

DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (SERVICES)

MINUTES of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Services) held on 16 October 2001 at 7.00pm.

PRESENT:

- Councillor I T N Jones (Chairman)
- Councillor Mrs M A Stock (Vice Chairman)
- Councillor Mrs A D Allen
- Councillor Mrs A C Batty
- Councillor A R Brooker
- Councillor F G Byrne
- (Substitute for Councillor Mrs M A Eaton)
- Councillor M A Crosby
- Councillor R J Dunn
- Councillor D A Hammock
- Councillor D E Lawson
- (Substitute for Councillor Mrs D J Stoate)
- Councillor K F M Leadbeater
- (Substitute for Councillor J A Kite)
- Councillor D E May
- Councillor Mrs M N Salway
- Councillor G C D Steele
- Councillor Mrs P A Thurlow
- Councillor B P Wood

ABSENT:

- Councillor Mrs M A Eaton
- Councillor J A Kite
- Councillor H Phillips
- Councillor Mrs D J Stoate

ALSO PRESENT: **Cabinet Members**

- Councillor J I Muckle
- Councillor T W Cook
- Councillor V W Stock
- Councillor R Bryant
- Councillor G T Prout

Dartford Borough Council Officers

- Managing Director – Mr G Harris
- Director of Central Services – Mrs S Green
- Director of Property & Regeneration – Mr D Fletcher
- Director of Environment – Mr R Scott
- Executive Director – Mr C Oliver
- Environmental Strategic Development Manager – Mr P Kessel
- Member Services Manager – Miss D Lennen-Wood
- Committee Co-Ordinator – Miss A Bright

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26. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chairman informed the Committee that he had visited Councillor Mrs M A Eaton and advised that the funeral of Councillor L C Eaton will be held on Tuesday 23 October and that a notice will be sent out in due course.

27. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs M A Eaton, H Phillips, J A Kite and Mrs D J Stoate.

28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs A D Allen declared a public interest pursuant to Standing Order 19(3) in Agenda Item B1 - Proposal For Opening of Darenth Country Park.

Councillor R Bryant declared a public interest pursuant to Standing Order 19(3) in Agenda Item B1 - Proposal For Opening of Darenth Country Park.

Councillor T W Cook declared a public interest pursuant to Standing Order 19(3) in Agenda Item B1 - Proposal For Opening of Darenth Country Park.

Councillor Mrs M A Stock declared a public interest pursuant to Standing Order 19(3) in Agenda Item B1- Proposal For Opening of Darenth Country Park.

29. MINUTES

The Chairman called upon Mr D Fletcher, Director of Property and Regeneration, to update Members on Hesketh Park (Minute 19).

Mr Fletcher advised that the Management Plan was in draft form and would be submitted to Cabinet on 22 November 2001 for consideration.

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Services) held on 11 September 2001 be confirmed subject to Paragraph 3 of Minute 21 on Page 3 of the Minutes being amended to read as follows:

Mr Harris explained if Members advised of the line of questions, he would endeavour to ensure that the responsible Officer, or suitable Officer, would be present.

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30. FORWARD PLAN

The Chairman asked if there were any issues which the Committee wished to consider arising from the Forward Plan for the period October 2001 to January 2002, which had been circulated to Members on 18 September 2001.

RESOLVED:

That no issues be raised.

31. CHANGE OF AGENDA ITEM ORDER

RESOLVED:

That the revised order of business, as tabled, be approved.

32. DARTFORD AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT AREA ORDER

The Chairman called upon Councillor Dunn to introduce this item.

Councillor Dunn welcomed Mr M Croucher from Temple Hill Residents' Association to the meeting. Mr Croucher thanked Members for the invitation to the meeting and advised the Committee that he was attending as a representative for the residents of Temple Hill, to express their views regarding the proposed Air Quality Management Area. He advised that a small part of the Temple Hill Estate is within the area covered by the Order. This matter had been discussed at the Association's General and Executive Committee and objections were raised regarding pollution and the retention of the tolls. Their views had been sent direct to the Highways Agency, to the Leader of the Council and the MP.

Mr Croucher advised that he had received increasing complaints from residents on the effect of pollution on their health and considered that this was a major concern to the Temple Hill Residents Association as well as residents who lived outside of the corridor specified on the Order. The residents considered that the corridor was not wide enough to cover those Affected. However, Mr Croucher fully supported the Order and welcomed any further measures that would improve the air quality in the area, but regretted the need for the Order which was as a result of pollution locally.

