

THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE SERVICE DELIVERY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON MONDAY 11 DECEMBER 2006

Present: Councillor D Raine (Chair)
Councillors S Bishop, J Goodwin,
H High, A J Holmes, Mrs B A Sloan
and D J Taylor-Gooby

Also Present: Councillor G Patterson - Executive Member for Liveability
Councillor F Shaw – Executive Member for Improvement

- 1 **THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** held on 20 November 2006, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.

2 **MATTERS ARISING**

**Planning and Building Control Quarterly Performance Report
(Minute No 4(ii) refers)**

The Scrutiny Support Manager explained that at a meeting of the Audit Committee on 30th November 2006, consideration was given to the report of the Principal Corporate Development Officer entitled "Quarterly Performance Report against Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI's)". During consideration of the report, a Member queried if recent problems experienced with the new I.T. system in Planning and Building Control was having an impact on the service.

The Audit Committee resolved that the query in relation to problems experienced with the new I.T. system in Planning and Building Control Services Unit be referred to the Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee.

The Head of Planning and Building Control Services explained that the Council's I.T. systems had been unavailable during the weekend of 18th and 19th November for essential maintenance. On 20 November 2006, the Planning and Building Control system would not reboot due to a problem with the server for that system. The IT system was under warranty and the Council had a maintenance agreement with the providers, IBM. The system had been out of operation for 3 days whilst waiting for a replacement part.

The following week, the Planning Administration staff had relocated offices but some of the IT ports used for the computers were not working and another 2-3 days were lost that week.

With regard to the maintenance agreement with IBM, the warranty had been upgraded and the Council was now on a 24 hour response. As of Friday the previous week, the IT system was back to normal and assurances were given that performance on planning applications was back on track.

The Scrutiny Support Manager suggested that a report be circulated to the Audit Committee outlining the problems that had been experienced with the Planning and Building Control IT system.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the information given, be noted;
- (ii) a report be circulated by the Audit Committee outlining the problems that had been experienced.

3 **THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE** held on 28 November 2006, 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 **WORK PROGRAMME ISSUES**

(i) **Energy Conservation Report**

Consideration was given to the report of the Energy Manager which provided information on progress with the District of Easington's fuel poverty, energy conservation and utility management schemes, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The District of Easington's Affordable Warmth Strategy sought to maximise external funding opportunities for energy conservation and fuel poverty schemes. Delivery was via the corporate Warm Homes Campaign to provide warmer healthier homes.

Details were given of schemes which assisted vulnerable households within the district:-

(a) **Over 60's Free Insulation Scheme**

215 homes had been insulated through the over 60's scheme at a cost of £97,900;

(b) **Insulation Programme to Council Dwellings**

Over the period August to November 2006, the rolling programme was in Peterlee and 142 properties had been insulated at a cost of £25,000 from the Capital Programme and £64,000 matched funding. Every single property in the area was surveyed and where required works were installed by the contractor. Energy conservation advice was also given. Due to the way some houses were built, certain types of property in Peterlee were unsuitable to have insulation installed;

(c) **Warm Front Scheme**

64 homes had been insulated through the Warm Front Scheme from August to November 2006 at a total cost of £77,750.

Jason Martin, the Fuel Poverty Officer had commenced his post in October 2006. The post was externally funded and aimed to maximise progress in

reducing fuel poverty levels whilst carrying out community events to develop a district wide referral network.

The Energy Manager explained that the District of Easington had taken back the utility management duties from East Durham Homes for all District of Easington public buildings. Bill Nutt, the Utilities Officer would undertake new duties with the objective of achieving best value from the utility accounts in reducing the utility costs in public buildings. All of the buildings had now been surveyed and insulation measures would be installed in all public buildings to reduce energy usage and expenditure. A Utility Management Plan would also be produced to ensure that the Council was achieving the best value from the accounts.

