

PUBLIC EVENTS SAFETY ADVISORY GROUP (PESAG) REVIEW GROUP

27 January 2015

PRESENT – Councillors Carson and Long.

APOLOGIES – Councillors Bladwin, Cossins, Culley, Donoghue, Richmond and Wright.

OFFICERS – Barry Pearson, Environmental Health Manager, Marion Ogle, Events and Programming Manager and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

OUTSIDE REPRESENTATIVES – Councillor B Jones, Sadberge and Whessoe Parish Council, Graham Robinson, Friends of North Lodge Park and Steve Rose, Darlington Community Carnival.

Purpose of the Meeting – To consider the views of voluntary groups that have sought advice from PESAG.

The Chair, Councillor Long, advised all attendees why Place Scrutiny Committee was undertaking a review of PESAG, current financial constraints of the Council, how community involvement for PESAG could be encouraged and health and safety considerations.

Points Discussed and Considered –

Members heard the views and comments of the represented voluntary groups as follows :-

Sadberge and Whessoe Parish Council

- Councillor Jones advised the Group that he had encountered problems with PESAG when holding Carnival events. It was felt that some of the issues raised were minor and not necessary, examples given included training required for assembly of trestle tables and gazebos;
- Concerns were also expressed that Durham Constabulary had withdrawn assistance during parades and no longer provided parking cones. It was considered that the Police were an essential part of the Community and it was felt that they had withdrawn from the community due to the requirements of policing of the night time economy. It was felt that the Police should get involved when the opportunity arose; and
- Councillor Jones concluded that PESAG was required and had a role but the effectiveness of that role was questioned.

Friends of North Lodge Park

- Mr Robinson raised concerns over the completion of Risk Assessments and made particular reference to crowd control and sound monitoring. It was stated that although the points raised were valid they had been addressed for previous events and the need to raise them each time was questioned. It was stated that

an event felt 'threatened' due to the standard approach adopted and it was suggested that a 'blanket' approach could be adopted for standard events;

- Group were advised that The Friends had their own safety feature cut-off point and cancelled events if there were too many attendees. It was felt that events had run smoothly for several years although The Friends always felt 'hammered' by PESAG every time an event was held; and
- Reference was also made to the provision of 'burger vans' which didn't require a licence as they were making a financial contribution to the event. The 'refreshment vans' were seen as providing for a community event rather than a business for profit.

Friends of the Denes

- Councillor Carson concurred with the comments of the Community Representatives and commented that The Friends had problems regarding security and insurance due to the financial implications on a small budget. He also advised that as the same events were run each year The Friends encountered less problems due to the repetitiveness.

Darlington Community Carnival and The Rotary Club

- Steve Rose believed that promotion and public awareness of PESAG was vital and although considered that volunteers felt they were being controlled and not advised he stated that, in order to have a successful event, an organiser had to abide by the rules;
- Mr Rose considered that each time an event form was completed for PESAG it became easier and suggested that volunteers were put off by re-submitted annual event plans;
- Mr Rose suggested that it would extremely useful to have regular community meetings as volunteers needed to be trained, trusted and facilitated;
- It was confirmed that the Community Carnival worked well and that the Police supported the event;
- Questions were raised as to why PESAG required information six months in advance as it was not always readily available until 4 to 6 weeks in advance of the Event;
- In relation to alcohol sales in Stanhope Park during the Carnival, Group were informed that the Licensing Officer Group had considered the issue therefore PESAG had no concerns;
- Mr Rose confirmed that the Events Team gave a great deal of time and resources to the Community Carnival but considered that sometimes different messages were received from the Events Team and PESAG – consistency was needed and perhaps one team was required as opposed to two – it was however confirmed that two teams were required – one PESAG and one the Event

Organiser; and

- Mr Rose requested that a positive statement be put on any response from PESAG, for example, 'We like the idea of and support you but please note you need to be mindful of

General Issues

- The Events and Programming Manager stressed that she understood that organising an event entailed a lot of work and the Events Team did try to help however it was stressed that an event was not the responsibility of the Events Team, it was the responsibility of the Organiser of the event, many of which were volunteers;
- In relation to the provision of refreshment vans Group were advised that the Policy was changed by the Council in order to provide a balance for the business trade and fairness to other traders;
- Particular reference was made to 'blanket requests' for events and the Environmental Health Manager advised that these would be appropriate in some cases, but not all, as there could be anomalies such as different performers at each event requiring differing needs. Group were advised, however, that a blanket form could be submitted with a Schedule of Events and this would cover all yearly events ;
- Concerns were raised around the information provided by Building Control and the Group were informed that standard advice text was provided for each application and it was stressed that a reply was not required. It was emphasized that the information was not Event specific and Building Control were reluctant to tailor a response to each individual event;
- The Environmental Health Officer stated that he did challenge people and requested an Event Plan that matched the proposed event, he only required a description that assured him the Event could be provided safety, he agreed it was burdensome especially on volunteers, however, the Community representatives were concerned that unnecessary pressures were being placed on volunteers resulting in a reluctance to undertake the task;
- It was stated that stewarding of events become more important once the Police decided not to support community events. Volunteers were normally briefed prior to an event and would normally only undertake crowd control. Larger Event Organisers would employ fully trained and qualified Stewards who could maintain order with the use of body language and voice control;
- Councillor Jones considered it ironic that a small village event was not supported by the Police but the PACT (Police and Communities Together) vehicle was present at the event. It was suggested that Special Constables could be deployed to community events to gain experience;
- The Environmental Health Officer advised the Group that the Police do not want any event organiser to make any reference to a police presence at an event

being involved in the arrangements for crowd management. They would, however, generally wish to attend events and engage with the public and if an emergency were to occur the Police would respond to a public safety/public order issue;

- Road closures are a significant issue for the Community Representatives. They felt that volunteers could organise them but were advised that a qualification was needed to ensure the process was done correctly;
- Making arrangements for a sponsor to fund the training of a team of volunteers who could manage Road Closures at community events would remove the need to pay for the employment of a specialist company; and
- Guidance about Road Closures for street parties were detailed on the Council's website and that signs, which had to be returned, were provided by the Council.

The Chair commented that it was important the public were encouraged to do more for their community and community policing needed to be explored and encouraged.

IT WAS AGREED – (a) That the thanks of the Group be extended to Councillors Jones and Carson and Mr Robinson and Mr Rose for their valuable input into the meeting.

(b) That the Democratic Officer make the necessary arrangements for the next meeting of the PESAG Review Group to formalise final recommendations.