

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
SERVICE DELIVERY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON MONDAY, 12TH MARCH, 2007**

Present: Councillor D. Raine (Chair)

Councillors S. Bishop, D. Chaytor, J. Goodwin,
H. High, A.J. Holmes, W.R. Peardon and
Mrs. B.A. Sloan

Also present: Councillor Mrs. J. Freak - Executive Member for Social Inclusion
and Culture
Councillor Mrs. E. Huntington - Executive Member for Health
Councillor G. Patterson - Executive Member for Liveability
Councillor R.J. Todd - Executive Member for Housing
Councillor F. Shaw - Executive Member for Improvement
Councillor D. Myers - Executive Member for Customer Services
Councillors Mrs. S. Mason, D. Milsom and B. Quinn

**PRIOR TO THE COMMENCEMENT OF BUSINESS, A ONE MINUTE SILENCE WAS OBSERVED
IN MEMORY OF COUNCILLOR DEREK ARMSTRONG**

1. AN APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor D J Taylor Gooby

2. THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING held on 19th February, 2007, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.

3. THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE held on 27th February, 2007, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member were submitted.

Item 6 - Gully Cleansing Operations in Easington District

The Director of Community Services explained that Durham County Council were implementing budgetary cuts therefore reducing the cleanses to 1¼ per year. The service was currently being transferred to Durham County Council and they would need to be included in future discussions in relation to performance. A press statement was currently being prepared to inform members of the public.

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) Planning and Building Control Quarterly Performance Report

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Planning and Building Control Services which provided information on the performance of the

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Planning and Building Control Services Unit, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The report outlined performance during the third quarter from 1st October to 31st December 2006. Key BVPI's were attached as an appendix to the report.

The Principal Planning Services Officer explained that problems associated with the new Planning and Building Control system had been resolved and as a consequence performance had continued to improve in determining planning applications.

Performance targets had been achieved for the first time in the quarter for applications in major and other categories. Performance in minor applications and appeal decisions were still of concern and were now being addressed. The Committee's concerns regarding the time taken to validate planning applications had been addressed through the purchase of a plotter/scanner in December and performance was approaching the two day target for validating applications.

Customer Services Centre staff had been trained to deal with routine planning enquiries and the Planning Performance Improvement Team had brought staff together to consider further performance improvements in the Planning Service.

With regard to planning policy, progress in producing the new Easington Development Framework moved into a new phase during the quarter following the initial consultations that were undertaken in summer 2006. Plan production was on schedule and work was currently underway on the production of a preferred development option. Timescales for plan production were still demanding and a revised scheme was submitted to Government in December which would streamline the process. A decision was expected from Government Office North East at the end of March. An Annual Monitoring report was also published to comply with Government's requirements.

Budgetary provision had been made to improve the maintenance of bus shelters. The responsibility for cleaning of bus shelters had been transferred to the Environmental Services and £50,000 of additional expenditure had been secured to enable the Engineering and Countryside Unit to bring the bus shelters up to a good standard of repair during 2007/8. Outstanding works were now being programmed.

£13,000 of funding had been secured from Natural England to remove gorse at Cross Gill SSI which was threatening rare local flora. This was a partnership project between the Council, Natural England and the local farmer.

A Member queried what the local flora was at Cross Gill. The Principal Planning Services Officer explained that if not properly managed, gorse could take over and destroy the rare flora so needed attention.

The Chair thanked the Principal Planning Services Officer for the report.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(ii) **Performance of East Durham Homes and the Housing Service Unit**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Housing which outlined performance information in respect of East Durham Homes and the Housing Service Unit for the third quarter of the current financial year, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The Head of Housing explained that the Housing Service Unit was made up of the following teams:-

Housing Renewals
Housing Policy and Strategy
Supported Housing
Service Support

All service areas managed by East Durham Homes and those in the Housing Service were subject to performance monitoring. Performance Indicators were set out in Appendix 1 and 3 of the report.

The Head of Housing explained that seventeen key indicators were selected for monitoring purposes which consisted of 5 Best Value Performance Indicators and twelve locally agreed indicators. Appendix 1 to the report set out East Durham Homes' performance against those indicators and targets which had been set.

The key service area of concern was the average re-let times where the overall performance at the end of the third quarter had shown no improvement from the previous quarter, however, the actual performance for the month of December had improved to 47 days.

Another service area of concern was the gross current rent arrears which had reduced by approximately £2,000 by the end of the second quarter but remained behind target. The performance to the end of January 2007 was £548,718.

With regard to the percentage of responsive repairs for which an appointment was both made and kept, an IT problem was currently preventing the extraction of performance information from September 2006 to January 2007. This has been taken up with East Durham Homes who were currently working to identify a solution.