A Member queried if there was a waiting list for the over 60's free insulation. The Energy Manager explained that this was a very popular scheme and did have a waiting list. People were informed that there was a waiting list and were quite happy to wait their turn.

A Member referred to the Peterlee area and explained that a lot of upgrading was currently ongoing to Council houses and asked if the installation was completed at the same time to minimise disruption for tenants. The Energy Manager explained that the Council installation ran across the whole of Peterlee and could be installed prior to any works relating to decent homes.

The Chair queried if the people living in Council houses were means tested for the free insulation. The Energy Manager explained that the installation programme to Council dwellings was not reflective of personal circumstances.

A Member referred to Lancaster Hill in Peterlee and explained that residents had been advised that they could not have insulation installed because they had no loft. The Energy Manager explained that because of the way some of the houses were built in Peterlee, they could not be insulated. If a pitched roof had been installed then the District Council would install a loft hatch if the tenant was willing for the work to be carried out.

The Chair thanked the Energy Manager for his report.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(ii) **Corporate Development Unit and Customer Services Unit Quarterly Performance Report**

Consideration was given to the report of the Assistant Chief Executive which provided information on the performance of the Corporate Development Unit in the period October to December 2006, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The Assistant Chief Executive explained that the report showed progress against the teams indicators in Appendix A. Appendix B detailed the work programme. During the last 2 months the unit had undertaken and delivered a number of key projects as part of the planned workload.

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Key achievements in the period October to December included performance and improvement, work at sub-regional and regional level, community engagement, equality and diversity, organisation and development, project support and policy work.

With regard to performance and improvement, work had also been ongoing with the Director of Finance and Corporate Services to develop a 'Value for Money' approach for the District Council.

With regards to equality and diversity, the District Council had been involved in a pilot with the Disability Rights Commission and Office of Public Management and had developed the publication "Beyond your good intentions". The document was for the benefit of other Local Authorities to help them develop their equality schemes. A copy was available from the Corporate Development Unit.

Work was almost complete on the draft Gypsies and Travellers Strategy for the authority, working with the Community Services Directorate.

The Assistant Chief Executive explained that work had not yet begun on procuring the new performance management system for the Council and work on the review of the community strategy was progressing with partners in the LSP but this had slipped.

The publication of the Local Government White Paper meant that this work had took precedence over some other work areas during November. The team had provided support to East Durham Homes in the pre inspection period and the Supporting People tendering exercise was unplanned but necessary during October. The degree of work needed to support the LAA Board in developing a response to the review of the County Durham Strategic Partnership was also additional to expectations.

Members were advised that the Audit Commission would be visiting the Council Offices on 18, 19 December and 4, 5 January 2007 to inspect the Council's Direction of Travel Statement.

A Member referred to the comments in the annual letter from the Audit Commission and queried the reasoning behind it. The Assistant Chief Executive explained that the Corporate Plan was a thick document which had a combination of high level and low level actions. Some of the detail needed to be taken out and put into individual Service Plans.

A Member queried what 'Direction of Travel' meant. The Assistant Chief Executive explained that the use of resources was regarding finance and performance. 'Direction of Travel' overall looked at how well the District Council was doing against its corporate objectives.

A Member referred to travellers and queried who the responsible authority was as he believed it was Durham County Council.

The Director of Community Services explained that the lead agency was Durham County Council but if the encampment was on land owned by the District Council then Officers would become involved. A draft strategy was being prepared in order to deal with unauthorised encampments on District Council owned land. A report had been considered by the

Executive the previous week and would be considered by the committee at a future meeting.

The Chair thanked the Assistant Chief Executive for her report.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

6 NOTES OF THE SITE VISIT TO PETERLEE LEISURE CENTRE

Consideration was given to the notes of the visit to Peterlee Leisure Centre on 10 November 2006 and the response from Leisure Connections, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The Senior Cultural Development Officer gave details of the response from the Regional Manager at Leisure Connections.

