

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE  
NORTH AREA FORUM**

**HELD ON WEDNESDAY 25 APRIL 2007**

Present:

**Representing the District of Easington**

Councillor Mrs. J. Maitland (Chair),  
Councillors E. Bell, Mrs. G. Bleasdale,  
B. Burn, P.J. Campbell, Mrs. S. Mason,  
D. Myers, Mrs. A. Naylor, C. Patching.

**Representing Town/Parish/County Councils**

R. Olaman – Dalton Le Dale Parish Council  
B Allen – Seaham Town Council  
E. Mason – Seaham Town Council/Durham County Council  
K Younger – Seaham Town Council

**Residents**

A S Badwal, R Blair, W A Place, D B Glover,  
L Morris, V. Morris, C. Halls

Apologies:

R. Davison, A. Napier

**1. CHAIR'S COMMENTS**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the District Council's North Area Forum and introduced herself and the Officers present. A representative from the Customer Services Section was also present to take any individual queries at the end of the meeting.

**2. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES**

The Minutes of the last meeting held on 25 October 2006 were **AGREED**.

**3. REVIEW OF DISTRICT COUNCIL'S CORPORATE ENFORCEMENT POLICY**

K. Parkinson, Environmental Health and Licensing Manager explained that the Council's Corporate Enforcement Policy set out a publicly available policy as to how the Council would encourage people to keep within the law. It showed how the Council would deal with any cases within its control where the law was broken or breached. Standards of service the community should expect from the Council's regulatory functions were set out and details were provided of how these would be achieved in the delivery of different and individual services. Details of how the policies and standards would be monitored and reviewed were also provided. The Policy applied to: -

- Town and Country Planning
- Building Control
- Private Sector Housing
- Anti-Social Behaviour

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- Commercial Enforcement.

The aim of the Policy was to ensure that clear standards were set out for enforcement. There should be openness and information should be provided clearly. The District Council wanted to be helpful in providing advice and be consistent on how the law was used and must always be used in a proportionate way. To obtain a copy of the Policy, members of the public could contact: -

- Envirocall on 0191 5275040
- By E.Mail - - [environment@easington.gov.uk](mailto:environment@easington.gov.uk)
- a Customer Services representative
- write to Envirocall at the Council Offices
- the District Council's Website - [www.easington.gov.uk](http://www.easington.gov.uk)

**AGREED** that the information given, be noted.

#### 4. **DOG CONTROL ORDER FOR THE DISTRICT OF EASINGTON**

The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager explained that the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act came into force in 2005 and gave Local Authorities new powers. A Dog Control Order would replace existing controls that the Council had under the Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996. It was an offence to foul in designated areas and there was a £50 fixed penalty notice and up to £1,000 on prosecution in court.

Approximately 100 spot fines were issued each year and 400 - 500 stray dogs were seized. Approximately 900 complaints from residents were received and investigated.

Preventative measures included dog-waste bins, warning signs, publicity and education, warning letters, area clean ups and free dog chipping. If an area needed cleaning, residents could contact Envirocall and request that this be done. Last year, a free dog chipping scheme was introduced and 1000 dogs were chipped the previous year.

K Parkinson explained that there were problems with the existing law and new estates could not be added to designated areas. The level of spot fines could be increased above £50 and could only be limited to dog fouling. The benefits of a Dog Control Order included:

- brings in additional controls
- extends the designated area where dog owners were required to clean up their dog faeces;
- designating areas where owners must keep their dogs on a lead;
- designating areas where dogs were prohibited;

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- designated areas where a person could only take a specified maximum number of dogs.

Restrictions needed to be realistic and enforceable and easy for the public to understand. Restrictions must also take account of dog owner's needs and required good signage and publicity.

In designating dog control areas the Council proposed to apply no fouling to all built up areas. A decision needed to be made on which areas would be dog on lead only, which areas the dog prohibition would apply and if the Council wanted to apply a maximum limit to the number of dogs a person could walk.

