

THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING

OF THE COASTAL AREA FORUM

HELD ON WEDNESDAY 9 JANUARY 2008

AT BLACKHALL PRIMARY SCHOOL, MIDDLE STREET, BLACKHALL

Present: **Representing the District Council:**

Councillors Mrs. E.M. Connor, R.
Crute, G. Patterson, D. Raine, P.G.
Ward and Mrs. V.M. Williams

Representing Parish Council:

Mr. W.S. Day - Easington Village Parish Council
W.B. Underwood - Monk Hesleden Parish Council
D. Boyes - Easington Colliery Parish Council
D. Raine - Easington Colliery Parish Council
J. Barnett, P. Barnett and P. Chicken - Horden Colliery
Residents Association
Sgt. Dickinson and P.C. Fixter - Durham Constabulary
Mr. Hoey, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Moore, Miss Gledhill, Mr.
Archibold

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

In the absence of the Chair and Vice Chair, nominations were requested for a Chair for the meeting.

AGREED that Councillor R. Crute be elected Chair.

2. OPENING INTRODUCTION

Councillor R. Crute welcomed everyone to the Coastal Area Forum.

3. FOLLOW-UP FROM THE LAST MEETING AND CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES

(i) Confirmation of the Minutes

The Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 3 October 2007, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were agreed.

(ii) Trade and Skill Centre, Horden

J. Barnett explained that he felt that the material on the site was hazardous and plasterboard was used and was not suitable for a hardstanding. The area was a complete mess and had been a dumping ground and he would like to know what the owner intended to do about it.

The Chair suggested that an Officer from Environmental Health contact Mr. Barnett direct to discuss the current situation.

AGREED the information given be noted.

(iii) **Heritage Coast**

The gates at Limekiln Gill had now been replaced and funding for the handrail at Easington Colliery had been applied for.

AGREED the information given be noted.

(iv) **Update On Anti-Social Behaviour In Blackhall Rocks**

Sgt. Dickinson explained that the mobile police station was located on the Blackhall estate on 14 November 2007. Free time switches were distributed and a survey carried out on anti-social behaviour in the area. The survey was compared to one completed in June 2007. There were a total of 37 survey forms completed.

Q1. **Do you believe that the people you come into contact with in your neighbourhood feel safer now than 6 months ago?**

29 people answered "yes" that they did feel safer and 8 answered "no". There were no unsure answers. The results compared to June were as follows:-

June - safer than 6 months ago - 57.5%
November - safer now than 6 months ago - 78.3%
June - less safe than 6 months ago - 25%
November - less safe than 6 months ago - 11.75%
June - unsure if safer or not - 17.5%
November - unsure if safer or not - 0%

Q2. **What do you consider to be the three biggest problems within your neighbourhood?**

The main concerns were gangs and youths drinking. Other problems were anti-social behaviour, criminal damage, drugs, litter, dog fouling, fires, neighbours, speeding vehicles, parking, no regeneration. It was interesting to note that 3 respondents were asked to identify 3 areas of concern, however, 78.3% could not identify 3, 14 people could only identify 2 and 8 could only identify 1 concern.

Q3. **Do you feel that these problems have got better or worse over the past 6 months?**

The results showed that 25 people answered "yes" things had got better over the past 6 months with 8 saying things had got worse and 5 saying things had stayed the same. This was only in relation to the identified problems and not in general. The results can be compared to the June survey as follows:-

June - problems better than 6 months ago - 42.5%
November - problems better than 6 months ago - 67.5%
June - problems worse than 6 months ago - 35%
November - problems worse than 6 months ago - 21.6%
June - no change - 20%

November - no change - 13.5%

A resident explained that there were some children who did not attend school and she had been threatened with a knife. Her rabbit had been killed and it was the same family name which was cropping up time and time again. She felt that there should be more CCTV cameras, more visibility patrols by the Police and if people got together, they would solve the problems on the estate. She felt that there should be patrols every couple of hours. Sgt. Dickinson explained that he would speak to the resident after the meeting to obtain details.

Councillor Ward explained that standard procedures should apply and anyone using drugs should be evicted. He had held a surgery the previous day and residents had explained that there was no Police presence. He was aware that Blackhall had lost 1 beat Officer and only had 1 PCSO to cover Horden and Blackhall and Street Wardens were not visible enough.

Sgt. Dickinson explained that a new PCSO had commenced employment three days ago. The beat officer for Blackhall was on a CID attachment and would be returning in May. Until that time, the Police had to work with the resources they had.

AGREED the information given, be noted.

