
- 3.5 A survey has been carried out to recommend improvements to individual pitches. Capital funding had been sought to improve drainage but the bid was unsuccessful. Compacted areas have been broken up, herbicide and fertiliser treatments have been carried out, and soil levels have been made up and over seeded.
- 3.6 The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 allows Authorities to introduce Dog Control Orders. These can be used to control dog fouling, areas where dogs must be kept on leads, and areas where dogs are banned. (The Durham District Councils are currently looking to bring in an order relating to dog fouling, and the new Unitary Authority will be considering areas where dogs are to be kept on leads, or banned, in due course.) As part of the LGR process work is currently ongoing to enable the new unitary authority to bring in an order relating to dog fouling on Vesting Day 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009. It is the intention that orders relating to areas where dogs are to be kept on leads, or banned, will follow in due course.
- 3.7 The Durham City News has been used to try to recruit potential sports coaches however the response was disappointing. There have however been a good number of Durham University students who have taken up sports coaching roles. Durham University run sports coaching courses which were also open to residents and the response to these was much more encouraging.

#### **4. Recommendations**

- 4.1 Having reviewed the recommendations made in their previous reports, considered progress made towards achieving these, and being conscious that further recommendations need to be relevant to the new Unitary Authority, the Community Services Scrutiny Panel recommend the following.
- 4.2 City Council Pitches
  - 4.2.1 That all playing pitches within City of Durham ownership, together with all of these leased to the City Council by organisations such as the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation, be retained for recreational use.
  - 4.2.2 That in accordance with the conclusions in the Playing Pitch Strategy, the availability, condition and maintenance of all City of Durham owned and administered pitches continue to be monitored and reviewed.
  - 4.2.3 That in accordance with current practice, where a pitch is under used, reasons should be carefully analysed, and with a flexible approach to supply and demand measures to improve take-up should be considered.
  - 4.2.4 That Dog Control Orders be introduced where necessary, and that the necessary signage be provided.
- 4.3 Changing Facilities
  - 4.3.1 That particular attention be given to increasing the availability and improving facilities for female players as and when the need arises.
  - 4.3.2 That increased community engagement be pursued to extend the use and concept of ownership and responsibility for premises.

- 4.3.3 That the Hire Agreement and Code of Conduct for use continue to be sent to all those people using the facilities.
- 4.3.4 That the facilities be regularly inspected and appropriately maintained.
- 4.3.5 That in accordance with the present practice, users be asked to either remove all sports equipment at the end of their season, or arrange acceptable storage with the Council.
- 4.3.6 That the new Unitary Authority be asked to give consideration to the provision of changing facilities at those sites where no provision currently exists.

#### 4.4 Maintenance and Drainage

- 4.4.1 That funds be allocated to continue the drainage improvement works being carried out, as identified in the recent survey.

#### 4.5 Working with other Organisations

- 4.5.1 The Panel urge continued and supportive working with partners to fulfil and secure playing pitch needs throughout the District and to maximise participation in sports activities as part of the Active Durham initiative.
- 4.5.2 That the new Unitary Authority be requested to maintain the City Council's close working relationship with Durham University.
- 4.5.3 That close communication be maintained with the School Sports Partnership Manager to explore ways of extending links, shared use and sports promotion to make full use of all facilities.
- 4.5.4 That further research be made into recruitment and training of more sports coaches; this work to be across the County Council, School Sports Partnership and University.
- 4.5.5 That encouragement be given to clubs that currently use Council pitches and facilities, and that where appropriate new joint initiatives be considered.

#### 4.6 General

- 4.6.1 That the recommendations with regard to the promotion of each sport, as made in the City of Durham Playing Pitch Strategy and approved by the City Council's Cabinet, should be actively pursued to further develop pitches and facilities for participants of both sexes, across the full age range, and that the Strategy and Panel's recommendations be forwarded to the new Unitary Authority to encourage use and development of these facilities.
- 4.6.2 That this report and recommendations be brought to attention of the new Unitary Authority and relevant Workstreams.