Councillor Dunn asked if the Temple Hill Residents' Association was opposed to tolling.

Mr Croucher advised that residents considered that in an ideal situation tolls would be abolished. However if they were to continue the money collected should be spent in the local area. He further advised that a

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pledge had been made by the Government which had not been honoured in this respect.

Councillor Dunn stated that tolling was a significant contributor to the reduction in air quality and asked for Mr Croucher's view on the impact of the Draft Action Plan.

Mr Croucher was unsure of the effectiveness of such a Plan and stated that the pollution had to go somewhere.

Councillor Dunn referred to News Shopper article in respect of health providers views.

Mr Croucher advised that he had no information in connection with health statistics in the Temple Hill area and that his information received was anecdotal.

The Chairman reminded the Committee that the issue for discussion was the Dartford Air Quality Management Area Order and called upon Mr R Scott to provide answers to the questions raised.

Mr Scott confirmed that the overwhelming amount of pollution was caused by the M25. However there was some evidence from modelling that removal of the tolls would encourage additional M25 usage, although views differ on the extent of this effect. Additionally, traffic could still reach similar congestion levels due to the constraining nature of the tunnel itself. In regard to toll receipts, the Council will be consulted on issues including the possible use of collected funds locally. A report on this consultation by the Government will be submitted to Cabinet on 24 October 2001. He referred to the comments regarding the corridor being too tight and explained that the appropriate criteria had been used to define the area, set by the Government. However this did not mean that solutions could not look wider than the defined area specified in the report.

Councillor Batty advised that four years ago a Greenwich University Study had been carried out by Professor Fisher into the air control levels PM10. She asked if these levels were deteriorating and would another study be carried out in the future.

Mr P Kessel, Environmental Strategic Development Manager, advised that there were no current studies. Two portable monitors had been purchased and to obtain statistics at high volume locations. He advised that an improvement in air quality was predicted by 2005 due to improved car emissions.

Councillor Leadbeater was concerned that Professor Fisher's study had not been thoroughly analysed and that vital data from the Health Services had not been sought. He stated that this information should

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be included in the Action Plan and felt that the Council should be defending the residents of Temple Hill and Stone at all times.

Councillor Hammock asked if any comparative readings had been taken within the Borough with the aid of the two portable monitors. If not could this be actioned immediately.

Mr Kessel confirmed that higher levels of PM10 (particulate matter less than 10 microns in diameter) would be expected in the area covered by the Order, and that existing monitoring elsewhere in the Borough would be continued.

Councillor Cook referred to Councillor Leadbeater's comments on Professor Fisher's study and the removal of tolls. He said that this study had been looked into and that the issue of tolls and their removal would have to be investigated further in the future.

Councillor Batty expressed her concern over the health issue and advised that profiles could be obtained from General Practitioners. She highlighted various health problems and stated that some, including asthma were not always caused as a result of traffic pollution.

Councillor Brooker was disappointed that New Town and Brent had not been included in the report. He was concerned at the possibility of removing the tolls from the crossing thereby making the Dartford tunnel into a free tunnel as the numerous problems encountered by the surrounding area of the Blackwall Tunnel could occur at the Dartford crossing.

Mr Kessel advised the Committee that Professor Fisher's study was for an air quality model and that he had been assisting the Kent Air Quality Partnership. With reference to the question on asthma, he advised that expert medical advice was required and that additional guidance from the Government on this matter would be required. He added that a range of options would need to be considered for the Action Plan.

Councillor Muckle stated his concern that the Opposition were using this item to campaign against the removal of the tolls, rather than focussing attention on the need to plan for the future.

Councillor Dunn thanked Mr Croucher for his contribution and for attending the meeting and proposed the following motion:

"That this Committee, whilst regretting the need to lay an Air Quality Order, welcomes the production of a Draft Action Plan but also believes that the Draft Action Plan should be sufficiently wide ranging so as to permit appropriate recommendations supporting the abolition of tolls thus leading to the improvement of air quality at Temple Hill and Stone."

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Upon being put to the vote the motion was LOST.

The Chairman thanked Mr Croucher for his contribution and for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report be noted
- (2) That it be noted that a report on tolling issues would be submitted to Cabinet on 24 October 2001.

33. PROPOSAL FOR OPENING OF DARENTH COUNTRY PARK

The Chairman welcomed Mr D Anstey and Mr Jones, from Groundwork Trust, to the meeting and called upon Councillor Leadbeater to introduce the item.