There were a number of options which could be taken: -

### **Option 1**

A simple approach, which would designate no fouling, controls only. The areas covered included

- target fouling as a priority concern
- easy to enforce
- easy for residents to understand
- easy to publicise and cheaper.

### **Option 2**

Applying no foul controls as Option 1 and have limited amount of dog on lead controls and dog prohibitions where problems justified: -

- more complex to enforce;
- more complex to understand;
- more signage required;
- may be more costly

### **Option 3**

The complete mix of these controls applied across the district with specific controls to suit Town/Parish Council land:

- required joint enforcement approach;
- harder to understand and required extensive signage;
- more costly and would take longer to implement

Councillor E. Mason asked if Council policy could be changed once it had been approved. K. Parkinson advised that the policy would be reviewed regularly.

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Mr. D. Glover made reference to Seaham beach and the amount of sewerage that was dumped by Northumbrian Water. Mr. Glover suggested that as well as signage related to dogs, Northumbrian Water should be requested to erect signage along the shoreline to advise visitors not to enter the water or eat shellfish due to the amount of sewerage in the water.

Mr. R. Blair, advised that local community groups were keen to be involved with the District Council in relation to this, and queried how this could be achieved. K. Parkinson advised that he was happy to meet with local community groups to discuss the issues involved. It was explained that consultation was ongoing and any comments made at this meeting would be taken on board.

Mr. Blair referred to the fact that children under the age of 12, who allowed their dogs to foul, could not be fined. Whilst he understood this, he suggested that a letter be forwarded to the parents of the children involved, advising that they had been lucky to avoid a fine.

Councillor R. Olaman queried if a Parish Council could designate play areas as no fouling areas. K. Parkinson confirmed this could be done.

Councillor R.J. Todd advised that implementing legislation was all well and good but it had to be enforceable. The District Council currently had four Dog Wardens that operated across the District and resources were scarce. K. Parkinson advised that the District Council did target areas based on knowledge of where dog fouling was at its worst. He was aware that walkways, particularly at access points, were heavily fouled. However, these areas were classed as being in the countryside and if the Dog Wardens were instructed to patrol them, it would result in fewer patrols in the towns and villages.

Councillor R.J. Todd asked how successful the District Council's dog bins had been. K. Parkinson advised that in some areas the bins had been very successful.

Councillor E. Bell advised that a simple approach was the best option. Residents wanted clean streets and often the District Council would clean the streets and within minutes they were fouled again. He queried what communication and publicity was undertaken regarding the Council's strategy. K. Parkinson advised that the District Council regularly provided articles for InfoPoint and regular press releases were issued.

Councillor E. Mason agreed that a commonsense approach was needed and queried what the District Council intended to do regarding fouling by horses. K. Parkinson advised that unfortunately fouling by horses was not covered by this legislation.

Councillor Mrs. A. Naylor queried how long offenders who were fined, had to pay. K. Parkinson advised that it was 14 days or longer if the resident agreed to pay. There was also a scheme in place where the £80 fine could be reduced to £50 if it was paid quickly. Councillor Naylor asked if the law restricted the number of dogs that could be walked on a lead. K. Parkinson advised that there was no law to restrict the number of dogs walked on a lead.

Councillor Mrs. G. Bleasdale advised that there were severe problems at Marlborough, Seaham. Marlborough was an open plan estate and many dog owners allowed their dogs to foul on the grass. K. Parkinson advised that he would refer this to the Dog Wardens to patrol the area.

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Councillor Mrs. A. Naylor suggested that the District Council erect cameras in "hot spot" areas to catch offenders. K. Parkinson advised that this was a very complex area and the District Council only had one set of equipment which was used to target anti-social behaviour rather than dog fouling.

The Chair made reference to dogs that fouled on school fields and asked who was responsible for these areas of land. K. Parkinson advised that Durham County Council enforced and issued fines on these areas of land.

Councillor C. Patching advised that many people, who did not live in Seaham, visited the beach with their dogs on a weekend. As they did not live in the town, they felt less responsible for cleaning up after themselves. He appreciated that there was limited capacity with regard to resources but suggested that the Wardens provide a "meet and greet" service to visitors as they pulled into the car park with their dogs. He also suggested that poop scoop dispensers be erected on Seaham beach.