**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL**

**REVIEW SCRUTINY OF COUNCIL HOUSE REPAIRS**

**1. Background**

1.1 Council house repairs had originally been scrutinised as part of the Building Services Best Value Improvement Plan in 2003. The topic had been reviewed by the Panel on several occasions, the most recent being in November, 2007, when four recommendations had been made. These recommendations were subsequently approved and adopted by Cabinet.

**2. Actions**

2.1 The Head of Property Services and Responsive Maintenance Manager attended the Panel's Meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> October, 2008, and together with the Portfolio Holder for Communities, updated the Panel on progress made towards the recommendations made in the last report.

**3. Outcomes**

3.1 Since April, 2008, the number of emergency and non-urgent repairs completed on time has been at least 97% and in some months, 99%. The results of the Gas Satisfaction Survey (April – November, 2008) show that 100% of tenants were satisfied with the workmanship and the attitude of staff.

3.2 The Exceptions system of the new Northgate system allows potential missed appointments to be spotted in advance which allows alternative staff to be dispatched or the customer to be contacted. Staff continue to use the handheld telephone/PDA communication system, which following upgrades, is now performing much better and many of the blackspots have been eliminated.

3.3 The Panel had previously recommended that ongoing training be provided for staff. This has been carried out over the last 12 months and the introduction of the Repair Finder allows both customers and Customer Services to identify repairs and is working very well.

3.4 A small number of recharges have been carried out where the emergency reporting system had been used by tenants to bypass the appointments system, although it is difficult to prove misuse of the system. Efforts are being made to reduce this problem.

3.5 The emergency call out teams have been responsive and have provided good service to tenant, but Members expressed some concern about ongoing problems with radiators and boilers.

3.6 Members have previously been reminded that customer repairs must be reported to Customer Services to be logged at the first point of contact. This provides an audit trail and enables the jobs to be actioned more quickly than if they are reported to Officers direct.

3.7 Members stressed the importance of the provision of co-ordinated service from first inspection to completion of a job with the tenant being kept fully informed.

3.8 Re-let times on void properties have increased by 4 days since last year to 47 days. This was due to a great extent to the inclusion of one particularly difficult to let property which

had been empty for 917 days. Additionally the number of void properties at any one time is difficult to predict and when the number is high, it is difficult to carry out all of the necessary works. Some void properties are in very poor condition, particularly where previous tenants had refused to allow modernisation works to be carried out in the past. Three major house fires had also added to the workload.

- 3.9 The Panel are very pleased with the progress made and congratulate the Head of Property Services and his staff for the work they have done. It is hoped that the same standard of work would continue following the move to the new Unitary Authority.

#### **4. Recommendations**

- 4.1 In drafting its recommendations the Panel recognises that had the City Council continued in office, it would have been appropriate for scrutiny of Council House Repairs to be ongoing, with a view to supporting service provision to tenants. Accordingly we anticipate that the recommendations will have immediate significance but will also need to carry over to the administration of the unitary authority.

- 4.2 The Panel therefore recommends:-

4.2.1 That procedures continue to operate to deter tenants who persist in using the emergency call out repairs service as an out of hours repair service, including the possibility of charging after a warning has been given.

4.2.2 That continued attention is given to the co-ordination of the repair system from initial investigation of the nature of a repair through to its completion in order to ensure efficiency and customer satisfaction.

4.2.3 That the continuing review of older central heating systems is particularly important in the winter period.

4.2.4 That the Head of Property Services and his staff be thanked and congratulated for their efforts in bringing about the improvements noted and the high standard of the service they provide.

4.2.5 That this report and recommendations be brought to the attention of the new Unitary Authority with the expectation that the Authority will support Property Services provision to the high standard currently being achieved by the City of Durham Department.

Community Services Scrutiny Panel  
November 2008

## **REPORT OF THE ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL**

### **SCRUTINY TOPIC – KERBSIDE RECYCLING SCHEME SIX MONTH REVIEW**

#### **1. BACKGROUND**

The City of Durham, along with several of the District Councils within County Durham, had in place an existing contract that provided a household kerbside recycling scheme, known as the “Kerb-It” Scheme. This contract terminated on 31 March, 2008 and consequently, the contract to operate a household kerbside recycling scheme on behalf of the Council was put out to tender. Following a joint tendering process by Chester-le-Street District Council, City of Durham, Easington District Council and Sedgefield Borough Council, a contract with Greencycle Plc. was entered into, with the new scheme commencing 1 April, 2008. The scheme as proposed by Greencycle provided an opportunity for cardboard and plastics to be included as recyclable items which increased the scope of recycling for Residents.

