

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING**  
**OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**HELD ON TUESDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 2007**

Present: Councillor C Patching (Chair)  
Councillors B Burn, R Burnip,  
D Milsom and T Unsworth

Also Present: Councillor A Collinson

Apologies: Councillors P Campbell, Mrs A E Laing and  
T Longstaff

1 **THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** held on 3 August 2007, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.

2 **THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE** held on 4 September 2007, 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 **FEEDBACK FROM SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**

At the last meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board held on 10 September 2007 the following issues were discussed:-

- Revised Housing Strategy 2007 – 2012
- County Durham Scrutiny Network Feedback
- Scrutiny of the Children's Trust

The scrutiny of the Children's Trust would mirror the Health Scrutiny arrangements although there would be only one Member representation from the District Council. The Member would be nominated from the Community Services Scrutiny Committee. A memo would be circulated to Members of the Committee requesting them to give consideration to the nomination.

**RESOLVED** that the information given, be noted.

5 **FORWARD PLAN**

Consideration was given to the latest Forward Plan of key decisions which covered the period 1 September – 31 December 2007, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

There was one issue in the Forward Plan, the Dog Control Order which fell within the liveability portfolio. A report had been presented to Members of the Council and the Community Services Scrutiny Committee. The Environmental Health and Licensing

Manager explained that the report was currently being drafted and it was hoped that approval would be given before the end of the month.

**RESOLVED** that the information given, be noted.

**6 SERVICE UNIT PERFORMANCE REPORTING – ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES**

Consideration was given to the joint report of the Environmental Services Operations Manager and Environmental Health and Licensing Manager which provided information on the Operations Unit, Enforcement Unit and Strategy Unit of the Environmental Services section from the period April through to August 2007, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Appendix 1 outlined Best Value Performance Indicator and local performance indicator outcomes from the year 2006/7. The colour system signified performance against targets where green indicated success, yellow a borderline situation and red showed where targets had not been met. Appendix 2 outlined the performance for the first quarter of 2007/2008. Appendix 3 detailed complaints received in relation to Environmental Operations Services.

The Environmental Services Operations Manager explained that from 1 October 2007, the Council had introduced a no side waste policy. All the refuse collection crews were to be fully supported by the Enforcement Unit for the first six months to deal with any problems that may arise with residents. Prior to the policy being introduced, there would be intense publicity and advisory stickers put onto bins that had side waste advising residents of the new side waste policy. When the policy was introduced, enforcement action would only be taken in the event of a resident placing side waste next to the bin on three occasions. This policy would hopefully encourage recycling as currently there was only 50% participation in the kerb-it scheme. The procedure that was to be followed for enforcement was detailed in the report.

The green waste service was continuing to run very successfully and was operating to maximum capacity. Tonnages had increased from the same period last year by 188 tonnes. However if tonnages continued to increase consideration would have to be given to increased resources in the service area. It was proposed to carry out a feasibility study regarding extending the green waste collection service throughout the district.

Discussions were ongoing with Create Furniture Reuse Charity to develop a partnership for white goods collection service as they would like to start and offer white goods for reuse. Whilst options were being considered there was to be a pilot delivering all the white good collections to their premises in Horden from Tuesday 4 September. This would enable them to start to increase their trainees and offer reuse items as soon as possible.

The Environmental Services Operations Manager explained that a value for money review had commenced on the horticultural service and it was envisaged that this would be completed in early January to enable a report to be presented to Resources Scrutiny Committee on 19 February 2008. A soft market test was being undertaken by East Durham Homes with the Council and an external provider for all the horticultural services presently provided by the Council to assess if they were providing value for money. Following the market testing, East Durham Homes would evaluate and decide if they were going to subject this work to a formal tender process.

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The graffiti removal machine continued to operate very successfully in the district and pathfinder areas and received regular support from the Probation Service and the Environment Agency. This service had now been mainstreamed and the temporary position had been filled permanently following a successful recruitment process. The total graffiti removed from 1 June 2005 to 31 August 2007 was detailed in the report.