Performance had improved in the percentage of former tenant rent arrears written off, which was 0.2% at the end of the third quarter in comparison to 0.99% for 2005/6. This represented top quartile performance. The percentage of responsive repair jobs completed within target times had reduced very slightly from the previous quarter, however performance was still above the target of 95.1% set for 2006/7.

The Head of Housing explained that 82% of Council stock was failing to meet the Decent Homes Standard.

With regard to the void dwellings, a working group had been established to carry out a full review of current void procedures in order to identify the delays/problems in the current system. The first meeting had taken place on 16th February and would be held every two weeks.

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In the third quarter of the current financial year, East Durham Homes received a total of 104 complaints and 27 compliments. Appendix 2 to the report provided details of those complaints and compliments.

With regard to Housing Services, Appendix 3 set out the performance against indicators and targets which had been set. Of the 20 indicators where information was available, 70% were on target, 10% were within the 5% tolerance and 20% were not on target.

There were 3 remaining houses in the clearance area in the B streets at Easington Colliery which would be demolished in the spring/early summer 2007 once DEFRA was satisfied that the resident bats issue had been resolved.

There were 145 landlords registered through the District of Easington Private Landlord Accreditation Scheme covering 501 properties. Details of energy conservation, development of the new District Housing Strategy and area renewal and settlement plans, choice based lettings, care services, homelessness and housing advice was also detailed in the report.

A Member referred to Morrisons, the company who had been employed to work in the District on general repairs and queried what their performance was. The Head of Housing explained that the Council monitored East Durham Homes for the whole of the District. Page 2 of Appendix 1 gave details of the percentage of responsive repair jobs completed within the target times for both East Durham Homes and Morrisons Facility Services. The target date for the new IT interface for Morrisons Facility Services was March 2007 and this would reduce time delays with paperwork.

A Member commented that he received numerous complaints from residents that repairs were not being carried out in a timely manner. The performance on paper did not match up to the performance reported by residents.

The Head of Housing explained that the Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee had established a working group in December to monitor East Durham Homes. The first meeting had now taken place and individual cases would be looked into in more detail.

Members commented that they felt a representative of East Durham Homes should attend the meeting in order to answer complaints and queries.

A Member queried if East Durham Homes collated figures on how many responsive repairs were resolved in one visit. He referred to a recent case in Malvern Crescent where the new intercom system was not working. It had been repaired but was now being taken out and replaced once again. The tenants were confused and angry that more works had to be done in their homes.

The Head of Housing explained that information on the number of repeat visits was collated but was not reported as part of the monitoring. The Audit Commission had brought to his attention in the inspection that there was high repeat visits due to lack of diagnosis of the repair. Further work was being done with Contact Centre staff to question tenants on the nature of their repair. He added that he would circulate information on repeat visits. With regard to the upgrade of the intercom system, he would speak to the Care Services Manager to ascertain what problems had occurred.

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The Chair commented that a number of tenants had been asked for their choice for the in upgrading of their homes to the Decent Homes Standard, but had not been informed when work would be commenced.

The Executive Member for Housing explained that the commencement of works relating to the Decent Homes standard would depend upon the release of funding to carry out the work. The work would not commence until East Durham Homes could convince Government that they were entitled to receive the funding. £1 million had been granted from the Capital Programme for replacement doors and windows.

The Head of Housing referred to the Capital Programme and explained that a presentation was given to Members the previous year on the detail of the Capital Programme for the financial year. The detail for the Capital Programme for 2007/8 would be presented to Members the following month.

A Member referred to the Delivery Plan and queried if the relationship was now established with East Durham Homes. The Head of Housing explained that there was a much more satisfactory relationship between the District of Easington and East Durham Homes and the Delivery Plan had clarified relationships.

The Executive Member for Housing explained that the District Council were the owners of the properties and had a responsibility to tenants and electors. The District Council and East Durham Homes must work together.

A Member commented that he felt that Corporate Services and the Housing Unit should work together to help East Durham Homes make improvements. The Head of Housing explained that a Joint Delivery Team had been established which included a number of Officers from the District Council. They were working directly with the Senior Management Team at East Durham Homes and had chosen a number of key areas of performance which needed to be improved. A full review of the East Durham Homes void procedures and practices was now underway.

The Chair commented that he felt that the Accredited Landlord Scheme should be made compulsory by Government.

The Chair thanked the Head of Housing for this report.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(iii) Environmental Health and Licensing Unit Performance Report

Consideration was given to the report of the Environmental Health and Licensing Manager which provided information on the performance 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 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,

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complaints relating to health and safety, notifications of workplace accidents, pollution control, authorised process inspections, assessments of local air quality, investigation of pollution, noise and public health complaints from commercial/industrial activities and contaminated land assessment and consultations.