Members were advised that up until the previous week, there was one machine still out of order at Seaham Leisure Centre which was waiting for a replacement part. With regard to the bar area at Seaham, if there was a full scale refurbishment Leisure Connections would be looking to the District Council to contribute. Discussions were ongoing regarding contributions towards this area.

The Senior Cultural Development Officer explained that the lockers at Peterlee Leisure Centre had now been dealt with and repaired.

The Director of Community Services explained that the visit to both Peterlee and Seaham Leisure Centres had brought out a number of issues. With regard to the use of lane ropes during public swimming sessions, assurances had been given from Leisure Connections that there would be no roping off of the pool. The handyman service would also be retained. Leisure Connections had also given the Council a clear undertaking in relation to the standards of cleanliness.

The Chair commented that it was Members' role to make sure that the public received the service they required.

A Member referred to Seaham Leisure Centre and commented that second hand equipment had been installed and it was hoped that a budget would be provided for new equipment at the Leisure Centre.

A Member commented that the hairdryers were often not working in Peterlee Leisure Centre and queried if there was a system in place to ensure that the equipment was in correct working order and replaced quickly. The Senior Cultural Development Officer explained that one of the issues at management level was to have systems in place to check equipment and replace equipment as and when necessary in a timely manner.

Discussion ensued regarding the refurbishment of the main pool at Peterlee Leisure Centre. The Senior Cultural Development Officer explained that a decision was yet to be made whether the pool would be retiled or regouted. Regrouting would give some flexibility on the budget and enable more works to be carried out in the Leisure Centres.

The Executive Member for Improvement explained that he was a paying customer at Seaham Leisure Centre and had been a member of the leisure centre for a year but had never been asked what he thought of the service. He explained that a number of people were referred by their doctors and used the leisure centres. The belts

that were used to measure the pulse had now been stolen and he queried if it was possible for them to be kept somewhere safe and ask people to pay a refundable deposit when using them.

A Member commented that he felt that a representative of Leisure Connections should be in attendance when the Leisure Connection report was being considered. The Senior Cultural Development Officer explained that he would request a representative from Leisure Connections when the Leisure Connections report was next considered.

A Member commented that on the visit to Peterlee Leisure Centre she had spoken to two ladies in the changing rooms who had commented that the leisure centres had improved a lot over the years.

The Director of Community Services explained that during the summer there had been an extra 6,500 attendances due to the free swims and the introduction of the leisure cards was now at around 3,000 participants.

Discussion ensued regarding the number of staff in Seaham Leisure Centre. The Senior Cultural Development Officer explained that Leisure Connections were currently restructuring their staff and the District Council and Trade Unions had made representations regarding this and he would be monitoring service delivery.

Members suggested that the report be brought to the attention of the Executive for their comments. Visits to the Leisure Centres should also be made regularly.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their report.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the information given, be noted;
- (ii) a visit be arranged to Seaham and Peterlee Leisure Centres in the New Year;
- (iii) the report be forwarded to the Executive Member for Health for their comments.

7 ANY 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 items of business, not shown on the Agenda, be considered as a matter of urgency.

8. PERFORMANCE OF EAST DURHAM HOMES (AOB)

The Scrutiny Support Manager explained that at the Special Meeting of the Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee on 1 December, Members agreed in principle to establish a working party to look at the performance monitoring of East Durham Homes.

Councillor D J Taylor-Gooby explained that concern had been expressed by Members that a representative from East Durham Homes was not at the meeting. He advised that he was discussing this matter with the senior management at East Durham Homes.

RESOLVED that a working party be established to look at the performance monitoring of East Durham Homes.

9 **MAINTENANCE OF CLOSED CHURCHYARDS (AOB)**

The Scrutiny Support Manager explained that following the recent Ombudsman case on the maintenance of closed churchyards, a report would be considered at the next meeting. It had been agreed that the members of the public who had attended previous meetings be invited to future meetings regarding the closed churchyards.

RESOLVED that members of the public who had attended previous meetings be invited to the next meeting.

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