#### **2. AIMS**

It was the remit of the Panel to consider information from the appropriate Council Officers to gain insight into the first six months of operation of the new kerbside recycling scheme. In addition, the Panel also felt that as Durham City was home to a large population of Students, representatives from the University of Durham should be invited to attend Panel meetings to give Members information on how the University and its Students recycled.

#### **3. ACTIONS**

##### **3.1 University of Durham – September 2008**

Representatives from the University of Durham attended a meeting of the Panel to give Members information as regards the internal operations of the University’s Environmental Policies. In addition, insight was given as to how the University liaised with its Students via individual College Representatives to spread information about various environmental issues, not merely recycling. It was also brought to light the existing working relationships between the University of Durham and the City of Durham Council in respect of both operational issues relating to waste and recycling from large Student halls of Residence, but also in activities in order to promote a heightened awareness of environmental and sustainability issues.

The University of Durham contract BIFFA Waste Management to collect the recycling from University buildings and some of the Colleges. Some purely residential colleges have their recycling collected by Greencycle via the Council’s scheme.

Representatives from the University of Durham made it clear that often, the Student populous were actually keener to recycle than perhaps facilities would allow, and that if many of the Students “living out” in private accommodation were given sufficient information, uptake of the kerbside scheme, amongst other methods of recycling and reuse, may indeed increase.

The University of Durham conducts a "Green Move Out" in order to attempt to reuse or recycle items that may be thrown away at the end of the University year. At these times, there may be need to have additional provisions to ensure the additional waste generated is cleared swiftly.

### **3.2 City of Durham, Environment Services – October 2008**

The City of Durham's Environment Services Manager attended a meeting of the Panel to give Members an overview of the progress that had been made over the first six months of the new kerbside recycling scheme. Estimates of volumes of recycling that may be generated when the new scheme came online were based upon a similar scheme operated in Congleton. However, due to an increase of over 70% in comparison to the April 2008 period, there were problems in the collection of recycling from households. Through investment in additional vehicles, equipment and staff by Greencycle, it is noted that initial teething problems appeared to have been overcome.

Initially, the recyclable materials were sorted at the kerbside into the individual streams. However, due to the larger than anticipated volume of recycling, this method of operation was thought to be too slow. Accordingly, upon suggestion from District Authority Officers, items were roughly sorted at the kerbside, with a final sort conducted back at Greencycle's Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) at Tursdale. At the MRF, the items that have been collected are fed on to two "picking belts" and the items are separated by material. The City of Durham had investigated the Companies that are taking the recyclable items from Greencycle, to ensure these companies are reputable and that the items would indeed be recycled. This was to ensure that material was not in fact ending up back at landfill as had happened in some cases via recycling schemes operated on behalf of some Local Authorities.

## **4. OUTCOMES**

### **4.1 In relation to Students within the City**

In response to the annual influx of students to Durham City, Environment Services Staff including Neighbourhood Wardens have issued leaflets to the City Centre Student areas. Also information relating to the kerbside recycling scheme and other environment issues would be disseminated via Durham City News, and by way of stickers on waste and recycling bins. In addition, fridge magnets with recycling and waste collection information have been provided for distribution to Students.

### **4.2 Enforcement**

As a last resort in cases where there has been continued non-use of the kerbside recycling scheme and recyclable items are simply being put into the main waste bins, there will be an option to issue a Section 46 Environmental Protection Enforcement Notice to households.

### **4.3 Future options regarding recycling**

As the current Aerobic Digester facility at Thornley Crossings is offline and the proposed Digester at Tursdale is only at the initial planning stages, the services provided by Greencycle are key in maintain progress towards stringent targets for diversion from landfill. Once technology relating to aerobic digestion has been verified as a viable option then it may be possible to return to all waste simply being collected by a single refuse vehicle and the materials being sorted after digestion.

