

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF AUDIT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

HELD ON MONDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2006

Present: Councillor G Pinkney (Chair)
Councillors B Bates, E Bell,
Mrs G Bleasdale, A Collinson,
M Nicholls, Mrs M Nugent and
P Stradling

Also Present: Councillor D Myers – Executive Member for
E-Government and Scrutiny Liaison

Apology: Councillor R Davison

1 **THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** held on 23 January 2006, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.

2 **THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE** held on 31 January 2006, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were submitted.

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) **Review of Environmental Services and the District Concordat**

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Community Services which updated Members regarding the position of the Environmental Concordat and outlined changes which were proposed to Council refuse, street cleansing and horticultural services. A copy of the report had been circulated to each Member.

On 14 February 2000 the District Council together with Sedgfield Borough Council and Durham City Council had signed up to a formal declaration of commitment to work in partnership. An opportunity to demonstrate this was in a joint best value review of environmental services covering refuse collection, street cleansing, fleet management, grounds maintenance and highways maintenance.

Considerable Member, Officer and Trade Union time had been invested in the review and the work resulted in significantly improved knowledge and awareness of the respective strength and weaknesses of each Council's environmental services.

Potential improvements were identified in an improvement plan. The plans for the joint venture were ambitious and involved significant risk and change with proposals for a joint venture company to deliver the services. Over the course of the negotiations one of the parties did not feel able to proceed as envisaged.

However the work in developing the joint best value review should not be considered as wasted. The baseline assessments undertaken had influenced the contents of service plans, for instance in recycling and fleet management from 2003/4 to the present day. The Concordat had provided an opportunity to examine what other Councils were doing and explore their ways of working in the higher performing areas. An example of this was the decision to introduce the four day week for refuse collection and zonal working which the Council was to implement from 1 April 2006. Details of the changes to the Council's environmental operations were set out in the report for Members' consideration.

O Sherratt made reference to the impact of the Local Area Agreement currently being negotiated in which all seven of the District Councils and Durham County Council were involved. The report outlined the environmental targets the Agreement would contain.

To conclude he advised that no further development of the environmental Concordat was proposed, however the principles of co-operation on environmental operations between Councils were now being extended with the emerging Local Area Agreement. Furthermore, lessons from the comparison work undertaken as part of the Concordat were being applied in Easington and considerable improvements to the Council's environmental services were envisaged as a result.

A Member asked why the Council had taken longer than both Durham and Sedgefield Councils to introduce the four day week for refuse collection to make savings. It was noted that this was because Easington had reviewed the whole of its environmental operations, not just the refuse collection service. The potential efficiencies and savings were outlined in the report.

In response to a question in relation to monitoring public satisfaction of the service, O Sherratt advised that carrying out surveys would be a key measure of success and discussions had taken place on the possibility of commissioning ENCAMS, the National Environmental Charity, who were specialists in training staff to conduct surveys, analyse the results and produce reports.

A Member asked how recycling had impacted on the refuse collection service and how it would be affected in the future. It was reported that throughout 2005/6 the Council had greatly improved in terms of achieving the Government's recycling target of 18% and it was hoped to achieve 24-25% by the year end. The amount of household waste collected had reduced by 2.2%. As recycling increased in forthcoming years there may be a need for a reconfiguration of the refuse collection service.

A discussion ensued on zonal working and reference was made to the cleansing of bus shelters. O Sherratt advised that new cleaning equipment had been purchased which should ensure a better response to reports. A standard had been introduced which required repairs to be carried out within two weeks of a complaint. Notices would be placed in shelters with details of how to report problems. Reference was made to specific problems with bus shelters in Wheatley Hill and Thornley and P Penman, Environmental Services Operations Manager agreed to discuss Members' individual concerns following the meeting.

A Member referred to powers given to Councils to introduce fines for households who produced too much waste for collection. O Sherratt confirmed that The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act allowed the issue of fixed penalties for side waste or if residents were not recycling enough, however Easington's approach was one of encouragement to recycle rather than enforcement. The provision of second wheeled bins was discouraged.

Following discussion it was **RESOLVED** that the information given, be noted.

(ii) **Vehicle Tracking System**

P Penman, Environmental Services Operations Manager and G Gray, Fleet Manager were in attendance to give an update in relation to the Council's vehicle tracking system.

G Gray advised that the vehicle tracking system had been a useful tool in the review of environmental operations and would be useful in monitoring zonal working arrangements. The system was used to monitor excessive speeding, fuel usage, misuse of vehicles and was also useful in the event of any false insurance claims being made.

In response to a Member's question in relation to regular monitoring, G Gray advised that there was not a formal system in place where specific checks were carried out at regular intervals because of time constraints and cost. The current arrangements were for random checks to be undertaken on a fortnightly or monthly basis and at other times when specific information was required. Whilst acknowledging the Officer's comments in relation to this, the Member suggested that routine monitoring procedures should be established.

Following discussion it was **RESOLVED** that the information given, be noted.

5 COMMUNICATION AND PUBLICITY

There were no items to report.