

## Parish Council Liaison Forum

A meeting of Parish Council Liaison Forum was held on Monday, 21st June, 2010.

**Present:** Cllr Terry Laing (in the Chair), Cllr Cook (vice Cllr Coleman), Cllr Barry Woodhouse (Stockton BC); H. Atkinson (Billingham T.C.), G. Colling, J. Walker (Egglecliffe & Eaglescliffe P.C.), Cllr Feldon (Ingleby Barwick P.C.), T. Hampton (Kirklevington P.C.), C. Algie (Maltby P.C.), R. Mosley (Thornaby T.C.).

**Officers:** G. Roberts (CESC), G. Clingan (DNS); N. Hart (LD), Mrs J. Danks, Mrs B. Brown (R).

**Also in attendance:** Cllr Mrs Maureen Rigg

**Apologies:** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs Beaumont, Coleman, Miss Inman and Mrs Walmsley.

### **PCL 1/10**      **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Woodhouse declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in respect of item 4 'Fair Access to Services' as a result of his spouse's employment associated with Telecare, a service included within the range of social care services consulted upon under Fair Access to Services.

### **PCL 2/10**      **Minutes of the Meeting held on 22nd March 2010**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 22nd March 2010 were confirmed as a correct record.

### **PCL 3/10**      **Fair Access to Services-Presentation**

Glyn Roberts, Integrated Services Area Manager (Adults) summarised for members of the Forum the content of the public consultation currently ongoing until the 27th August 2010 regarding the Council's consideration of changes to the 'bands' of eligibility for care support provided for adults.

Fair Access to Services (FACS) was the term given to describe the national eligibility criteria for adults access to care services, which was subsequently banded into four levels of needed based on an assessment of safety and independence ranging from low, moderate, substantial to critical. Each assessment made of an individual's needs was unique and personalised and influenced by a range of factors, variables and interactions.

This Council currently provided support for moderate, substantial and critical bands of need, and directed those with low needs with relevant information and advice. However, such was the impact of recent demographic change (with an increasing ageing population in the Borough with the number of people 85+ having doubled in the last 30 years) and the increasing pressure on budgets, the Council were faced with the prospect of prioritising support towards those in most need, hence consideration to now concentrate support on only the most substantial and critical need, an approach taken by 72% of Councils nationally. If implemented, this would mean those with low and moderate needs would be directed to other community services. A summary of the types of resources and services available to all, as well as targeted intervention services, was provided.

The consultation being undertaken was being led by the Council's Health Select Committee who were undertaking a scrutiny review of the service which would

culminate in recommendations being submitted to the Council's Cabinet in the Autumn for a decision.

Local Parish and Town Councils were invited to feed their own views into the consultation process, particularly on the key question of whether they agreed with the idea of changing the eligibility criteria for social care services so that some of the savings could be re-invested in community services that are available for all. If such a change was made, what sort of community based services would local councils most like to see? These could include advice and information, sitting or short break services, transport, shopping, cleaning, help getting to appointments etc.

Feedback received to date had been primarily from people who currently received a package of care support and assurances were given that the consultation included tailor made sessions for those with most need and hard to reach. There were currently approaching 7,000 people within the Borough receiving some level of support. The principle behind Fair Access to Services would be retained to ensure that whatever the outcome of the consultation there would be an equitable distribution of resources within the Borough with the same criteria applied to all residents.

Further details of the consultation survey were contained within Stockton News delivered to each household within the Borough, available via the Council's website and would be the subject of a number of public meetings in the consultation period June until end of August. A helpline was also available with further information.

RESOLVED that the content of the presentation be noted and Parish/Town Councils be invited to make their views known as part of the consultation process.

**PCL  
4/10**

### **Local Government Finances-Presentation**

In advance of the Government's emergency budget to be announced on the 22nd June 2010, Julie Danks, the Council's Corporate Director of Resources, provided members of the Forum with an overview of the Council's approach towards its existing three year Medium Term Financial Plan, as well as the effects on this of recent Government announcements of public expenditure cuts.

Prior to 2010/11, the Council had reduced its budgets by £6m through its value for money culture and had been recognised by the Audit Commission as achieving excellence in its Use of Resources. The economic downturn had seen increased demand for benefits and social care, had seen increased incidents of domestic violence, and had reduced the Council's funds due to less investment income being received and reduced Government grant. Other pressures, such as recent severe weather, increased demand for personal care as a result of demographics, the affects of the Baby Peter case, had all contributed towards a financial strain on the authority. Nevertheless, Council Tax levels had been contained as much as possible and were the third lowest in the region.

As a result of the above pressures, the Council had taken a number of immediate decisions, including a 2% reduction across all services, the removal

of certain employee allowances, and the undertaking of a three year Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation review process of all Council services. In addition, the Council would be challenging its procurement and commissioning arrangements and examining the potential for further expansion of its partnering arrangements for the delivery of services. Such measures were all designed to allow the Council to be in a position to reduce its budget by a further £12m, a significant challenge facing the authority.

