

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
SERVICE DELIVERY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

HELD ON MONDAY 29th JANUARY 2007

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

Also Present: Councillor G. Patterson - Executive Member for Liveability
Councillor Mrs. J. Freak - Executive Member for Social
Inclusion and Culture
Mr. G. Whitehead - Premier Waste
Mr. S. McNally, Ms. R. Scott - Gypsy Liaison Service, Durham
County Council
Mr. M. Grinstead - Leisure Connections

1. **THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** held on 8th January 2007, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.
2. **THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE** held on 16th January 2007, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were submitted.

Item 8 - Indemnity for Members and Officers

The Scrutiny Support Manager advised that the Monitoring Officer was arranging a briefing for Members on the implications of the report.

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

3. **PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

There were no members of the public present.

4. **WORK PROGRAMME ISSUES**

(i) **Regeneration and Partnership Unit Performance Report**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Regeneration and Partnerships which provided information on the performance of the Regeneration and Partnerships Unit, informed Members of the forthcoming staffing review of the service and its implications and to receive comments for the purpose of consultation, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Details of the Units performance from 1st July to 30th September 2006 was outlined in the appendices to the report. Progress, achievements and non-achievements were also fully detailed.

The Head of Regeneration and Partnerships explained that a draft staffing review report that outlined the proposed changes to the Unit aligned with the mid-term financial plan until 2010 had been prepared and was currently out to consultation.

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Members were advised that the service had continued to manage and facilitate large infrastructure, investment and development projects.

- * Seaham Town Centre was ahead of schedule
- * The East Durham Link Road would be on site in May/June 2007.
- * The Hawthorn Business Park would be established in 2008/09.

- * The preferred developer would be appointed for Seaham Colliery the following month with a start on site in the summer.
- * English Partnerships were looking to bring forward proposals for the Murton Colliery site.
- * The second phase of work on the Peterlee Masterplanning Process was nearing completion.

- * A recent enquiry to establish a media village on the Strategic Reserve Site south of Seaham had also been received.

The Head of Regeneration and Partnerships explained that there was to be changes in funding streams from 2007 which would change the way in which the Unit dealt with funding applications, although it was not clear yet how the funds would be administered.

The Community Empowerment Network and the Council for Voluntary Services had now merged and become the Community Development Trust.

Details were also given in the report relating to policy, promotion and planning. As a result of policy and funding changes as well as an increasing emphasis on community engagement and involvement, the work content of the Unit in the medium term, was likely to change focus. This had brought forward the requirement to undertake a review of the functions of the Unit and had been incorporated with the medium term financial planning exercise the Council had undertaken. Future reports would therefore reflect this change in content.

The Chair queried how the Peterlee Masterplans were progressing. The Head of Regeneration and Partnerships explained that the Peterlee Masterplans fed into the Regeneration Statement for the District as a whole. The costs for delivering the Masterplans were currently being calculated and it was expected that these would be known before consideration of his report in three months time.

A Member queried where the new Community Development Trust operated from. The Head of Regeneration and Partnerships explained that the new Trust operated from the Community Empowerment Network offices but they were currently looking for new premises.

A Member queried if Members would be consulted on the plans for the North Dock. The Head of Regeneration and Partnerships explained that the planning application had been submitted for the Workshops, Dock Gates and Pontoons and there would be continuing consultation. The Council was part of the Steering Group for the North Dock.

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The Chair thanked the Head of Regeneration and Partnerships for his report.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

5. **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 item of business, not shown on the Agenda, be considered as a matter of urgency

6. **PARC-IT RECYCLING SCHEME AND IMPROVEMENTS TO RECYCLING BANKS (AOB)**

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Member for Liveability which sought Members' views on the introduction of a pilot Parc-It Scheme for collection of plastic and cardboard and the improvement of recycling banks, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Mr. Whitehead advised that he was the Commercial Director of Premier Waste Management Limited and explained to Members that the CO² carbon emissions from Waste Management activities were under increasing scrutiny. There was growing support for active carbon management via intensive recycling schemes. With regard to carbon management, the risks and benefits to local authorities were as follows:-

- * Next generation of BVPI's would probably include carbon footprint targets.
- * Waste Management dominated all other local authority carbon consuming activities.
- * The Stern Report - All CO² emitters would be taxed and there were profound implications to EfW plant/incinerators.
- * Process that captured carbon would generate tradable carbon permits
- * the swing between Parc-It incineration would be ultimately reflected in service prices.