These will be issues for the new Unitary Authority to consider in the near future with help from District Colleagues, and in much greater detail after amalgamation post April 2009.

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Panel gained an insight into the work that has been undertaken by City of Durham Officers and appreciate that this work was not undertaken in isolation, but rather through working in Partnership with other Local Authorities. The current kerbside recycling scheme initially had difficulty in coping with the unprecedented uptake by the Residents of the four participating Districts. However, it is noted that now the scheme is operating very well and is helping to keep diversion from landfill statistics from being far short of target.

Therefore the following recommendations are made by the Panel:-

1. That staff from the City of Durham's Environment Services section and from Greecycle Plc. be congratulated on their hard work in overcoming initial teething problems with the Kerbside recycling scheme in order to have a scheme that is operating at an average increase of 57%.
2. That the new Unitary Authority gives consideration to the Kerbside Recycling Scheme as operated by Greecycle Plc. in formulating approaches to meeting diversion from landfill targets in the future, especially in light of the closure of the Aerobic Digester located at Thornley Crossings, near Shotton Colliery. Such consideration should be by whichever Authority/Body is appropriate at this point in the LGR process, i.e. by currently operating workstreams with District and County Officers, or by Durham County Officers once they are in place within a new Directorate.
3. That as an interim measure, until the new Unitary Authority brings together an integrated website encompassing all current District and County Council functions, the appropriate pages of the City of Durham website be amended to make it easier for Residents (including Students) to obtain information relating to recycling and the days of the kerbside collections.
4. That further to the measures already undertaken by the City of Durham's Officers in relation to helping to inform the incoming Students, the relevant University of Durham Officers be given the relevant links to the City Council's website as an interim solution, prior to the new Unitary Authority putting in place an integrated website.



## **POLICY SCRUTINY PANEL**

### **DRAFT REPORT**

#### **REVIEW OF SICKNESS ABSENCE OCT' 08**

##### **BACKGROUND**

1. The Policy Scrutiny Panel has reviewed the Council's Sickness Absence levels on an ongoing basis. The Panel has previously submitted its Reports and Recommendations to Cabinet.

1.1 The aim of this Review was again to consider progress against the implementation of the Recommendations previously submitted and agreed by Cabinet and to receive an update on the current levels of Sickness Absence.

##### **ACTIONS**

2. At the Policy Scrutiny Panel Meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> October, 2008, Members were provided with updated Sickness Absence figures. Subsequently, at the Panel Meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2008, the Director of Corporate Services was in attendance to give Members a strategic overview of the figures.

##### **OUTCOMES**

3. Current figures showed a further reduction in the rate of Sickness Absence. Though there were variations in the rate between Service Areas, the reduction was apparent across all Council Services.

3.1 There has been a continuous decline in the overall Sickness Absence figure over the past five years. From a national Lower Quartile figure of 13.9 days per employee in 2003/2004 it has fallen to a current figure of 9.9 days and as the trend continues to show a reduction it is anticipated that the figure will fall to around 8 days which would place it in the Upper Quartile nationally.

3.2 A slight reversal was noted in September, 2008. This appeared to have corrected itself however the Director of Corporate Services advised Members that caution will still be needed over the next six months as the figure could rise in response to the general uncertainty surrounding the lead up to Unitary Authority Vesting Day.

3.3 The continuing reduction in the figure has been as a result of a number of factors but a significant impact has been made by the consistent application of Corporate Sickness Absence Procedures across the Authority and the introduction of the services of Diagnostic Health Solutions as a mechanism for dealing with Employee Absences.

3.4 It is noted by Members that there continue to be certain areas of Council activity where the Sickness Absence average is proportionately higher. However it is accepted that these are areas where the nature of the work can be particularly physical or stressful.

3.5 The Panel was informed that the County Council had in place similar support mechanisms for employees with regard to Sickness Absence and had, as had the City of Durham, achieved the Silver Award for "Wellness at Work".

3.6 In relation to the Panel's Recommendations contained in the previous Review Report in April, 2008, the proposed annual Staff Attitude Survey had not been carried out due to LGR.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

4. In the Report on the Review of April, 2008, the Panel had Recommended that the efforts of all Staff and Managers in reducing the rates of Sickness Absence be acknowledged.

