

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
REGENERATION SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

HELD ON MONDAY 8 OCTOBER 2007

Present:- Councillor D. Raine (Chair)
Councillors S. Bishop, Mrs.
S. Forster, H. High, A.J.
Holmes, M. Routledge, Mrs.
B.A. Sloan, D.J. Taylor-Gooby
and C. Walker

Apologies:- Councillor Mrs E M Connor

1. **THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** held on 17 September 2007, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.

2. **MATTERS ARISING**

**Department of Health's Easington Health Profile 2007
(Minute No. 6 refers)**

Members raised concerns regarding alcohol abuse in young people and suggested that further investigations be carried out. The Chair explained that Graeme Greig had advised that he would give updates at the request of the Committee. It was suggested that this be included in the work programme and the appropriate Officer attend a future meeting.

RESOLVED that alcohol abuse in young people be added to the work programme and the appropriate Officer invited to a future meeting.

3. **THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE** held on 25 September 2007, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were submitted.

**Item 4 – Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy and Empty Homes Officer Post
(AOB)**

Members welcomed the creation of the post of Empty Homes Officer within the Housing Services.

RESOLVED that the information contained within the Minutes, be noted.

4. **PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

There were no members of the public present.

5. **FEEDBACK FROM SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**

At the last meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board held on 1 October 2007, the following issues were discussed:-

- * Scrutiny of the Childrens Trust
- * Correspondence from East Durham Local Strategic Partnership regarding the work carried out by the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee

RESOLVED that the information given be noted.

6. SERVICE UNIT PERFORMANCE REPORTING

(i) Environmental Health and Licensing Unit Performance Report 2006/2007 Outturn and 1st Quarter 2007/2008 - April 2007 to end of June 2007

Consideration was given to the report of the Environmental Health and Licensing Manager which provided information on the performance of the Commercial Enforcement and Licensing Teams of the Environmental Health and Licensing Unit, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Work on the Environmental Health and Licensing Unit was divided according to teams. The report provided details on the commercial and enforcement team which included food safety and infectious disease control, food premises inspection, complaints relating to food safety or food premises, cases of food related infectious disease and outbreaks of infectious disease, health and safety at work enforcement, inspection of premises for health and safety, complaints relating to health and safety, notifications of workplace accidents, pollution control, authorised process inspections, assessment of local air quality, investigation of pollution, noise and public health complaints from commercial and industrial activities and contaminated land assessments and consultations.

The report also gave the position statement on the licensing team. An addendum to the report had been circulated to Members which related to the code and guidelines to determine if an applicant was a fit and proper person to hold a hackney carriage/private hire drivers licence. An explanation of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 and the Rehabilitation Periods were also circulated.

At the end of the financial year 2006/2007, there were 93 hackney carriages and 161 private hire vehicles. From 1 April 2007, another 12 private hire vehicles were licensed for the first time. Each vehicle was inspected visually by Enforcement Officers six times per year to ensure its safety and condition. This was in addition to the two mechanical inspections they were required to undertake with the Council's Vehicle Inspector. 100% of visual inspections were completed in the last financial year and the programme was on schedule for this year.

In the last financial year, the Regulatory Appeals Panel had met twice to determine appeals regarding drivers who had appealed regarding refusal or suspension of their licences. In both instances, the appeals were upheld and the drivers had their licence granted or reinstated. In the first quarter of this financial year, two further appeals had been heard and the Panel had granted both licences.

Details were given of the numbers of premises with licences under the new Licensing Act 2003. All pubs in the District had been visited at least once during out of hours enforcement. One of those operations led to the review of the premises licence for Horden Big Club, the licence was subsequently revoked by the Licensing Committee with video footage forming part of the evidence.

A Member referred to the investigation of pollution, noise and public health complaints from commercial and industrial activities and queried how they were resolved. The Commercial Enforcement Manager explained that the Council had a Customer Charter on Statutory Nuisance and attempted to solve by negotiation rather than issuing a notice. Very few notices were issued on the commercial sector.