Mr. Whitehead explained that the Waste Strategy Consultation paved the way for new national recycling and composting targets of 40% by 2010 and 50% by 2020. There was increased pressure to improve participation and scope of the recycle collected. Plastic recycling was becoming a more critical issue in terms of the general public perceptions and the need to recycle carbon content in plastics.

The Parc-It recycling bag collection scheme would be an 'in the bin' recycling bag for plastic bottles/containers and card. This would be a tie-tie style bag and could be stored on top of the bin whilst in use by knotting the handle. The recycling bag was to be placed on the top of the bin and collected every week with the domestic waste. The green bags would be segregated at the transfer station for processing in automated MRF.

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Currently, the landfill diversion efficiency was 73.7% and this would improve as a result of the introduction of the Parc-It Scheme as the biodegradable function of each batch would increase. The DEFRA funded 3rd tower programme would establish exact performance levels. Premier Waste was seeking collection partners approval for the programme.

The Parc-It Scheme would be an intensive recycling scheme and address the plastics recycling issue. This would be a low cost, high recycling and carbon neutral and would be a win-win situation.

Mr. Whitehead explained that the NTDP project was a new 22,500 tons per annum concrete digester tower which was to be built at Thornley Station which would be available from May 2007. The 15 month NTDP project aimed at establishing the effect of different collection strategies on plant performance, comparative performance of concrete and steel tower designs and optimisation of product quality by varying input material mixes.

Easington's participation would deliver around 110 tons of Parc-it input per week and had a predicated 80% diversion rate. This was an opportunity of an additional 4,576 tons of recycling and composting including BVPI's 82a and 82b. The bags and the Public Relations was to be funded through the trial. The Council would deliver the bags quarterly or bi-annually and extra bags would be available to residents on request.

The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager explained that the trial period was for 14 months commencing in May 2007. Villages that would be included in the Parc-It Scheme were Thornley, Wheatley Hill, Wingate, Station Town and Deaf Hill. Benefits to the Council was that there would be a 10% increase in the overall recycling rates. This was DEFRA funded and had very little cost to the Council.

With regard to the recycling banks, the sites were run down, had poor signage and had all been well used. They were in need of improvement and some of the locations were not appropriate. Upgrading of the recycling banks would involve a programme of refurbishing the containers and improving the signage. It also proposed to provide attractive casings around the recycling containers at the Council Offices complex as a pilot with a view to extending the use of casings to other sites subject to further Government funding. It was anticipated that making the recycling sites more attractive may increase recycling rates within the District and improve customer satisfaction. The proposed sites to be resited to improve accessibility for public use were detailed in Appendix 1.

A Member queried if Premier Waste had thought of improving the kerbside collection. Mr. Whitehead explained that some authorities used twin bins or other methods but Durham County Council had chosen to use the black box method of recycling.

The Director of Community Services explained that the contract for the black boxes ended in March 2008 and Officers were currently reviewing potential collection methods. A longer term option might be to introduce the Parc-It Scheme Districtwide, but the pilot enabled the Council to explore if the scheme was successful.

A Member explained that some residents did not want 3 bins for their re-cycling and if the Council could simplify the system then it would make it more popular.

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A Member commented that the scheme seemed to be duplicating as the bags were collected with the domestic waste then segregated later. Mr. Whitehead explained that if the trial was successful then investment would be made in the Thornley Station site. There was space in a building at Coxhoe which would be used during the pilot.

The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager explained that the kerb-it scheme was a four year contract which ended on 31st March 2008. Officers were currently looking at alternative methods of collecting recycling. The kerb-it scheme was cost effective and may be extended until the best method was investigated.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the information given be noted;
- (ii) the introduction of the pilot Parc-It Scheme and refurbishment or resiting of the recycling sites as detailed in the report, be endorsed.

7. WORK PROGRAMME ISSUES

(i) Leisure Centre Partnership Arrangements

Consideration was given to the report of the Senior Cultural Development Officer which provided Members with a position statement on the operations of the Leisure Centres under the partnership arrangements with Leisure Connection Limited, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The Senior Cultural Development Officer explained that following an inspection undertaken during October 2006, an official notice was issued to Leisure Connection in relation to cleaning standards at Peterlee Leisure Centre. The areas of concern were rectified within the agreed timescales and the performance of the Company in this area would be continued to be monitored. This was the second official notice issued to the Company and discussions had been held with them to ensure standards were maintained to the highest possible level and service was provided to the residents of the District.