Mr. Place, stated that if the District Council proposed to stop residents walking their dogs on the beach, would they provide an alternative area. K. Parkinson advised that there would be a designated area where people could walk their dogs.

Councillor P. Campbell advised that the car boot sale held at Seaham attracted dog owners who allowed their dogs to foul. Councillor C Patching advised that there should be flexibility and seasonal regulations should be investigated i.e. no dogs on the beach between June and September. However, over the winter months, this could be relaxed. K. Parkinson advised that this was something that could be investigated further.

**AGREED** that the information given, be noted.

### 5. **YOUR QUESTION TIME - YOUR SAY IN SERVICE DELIVERY - YOUR CALL**

#### (i) **Junction of North Railway Street/Vine Place**

Mr. D. Glover referred to a property at the junction of North Railway Street and Vine Place which had an old sign erected on its gable end which was deteriorating. Mr. Glover was worried that the deterioration of the sign was increasing and very shortly a piece of Seaham's history would be lost forever.

Mr. Glover was advised that this matter had been referred to Seaham Town Council who had discussed the property in question with the Story of Seaham Group and were investigating the possibility of having the sign repaired. This property was privately owned and no work to the property could be undertaken without the owners consent.

Mr. Glover provided details of legislation, which he believed would allow the District Council to carry out works to the property, and requested that this be investigated further.

K. Parkinson advised that this was a planning issue and G. Reed, Head of Planning and Building Control Services, would need to investigate.

**AGREED** that the information be referred to G. Reed, Head of Planning and Building Control Services for investigation.

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### (ii) **Mine Water**

Mr. D. Glover expressed concern that since the last pit closures in County Durham, minewater was rising at both Horden and Dawdon.

Mr. Glover explained that if the minewater was allowed to continue to rise it could result in contamination of the Durham aquifer. There was a temporary treatment plant at Horden and Mr. Glover asked what the current situation was at Dawdon, Seaham.

It was suggested that this query be referred to the Coal Authority and Northumbrian Water.

**AGREED** that the matter be referred to the Coal Authority and Northumbrian Water.

### (iii) **Noise Nuisance**

Mr. Place advised that an ice cream van regularly played its music after 7pm which caused a nuisance to residents. K. Parkinson advised that it was illegal to play music after 7pm and the District Council would investigate.

**AGREED** that K. Parkinson investigate and reply direct to Mr. Place.

### (iv) **Queen Alexander Road, Dawdon**

Mr. Badwal explained that he had experienced problems related to youths congregating at his shop, particularly youths who were not from the area, and causing nuisance and anti-social behaviour. He advised that the Police regularly moved the youths on but within a short space of time, they were back. Mr. Badwal provided details of a recent incident where a youth had broken his shop door. The Police apprehended the culprit, took witness statements and took the case to court. Mr. Badwal explained that the case was ultimately thrown out and he felt very frustrated that no further action could be taken.

K. Parkinson explained that the Street Wardens regularly patrolled this area. Mr. Badwal explained that he had not seen a Street Warden at his property in over a year. K. Parkinson advised that the District Council were aware of the ongoing problems in this area. A strategy to collect as much evidence as possible to enable an in-depth investigation to be undertaken was put in place, however, nobody came forward with any evidence of anti-social behaviour. Mr. Blair confirmed that previously a schedule of action to be taken was drawn up and a strategy was implemented. K. Parkinson advised that statements were asked for but nobody came forward with any reports and anti-social behaviour appeared to have reduced.

**AGREED** that the information given, be noted.

### (v) **Local Government Re-organisation**

Mr. B. Blair expressed concern at the proposals for Local Government Re-organisation in County Durham and what effect it would have on Area

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Forum meetings and other similar type meetings which were regularly attended by community groups.

The Government were consulting on the proposal to abolish all local District Councils and Durham County Council and to establish a single unitary council for the whole of County Durham.

It was explained that at this moment in time it was unclear what the outcome would be.

**AGREED** that the information given, be noted.

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