

THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE MURTON NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM

HELD ON MONDAY 21 JULY 2008

Present: Councillor Mrs A Naylor (Chair)
Councillors Mrs J Maitland, A Napier
and C Patching

Also Present: E Farrelly OBE, S Pownall, K Green,
G Ebbblewhite, A Griffiths, A Spencer
and F Thompson

1 CHAIR'S OPENING INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the District Council's Murton Neighbourhood Forum. She advised that a number of people present had attended a pilot meeting in March at the Glebe Centre and the Forum had been established to provide the community of Murton with an opportunity to comment on and shape services provided by public authorities including the Police and the District Council.

There were a number of Officers present who would advise of ongoing initiatives to tackle some of the issues identified as being high priority.

The meeting would focus on the Agenda for Action document for Murton which had been circulated.

J Brindle, Assistant Chief Executive explained the background to the establishment of the Murton Neighbourhood Forum and gave details of the scoping event which was facilitated by East Durham Trust. The event had identified issues which people saw as priorities and made up the Agenda for Action.

2 MURTON AGENDA FOR ACTION

(i) Improve range of activities and diversions for young people/upgrade park to improve activities

S Clark, Youth Strategy Officer briefly outlined the current range of activities aimed specifically at young people.

He advised that a mobile skate park had been purchased which was free for community groups to use. Training in the erection of the equipment was to be provided to interested groups.

The Youth Opportunity Fund had granted a further £200,000 for activities or capital builds for young people which did not need matched funding and could be supported by an organisation. Application forms for grants were processed within four weeks and the scheme would be available for a further two years giving a total of £600,000 available funding.

He advised that funding had also been secured for the appointment of four outreach workers across the District.

The 'Get Out There' Project was aimed at young people in care or in receipt of free meals and those eligible could claim £30 per month to

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spend on leisure facilities. The take up to date had been limited, however there was still six months of the Project remaining.

He had met with the Murton Young People group who had expressed an interest in being part of a Steering Group to look at initiatives and activities in their area. Initial discussions had resulted in the following suggestions:-

Skate/bmx park;
zip line;
basket ball;
pavilion/ shelter;
astro turf area;
climbing wall/frame;
slide for teenagers;
trampoline.

In addition to these suggestions, the young people had highlighted issues they were concerned about which were security, lighting and CCTV.

A Griffiths stated that since the meeting with the Murton Young People two out of the four in the group had advised that they did not now want to be involved in the Steering Group. Therefore, acknowledging the importance of being represented, A Griffiths and G Ebblewhite advised that they would discuss the possibility of sitting on the Steering Group with S Clark following the Forum meeting.

With regard to the Welfare Park, P Penman, Environmental Services Operations Manager advised that Murton Parish Council were looking at the development of a multi-use facility there. Architects had been appointed and the Steering Group would be involved in deciding the facilities to be provided. It was also suggested that The Ribbon Community School be involved in this.

Councillor A Napier stated that whatever facilities were provided it was important that they were sustainable and were owned by the young people.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

(ii) **Development at Woods Terrace to improve retail provision and establish a Retailers Forum**

G Tinkler, East Durham Business Service explained that through East Durham Business Service there were a series of grants available to improve the retail premises in Murton. Three properties in Woods Terrace had benefited from the grants. The current retail climate had resulted in a number of properties becoming empty in Woods Terrace in recent years, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to encourage new businesses into the development.

East Durham Business Service was trying to re-invest in existing occupied premises to ensure their sustainability. In doing this, it was acknowledged that some of the premises would probably never be occupied and needed regeneration.

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With regard to the establishment of a retail forum it was suggested that Murton's retailers could be part of the existing forum at Seaham.

A lengthy discussion ensued on this issue, and a comment was made that the number of residents living in Murton would increase with the recent housing developments and this should help to support existing businesses and may encourage additional retail developments.

It was also pointed out that some of the empty shops had been converted into flats, and that the availability of alternative retail outlets nearby had affected Woods Terrace, especially since the introduction of the concessionary fares scheme.

In terms of bringing the unoccupied properties back into use, Councillor Napier asked if some of the Youth Opportunity Fund could be utilised to develop facilities for young people in one of the empty buildings in Woods Terrace. S Clark advised that this may be possible and he would contact Centrepoint and Groundwork to discuss the matter in detail, also involving I Morris, Head of Housing.

AGREED that the information given, be noted and S Clark and I Morris investigate the possibility of developing youth facilities at Woods Terrace, Murton.