4.1 Again, Members considered that congratulations were due to the Director of Corporate Services and all employees involved in the ongoing reduction in Sickness Absence Figures.

4.2 It was noted that a different method of measurement and interpretation of the figures may have been utilised and may have produced slightly different results. However the Panel acknowledged that the methods of measurement used were used by other Local Authorities and were nationally accepted for benchmarking purposes.

4.3 Members of the Policy Scrutiny Panel once again expressed their satisfaction at the improvement in the Sickness Absence Figures.

## **Recommendations**

1) That the Policy Scrutiny Panel commend the Director of Corporate Services, his staff, and Employees across the Council for their efforts in reducing Sickness Absence Levels.

2) That following Unitary Authority Vesting Day, Durham County Council direct, for the same purpose, the amount of funding previously held by the City of Durham Council specifically for employee support in relation to Sickness Absence.



**POLICY SCRUTINY PANEL**

**DRAFT REPORT**

**EQUALITIES POLICIES UPDATE**

**BACKGROUND**

1. The Policy Scrutiny Panel previously considered the content and level of application of the Council's Equality Policies. A Report with Recommendations was subsequently drawn up and submitted to the Cabinet which approved and adopted the Recommendations.

1.1. The aim of the update was to review progress against Recommendations previously made by the Policy Scrutiny Panel and to assess the current and likely proportion of the City of Durham's Elected Members and Employees who will be fully trained in Equalities Issues by April, 2009.

**ACTIONS**

2. The Panel had previously recommended that the Corporate Training Programme be reviewed in order to ensure that Employees and Elected Members who had not received Equalities Training were given the opportunity to do so before December, 2008.

2.1 The Director of Corporate Services attended the Policy Scrutiny Panel Meeting on the 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2008, to update Members on the current situation.

**OUTCOMES**

3. Eighty seven per-cent of City Council employees have already received Equalities Training and the Corporate Training Programme for 2008/2009 included further Equalities Training opportunities for those wishing to take advantage of them.

3.1 The Panel was advised that because of the increasing pace of preparatory LGR work it was no longer feasible to target one hundred per-cent of Employees to be trained in line with the Panel's previous Recommendation.

3.2 It is acknowledged however that relevant work in relation to the harmonisation of Equalities Issues between constituent Councils is currently being carried out in the appropriate LGR Workstream.

**CONCLUSIONS**

4. Members acknowledged that the priority given in the current Corporate Training Programme was to allow access for City of Durham employees to training in the range of key skills necessary for them to have for their transition to the Unitary Authority in April, 2009.

4.1 It was further acknowledged that the County Council currently had a robust system of Equalities integration across their Service Areas and had already been assessed at Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Authorities.

### **Recommendations**

1. That the good practice evident in the Equalities Policies and Procedures at the City of Durham Council, together with further examples of good practice from across the other constituent Councils be incorporated into the work of the appropriate LGR Workstream.

2. That Durham County Council is requested, following Unitary Authority Vesting Day on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2009, to ensure that every employee receives relevant Equalities Training as part of Induction or as part of the ongoing Corporate Training process.

## **POLICY SCRUTINY PANEL**

### **DRAFT REPORT**

#### **REVIEW – WORKING WITH PARISH COUNCILS**

#### **BACKGROUND**

1. The Policy Scrutiny Panel Report “Working with Parish Councils” was originally submitted, along with a number of Recommendations, to Cabinet in September, 2007. The Report and Recommendations were deferred by Cabinet pending the outcome of unitary status developments.

1.1 The Panel agreed to review the contents of the Report together with the original Recommendations in order to establish what, if any, practical measures of assistance the Panel may be able to recommend the new Durham County Council give Parish Councils in light of Local Government Reorganisation, the possibility of devolution of functions and future developments in community governance.

#### **ACTIONS**

2. Panel Members were provided with the original Report and the Executive Officer of the County Durham Association of Local Councils was invited to speak to the Panel and advise Members of current developments in relation to LGR.

