

AD HOC SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel was held on 6 October 2008.

PRESENT: Councillor Brunton (Chair), Councillors J A Walker, Dunne, Elder, C Hobson, Majid and McIntyre.

OFFICIALS: P Clark and S Harker.

**** PRESENT BY INVITATION:** Councillors Clark, Jones, Porley, G Rogers and Williams.

**** PRESENT AS AN OBSERVERS:** Councillor McPartland.
L Young, Cleveland Combined Fire Authority.

**** APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

**** DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made at this point of the meeting.

****MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel held on 18 August 2008 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

RELOCATION OF FIRE EMERGENCY CONTROL ROOM

By way of introduction to the scrutiny topic on the Relocation of the Fire Emergency Control Room the Senior Scrutiny Officer submitted a report which provided a brief overview of the purpose of the meeting.

The Overview and Scrutiny Board had been alerted that consideration was being given to the national rationalisation of the Fire Emergency Control Rooms and that this could result in a proposal to relocate the control room for the Middlesbrough area. The Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel had been directed to explore the issues associated with the proposed rationalisation of the Fire Emergency Control Room and report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

Members of the Fire Authority who were also Members of Middlesbrough Council had been invited to the meeting.

The Panel was informed that the rationalisation of the fire emergency control rooms was a national programme that the Government had introduced. The decision to have regional control was taken in 2004 and at that time there was resistance from Cleveland, Durham, Northumberland and Tyne and Wear to the proposals. A private company – Fire Control North East had been established to manage the new fire emergency control rooms. The fire emergency control room for this region would be based at Belmont, Durham and would be one of nine in total. If for any reason the fire emergency control room at Belmont ceased to function its operations would be immediately taken on by one of the other controls rooms as they were all linked.

A great deal of discussion had taken place at the Regional Management Board on issues including costs, staffing and the effects of the proposal on local communities. Members of the Fire Authority had received assurances that the new control room would serve the public much better than the current control room at Hartlepool which was in need of modernisation. There would be about a 43% reduction in staff over the four areas and sixty three staff would be required to operate the new control room.

It was highlighted that the Emergency Planning Committee had concerns regarding loss of local knowledge and capacity if there was a major incident. Risks particular to the area were highlighted – there were 37 top tier sites, the second largest chemical complex in Europe, at least 700 road tankers started and finished their journeys in Cleveland every day. Chemicals were also transported by rail and there was the nuclear power station at Hartlepool.

The Panel was informed that a brand new Global Positioning System (GPS) would be in place, which would allow the location of every call to the control room to be pinpointed. Every fire hydrant could be located using the GPS and the movements and locations of all fire vehicles could also be identified quickly. The existing fire stations would not be re-located and most chemical plants had their own fire stations on site. Detailed chemical plant information including floor plans for the buildings were included in the new system. The new system would be a substantial improvement on the existing service. All the major industries were directly linked to the new control centre. Over one hundred million pounds had been invested in the new control centres and systems by the Government.

In response to a query regarding consultation, the Panel was informed that there was no mechanism in place requiring Members of the Fire Authority to report the back to their Local Authorities. However it was noted that minutes of Fire Authority meetings were sent to all Members. A suggestion was made that reports from the Fire and Police Authorities could be included on the agenda for future Council meetings.

The Chair thanked Members of the Fire Authority for their attendance and input to the meeting.

AGREED that the following information would be reported back to the Overview and Scrutiny Board in response to the issues requiring clarification:

1. That the proposal to relocate the fire emergency control room which covered Middlesbrough was part of a national programme that the Government had introduced. The decision to have regional control had been taken in 2004.
2. There were some concerns about Middlesbrough being located in a high risk area although the Panel had been assured that the new fire emergency control room would be state of the art and capable of dealing with all eventualities much more efficiently than the current service.
3. With regard to the Fire Authority's consultation with Local Authorities in the Cleveland Area it was highlighted that the Fire Authority was an independent body. However, the Local Authorities were represented on the Fire Authority and therefore had a mechanism to voice any concerns.
4. There was not currently a process in place for Middlesbrough Members who sit on the Fire Authority to ensure that Council was appraised of significant changes which could affect their area. However, the possibility of including quarterly reports from the Fire and Police Authorities on the agenda for Council meetings was raised.

CLEVELAND SHOW – DRAFT FINAL REPORT

The Senior Scrutiny Support Officer submitted a Draft Final Report in relation to the Panel's assessment and proposals on the Cleveland Show. The aim of the scrutiny investigation was to assess the issues associated with the Cleveland Show and make appropriate recommendations.

The Panel appreciated that the Council had little direct control over the introduction of many of the recommendations in the Report and that these would be under the control of the Show Committee.

However there were a number of recommendations that the Council did have direct control over and the Panel encouraged the Executive to give the following recommendations serious consideration:

1. That approaches be made to the large agricultural manufacturers for sponsorship and attendance at future shows.
2. That the Vintage car and motorcycle clubs be approached and encouraged to attend future shows.
3. That the Committee consider greater youth involvement in the direction and arrangements when developing future shows and indeed has a representative from the youth council on its Committee.
4. The Council's services (Culture, Arts and Leisure) have an active role in developing the Show and that they have direct involvement in the methodology adopted for marketing and publicising the event.
5. That the Executive establishes a Policy, which addresses the Council's stance on underwriting any loss incurred by the Show.
6. As a major agricultural county show, the Council approach other councils in the Tees Valley for financial support.
7. That the Council's Grants Officer pursue sponsorship and grant funding to support the show in a similar way as achieved with the Mela.
8. That the Council's Leisure and Culture service take a responsibility for any displays at the show and that the Environment Service be responsible for the Park and not the event held within it.

AGREED that the report be approved and referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Board for consideration.