The report also gave a position statement on the Licensing, Environmental, Enforcement and Environmental Strategy teams.

The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager explained that recycling was on course to hit the stretched target of 27%. The current participation rate was 45% however the gap was not being closed on other Durham Districts who were part of the kerb-it scheme as their participation rates had increased by a greater degree. Since the last meeting, two serious complaints regarding the kerb-it scheme had resulted in rectification notices being served. One resulted in the problem being rectified and the other was not rectified and had been referred to the County Council to use the default procedure.

Mr. Whitehead from Premier Waste apologised to Members for any complaints that had been brought to them. Premier Waste Management had a new procedure in place for dealing with complaints. Back office support had been reviewed which would give greater support to District Councils. The way in which operatives carried out their work had been reviewed and route sheets had been introduced. Route sheets were issued on a daily basis and each street would be signed off by the operatives. High profile incidences and complaints would be controlled by David Carpenter, General Manager at Premier Waste. Monthly meetings will be held between the District of Easington's Environmental Co-ordinator for Waste Management and David Carpenter from Premier Waste.

Mr. Whitehead explained that Premier Waste had a higher than normal sickness rate especially in the Easington Area and Premier Waste were looking at ways to manage absenteeism, such as back to work interviews. The disciplinary process had also been invoked. Premier Waste were also increasing the supervision in the Easington area and it was hoped that a more visible supervisor would help motivate and maintain standards. Additional investment was also to be made in service vehicles.

Mr. Whitehead explained that the Parc it scheme would be commencing in May 2007. It was anticipated that an extra 4,000 tons of recycling would be collected for Easington. The recycling sacks had been designed and ordered together with the publicity. The processing plant at Thornley Station had now been built and was on track for commissioning in April. A letter would be distributed to residents taking part in the pilot in April and drop-in days would be held together with press releases.

A Member queried what the default procedure was. Mr. Whitehead explained that the default procedure was written into the contract. If Premier Waste fell outside of the specification for the contract then the client could issue a rectification notice. Durham County Council could invoke the default notice for non-compliance. Premier Waste carried out a lot of local authority work and when tendering for new contracts they had to declare default notices which could damage their ability to win new contracts.

Members congratulated Officers on the free delivery of composters which had been a great success and queried if the scheme would be operating elsewhere

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in the District. The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager explained that Officers had misjudged how popular the composters would be and there had been large queues. This would be taken into consideration if the scheme was provided elsewhere in the District.

The Director of Community Services explained that Officers had attempted to obtain names and addresses of the people who had been unable to receive the composters.

Members explained that they received numerous complaints from residents that the black boxes were thrown by operatives when emptying them on a windy day, the boxes were blown all over the street and Members queried if they could be placed inside the gate in inclement weather.

Mr. Whitehead explained that the contract was to pick up at the kerbside. To physically replace the black boxes would have a huge additional cost. Residents on assisted lists did have their black boxes taken to the kerbside and returned.

The Director of Community Services explained that the contractual agreement was to collect from the kerbside. If the black boxes were returned into gardens and yards this would be a considerable increase in costs to the Council. Whilst this was a fairly simple task, to provide this service for 42,000 households would have an additional extra cost.

The Executive Member for Liveability explained that the District Council had agreed to a kerb-it scheme. If Members wished the scheme to be amended then a further report would have to be considered by District Council.

The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager explained that the contract allowed up to 8% of residents to use the assisted list. The District Council at present had 9.5% of residents on the list and Premier Waste did not charge the Council for having additional assisted pull-outs.

A Member referred to the dog chipping and explained that the public were more interested in having their dogs chipped than cleaning up after them and would like to see more fines for dog fouling.

The Director of Community Services explained that a survey undertaken by the dog wardens 18 months ago showed that the majority of dog fouling was caused by stray dogs. One way to tackle this was to recognise the owner of the stray dog which would hopefully reduce the amount of strays and therefore reduced dog fouling.

A Member queried if there was anything the Council could do regarding nuisance vehicles parked for sale on grassed verges. The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager explained that a strategy had been adopted for nuisance vehicles and gave the Council certain enforcement powers. Any complaints regarding nuisance vehicles should be forwarded to Envirocall to investigate.

A Member queried what input the Unit had on the 'no smoking' legislation that was to be introduced in July. J. Benson explained that a report was to be considered by Executive on the 'no smoking' legislation.

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A Member queried how many dog wardens were employed by the District Council. The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager explained that there were 4 dog wardens although 1 had been engaged in the graffiti removal service but would be back to his dog warden duties the following month.

The Chair thanked Officers for their report.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

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14 March 2007