Following the success of the summer free swims programme, it was proposed that free swimming for all young people who held a leisure card, would take place at Peterlee Leisure Centre during February and March including the half term holiday. This scheme would allow all young people who held a leisure card access to free swimming sessions. The scheme was developed by working in partnership with Leisure Connections and the County Durham Primary Care Trust and funded by the Local Strategic Partnership.

To date, 2,874 leisure saver cards had been issued which had resulted in an additional 12,342 visits to the Leisure Centres. A breakdown of the age categories of the cards issued were detailed in the report.

The 9 month review of performance indicators developed with Leisure Connection were shown in Appendix 1 together with a complaints summary detailed in Appendix 2.

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M. Grinstead, Manager of Peterlee and Seaham Leisure Centres, circulated the 9 month review from 1st April 2006 to 31st December 2006. It was explained that partnership working was considered key to achieving many of the key performance indicators and objectives contained within the annual plan and a number of organisations had been identified as key partners.

Notable achievements during the past 9 months included the Leisure Saver cards, key partners meeting, partnership working with the NHS and the PCT, schools booster swimming sessions, junior 5-a-side football league, Leisure Connection website, on-line bookings, disabled use, cleaning, health and safety, customer first project, Quest and free swims.

During the period 1st April - 31st December 2006, both Centres received a total of 346,949 visits, an average of 1,270 visits each day. The number of individual customers during the period was 31,044 attracting approximately 33% of the District's population.

Areas of improvement during the next 3 months included:

- * continue to promote the new Leisure Saver card
- * continue to develop and improve the Leisure Connection website
- * continue to promote facilities to people with disabilities
- * continued emphasis on raising standards of cleanliness at both Centres
- * provide a successful free swim promotion at Peterlee during the school February half term holiday
- * work in partnership with the Council on everyday swims which aimed to help childhood obesity. It was hoped that Duncan Goodhew would visit Peterlee Leisure Centre in February
- * refurbishment of showers at both Centres
- * provision of swimming pool covers at Peterlee Leisure Centre
- * installation of new lockers in the family changing room at Peterlee Leisure Centre
- * purchase of new gymnastics equipment at both Centres.

M. Grinstead explained that there had been a number of complaints regarding the equipment in the gym at Seaham. An application had been submitted to Leisure Connection to have all of the equipment replaced. New equipment was installed in Peterlee in 2003 and the equipment from Peterlee had been transferred to Seaham.

The Senior Cultural Development Officer explained that the District Council had made representations to Leisure Connections, particularly around the gymnastics equipment at Peterlee and gym equipment at Seaham Leisure Centre.

A Member explained that when the Committee visited Seaham Leisure Centre he was shocked to see how far run down the Leisure Centre had become. As a Local Member he was very concerned and hoped that the new equipment would be installed and the Leisure Centre would improve.

M. Grinstead explained that Seaham Leisure Centre was a small community based sports centre. During the recent service review, staff had become demotivated which had a knock on effect on customers. He added that he had followed every complaint up personally and hoped that

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the customers would return to the Leisure Centre. He was working with the Senior Cultural Development Officer in trying to improve the Leisure Centres and would welcome a visit from the Committee at the end of March to show Members that things had improved.

A Member queried if there were financial constraints at the Leisure Centres. M. Grinstead explained that there were financial constraints and he had tight budgets to work towards. When repairs were required, he tried to act as quickly as possible.

A Member queried how many permanent staff were at Seaham Leisure Centre. M. Grinstead explained that at any one time there should be a Duty Manager, Recreational Assistant and Receptionist on duty.

The Chair thanked the Senior Cultural Development Officer and Mr. Grinstead for their report.

RESOLVED that the information given be noted.

(ii) Democratic Services and Administration - Performance Report

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Democratic Services and Administration, which updated Members on the performance of the Democratic Services and Administration Unit, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The Head of Democratic Services and Administration gave a brief summary of the work of the Unit which included political management arrangements, scrutiny, Member training and development, elections and electoral registration, local land charge searches and risk management.

The Best Value Review of Support Services was now nearing completion and would result in an improvement plan that would allow the review of Unit's Service Plan and the structure of the Unit.

A Political Management Working Group was to be held on 31st January 2007 to consider an updated report with a view to revised structures being implemented from May 2007.

The White Paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities" was published in October 2006 and contained a number of issues which would impact upon the Council's scrutiny function. Further reports detailing the implications of the White Paper for the Council's Scrutiny Committees were being prepared.

