

PUBLIC PROTECTION FORUM

25th January, 2007

PRESENT -

Representing the Council – Councillor Harker (in the Chair); Councillors Holmes, Mrs. D. Jones and J. Vasey.

Representing Outside Organisations –

Darlington and District Townswomen’s Guilds –

Mrs. A. Turnock.

Darlington Association of Parish Councils –

Councillor B. Jones.

Darlington Federation of Womens’ Institutes –

Mrs. A. Eynon.

Heighington Village Hall –

Mr. L. Bedocs.

Independent Member –

Mr. K. Fridd.

Patients and Carers Council –

Mrs. M. Springett.

Patients Council –

Mr. M. Smith.

Red Hall Partnership –

Mr. B. Bell.

Officers Attending – The Assistant Director Public Protection and the Licensing and Parking Manager, within the Development and Environment Department and the Head of Street Scene, within the Department of Community Services.

Apologies – The Mayor, Councillors Hartley, Lawton and Ruck, Mr. G. Pybus, Darlington Association on Disability, Mr. J.P. Rodwell, Darlington Alzheimer’s Society and Parish Councillor S. York.

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

18. MINUTES – Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of the Public Protection Forum held on 12th October, 2006.

IT WAS AGREED – That the Minutes be approved as a correct record.

19. MATTERS ARISING – There were no matters arising.

20. STREET SCENE - The Assistant Director of Environmental Services gave an overview of Street Scene since its introduction in July, 2006 and updated Members on where Street Scene is now five months after introduction.

The Assistant Director of Environmental Services highlighted the design objectives of street scene which was primarily to develop an innovative, responsive and joined up approach to Street Scene Services by ultimately improving the quality of life in Darlington for residents, and empowering local communities to also take responsibility for the quality of their environment.

The outcomes of Street Scene were to have an area based approach of which there are now five areas, with teams of 24-30 operatives led by a Team Leader and a Co-ordinator. These teams work generically, seven days a week and aim to engage with the community in assisting them in delivering the services and develop a new culture and way of working.

It was reported that efficiencies are anticipated of £130,00 for 2006/07 increasing to £500,000 by 2008/09, and those efficiency savings are currently on target for this year.

The Assistant Director of Environmental Services acknowledged that there have been ‘teething problems’ with the introduction of Street Scene however, now after five months of an area based approach and generic working, services have improved and this is reflected in the Annual Community Survey which showed how ‘satisfied’ residents were with streets, refuse collection, upkeep and appearance of residential areas, parks and open spaces. However, it was acknowledged that there was some concerns with children’s play areas and this was to be addressed by Local Area Agreement.

It was also reported that the next few months will see a continuation of community engagement; a programme of leaf clearance; improvement programme for the winter months; planning for improvements in grounds maintenance service; planning for new refuse rounds; winter maintenance; low level highway maintenance; and mobile working. Future opportunities include funding via Local Area Agreement; scheme for ‘Young Caretakers’; links with Anti Social Behaviour and Environmental Crime teams; continuing with Members briefings; new Performance Management Framework; and the Crime Disorder Reduction Partnership.

Following a question by a Member the Head of Street Scene advised that there was no priority policy and that if Street Scene was made aware of problems that were within its remit they would respond. Problem highlighted included overhanging of shrubs, moss on paths, smell of urine in Town Centre sub-ways and possible cleansing of bus shelters in rural areas more frequently.

It was confirmed that seven day week working was in place with staff’s requirements being accommodated and that days off were not always Saturday and Sunday and could be mid-week.

General feedback on Street Scene was positive and members expressed to the Street Scene Manager and the work undertaken by the Street Scene Teams.

IT WAS AGREED – (a) That the thanks of this Forum be extended to the Head of Street Scene for his informative presentation.

(b) That the Head of Street Scene be invited to a future meeting of this Forum to update members.

21. GAMBLING ACT 2005 STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES – The Director of Development and Environment submitted a report (previously circulated) on the recent publication of the Council’s Statement of Principles in relation to the Gambling Act 2005 (also previously circulated) which comes into effect on 31st January, 2007 in accordance with statutory requirements.

The submitted report outlined the three licensing objectives contained within the Gambling Act 2005 and detailed the role of the Gambling Commission. The report also summarised the licensing responsibilities to be undertaken by the Council, the results of the consultation exercise conducted and the delegation of powers.

It was reported that under the 2005 Act the Council would only be responsible for the issue of Premises licences and the Gambling Commission would be responsible for the issue of Operating and Personal Licences. Indications are that the Council will take responsibility for licensing 20 betting shops and two bingo halls which will have grandfather rights in relation to the continuance of their businesses with little discretion available to the Council in dealing with such applications. The Council currently has responsibility for four amusement arcades and this will continue under new legislation. The Council also has responsibility for issuing gaming permits in respect of machines in alcohol licensed premises (pubs) and would take responsibility for clubs when the new legislation comes into force.

In relation to the Licensing objectives the Forum was advised that the protection of children and other vulnerable persons from being harmed or exploited by gambling would impact on Local Authorities and consideration may be given to locality, supervision of premises, separation of adult gaming areas and promotion of gambling support organisations.

Discussion ensued on the policing of admitting under-age children to premises although it was highlighted that some children could play some of the machines but not access the over-18 areas. Children will be excluded from casinos and betting shops. The Licensing and Parking Manager advised members that if a premise was known to allow under-age children to gamble then the Local Authority should be advised and action would be taken.

As Internet gambling sites were mostly out of this country it was a matter for the Gambling Commission and it was advised that, although lottery licences would be affected, it was not yet known to what extent, as the Regulations were not fully available.

IT WAS AGREED – (a) That the thanks of this Forum be extended to the Licensing and Parking Manager for her informative presentation.

(b) That the report be noted.

22. PANDEMIC INFLUENZA – The Assistant Director Public Protection gave a presentation to the Forum on Pandemic Influenza to ensure members of the Forum were aware of its effects and did not mistake Pandemic Influenza for the Bird Flu virus.

The presentation outlined the differences between seasonal flu, pandemic flu and avian flu together with the characteristics and symptoms of each virus. It was also reported that it was very rare for a human to contract bird flu although it had occurred in poorer countries where humans had regular contact with poultry. With regard to Pandemic Flu there had been three pandemics per century recorded since the 16th Century, the latest being 1918, 1957 and 1968. Some people were infectious with the pandemic flu without showing symptoms and therefore the virus could spread rapidly to about 25 per cent of the population, with several waves of infection each lasting 12 to 16 weeks resulting in the depletion of all workforces in the United Kingdom due to illness and other disruption. Details of control measures to contain the virus were highlighted although effectiveness would be unknown until the pandemic actually begins and planning control issues were also highlighted.

Discussion ensued on the effectiveness of vaccinations and its shelf-life however it was agreed that the virus could develop anywhere although distinction was required between this and the bird flu virus.

IT WAS AGREED – (a) That the thanks of this Forum be extended to the Assistant Director Public Protection for his informative presentation.

23. QUESTIONS – There were no questions.