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The Commercial Enforcement Manager explained that statistics and information on the smoking legislation that had recently been introduced, would be given at future meetings. Early indications were that this legislation had been very successful.

A Member queried why low risk category inspections had been removed from the programme. The Commercial Enforcement Manager explained that in line with Food Safety Act Code of Practice, they had advised that low risk premises could be subject to alternative enforcement strategies. A questionnaire was distributed to ascertain if the risk had increased. If the risk had increased, then an Environmental Health Officer would visit the premises.

A Member referred to the Argus Butterfly in Peterlee and queried what the current situation was. The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager explained that Environmental Health only had powers to make sure it was tidy and boarded up. If the premises was causing an obstruction to public areas, then the Council had certain powers to serve notice and have the area cleaned up. This would be dealt with by the Planning Enforcement Team.

A Member explained that she had received a lot of complaints regarding the taxis in the Asda car park. The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager explained that there were not enough taxi ranks in Peterlee and Asda had a private arrangement with the taxi company and was beyond the Council's control.

A Member referred to the large supermarkets and queried if it was easier for the children to obtain alcohol. The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager explained that the large supermarkets had strict staff. A lot of the supermarkets joined a scheme where they challenged anyone if they looked under 21. Test purchasing was carried out on off licences and the Council did prosecute where necessary. The Community Safety Partnership worked together with Trading Standards, Police and the District Council.

A Member referred to the smoking shelters and queried if there were any guidelines. The Commercial Enforcement Manager explained that a leaflet had been distributed to all clubs and pubs and they were consulted by the Planning Department on planning applications for the smoking shelters. He added that he would circulate a copy of the leaflet to Members.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their report.

RESOLVED that the information given be noted.

(ii) **Asset and Property Management**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Asset and Property Management which provided Members with performance information in relation to the Asset and Property Management Section for 2007/08, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The Head of Asset and Property Management explained that the Council's property portfolio comprised 339 property assets and was managed in an operational estate and a non-operational estate. There were currently 9 staff employed within the Section, including the Head of Service, 3 valuation staff, 1 Facilities Manager and an administrator, 2 car parking security officers and 1 caretaker. Subsequent to a recent restructure within the Unit, an additional 4 posts had been approved and were

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currently being advertised in order to appoint additional staff to meet the ever increasing demands that were placed on the Unit.

As part of the re-structure, the Unit had been divided into specialist work areas:-

- * **Valuation Services** - which included Asset Management which was responsible for preparing and viewing the Council's Asset and Management Plan;
- * **Acquisitions and Disposals** - This was responsible for identifying surplus property assets, realising development potential and marketing and negotiating terms for the disposal of land and properties. During the current year, the Section had also facilitated 122 Right to Buy valuations and process 97 applications for release of restrictive covenants and 7 applications for minor land purchases.
- * **Property Management** - responsible for managing the commercial estate.
- * **Facilities Management** - responsible for the maintenance of 84 operational and non-operational properties including the Council complex.

Performance Indicators had been developed and included in Appendix 1 which formed part of the Unit Service Plan for 2007/2008. These were a new set of indicators that reflected the priorities and objectives of the newly restructured Unit. Details were given of the key projects in Facilities Management, Asset Management, Acquisitions and Disposals.

A Member referred to disposal of assets and queried if they had to be sold at the market price. The Head of Asset and Property Management explained that the Council could dispose of land at less than the market value but this decision would be made by Members. The Council could use its powers as long as the land would be used for social and well being issues but this had to be proven.

A Member asked for an update on the North Blunts School Site. The Head of Asset and Property Management explained that the site was owned by Durham County Council and the District Council had restrictive covenants on it. The site was also tied into the ITEC site and discussions were still ongoing.

A Member commented that she applauded the idea of a one stop shop in Building 9.

The Chair thanked the Head of Asset and Property Management for his report.

RESOLVED that the information given be noted.

CERTIFIED TRUE RECORD

CHAIR

DATE

