

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
REGENERATION SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON MONDAY, 2ND JUNE, 2008**

Present: Councillor D. Raine (Chair)
Councillors S. Bishop, Mrs. E.M. Connor, H. High,
A.J. Homes, Mrs. B.A. Sloan and C. Walker

Also present: Councillor R.J. Todd - Executive Member for Housing

Apologies: Councillors D.J. Taylor-Gooby and Mrs. S. Forster

1. **THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** held on 21st April, 2008, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were agreed.

2. **MATTERS ARISING**

(i) **Dalton-le-Dale Beck (AOB)**
(Minute No. 8 refers)

The Head of Planning and Building Control Services explained that although the flow of the water to the beck had been restored, investigations were still being carried out to ascertain the reason for the water absorbing into the surrounding limestone. It was not unusual in limestone areas for the water to be absorbed.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(ii) **Service Unit Performance Reporting - Housing Services**
(Minute No. 6 refers)

The Chair explained that a letter had been received from East Durham Homes explaining that they had regular meetings with the Executive Member for Housing, the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive and did not feel the necessity to attend the Committee.

The Chair commented that he felt it was difficult to scrutinise East Durham Homes without a representative being made available to answer questions. An invitation would be extended to East Durham Homes for the next position statement.

The Executive Member for Housing advised that he would take the issue up with the Chief Executive of East Durham Homes.

The Scrutiny Support Manager explained that with regard to fire exits in bungalows, information had been received that there were properties which only had one entrance and exit but the Health and Safety Manager had confirmed that there were no health and safety issues relating to them. There were no health and safety concerns and the Council did not have any liability.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

3. **THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE** held on 20th May, 2008, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were submitted.

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 27th May, 2008 the following issues were discussed:-

- * **Momentum : Pathways to Healthcare - Consultation**
- * **District of Easington Scrutiny Annual Report 2007/08**

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

6. **SERVICE UNIT PERFORMANCE REPORTING - PLANNING AND BUILDING CONTROL SERVICES**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Planning and Building Control Services which provided information on the performance of the Planning and Building Control Services Unit, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The Chair referred to the works that were being carried out outside of the Post Office on Seaside Lane and asked for an update on the current situation.

The Head of Planning and Building Control Services explained that the Pet Shop, Post Office and News and Booze in Easington Colliery had been closed because of a burst water main. The burst had washed away a lot of the material in and around the pipe and underneath the three shops. This was an issue for Northumbrian Water and Durham County Council but the District Council had responsibility in terms of the dangerous structure. The District Council's Building Engineer had visited the site and the buildings were found to be dangerous and works were needed to the foundation of the shops.

Northumbrian Water had repaired the leak and the insurance company was involved for the underpinning of the foundation of the shops. The foundations of the shops had been repaired the previous week and it was now for Durham County Council to reinstate the road but they needed to be certain that the buildings were stable. It would be approximately ten days before the road could be reinstated.

The Chair commented that the owner of the businesses were worried that they would lose clientele. The butcher had not been affected but they was losing trade because there was nowhere to park because of the traffic control measures around the shops.

M. Larsen, Building Engineer explained that the extent of the ground that had been washed away from the footpaths and shops was extensive and there had been concerns regarding the stability of the Pet Shop and the Post Office. The insurance company had used a specialist company to design the foundations and work was required to ensure that the erosion had not gone too far. News and Booze was currently being investigated to make sure that they did not need any additional work. With regard to the Pet Shop, the insurance company had advised that part of it needed to be removed because the building had rotated too far. The owner of News

and Booze had been contacted and he was going to assess the damage and it was hoped that a meeting would be held with him.

The Chair queried if Northumbrian Water had accepted responsibility. The Building Engineer explained that they had not denied responsibility but the cause was yet to be established. The pipe had been recently installed and components had been removed for examination, in order to ascertain the cause of the burst. Northumbrian Water's response had been very prompt and they had been on site the same day the pipe had burst.

The Head of Planning and Building Control Services explained that performance was still showing significant year on year improvement exceeding national and Council service targets for major and minor applications during 2007/08 whilst significant performance improvement was also demonstrated for other applications, the end of year turnout fell slightly short of service target and was now within 1% of high quartile performance.

In addition to normal duties, staff had also contributed to workstream and sub-workstream activity designed to recommend appropriate new structures for both the Planning and Building Control and Engineering and Countryside functions within the new authority.

