

Parish Council Liaison Forum

A meeting of Parish Council Liaison Forum was held on Monday, 21st September, 2009.

Present: Cllr Cllr Terry Laing (Chairman), Mrs Jennie Beaumont, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Barry Woodhouse, Cllr J.H. Wills (Stillington and Whitton), Cllr T. Bowker (Redmarshall), J. Walker, G. Colling (Eggescliffe, H. Atkinson (Billingham)

Officers: P. Dobson, R. McGuckin, E. Bird, G. Rowbotham (DNS); A. Squires and M. Henderson (LD)

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Cllr Miss Barbara Inman, Cllr David Coleman.

PCL 10/09 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

PCL 11/09 **Minutes of the meeting held on 15th June 2009**

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2009 were confirmed as a correct record.

PCL 12/09 **Local Assessment Framework**

The Forum received a presentation relating to the Local Assessment Framework. The Framework was the mechanism through which certain complaints about Borough and Parish/Town Councillors, within the Borough of Stockton, were investigated, determined and, where necessary sanctions applied.

Members were provided with general information relating to the 11 complaints received since the introduction of the Framework in May 08 and noted the Sub Committees, of the Standards Committee that operated:-

- The Assessment Sub Committee - which would meet to make an initial assessment.

- The Review Sub Committee - if the Assessment Sub Committee resolves that no further action is required in a particular case the complainant may, within 30 days ask that the Review Sub Committee meets to look at it again.

The Consideration Sub Committee - meet to consider an Investigating Officers report.

The Hearing Sub Committee - meet to consider Investigation reports where the Investigating Officer considers a breach has occurred and the Consideration Sub Committee feel that if proved the sanctions available locally would suffice.

During consideration of the information members discussed how much information was provided to members who had been the subject of a complaint. The Forum noted that legislation governed what information could be initially provided to such members. The Forum felt that, within the parameters of that

information, as much information as possible should be made available.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

**PCL
13/09** **Green Infrastructure Strategy**

The Forum received a presentation relating to Stockton Borough's Green Infrastructure Strategy 2009 - 2012.

It was explained that in partnership with a number of other organisations Stockton Borough Council had published a draft Green Infrastructure Strategy. This followed on from the publication of the Tees Valley Green Infrastructure Strategy in 2008.

Letters were sent to Town and Parish Councils in July 2009, inviting comments and feedback on the draft Strategy by 9 October 2009. Forum Members representing Town and Parish Councils were encouraged to respond.

It was noted that the Green infrastructure incorporated all types of countryside and urban open space, including parks, playing fields, rivers, streams, ponds, nature reserves, allotments, footpaths, cycleways, trees and woodlands. It was important to us all as it provided places for play and exercise; spaces to grow food; attractive environments to live and work; 'green routes' for walking and cycling; areas for wildlife; and much more. Green Infrastructure helped to give us clean air and water, and in the future it would play an essential role in helping us adapt to climate change; for example, by cooling our towns and reducing the risk of flooding.

The draft Strategy set out priorities for the future management and development of the Borough's green infrastructure under 10 broad themes:

- Image and green settings for new development
- Natural systems to combat climate change
- Local greenspaces for enjoyment, health and well-being
- Destinations for recreation and tourism
- Biodiversity, air and water quality
- Routes for sustainable travel and recreation
- Landscape and heritage
- Productive landscapes
- Promoting understanding and community involvement
- Skills, training and employment

The Strategy identified a network of 'primary' and 'secondary' Green Infrastructure corridors across the Borough, which could be enhanced and developed over the lifetime of the Strategy.

The Borough's primary green infrastructure network comprised nine corridors, some of which extend beyond the Borough boundary.

The Strategy also recognised that local networks of public open space, trees, streams, wildlife sites other landscape features are also vitally important. The way in which those networks were managed would make a major contribution to

the overall aims of the strategy, complementing investment in the primary and secondary green infrastructure network. So the Strategy promoted the concept of the 'Green Grid' as a way of planning and managing those spaces and featured as multi-functional networks.

The final version of the Strategy would be accompanied by an Action Plan which would identify individual projects to be delivered by the Borough Council and many other partners.

The Strategy had been developed in consultation with a number of partner organisations, and given that the delivery of the Strategy would also be based on a partnership approach it was proposed that a Stockton-on-Tees Green Infrastructure Task Group be established. This group would oversee development the Action Plan, coordinate its delivery, and input to any future review of the Strategy.