Councillor Leadbeater expressed a high opinion of Groundwork and was delighted that they were able to be present tonight. He advised that he wished to explore the transparency and accountability within the Authority and the Council's relationship with Groundwork. He stated that he was unable to understand the reason why this report had been deferred to the next meeting, which would enable Mrs S Free to be available to answer questions, even though the report had been written by Mr Fletcher.

Mrs Free responded by advising the Committee that she was unable to attend the previous meeting due to holiday commitments. She said that since the Annual Council meeting she had been acting as an advisor to Groundwork and dealt with the Council's general relationship. Mr Fletcher was responsible for the future management of this specific scheme.

Councillor Leadbeater pointed out that he was delighted Groundwork had received the funds from the Millenium Commission and that the three principal objectives; to celebrate the Millennium, acknowledge the support provided by project partners and to involve the local community were worthy objectives. He asked why the Council had no specific budgetary allocation for the opening.

He drew the Committee's attention to paragraph 6.5 which stated that the Council would be arranging its own events on this site. He considered that this was not the way for one public body to treat another and queried why was Dartford Borough Council was having its own celebrations.

The Chairman asked if Officers had discussed the opening prior to referring it to Members.

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The Leader confirmed that Officers usually come to a view on available options and presented these to Members.

Mr Fletcher explained he had taken over responsibility for this area of work on 2 April 2001. Unfortunately due to the Foot and Mouth outbreak the proposed opening of the park in May 2001 was postponed. He advised that a suggested date of September 2001 was proposed by Groundwork as a date for the opening but in his view this date was unrealistic due to various unfinished work and the Foot and Mouth problem. Following discussion with Groundwork a deadline date of April 2002 was now proposed for the Opening.

Councillor Mrs Stock confirmed that there was not a problem in the relationship between Groundwork and the Council and that the lack of a budgetary allocation would be addressed in the next year's budget. She hoped that there would be a joint opening between the Council and Groundwork Trust.

Councillor Mrs Salway stated that she was delighted to meet the Groundwork representatives and said that they were a most encouraging organisation. She hoped that they would be able to report back once a year, to advise an update on the project and looked forward to the opening of the Park in April 2002.

The Chairman thanked Groundwork for attending and invited them to speak.

Mr D Anstey, Executive Director, thanked Members for the invitation to the meeting and their fantastic level of support for this scheme. He asked them to bear in mind that the scheme had encountered many major changes. A very sound basis for the Park had been provided to Dartford Borough Council and had involved a strong community involvement. He said he was very proud to take over this flagship project from the previous Chief Executive. Mr R Jones reiterated Mr Anstey's comments and thanked everyone for their endless support.

Councillor Leadbeater was not satisfied with the reason given for non-participation in the Groundwork's opening was that works were not complete. He stated he was delighted with the proposed opening in April 2002 and suggested that we could possibly combine this event with the Queen's Jubilee. He hoped that comments of the Committee would be relayed back to Groundwork staff and proposed the following motion:

"That this Committee congratulate and support Groundwork on their successful project and recommend that Dartford Borough Council participate in a joint opening of the park in Spring 2002.

Upon being put to the vote the motion was CARRIED.

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The Chairman thanked Mr D Anstey and Mr R Jones for their contribution and for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That congratulations and support be conveyed to Groundwork on their successful project and recommend that Dartford Borough Council participate in a joint opening of the Park in Spring 2002.

34. TRAVELLERS

The Chairman called on Mr Fletcher to introduce the item.

Mr Fletcher advised the Committee that there was to be a meeting held on 17 October 2001 at Kent County Council, to discuss the Travellers Protocol and a further meeting which would assess the health impact issues. The next stage for the Working Group would be to continue meetings with the target of bringing a final report back to this Committee on 18 December 2001 on the issues included in the Work Plan.

Councillor Dunn asked if budgets were in place to enable Dartford Heath to become a local nature reserve and how many Wardens would be required for this site. He queried the completion timescale on the Community Safety Strategy. Additionally he asked what work had been carried out to identify potential Traveller transit sites in the Borough and if any consultation had been carried out.

Councillor Mrs Thurlow expressed her concern that we had been sharing information with the rest of Kent and had not received any information back in return from other local authorities. She asked if it was known how many sites were already situated in the Borough and how many were envisaged. Additionally she asked if we had any statistics regarding the number of Travellers that visited the Borough last year. This would enable us to determine if there had been a reduction.

She asked if there was a possibility of visiting a traveller sites outside the Borough to enable Members to ascertain the requirements of such facilities.

