

**DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting** of the **Scrutiny Sub-Committee for Looking After the Environment** held at the County Hall, Durham on **Monday 30 June 2008** at **10.00 a.m.**

**COUNCILLOR D Myers** in the Chair

**Members:**

Councillors E Bell, R Crooks, J Gray, J Moran, G Richardson, P Stradling, G Tennant, A Turner and C Woods

**Other Members:**

Councillors O Johnson, R Rodgers, C Walker, M Wilkes, (Wilkinson ?) M Williams,

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Armstrong, D Hancock, G Huntington, P Taylor, W Meikle and J Crosby and D Easton

**A1 Welcome from the Chairman**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Looking After the Environment Scrutiny Committee.

**A2 Terms of Reference of the Committee**

The Committee noted a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny regarding the Terms of Reference of the Committee, Membership for 2008/09, and the Dates of Meetings.

**A3 Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2008 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**A4 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**A5 Items from Co-opted Members**

There were no items from Co-opted Members.

The Chairman of the meeting was of the opinion that the following item of business was of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration because of the timescale involved.

## **A6 'There and Back' – Report of the County Durham Overview and Scrutiny Member Network**

The Committee considered the report 'There and Back' of the County Durham Overview and Scrutiny Member Network examining local solutions to local transport challenges in County Durham (for copy see file).

The Committee also received a presentation (for copy of slides see file) from Tom Bolton, Principal Scrutiny Support Officer explaining the background to the report, the projects terms of reference, the project methodology, the key findings, the recommendations and the proposal to submit the report to Cabinet.

Members of the Committee expressed concern that the increasing cost of fuel would impact upon the recommendations in the report. It was explained that operators had drawn attention to the rising price of fuel and the impact this can have on services. There are two recommendations within the report which deal with this issue. The first recommendation relates to the lobbying of Members of Parliament to ensure that the Bus Operators Grant is fully implemented. In the past when there have increases in the prices of fuel this has been reimbursed by Government so that it does not affect fares and services. The Operators have concerns that they may not be fully reimbursed. The other recommendation relates to a significant increase in resources to secure services. The Acting Corporate Director explained that was concern about the withdrawal of some services and it might be necessary to make extra provision to support services.

In relation to the provision of on-demand services, Councillor Wood expressed concern that there might be insufficient contractors who are willing to provide this service. It was explained that the proposals in the Bus Strategy were for eight vehicles to be available for on demand services and there might be a need for some of these vehicles to be moved into the rural areas of greatest need. In addition there are other options which the Head of the Integrated Transport Unit will want to explore.

With reference to recommendation 29, Councillor Wood explained that when low floor mechanisms are not operational this can cause great difficulty for passengers with mobility problems. It was suggested that Commercial Operators needed to include the testing of low floor mechanisms in the daily safety test of vehicles and that the recommendation needed to be strengthened to reflect this.

Members of the Committee thanked the staff and participants who were involved in the project and in producing the report.

### **Resolved:**

1. That subject to the above amendments, the report be approved for submission and consideration by Cabinet.
2. That the actions of the other participating authorities in the Network in considering the report be noted.

## **A7 Environment Service - Overview of Directorate Priorities**

The Committee received a presentation from Roger Elphick, Acting Corporate Director for Environment Service (for copy of slides of presentation see file of Minutes).

The presentation included details of the leadership of the service, statistical information about the capital and revenue budget, the priorities for improvement for both corporate and service outcomes and issues for the Environment Service. The Acting Corporate Director highlighted the following areas which could be examined:

- Highway Maintenance – There is a maintenance backlog of approximately £170M. The highway network is the Authority's largest asset. Utility openings are having an impact on highway maintenance.
- Civil Parking Enforcement – Civil parking enforcement in the Durham District is expected to commence in November
- Public Transport Fuel Costs – This is having an effect on supported and commercial bus services and linked into the report "There and Back".
- Waste Project – This will look at how we deal with waste up to 2020.
- Climate Change – The Climate Change Bill is going through Parliament and will set challenging targets for reductions in emissions.

In response to a question from Councillor E Bell about waste collection the Acting Corporate Director explained that the establishment of a unitary authority would be an opportunity to improve waste collection and increase recycling levels. Councillor Bell requested that greater consideration be given to off road parking when planning new housing developments. The Acting Corporate Director advised that parking standards are decided by Central Government and the present limit is 1.5 vehicles per dwelling.

Referring to a recent accident involving an employee carrying out the green waste collection, Councillor Walker stated that the Council needs to ensure that all staff involved in waste and kerbside collections receives full training in operating procedures and health and safety issues.

### **Resolved:**

That the presentation be noted.

## **A8 Overview of Local Area Agreement (LAA), Sustainable Communities Strategy, the Corporate Plan, and Performance Framework**

The Committee received a presentation from Donna Jefferson, Senior Corporate Policy & Performance Officer which gave an Overview of the Local Area Agreement, The County Durham Sustainable Community Strategy, the Corporate Plan, and Performance Framework (for copy of slides of presentation see file of Minutes).

The presentation included national and regional strategies, the new agenda, strategy development, identification of priorities, key partnership principles and the county council mission, Sustainable Community Strategy Themes, LAA Themes, Corporate Plan Themes, Existing LAA Stretch Targets, Next Steps, and Action 2008/09.

Councillor Tennant expressed concern that Members have not had sufficient opportunity to influence the LAA. Donna Jefferson explained that this had occurred because of the process adopted by Central Government and the need to adopt the LAA by end of May 2008. A review process will take place in November and a programme needs to be established to provide Members with the opportunity to influence the review of the LAA.

Members of the Committee were asked to suggest areas for examination by scrutiny. The following areas were put forward by Members:

- Climate Change
- Waste Collection/Disposal
- Unadopted Streets

**Resolved:**

That the presentation be noted.