

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
COASTAL AREA FORUM**

HELD ON WEDNESDAY 28 JANUARY 2009

Present:

Representing the District Council:

Councillor P. Stradling (Chair)
Councillors A. Burnip, R. Burnip,
Mrs. E.M. Connor, R. Crute and
G. Patterson

Representing the County Council:

Councillors D. Boyes and A. Cox

Representing Parish Councils:

Councillors W. Hill, Mrs. M. Robinson
and T. Phillips - Horden Parish Council

Councillor W.B. Underwood - Monk Hesleden
Parish Council

K. Gray - Horden North Residents Association

J. Barnett and Pat Barnett - Horden Colliery
Residents Association

Mr. Archbold, H. Wilson, D. Wilson and E.
Rowe

1. OPENING INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed everyone to the final Coastal Area Forum and thanked everyone for all their contributions and support over the years. He thanked the Democratic Services Officer for the support she had given him as Chair.

2. FOLLOW UP FROM LAST MEETING AND CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES

(i) Confirmation of the Minutes

The Minutes of the last meeting held on 29 October 2008, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were agreed.

3. SELECTIVE LICENSING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW

The Head of Housing explained that housing in Durham was provided by the seven Districts and at present, Durham County Council had no input into the service. The Director of Housing had been appointed and the remainder of how the Directorate would be structured had been circulated that day. With regard to Council housing, nothing would change. Four years ago, Easington District Council transferred the management of their housing stock to East Durham Homes and that arrangement would remain. There was an ALMO at Wear

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Valley, Durham City did their housing in-house, Sedgefield was currently going through a stock transfer to a housing association, Derwentside and Chester-le-Street had transferred their housing stock to a housing association. There were no proposals at present to change how any of the organisations operated.

With regard to private sector housing, details were still to be decided and there would be a single financial assistance policy for private home owners. The Senior Management Structure had been released that day and appointments would take place in March.

The new authority would be looking at all issues for the whole of the County although the re-structure did not change any of the housing issues and still had the same challenges to face.

S. Janes explained that with regard to selective licensing, a designation in the Wembley area of Easington had been approved. Selective licensing was about raising standards of management in private rented properties. There was a lot of landlords and some that did not take responsibility for their tenants or the houses. There were issues in a lot of private rented properties across the District and in submitting the bid for selective licensing, they had to look at statistics which took months of gathering data.

Selective licensing in the Wembley area came into force on 10 February 2009 and all private landlords would need to apply for a licence. If they did not, there were financial penalties and a fine of up to £20,000. Three prosecutions had been taken in Gateshead and had been successful. They were learning from how Gateshead and Sedgefield had operated their selective licensing which had been in operation for a year.

S. Janes explained that she had had a lot of questions as to why the Wembley area was chosen when information and data had been gathered, the amount of data was staggering. Data came from partners including Police, house prices, turnover of tenants and anti social behaviour. Each licence would come with conditions and they were not asking for any more than the basic standards, for example, regular gas checks, management procedure in place, tenancy agreement, procedures for vetting tenants. They had to be satisfied that the landlord was a fit and proper person.

J. Barnett explained that this was a good scheme for sorting out anti-social behaviour. A lot of powers that the local authority had, would come into play. He commented that the environmental staff at Easington were working very well but he felt that it was necessary to tighten up on landlords who did not care about their properties. He queried what would happen when the authority transferred to Durham County Council and would the procedure run smoothly.

S. Janes explained that the designation for the Wembley area was for five years and Durham County Council was committed to selective licensing.

The Head of Housing explained that the challenge was using the new authority to get selective licensing in other areas. There could be efficiencies in staff experience and knowledge.

Councillor Boyes congratulated staff on receiving the designation and queried what the situation was with regard to contacting some absent landlords and if all of the landlords had come on board with the scheme.

S. Janes explained that landlords had been contacted on several occasions. There were some absent landlords who had not replied and a meeting had been held two weeks ago and some had attended. Information had been sent out and they had been kept fully informed. Council tax records had also been checked to make sure that distribution lists were up to date. A pro forma had been distributed and they had to request an application pack. They had been given one month to reply. If they did not reply, there were procedures to follow and three months notice could be served and then court action. If the landlord was fined, then the District Council would take on the management of the property until they could find a fit and proper licence holder.