Progress reports on delivery of the Strategy and Action Plan would be provided to the Environment Partnership and the other thematic and area partnership boards under Stockton Renaissance, Town and Parish Councils, and to Cabinet as appropriate.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

**PCL
14/09** **Carboard and Recycling Service**

An officer from the Care for your Area Team was present at the meeting and explained that the third Phase of the Council's Plastic and Cardboard Recycling Scheme would commence in October. This would see all households in the Borough covered as part of the fortnightly kerbside collection service. The officer invited the Forum to ask any questions/provide any feedback.

The Forum discussed the scheme and agreed it was excellent and was working extremely well. It was indicated that the bags for plastics were quickly filled - The Officer indicated that additional weighted hessian bags could be obtained from his team or users could use their own bags. The Forum asked that efforts be made advertise this more widely.

A member indicated that on occasion it appeared that the Green Waste was not collected as well as the recycling bags. The officer explained that he would look into this and indicated that where this occurred Care for your Area would try to respond immediately. It was explained that the collection of Green Waste would cease in October and the Forum felt that it was important that this be publicised over the coming weeks.

RESOLVED that the information be noted and the issues raised be persued by the officer.

**PCL
15/09** **Village Bus - Feedback**

The Forum noted that following a review of the tenders received in respect of

Borough bus supported services it was determined that due to the increased price submission there would be a considerable deficit in the budget allocation.

Information available indicated that the uptake of passenger journeys on the services in the western villages was particularly low and therefore the funding required to maintain the services was uneconomical.

Alternatives were considered and it was agreed that the Community Transport service would, for a trial period, expand the existing Community Lynx service provided through Rural Transport funding from DFT.

When the contracts expired on the 28 June 2009 the new service operated by SBC Community Transport commenced. The service operated a circular route every hour between the villages and Stockton High Street from 6pm 11pm Monday to Friday and 1pm to 11pm Saturday and Sunday.

Whilst the service was operated to a defined timetable it was not registered with the Traffic Commission as a 'registered public service'. Permission was granted to operate the service under a section 19 permit provided all passengers who wished to use the service were individually registered (to register passengers must live in or wish to access the villages). Between the 1st July and the 31st August there were a total of 280 registration.

The Forum from 1st July to date 554 trips had been taken. Of those trips 132 had been concessionary fares and the remaining 422 were fare paid.

It was explained that once vehicle was used to deliver the service which was drawn from the existing fleet at no extra cost due to the time of operation. A total of 61 driver's hours per week were required at a total cost of £35,620 per annum based on 52 weeks of operation (not including holiday cover) The cost of the fuel for the 16 seat mini bus was approximately £9.5k.

The Forum noted that activity levels were indicating that the service in its current format could not justify the expenditure. Vehicles were operating at times when there was no demand.

The Forum noted some possible options that may need to be considered.

- Survey all registered passengers and seek to establish what would encourage them to use the service.
- Route the service to operate alternatively between Stockton High Street and Stillington in each direction rather than the current circle.
- Operate evenings only after 6pm Monday to Sunday.
- Remove the Sadberge and Bishopton Link and include Hartburn Village.
- Schedule services at peak times and operate Demand Responsive at peak times.
- Combine the current Dial a Ride and Village Link and operate Demand

Responsive only.

- Combine the current Dial a Ride and Village and operate Demand Responsive only.

The Forum did not raise any concerns about the options and indicated that the operation of the service in each direction and operation on a responsive only basis would be beneficial/appropriate.

The Forum discussed the service and noted that Commercial bus companies were concentrating on core routes in the Borough rather than less profitable services in rural areas. The Council was adopting a flexible approach to address this and the village bus was part of that approach.

A suggestion was made that the route could be used to encourage Tourism and open up rural areas of the borough to residents living in the larger settlements. There were a number of countryside walks that could be accessed via the service and this may encourage residents to get out to the countryside.

RESOLVED that the information and comments be noted.

PCL **Issues submitted by Parish/Town Councils**
16/09

The Forum received two questions from Egglecliffe and Eaglescliffe Parish Council. The first question related to the Yarm and Eaglescliffe Area Action Plan and it was queried why there had been little progress made with the plan.

In response it was explained that issues surrounding the Core Strategy had proved to be extremely complicated and officer's time had been taken up far more than had been anticipated. The Core Strategy would be the subject of an independent examination, at the end of September. Once that inspection was completed it was envisaged that the Yarm and Eaglescliffe Area Action Plan would be progressed.

The second question related to the impact any decision, coming from the Yarm Car Parking Study might have on the Parish. In response it was explained that the information gathered from the study was currently being analysed. This analysis was likely to be complete by the end of September. Following this Ward Councillors and Yarm Town Council would be briefed. It was suggested that outcomes could be reported to the Forum's next meeting.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.