(iii) **Transport Service to Durham/Peterlee more closely linked to working and college times**

S Day, Integrated Transport Unit, Durham County Council provided a background to the commercial operation of the bus services. He explained that during the daytime, the majority of services operated as viable businesses and £3.5m in grant subsidy was utilised for less profitable times such as evenings, weekends and for some rural services. The two corridors referred to, Murton to Durham and Murton to Peterlee were subsidised on evenings and Sundays only.

Durham County Council and the bus operators did try to work timetables around work and college times, which was also in the interests of the bus operators in terms of commercial viability.

In response to S Day's request for clarification of the problems experienced, A Griffiths outlined the difficulties he had in his travel to and from the college in Framwellgate Moor, adding that whilst there was a free bus service provided by the College which he had to use, this departed at 6.00am. Around ten other students in Murton experienced similar problems.

Following discussion, S Day advised that he would re-visit the timetables with the bus operators, and also discuss start/finish times with the college.

A general discussion ensued in relation to funding available for travel for students between the ages of 16 and 19. S Day advised that students could apply for a grant based on a distance banding which could be paid either as a cash amount or as a term time ticket. G Ebbelwhite and A Griffiths advised that many students were not aware of this scheme, and it

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was suggested that the information be made available for the next meeting.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

(iv) Increased Police presence including CCTV around Woods Terrace

Inspector V Addison from Durham Police advised that the regular presence of the Police Community Support Officer and Police Constable had proved a success in the village with good reports received.

He explained that police crime figures had reduced in the last year and in the first three months of 2008 a significant reduction had been recorded against the same period in 2007. From these figures it had been established that the two main problems in Murton were vandalism at the Welfare Park, and motorcycles and quad bikes along the old railway line beside Broadoaks. Plans were in place to tackle these issues.

He also advised that anti-social behaviour was of concern to residents who felt that it increased in the school holidays and to tackle this, the Police had set up 'Operation Summer Nights'.

With regard to CCTV he explained that this had been recognised as an issue across the District and the Community Safety Partnership was currently undertaking a review, the outcome of which was expected in the near future.

In discussing the information provided, residents were asked if they considered that this should remain as an Agenda for Action item and if there were any specific areas that they felt the Forum should focus on.

S Pownall stated that there were problems caused by underage drinking, particularly in the Welfare Park. This was reiterated by A Griffiths and G Ebblewhite who advised that some of the children were as young as 12 or 13.

AGREED that underage drinking in the Welfare Park be classed as a priority area for action.

(v) Creation of affordable housing and improve mix of housing in Murton

I Morris, Head of Housing outlined action being taken to attempt to address this issue.

He advised that 83 houses had recently been developed in Murton and through the Council's Affordable Housing Policy there would be a further 16 through a shared ownership scheme.

The Council was also liaising with housing associations on plans to provide a mix of housing. These would be for rent, shared ownership and outright sale at market prices.

He continued that the demolition in Bevan Square was almost complete and a similar scheme was being looked at for this site.

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East Durham Homes had recently introduced a Choice Based Lettings Scheme which allowed tenants to 'bid' for advertised properties. This provided more choice to tenants than the previous Housing Allocations Policy.

In addition to the provision of affordable housing the Council also aimed to help tenants run their homes more economically. To this end, capital funding had been set aside to install energy efficient measures which would be from renewable sources in ten properties in Murton.

Councillor Mrs Maitland asked if there was any provision for affordable accommodation for people who wished to downsize their homes. I Morris acknowledged that this was a problem and the Council's policy gave priority to people who wished to downsize, as this then freed up family accommodation which was in high demand. However, a lot of the existing bungalow stock was one bedroomed which was difficult to let.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

3 MURTON AGENDA FOR ACTION – WAY FORWARD

To summarise, J Brindle explained that the Murton Neighbourhood Forum was a new initiative and asked those present if they were happy with the format of the meeting and the agenda. It was important that the original priorities identified at the scoping meeting were right and if there were any other priorities that needed to be added to this list.

Following discussion it was **AGREED** that the following priority areas, be confirmed:-

Improve range of activities for young people

S Clark/I Morris to investigate the possibility of developing youth facilities in Woods Terrace, Murton.

Bus services to Durham Colleges

S Day to discuss the bus timetables with the bus operators and discuss aligning start/finish times with the college;

S Day provide information on the travel scheme for students, for circulation to the young people at the Forum.

Police Presence/CCTV

Inspector V Addison to investigate the problems of underage drinking, particularly in the Welfare Park, Murton;

Inspector V Addison to provide an update on the CCTV review currently being carried out.

FURTHER AGREED that the next meeting be held in September 2008, on a date to be confirmed.