The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager gave a position statement on the Environmental Enforcement and Environmental Strategy Teams.

A multi agency four day Operation Milkshake took place in May 2007 involving the Police, Street Wardens, Environmental Wardens, Clean and Green Teams, Fire Brigade, Trading Standards, VOSA, East Durham Homes, Community Safety, Education Welfare, DVLA, Environment Agency along with others. This was a targeted enforcement initiative in Horden and Blackhall with the agencies working together to tackle crime, anti-social behaviour and local environmental issues. The success of this operation had also led to a further four day operation in September.

The Audit Commission had expressed concern about the level of secondary deliberate fires and incidents of criminal damage occurring within the district. The numbers of the incidents were higher than elsewhere within the county and were rising. In response to this, the Police, Fire Brigade and Community Services Directorate had been holding working group meetings to identify potential causes and to develop action plans to reduce the problem.

Members were advised that in April, a two week good dog ownership campaign was ran in conjunction with the Pride in Easington Team and included a number of initiatives that were detailed in the report. Details of dog fouling fines issued, complaints of stray dogs and fouling and litter fines issued were detailed in the report.

The Wembley estate pilot was ongoing and the Street Wardens were conducting weekly surveys identifying problem properties. Action was then taken by various Officers to encourage those responsible for the properties to carry out the necessary work to upgrade them and bring them back into use. This used powers from various sections across the Council along with the Police.

In August, a week in action took place in conjunction with the Pride in Easington and other partner agencies offering a variety of services. Appendices 7 and 8 were posters and leaflets from the event.

During 2006/7, the Council achieved a grade 1 BVPI199 rating for the efforts to tackle fly tipping. This was the highest score and an improvement from a score of 4 from the previous year. To achieve this there must be a reduction in fly tipping incidents and an increase in enforcement activities.

With regard to recycling, performance had improved dramatically the previous year as a result of a number of initiatives. The improvement had continued into the financial year however there had been a decline during the second quarter largely because other Durham districts were now sending their waste to the aerobic digester. The apportionment of waste going to the aerobic digester was beyond the Council's control and if it were to reduce significantly this may have an impact on the Council's ability to hit targets.

Tonnage of material collected via the kerb-it scheme had increased by 14% on the same period the previous year. Participation rates had increased to around 40-

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45%, however the Council was not closing the gap on other Durham districts who were part of the kerb-it scheme as their participation rates had also increased.

Complaints had been received regarding the operation of the kerb-it scheme including missed collections, littering by crews and not replacing boxes. Each complaint was investigated and regular meetings were held with Premier Waste Management to monitor contract delivery and to resolve operational difficulties. The numbers of complaints regarding delivery of boxes had drastically reduced since the Council took over their own deliveries. The procedure for dealing with complaints against the kerb-it service was detailed in the report.

Two serious complaints regarding the kerb-it service had resulted in Rectification Notices being served. One resulted in the problem being rectified and the other had been referred to the Council to use the default procedure.

A Member referred to fly tipping and queried if some actions that the Council had put in place had increased or decreased it. The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager explained that BVPI119d had introduced a system called 'fly capture' which set out what measures, number of prosecutions, warning, how many incidents were recorded in the area. Unless the Council had showed that fly tipping was reducing then they could not have achieved the highest grade.

The Director of Community Services explained that Durham County Council had introduced permits for local amenity sites and the Council had introduced some charges for special collections although the majority were free. No adverse impact had been shown on fly tipping. Members had approved the new refuse policy on side waste before recess which would be reviewed and monitored. There had not been any noticeable impact in relation to fly tipping and the refuse crews were collecting less side waste.

A Member commented that he received a lot of complaints regarding how the black boxes were handled from Premier Waste staff. The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager explained that this issue had been raised regularly by members of the public and Premier Waste had been contacted to rectify the complaints.