On top of this, the Government had recently announced in-year cuts in public expenditure of some £6.2bn nationally, which was likely to equate to £1.165bn for local government, and £3.3m for this authority for this year. This latter amount was made up largely of Area Based Grant funding and transport capital funding. In addition, the Government was reviewing spending decisions made by the previous Government after 1st January 2010. A number of major capital schemes were being questioned as a result. The recent Treasury announcement around withdrawal of funding for the new hospital at Wynyard was one such scheme.

The outcome of the Government's emergency budget was therefore awaited with some expectancy, as was the Government's Spending Review in the Autumn. This Council's planned approach encompassing value for money programmes, was still however likely to be relevant, adjusted where relevant to take account of the effects of any further in-year reductions.

RESOLVED that the presentation be noted.

**PCL 5/10 Draft Stockton on Tees Strategy for Allotments and Leisure Gardens-Presentation**

Graham Clingan, the Council's Countryside and Greenspace Development Manager, summarised the content of the consultation currently ongoing until the 12th July 2010 inviting the views of Town and Parish Councils and Area Partnership Boards on existing allotment provision and possible new sites within the Borough, alongside a proposed draft strategy for Allotments and Leisure Gardens.

The draft strategy, which had come about as a result of a need identified by Cabinet in June 2009, was based on a proposed vision to 'provide a network of allotments, pigeon parks and leisure gardens to meet current and anticipated future demand, and to encourage more people to grow their own food-promoting the numerous health, social, economic and environmental benefits'.

The vision was supported by seven strategic objectives, each of which invited participation by other partners such as Town and Parish Councils, Allotment Associations etc. It was stressed that the strategy was not just for Stockton on Tees BC, but for all relevant partners. Local councils were therefore invited to contribute to comment on the Strategy itself; suggest actions for inclusion in the Action Plan, and highlight potential new allotment sites using the plans already circulated.

Reference was made to the importance of allotment sites being maintained to a high standard and it was noted that whilst the Council did not manage the

majority of sites, it was sensible to agree a collective approach towards their management and the Council would assist in this regard wherever possible.

RESOLVED that the presentation be noted and Parish/Town Councils be invited to make their views known as part of the consultation process.

**PCL  
6/10**      **Summer Events Programme**

The Forum was provided with a copy of the Council's Summer Events Programme, a new brochure including all of the known events and leisure activities taking place within the Borough over the Summer.

Every household within the Borough would receive a copy and further copies were available for local councils to share within their own parishes should they require them. An Autumn/Winter brochure was also planned and local councils were invited to inform the Council's Communications Section of any known events/activities they wished to be included within the forthcoming brochure.

RESOLVED that the Summer Events Programme be noted.

**PCL  
7/10**      **Issues Raised by Parish/Town Councils**

The Forum received one question from Ingleby Barwick Town Council seeking assurance that Stockton on Tees Borough Council would provide assistance to the Town Council in support of an application being progressed for a 'Free School' under the new Government's proposed legislation.

A response to the question was submitted as follows by the Council's Chief Executive and included comments from the Cabinet Member for Children & Young People:-

"Stockton Borough Council is aware of the 'Free School' proposal being developed by the BO2SS group and local ward councillors, supported by the Town Council. As you will be aware, the Council understands and sympathises with the secondary school issues impacting the South of the Borough. The Council has given a very public commitment to review all options for the South of the Borough"

Quote from Councillor Ann McCoy, Stockton Council's Cabinet Member for Children and Young People: "We continue to work with great determination to find a solution to the issue of the provision of secondary school places in the South of the Borough. We understand the pressure on student numbers, particularly in Ingleby Barwick, and recognise the hard work of families and groups working towards identifying a solution.

"We will of course factor the implications of the emerging announcements on new options for schools into our comprehensive feasibility work for the South of the Borough and, as more details become clear, we will consider them and their implications thoroughly. We remain absolutely dedicated to our vision of ensuring that every child in the borough has access to an excellent school."

The Chief Executive continued: "This comprehensive review is well under way

and is due to report back to Cabinet in September.

Clearly this review will in due course take into account any new options which may arise as a result of new policy or funding opportunities. However, at this time, we do not have any details to enable a proper evaluation of any potential opportunities. It is unfortunate that the 'Free School' proposal being suggested is done so at a time when there is no detail available from the government as there is a danger of presumption about processes and funding.

The Cabinet Member of Children and Young People has formally written to the Minister stressing the urgent need for detail so that a properly informed analysis and assessment can take place and appropriate consideration given. I hope that the Government will respond to Cllr McCoy's letter quickly and subsequently provide the necessary detail sought.

I can assure you that as soon as details are available, the Council will carry out a thorough and detailed analysis and will factor the results into the overall options appraisal for the South of the Borough."

Thornaby Town Council referred to their objection to any proposed planning applications that contained the removal of any areas of green space from estates, and requested that any such proposal should be clearly indicated on any planning application submitted. It was agreed that this request be referred to the Council's Head of Planning for consideration.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

**PCL  
8/10**

**Standards Board for England-Stockton on Tees Borough Council-Annual Return 2010**

Details of the Council's Annual Return to the Standards Board for 2010 were provided for information.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.