The Head of Democratic Services and Administration explained that the Annual Canvass for the Electoral Register was undertaken between August and November. The Government had placed new duties on Electoral Registration Officers to be more pro-active during the Annual Canvass in order to maintain the register and increase registration levels. The return rate for the canvass was 97% which was an improvement on 91% in 2005 and 92% in 2004.

With regard to new absent voting procedures, the Unit was undertaking a process which acquired the collection of signatures and dates of birth from approximately 14,000 existing absent voters and approximately 10,500

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new applications. This process was due to be completed by the end of February 2007. Currently, 54% of absent voters had responded.

Effective sickness monitoring continued to be carried out. The sickness figures for the second quarter of 2006/07 showed 6.74 days lost per member of staff and for the third quarter, 10.83 days. A member of staff who had been on long term sickness had returned to work in December and it was expected that the sickness figures would improve.

A Member queried if any guidance had been received regarding witnessing postal votes. The Head of Democratic Services and Administration explained that when the postal votes were returned in May, there would be no requirement for a witness.

The Chair thanked the Head of Democratic Services and Administration for his report.

RESOLVED that the information given be noted.

8. DRAFT PROCEDURE FOR RESPONSE TO UNAUTHORISED ENCAMPMENTS

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Member for Liveability which sought views on the new procedure for responding to unauthorised encampments within the District prior to formal consideration by the Council's Executive, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The Director of Community Services explained that unauthorised encampments were defined by Government as "encampments of caravans and/or other vehicles on land without the landowner or occupiers consent and constituting trespass". Gypsies and travellers were one group frequently associated with unauthorised encampments.

The shortage of authorised sites both nationally and locally meant that unauthorised encampments occurred regularly in the District. The County Council's Travellers Liaison Service reported seven encampments in the District during 2005/6 and ten in the first half of the year of 2006/07. Recent encampments included Thornley, Shotton, Murton and Seaham.

There was currently an absence of a procedure in responding to unauthorised encampments. Whilst there was often liaison between the District Council, the County Council Travellers Liaison Service and the Police, decisions relating to 'directions to leave' were typically made as a reactive response to complaints received. A position which was not satisfactory for the travellers or settled community alike.

The draft procedures were attached at Appendix 1. The procedures helped to ensure improved communication particularly between the Police, the District Council and Travellers Liaison Service, allowing each encampment to be treated on a case by case basis that respected any welfare issues that were presented.

For encampments on public land, the procedures included a list of sites where the encampments would not normally be permitted. This was to safeguard the interests of both the travelling and the settled community. The sites were detailed in the report. If an encampment arrived on sites which would not normally be acceptable for encampments, then subject to a welfare assessment

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confirming that it would not have a deleterious impact, a 'direction to leave' would be issued.

A Code for Travellers on land owned by the District of Easington was detailed in the report. Breach of the code of conduct would normally result in a 'direction to leave'. The procedures also included and provided advise to landowners where the encampments arrive on private land. This would include a pamphlet outlining rights and responsibilities together with sources for further help and assistance.

Mr. McNally explained that this was partnership approach. In the past there had been a lack of communication between the District Council and the County Council. Both Authorities had information the others did not have and needed to share all information.

A Member queried what the temporary period would be. R. Scott explained that the Travellers Liaison Service at present handed out leaflets to travelling families. A temporary period would normally be 2-3 weeks. She added that she worked with the travelling community on a daily basis and there were no permanent authorised sites in Easington. A 'direction to leave' could only be commenced once all of the checks were completed.

The Director of Community Services explained that if an unauthorised encampment was close to residential areas, parks, playing fields etc., then there was a more immediate presumption to leave.

A Member queried where the travellers would obtain their water from and sometimes in his area, travellers were on land for more than 5-6 weeks near to a busy road.

R. Scott explained that the travellers would find their own water and in other parts of the County they had tried to provide water for horses. Portaloos were sometimes provided otherwise the County Council had to clear up the mess when the travellers left. The majority of caravans did not have toilets but providing portaloos would depend on the location. With regard to horses, this was a policing matter and they did work in liaison with the Police.

Mr. McNally explained that the protocol did involve the Police. If the local authorities got it wrong, then they could expose themselves to legal liability. Last year, he managed 196 unauthorised encampments, of which, only 1 went down the legal route.

The Scrutiny Support Manager explained that there was inconsistency in the report and the procedures, relating to the number of caravans which may or may not be tolerated.

RESOLVED that the proposed procedures be endorsed.