The last six months had been particularly demanding with three large applications requiring detailed consideration and negotiation. Two of the applications, the Centre of Creative Excellence and the Murton Network Village, had been determined in May. The third was the North East Industrial Estate and one major employer had been relocated within the District.

Section 106 monies were now routinely reported to the Development Control and Regulatory Panel and regular reminders were sent to the Town and Parish Councils to generate appropriate schemes and enable the release of funding. At present, £490,000 was available for Section 106 applications. The new requirement for affordable housing provision was now routinely negotiated for appropriate applications.

The draft LDF Core Strategy had been published in May. The document was now out to public consultation for a period of six weeks.

Enhanced programmes of bus shelter replacement and verge hardening works were successfully completed during 2007/08. Three local nature reserves were also declared on land owned by the Council to ensure the continued management of these areas for nature conservation purposes.

Investigations were continuing at Dalton-le-Dale to determine the cause and preferred remedy to address the ground movement that originally caused the loss of the stream. The engineers were currently liaising with other statutory bodies to ensure that any remedial action satisfied the engineering requirement.

A Member referred to the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) and queried if the Council was in fear of over supply of housing estates in villages to the detriment of current estates. The Head of Planning and Building Control Services explained that he had received comments from other towns and villages regarding the number of houses that had been built rather the public sector investment. The market in Easington had changed radically. The RSS required a balancing of houses where jobs were available. The Council needed to make sure they had the right development and there were few sites now available.

A Member explained that he had received complaints from residents that the outcome of planning applications were displayed on the internet before applicants had been advised of the outcome. The Head of Planning and Building Control Services explained that he was not aware that this was happening. Once an application was determined by the panel then the applicant would be informed that week.

A Member referred to the Section 106 monies and queried what type of schemes could be applied for. The Head of Planning and Building Control Services explained that the Council had a policy for provision of a play area on open space or housing estates. Developers often offered a sum of money for existing play areas or open space to be enhanced instead of a play area on site.

A Member queried what reassurances could be given that the Section 106 funding would be ring-fenced once the unitary authority was in existence. The Head of Planning and Building Control Services explained that the legal agreements were robust and the new unitary authority could only expend the monies in accordance with them.

The Chair thanked the Head of Planning and Building Control Service for his report.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

7. **MOMENTUM : PATHWAYS TO HEALTHCARE - CONSULTATION**

The Scrutiny Support Manager explained that correspondence had been received from Carol Langrick, Director of Strategic Service Development County Durham PCT which set out the formal consultation process that commenced that day which detailed roadshows, summit events and meetings which were to be held. The formal document that had been published by the PCT had been circulated at the pre-meeting and identified the two shortlisted sites. Details of the shortlisting process that had been taken into consideration when arriving at the two sites had also been circulated.

The Council had indicated that they wanted to contribute to the consultation process and previous concerns had revolved around a robust public transport infrastructure prior to the new hospital opening. It was suggested that a press release be formulated for Infopoint to advise residents that a public meeting would be held on 9th July at Peterlee Leisure Centre from 1-3pm.

The Chair explained that it was essential that a press release was circulated and he hoped as many people could attend the public meeting to express their views.

Members commented that it was vital that transport links should be investigated and in place and reassurances should be sought.

The Executive Member for Housing explained that a new hospital had been suggested by the Strategic Health Authority ten years ago. There had been numerous studies over the past ten years and the question of access and transport had been raised on many occasions.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the information given, be noted;
- (ii) a press release be distributed through Infopoint.

8. **ADDITIONAL URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS**

In accordance with the Local Government Act, 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, Section 100B(4)(b) the Chair, following consultation with the Proper Officer, agreed that following item of business, not shown on the Agenda, be considered as a matter of urgency.

9. **DISTRICT OF EASINGTON SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2007/08 (AOB)**

Consideration was given to the report of the Scrutiny Support Manager which sought approval of the District of Easington Scrutiny Annual Report 2007/08, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The report highlighted the work undertaken by the Community Services, Resources and Regeneration Services Scrutiny Committees during 2007/8 and set out the proposed areas of work that would form part of the work programme for 2008/9 which were drawn from the Council's Corporate Plan and Transitional Plan which detailed Council priority areas of work over the coming year.

RESOLVED that the District of Easington Scrutiny Annual Report 2007/8 be approved and submitted to full Council for endorsement.