AGREED that the information given be noted.

4. AREA ACTION PARTNERSHIPS

J. Bellis, LSP Co-ordinator explained that the East Durham Local Strategic Partnership would be replaced by the Area Action Partnerships (AAP) on 1 April 2009. The County Council's proposal for unitary status had outlined the model for community engagement and local partnership working through the development of twelve to fourteen AAP's. A stakeholder and public consultation had been held in July - September 2008 and a report had been considered by Durham County Council for fourteen AAP's across the county. There would be one for Easington, based on the existing boundaries.

To date, the Areas and Participation work stream had worked on the geography, function, governance, broad criteria and processes for area member budgets and the transition from the District LSP's to AAP's. The proposed functions of the AAP's were based around engagement, empowerment, local action and performance. There needed to be further clarity between AAP's contributing towards the Local Area Agreement outcomes and ability to focus on local priorities.

Each AAP would focus on a small number of priorities and there would be a neighbourhood level underneath. There would be a lead officer for the Easington area and an AAP Co-ordinator will be appointed. The AAP would meet twice per year to consider issues such as defining local priorities and agreeing an annual local plan. An Area Board would meet initially on a monthly basis to consider issues such as delivery against the local plan and manage and monitor spending.

The Area Board that would be held twice yearly would be open to anybody and have senior representation from partner agencies. The Area Board would use the thirds model, one third elected members, one third members of the public and one third representatives of partner organisations and meet on a monthly basis. This may change to quarterly and would look at all areas of the delivery of the plan.

J. Bellis explained that there would be neighbourhood budgets which replaced the former member budgets and would be £50,000 per unitary ward to spend on individual projects or service/facilities improvements and there would be a minimum spend of £2,000. Final recommendations for quarterly spend for Members must be in discussion with the Board and uncommitted funds would go back to the Council's central reserves unless approval was sought.

£250,000 was to be allocated to each AAP of which £100,000 was to cover admin and staffing costs and £150,000 for local initiatives.

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There would be launch meetings for the AAPs. This was only the start of the process and, if successful, they would evolve and the framework agreed would amend and change. The AAP's were only one form of the engagement mechanism and other processes would remain for communities to influence services. Buildings were currently being looked at to identify potential accommodation for the AAP Co-ordinators within the communities as well as meeting locations for forums and boards. The recruitment of the AAP Co-ordinators have been fast tracked and would be in post for April.

Mr. Barnett queried how AAP's would relate to Parish Councils. J. Bellis explained that there would be seven places for elected members. The Chair explained that of the seven elected representatives, one would be a Parish Council member. How the person would be selected was unclear and one of the suggestions was to use the Local Authority of Parish and Town Councils to choose their representative. Parish Councils were entities in their own right and responsibility may increase and extend them.

Councillor Mrs. Connor explained that if there were only seven elected representatives, there would only be seven wards represented across the District and queried if there was any possibility of having more places.

The Chair explained that the County Council had accepted that there would be twenty-one members on the board and it had been agreed that Scrutiny would monitor the AAP's. If they were not operating effectively, then changes would be made. The LSP in Easington had been reasonably successful and the most successful in the County and only two District Councillors were represented on that.

Councillor Boyes explained that the Boards were to be open to the public and would be transparent and people could go along to board meetings.

J. Barnett queried if there would be a mechanism in place to feed back to the public. J. Bellis explained that there would be elected Members and members from the community sitting on the boards and there would be an AAP Co-ordinator for the area.

Councillor Crute explained that the AAP's were going to mirror the LSP. He was the District Council's representative on the LSP and there had always been a consensus agreement on where the funding would be expended. Easington LSP had been assessed and it came out as one of the top performing LSP's in the country.

Councillor Burnip explained that a prime example of community engagement had been through the Easington and Horden Pathfinder which had engaged with community groups and had a good working relationship with the Police.

The Chair commented that the timescales for the implementation of the Local Government Review had been very tight and Councillors would still provide the same service although it may take longer for them to do so as they represented more people than previous.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.