#### **OUTCOMES**

3. Members were informed of a number of current developments.

- The County Association have 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 include Governance Arrangements, Standards Issues, Charter Development and the possible role of Parish Councils in AAP’s. Their findings will be submitted to Elected Members and the County Council.
- It was hoped to establish a small number of Pilot Schemes for Service Devolution to Parishes, perhaps to carry out certain Horticultural, Street Scene and Planning Services. A business case for this is currently under development.
- It is apparent that certain issues remain problematic. How issues such as Double Taxation, Rationalisation of Precepts, Duplication/Amalgamation of Functions etc. are dealt with will be critical.
- The issue of parishing current unparished areas is ongoing. As well as those in the City of Durham area, Chester-le-Street and Crook have also commenced consultations over a Parish/Town Council.
- Future involvement of Parish Councils in AAP’s is being considered and there is a possibility of smaller Parish Councils coming together in “clusters” to share resources in order to resolve common individual issues.

- Finance has been made available to Parish Councils by the County Council for expenses in relation to training for Parish Clerks and costs of publications.
- The attainment of Quality Status by Parish/Town Councils is still a major issue. CDALC has made financial assistance available to Local Councils to assist in the necessary training of Clerks and Councillors. It was noted that Brandon and Byshottles Parish Council has attained Quality Status. The City Council has also made finance available to Parish Councils within its area in relation to the production of Parish Plans.

3.1 It is noted that there was a commitment in the County Council's Unitary Bid to eventually parish all unparished areas. However to take advantage of the possible devolution to Local Councils, and therefore local communities, of certain functions together with their respective budgets it would be necessary for Local Councils to demonstrate their ability to properly administer and manage those functions and budgets. Local Councils may therefore need assistance from the Principal Authority to demonstrate this ability.

3.1 The Policy Scrutiny Panel's original 2007 Report highlighted some specific examples of assistance then offered to Parish/Town Councils by Principal Authorities.

- District of Easington had offered to pay the Registration Fees of Clerks beginning training for the CiLCA qualification.
- Bradford Borough Council had paid for a Training Course (£195), for each Parish/Town Clerk in their area.
- Cumbria County Council had established a "Parish Champion", liaison Member.

3.2 The original Report identified that the development of a Joint Charter between Principal and Local Councils would be likely to provide:-

- Enhanced roles for Local Councils
- Improved working relationships between Local and Principal Councils
- Better Community Planning
- Written rights and responsibilities for both partners
- Agreed working compacts
- Proper Consultation and Involvement

3.3 The original Report also identified that the achievement by a Local Council of Quality Status would provide benefits for:

The Local Community – From more responsive services, better communication and discussion about, and access to those services.

The Principal Authority – From evidence of the capacity and ability of the Local Council to deliver services on its behalf or in partnership and from a stronger partnership with a Local Council which is demonstrably representative, competent and well managed.

The Local Council – From greater public credibility leading to enhanced representation of the local community. Greater civic pride and the ability to articulate the needs and wishes of that community. Enhanced partnership working by demonstrating the organisation is properly and effectively managed with suitably qualified staff.

3.4 The original Report identified that Principal Councils are in a position to support and encourage Local Councils to participate in the Quality Status process and perhaps offer practical assistance to Local Councils in relation to facilitating the use of available resources eg Information Technology and Training.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

4. It is noted that previous suggestions for formal agreements between Parish Councils and Principal Authorities have largely come to nothing. The future relationship between Local Councils and the County Council is currently unclear and it is considered that any issue of Devolved Powers to Local Councils must in the future be fully supported by adequate funding.

4.1 The County Council's proposals for promoting Councillors as leaders in their own communities are 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 were adopted.

4.2 It is also noted that issues surrounding Quality Council Status carried with them significant resource implications particularly for the smaller Parish Councils.

4.3 It was acknowledged by Members that both the future development of Area Action Partnerships and the current Boundary Commission study on existing electoral boundaries were likely to impact on the future governance of Local Councils though as yet it was unclear what that impact would be.

4.4 The Policy Scrutiny Panel considers that the following Recommendations will therefore assist in enabling an enhanced level of future partnership working between Local Councils and the Principal Authority.