The Director of Community Services explained that the kerb-it contract was out for tender and new arrangements would be in place from 1 April. Under the new arrangements, the District Council would have the contract not Durham County Council and therefore would have greater enforcement capabilities.

A Member referred to horses fouling the streets and the recent horse fair that was held in Seaham and queried what legislation was in place for people who allowed their horses to foul the streets. The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager explained that the Council could not use any enforcement powers unless bylaws were introduced. He added that he was working with livery stables in the area where this was more of a problem to come to a solution. Durham County Council had advised that it was the District Council's responsibility to clear up any horse manure.

The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager explained that they were aware of the problem resulting from the horse fair in Seaham and enhanced cleaning operations would be put in place. The Director of Community Services explained that the Council had received a number of representations and concerns from residents and he would be contacting the landowner and organiser to discuss the event the following year.

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The Chair referred to the Parc-it pilot scheme and raised concerns that Premier Waste had under estimated the costs. The Environmental Services Operations Manager explained that the reason for the costs were that the bags were becoming contaminated and bursting.

The Director of Community Services explained that the colour of the bags made it difficult to sort and the volumes of plastics and cardboard had not met expectations. Consideration was being given to extend the Friday collection to take on more although he did not want to offer a service to residents for it then to be withdrawn.

The Chair referred to the new footpath sweeper and queried if there was more smoking related litter on the footpaths since the smoking ban. The Environmental Services Operations Manager explained that he had received no feedback to confirm that there had been any added pressure since the smoking ban. The footpath sweeper was required and would be introduced and realigned with no additional cost to the service.

The Chair referred to DEFRA's recycling targets of 20% and queried what the Council was currently achieving. The Director of Community Services explained that the Council was currently achieving 37% at the moment but had increased in the second quarter. This was largely dependent on the aerobic digester.

The Chair commented that he felt the traffic light system when reporting performance indicators worked very well but where it was shown red he would like some comment as to what the Council was doing to remedy the performance indicator to put it back on target.

Councillor Collinson referred to bus shelter maintenance and explained that in 2006 the Engineering Services Manager had conducted a survey of bus shelters in the district. In 2007, £50,000 had been allocated to bring shelters to a good state of repair but he had seen no evidence of this in Shotton. For example, the bus stop on Salter's Lane near Horns Garden Centre was brick built with a wooden roof which had had a hole in it for over two years. This had been reported on numerous occasions but nothing had been done. It was the cleaner of the shelters responsibility to report defects and he queried if this was being carried out.

The Environmental Services Operations Manager explained that he could check if it had been reported through the teams. The Engineering Section was now without a Head of Service and he was not aware if the bus shelter maintenance programme had been commenced. If he received a complaint he e-mailed Brian Weatherall in the Engineering Section to action the work.

The Director of Community Services explained that he was aware the programme was being developed and would take this up with the relevant Director and inform the Scrutiny Support Manager.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their report.

**RESOLVED** that the information given, be noted.

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### **NOTES OF A SITE VISIT TO SEAHAM AND PETERLEE LEISURE CENTRES**

Consideration was given to the notes of the site visit to Seaham and Peterlee Leisure Centres undertaken by the Community Services Scrutiny Committee, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

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The Scrutiny Support Manager explained that there had been a marked difference between usage at Peterlee and Seaham Leisure Centres. Peterlee was used by more younger people than at Seaham but this could be because Peterlee had both a wet and dry centre. The usage of the gyms via the Exercise Referral Scheme were well used in both centres and all equipment was in good working order. Leisure Connections were currently looking to see what could be invested in future services upon completion of a refinancing exercise. Refurbishment and revitalisations in both centres would be undertaken if a package was available.

Discussion had ensued round the recent announcement regarding the future of local government in County Durham and it was reported that any changes to existing arrangements would be subject to a renegotiation of the contract.

**RESOLVED** that the information given, be noted.

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