Councillor Steele advised the Committee that he had attended the Nexus Conference on 27 September 2001. He suggested that the Working Group should extend an invitation to a Member of the Gypsy Council to attend a Working Group meeting which would provide a valuable prospective. He mentioned that Charles Smith was both a

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Traveller and Councillor and that he would pass his details to Mr Fletcher as a possible contact.

The Chairman was supportive of the proposed invitation.

Mr Fletcher confirmed to the Committee that Dartford Heath was one of the areas where Management Plans were to be prepared. The issue of a Nature Reserve will be addressed as part of the Management Plan. The Authority was in the process of advertising for a Park Ranger.

Mr Fletcher stated that a regional approach was being taken to transit sites and would be discussed at the Kent County Council Protocol meeting on 17 October 2001.

Mr Fletcher confirmed that he would request information regarding statistics on travellers' sites and would report back to the Working Group. He said he welcomed the idea of inviting people to the Working Group meetings and that a visit to a Travellers encampment could be arranged.

Mrs S Free, Director of Community Services, stated that the Community Safety Strategy was a three year programme due to be completed at the end of March 2002. A Community Safety audit was being completed to underpin the Strategy. In due course consultation on the Strategy will take place.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Minutes of the first meeting of the Travellers Working Group held on 13 September 2001 be noted.
- (2) That the Group's proposal that they should target the meeting on 18 December 2001 as the date for the final report back to the main Committee be noted.

35. SURE START – APPLICATION FOR FUNDING

The Chairman asked Councillor Leadbeater to address the Committee on this item.

Councillor Leadbeater congratulated Mrs S Free and Councillor Prout on the report and explained that he wanted to explore the implementation of the scheme across Dartford and Gravesham. He expressed his concern that the Councils had submitted separate bids and that these would incur duplication of numerous costs. He said that despite Sure Start advising that combining the two bids would not be possible, he asked that the issue be reconsidered.

Councillor Mrs Thurlow asked if a Family Learning Centre had opened on the Oakfield School site.

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Councillor Mrs Salway enquired why Brent and New Town had not been included in the scheme and asked if some families were slipping the net.

Councillor Prout responded by advising the Committee that this was not a competitive bid and that Dartford Borough Council had been invited to bid for funds. We were currently in the fourth round of discussions and the bid was progressing very successfully.

He advised that a Family Learning Centre would be opening in October on the Oakfield School site. Kent Children's University was in the process of placing a study support centre at the site on Highfield Road, occupied by Adult Education for after hours activities for school age children, next month. He said that the areas in question, Brent and New Town, had not been included in the scheme, as they would not have met the criteria.

Mrs S Free advised that they had received favourable comments from Sure Start regarding the Healthy Living Centre bid for Temple Hill and added that the Tree Estate area would include facilities for residents of properties in Wilmington East also.

She said that Sure Start was satisfied with the bids and she hoped to receive confirmation, in writing, within the next week of the next round. She explained that the submission of one bid would have proved extremely difficult combining the two Boroughs. She confirmed that, following discussions with the Sure Start Unit, economies of scale and effort would be obtained, in the future, where possible.

RESOLVED:

The report be noted.

36. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information.

No members of the press and public were present during the discussion of the following item of business.

37. PERFORMANCE OF SCHEDULE OF RATES CONTRACTOR: DAY TO DAY MAINTENANCE (EXEMPT CATEGORY SO46 (1) (b) ANNEX 1 PARAGRAPHS 8 & 9)

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The Chairman asked Councillor Leadbeater to address the Committee on this item.

Councillor Leadbeater expressed his concern that the Council was not providing a good service to residents and explained that this item had been drawn down to explore the monitoring procedure. It was noted that this item was a key decision and that it could be drawn down using that process.

Councillor Leadbeater drew attention to the five options available to the Council. He drew Members' attention to the tendering process used in this case and pointed out that the results had been very close.

Councillor Mrs Allen raised a question regarding the level of voids and its effect on the waiting list.

The Leader pointed out that he had to recognise the seriousness of this issue and the implications to the residents.

The Chairman summarised by recommending that the Committee note the decision of the Cabinet and agree the desire that the issue be treated as confidential.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That the Committee noted the decision and agree the desire that the issue under discussion be treated as confidential.

38. CHANGE OF NEXT COMMITTEE DATE

RESOLVED:

It was agreed that the overview and Scrutiny Committee (Services) meeting on 13 November 2001 be cancelled and the next meeting be held on Monday 3 December 2001.

The meeting finished at 9.35 pm

Councillor I T N Jones

CHAIRMAN