## **Recommendations**

- 1). That Durham County Council be requested to support in principle the development of a Joint Charter with all Parish/Town Councils.
- 2). That Durham County Council be requested to offer appropriate financial assistance to Parish Councils to support their efforts to attain Quality Council Status.
- 3). That Durham County Council be requested to offer appropriate practical assistance to Parish Councils to support their efforts to attain Quality Council Status.
- 4) That Durham County Council be requested to consider the establishment of a Joint Parish/Town Council Liaison Group made up of Local Council representatives and County Council Members.



## Economic Scrutiny Panel

### Review of Community Development

#### 1. Background

- 1.1 The work of the Economic and Community Development team had been brought to the attention of Economic Scrutiny Panel through their excellent SRB work this was originally scrutinised in July, 2005. SRB funding is no longer available but Economic and Community Development teams have continued to work closely with the communities within the District completing many successful projects.
- 1.2 The Community Development Team was set up following a restructure in 2005.
- 1.3 The Panel were eager to discover what is going well, what the current situation is and how the excellent practice can be continued in the new Unitary Authority.

#### 2. Findings

- 2.1 The Community Development structure is not replicated in any of the other seven Councils in County Durham. The work carried out by the Team is unique, they work with community groups and individuals on a range of projects, they help to build capacity and confidence
- 2.2 The Community Development Team have developed a 'hands on' approach and there is one Community Development Officer (CDO) for every three villages. The CDOs help groups and individuals in various ways from filling application forms for funding at the beginning to seeing a project all the way through to the end.
- 2.3 Since the team was formed in 2005 over 300 new groups have been supported this is an average of 87 groups per month being supported. The team has been directly responsible for securing approximately £3 million of funding for City of Durham District local groups and residents. This figure does not include projects where officers have had limited responsibility or where officers have just made recommendations.
- 2.4 Community Development Officer Activity Grants were established in June 2006. The grants allow CDO's to use their discretion to distribute funds to projects within their zone. Up to February 2008 a total of £91,266 had been distributed to local community groups.
- 2.5 The Community Development Team is not subject to National Performance Indicators therefore they have developed 12 outputs which are recorded. Therefore monitoring their own progress and recording how grants benefit the local groups and communities. A list of the 12 outputs is attached at Appendix 1.
- 2.6 The team have also assisted with a wide range of corporate exercises relating to most departments of the Authority

#### 3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That the City of Durham Community Development Team be commended for their excellent work and achievements over the last 3 years.
- 3.2 That the Durham County Council adopts the City of Durham model of Community Development as a framework in order to provide a level of service across the County equal to current best practise and to provide a solid foundation on which the relevant LGR workstreams and DCC Directorates can build upon.

## Appendix 1

### ■ Outputs to CDO grants June 2006 – February 2008

Outputs are attached to the previously highlighted Community Development Activity Grants in order that we may effectively monitor how our grants benefit the local groups and communities we fund. Outputs as at February 2008 were as below:

Output	Definition	Actual
1A	No. of employed people trained obtaining qualifications	27
1A(i)	No. of unemployed people trained obtaining qualifications	12
1A(ii)	No. of 1A or 1A(i) who are female	20
1A(iii)	No. of 1A or 1A(i) who are from minority backgrounds	6
1B	No. of training programmes supported	13
2A	No. of young people benefiting from projects to promote personal and social development	7464
2B	No. of older people (60+) benefiting from projects to promote personal and social development	3924
3A	No. of community safety initiatives	11
4A	No. of new community health opportunities supported	46
4Ai	No. of people accessing these new opportunities	6425
5A	No. of new community sports opportunities supported	252
5A(i)	No. of people accessing these new opportunities	7702
6A	No. of new community cultural opportunities supported	1205
6A(i)	No. of people accessing these new opportunities	10794
7A	No. of voluntary organisations/community groups supported	394
8A	No. of individuals involved in voluntary work	2224