(v) **Double Yellow Lines - Middle Street, Blackhall**

Councillor Cox had advised that a full survey of double yellow lines was to be taken in Blackhall.

The Chair commented that Officers would ascertain when this would be carried out.

AGREED the information given, be noted.

4. **ACCREDITED LANDLORD SCHEME AND SELECTIVE LICENSING IN WEMBLEY AREA**

Shirley Wild, the Housing Renewal Manager explained that the Accredited Landlord Scheme had been in operation for over 5 years. This was a voluntary scheme where Officers vet tenants, advertise properties and make sure they were up to standard. Accredited landlord properties were now available to view on the website. There were 121 accredited landlords covering 625 properties across the District. The scheme was currently being updated with a new logo and re-branding and the Council was to offer training to landlords. Officers helped to draw up tenancy agreements and gave advice if landlords needed to evict tenants.

There were a number of landlords who were not accredited and would not engage with the Council. This was one of the reasons why the Government had introduced Selective Licensing in April 2006. The main aim was to raise the management standards of the private sector. To have Selective Licensing in an area they had to be suffering from anti-social behaviour. In a Selective Licensing area, the landlord would have to buy a licence in order to rent out his property and if they did not do this, they could be fined up to £20,000.

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To have Selective Licensing in an area, a submission had to be made to the Secretary of State. The Wembley area in Easington Colliery was currently being looked at and the submission should be made in February. Easington Colliery was a housing renewal area and a lot of work had gone into the village with demolitions. There were 195 properties in the Wembley area, and 103 were privately rented. An Empty Properties Officer had been appointed and would commence employment at the beginning of February.

The Chair commented that this was a pilot scheme and queried what the scope of rolling it out would be. S. Wild explained that the vision was to get the Wembley area up and running and then look to other areas in the District.

Councillor Boyes explained that this was very welcome and was long overdue. It was a disgrace for the people who lived in that area. The problem was with the absent landlords and he queried what the Council were doing to target them.

S. Wild explained that a Management Agent that had been accredited had sold their properties. Some individuals who had bought them, had joined the scheme but some had not. The Council were continuing to try and get landlords on board with the scheme and Selective Licensing was now one way to do it.

J. Barnett queried how many landlords were involved in the Wembley area. S. Wild explained that there were 35 landlords in total owning 103 properties and only 9 of those were accredited.

The Head of Housing explained that Selective Licensing applied to everyone in the area whether they were accredited or not. If they did not apply for the licence, then the Council could prosecute.

Mr. Barnett queried how soon Selective Licensing would be rolled out in Horden.

Councillor Raine explained that Councillors had been pushing for Selective Licensing because the landlords had not joined the voluntary scheme. This had taken a lot of time and work by Officers.

Mrs. Barnett explained that in the street she lived, people lived with broken windows, no heating, no hot water, toilets did not work and queried why they had to wait for the local Council to roll out Selective Licensing to other areas.

The Head of Housing explained that the Government had brought forward powers for Council to start the process. The powers were prescribed by the Secretary of State and there had to be a designated area and could not be a blanket Districtwide approach. The process had been very difficult, onerous and time consuming and the Wembley area was the worst in the District. The Council had been working on this area for over a year.

Mrs. Barnett commented that maybe members of the public needed to lobby at a higher level. The Head of Housing explained that he was being interviewed for a BBC politics programme and one of the points he would be making would be that if the Government was serious about Selective Licensing, then it should be made mandatory.

P. Chicken queried if the Council could do anything if a landlord did not carry out repairs. S. Wild explained that the Council would get in touch with the landlord and try to do something about it.

AGREED the information given be noted.

4. **YOUR QUESTION TIME, YOUR SAY IN SERVICE DELIVERY, YOUR CALL**

(i) **West Street, Blackhall**

Mr. Archbold referred to traffic calming measures in West Street in Blackhall and explained that a survey had been issued to all residents asking for their comments and complaints. Motorists used West Street as a short cut instead of going through Middle Street on the A1086.

The Chair explained that he did not know what progress had been made but he was aware of the situation. There had only been a limited amount of residents who had responded to the survey but would raise this with Durham County Council.

AGREED that progress on the traffic calming measures in West Street be obtained.

(ii) **Manhole Cover - Hesleden Road**

Mr. Moore explained that there had been a broken manhole cover and he had telephoned on 5 November but it still had not been repaired. The manhole was between lamp posts 864 and 863 from Blackhall Rocks to Hesleden.

AGREED that the manhole cover between lamp posts 864 and 863 be reported.