
PEDESTRIAN HEART GAS MAIN REVIEW

Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor John Williams, Leader

Responsible Director - John Buxton, Director of Development and Environment

Purpose of Report

1. To report the Resources Scrutiny Committee's finding and recommendations in relation to the circumstances surrounding the finding of a gas main during the course of the Pedestrian Heart works.

Information and Analysis

2. As Members will be aware, following a request by Council, the Resources Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting held on 6th April, 2006, established a Review Group to look into the circumstances in which a gas main was found during the course of the Pedestrian Heart works.
3. Since that date, the Group has met on three occasions and site visits to the area concerned have taken place. The Review Group presented its Final Report (**attached as Appendix 1**) to a special meeting of the Resources Scrutiny Committee held on 30th June, 2006.
4. At the meeting on the 30th June, 2006, the Scrutiny Committee considered the report and the recommendations and, in addition, they also considered written submissions (**attached at Appendix 2**) from Mr Smith, a member of the public, who has shown interest in the issue.
5. In considering Mr. Smith's written submissions, the Scrutiny Committee felt that the issues raised by him had either been fully covered during the meeting on the 9th June, 2006, or would be covered at a later stage if the recommendations of the Group were adopted.
6. With the addition of a resolution in relation to the involvement of Darlington in the national work on the mapping of underground services, the Resources Scrutiny Committee therefore agreed to accept and endorse the review Group's recommendations and agreed to forward the following to Cabinet for consideration :-
 - (a) That, in the light of the survey information provided, further works could have been undertaken and Darlington Borough Council explores the possible legal implications;
 - (b) That further discussions take place with United Utility Networks for a greater contribution towards the cost;

- (c) That the Council produce a strategy for strengthening its project management arrangements with external agencies; and
- (d) That the Officers be requested to monitor the situation in relation to the pilot work being undertaken by Birmingham University into the mapping of underground services.

Officer Comment

- 7. The Chief Executive, Director of Corporate Services and the Director of Development and Environment are committed to taking forward the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee. With regard to the recommendations of the Review Group on project management an analysis of the existing and likely capital programme has been undertaken. The review was prompted by the funding announcements in recent months for both Hummersknott School and the Eastern Transport Corridor.
- 8. The review concluded that an additional post at Assistant Director level should be created within the Development and Environment Department to be responsible for project management and co-ordination of the major capital schemes. The post is about to be evaluated and it will be advertised soon.
- 9. Additional funding of £80k is required per annum (includes all on costs) for Development and Environment budget prior to the post being appointed. The funding of this post now would address the concerns of the Review Group and improve the Council's project management.

Outcome of Consultation

- 10. In undertaking this Review, some Officers of Darlington Borough Council, external agencies involved and members of the public were involved.

Legal Implications

- 11. This report has been considered by the Legal Services Manager for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Legal Services Manager considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

- 12. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

Council Policy Framework

- 13. The issues contained within this report do not represent change to Council policy or the Council's policy framework.

Decision Deadline

14. For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter.

Recommendation

15. It is recommended that Cabinet :-

- (a) Note the recommendations of the Resources Scrutiny Committee.
- (b) Note that officers will be taking forward the recommendations of the Resources Scrutiny Committee.
- (c) Approve funding of £80k to enable the post of Assistant Director (Capital Projects) to be established.

Reasons

16. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :-

- (a) To enable the investigative work undertaken by Resources Scrutiny to be taken to its conclusion.
- (b) To improve the Council's project management.

Paul Wildsmith
Director of Corporate Services

Background Papers

No Background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

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