**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**8 December 2008**  
**DECISIONS TAKEN BY PORTFOLIO MEMBERS**

No.	Portfolio Member	Nature of Decision	Date
1	Councillor Reynolds	<p>Application to dedicate/dispose of land to the rear of St Mary Magdalene Church St Mary's Road Carrville from Belmont Parish Council for use as a memorial garden.</p> <p>Recommended that subject to contract and conditions that 750 sq m or thereabouts be offered to the applicant.</p>	13.10.08
2	Councillor Van Zwanenberg (legal)	<p>Correspondence received from Charles Barker of HJ Banks Ltd developer of site at Neville House and Sheraton House Nevilles Cross Durham who entered into a unilateral undertaking with the city council to at their own costs and expense to use their reasonable endeavours to procure the construction of a new public footpath link from the northern boundary of the application site to the A690 trunk road known as Crossgate Peth on a line to be agreed with the council to be completed prior to the completion of the sale of the residential units to be constructed on Phase 2. Due to another development close to the site that footpath can no longer be constructed.</p> <p>HJ Banks Ltd have been in correspondence with Mr P Herbert of Durham City Council planning section and who has confirmed that it is no longer possible for the footpath to be installed and therefore that HJ Banks Ltd have used all their reasonable endeavours to construct the footpath but is now impossible. Recommended that consent to the discharge of the condition in light of the fact that the construction of the footpath is no longer possible due to further development.</p>	19.10.08
3	Councillor Woods	<p>Application received to Grant a temporary road closure for various roads on Monday, 5 November 2008 in order to hold Firework Display between the hours of 4.00 p.m. and 10.00 p.m.</p> <p>Recommended that an Order be made in accordance with the provisions of Section 21 of the Town Police Clauses Act 1847 authorising the temporary closure.</p>	22.10.08
4	Councillor Southwell (legal)	<p>By virtue of a tenancy agreement dated 30 September 1997, Mr &amp; Mrs Lightfoot occupy an area of council land to the rear of their property. The annual rent of £100 demanded in July 2008 remains outstanding despite reminders addressed to the tenants. The council could opt to recover the annual rent</p>	6.10.08

		only but not terminate the lease itself. However, this would enable the tenants to remain in occupation during any civil proceedings and it is suggested therefore that in addition the council takes steps to terminate the lease upon the given of 3 months notice in accordance with the terms of the lease. Recommended to agree to taking proceedings against the tenants for recovery of the annual rent of £100 in addition to giving notice of termination of the Lease.	
5	Councillor Reynolds	An application has been received from Mr Chapman of 47 Magdalene Avenue, Carrville enquiring if the Council would consider selling to him land adjacent to his property for use as off street parking Recommended that subject to contract and certain conditions an area of 23 square metres or thereabouts be offered to the applicant on terms to be agreed by the Council Valuer	24.10.08
6	Councillor Reynolds	Application to purchase council owned land at Front Street Coxhoe received from the Coxhoe Banner Group enquiring if the council would consider the sale of an area of council owned land. The Group would intent to place a memorial pit wheel on the site for the benefit of the village as a whole. Recommended that the application be approved	24.10.08
7	Councillor Reynolds	An application has been received from Mr Pearson of 32 Grey Ridges, Brandon enquiring if the Council would consider selling to him land adjacent to his property for use as garden only. Recommend that the application be refused	5.11.08
8	Councillor Reynolds	An application received from Mr Pouton of 6 High Shaws Brandon enquiring if the council would consider selling to him an area of council land adjacent to his property. He intends to use the land as additional garden and to afford a greater degree of privacy. Recommended that the application be put through the usual land application procedure.	17.11.08
9	Councillor Reynolds	Application received from Durham County Council enquiring if the council would consider dedicating to them land at Gray Avenue Sherburn Village. The County Council require the land for highway safety. Recommended that subject to contract and under conditions an area of approximately 102 sq m or thereabouts be dedicated to the County Council.	17.11.08
10	Councillor Reynolds	Application received from Mr & Mrs Stewart of 27 Front Street Broompark enquiring if the council would consider selling to them an area of land adjacent to their property. They intend	24.11.08

		to use the land as additional garden. Recommended that the application be refused	
11	Councillor Reynolds	An application has been received from Mr Farrell of 47 Jubilee Crescent, Sherburn Hill enquiring that consideration be given regarding renewal of a Grazing Licence which expired in October 2008 Recommended that the Licence be renewed for a further 12 months subject to revision of Licence fee	20.11.08