

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
SERVICE DELIVERY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON MONDAY, 12 SEPTEMBER, 2005**

Present: Councillors S Bishop, H High,
A J Holmes, Mrs E Huntington, Mrs A Naylor,
D Raine, D J Taylor-Gooby, C Walker
and T Taylor

Also Present: Councillor D Myers – Executive Member for
E-Government and Scrutiny Liaison
Councillor J Goodwin - Executive Member for
Community and Culture
Councillor G Patterson – Executive Member for
Environment and Transport

Mrs S Sidhu – IDeA
Nicola Peak – Tenants Federation

1 **THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** held on 18 July, 2005, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member were confirmed.

2 **THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE** held on 30 August, 2005, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member were confirmed.

3 **PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

There were no members of the public present.

4 **WORK PROGRAMME ISSUES**

(i) **Position Statement – Revenues and Benefits**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Financial Management which provided a Position Statement in respect of the Revenues and Benefits Services, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Details of performance from 1 April, 2005 to the period ended 30 June, 2005 were outlined in Appendix 1 to the report. The tables showed national averages and upper quartile performance for previous years as comparators.

The Benefits Manager gave details of the key issues with regard to benefits and in particular performance on benefits claims, percentage of new claims paid on time, sickness levels in both revenues and benefits, average time for completing changes in circumstances and the amount of benefit paid correctly. It was explained that new applications for benefits had now reduced to 35 days which had improved dramatically.

Details were given of the key issues with regard to revenues in respect of the percentage of council tax collected in the year, the percentage of business rates collected and the cost of collecting council tax per chargeable dwelling.

Members were advised of the overall performance of the Unit together with details of recorded complaints. The Best Value Service Improvement

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Plan was set out in Appendix 2 and the Unit were currently implementing targets for 2005/2006 onwards.

It was explained that the District Council was ranked 37 in the country with regard to the increase in the number of claimants in receipt of Pension Credit. In the past 15 months, it was estimated that £300,000 of pension credits had been gained for residents.

The June 2005 performance figures showed that in the case of new applications and claims processed within 14 days, the Council was in the second quartile with change in circumstances and accuracy of processing was a top quartile performer. It was explained that Job Centre Plus was to hold a presentation for Members on 14 September at 2.00 pm in the Council Chamber.

The Benefits Manager explained that sickness levels in the unit were increasing due to long term sickness. The problem was currently being addressed jointly with Personnel Section through the sickness monitoring procedure.

A Member commented that he was pleased to see that the efforts of staff and best value had improved dramatically and he had received no complaints in recent months.

A Member referred to the Gershon efficiency savings and asked if there was more revenue to be collected. The Principal Council Tax Officer explained that the Council's rate had always been between 95 and 96% although this was not in the top quartile. Easington was a deprived area and 95% was quite an achievement in comparison with similar authorities in deprived areas. New initiatives were being introduced in order to try to improve the figures further.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(ii) Democratic Services and Administration – Performance Report

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Democratic Services and Administration which updated Members on the performance of the Democratic Services and Administration Unit, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The Head of Democratic Services and Administration explained that the report provided an update on the progress of the Unit which comprised Democratic and Member Services, Elections and Electoral Registration, Legal Services, Administration Services and Risk Management.

It was explained that an interim review of the Unit had been approved in February 2005 which had highlighted the increasing demands placed upon the Unit. A number of key issues had been highlighted which had resource implications. The current Best Value Review of Support Services would have a significant bearing on the future structure and services delivered by the Unit.

The Head of Democratic Services and Administration explained that the key achievements over the last six months were detailed in Appendix 1 and gave a brief summary of the work of the Unit which included Scrutiny, Licensing Committee, Member Training and Development, E-Government, Elections,

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Electoral Registration, Legal and Administrative Services and Risk Management.

The Head of Democratic Services and Administration explained that the District Auditor had complimented the Scrutiny Committees on developing work programmes which were focussed on Council priorities and acknowledged the Council's focus on training and development for Scrutiny Members.

It was explained that the unit was responsible for Priority Service Outcome RO5 and this had been achieved ahead of the December 2005 deadline. The Executive Member for E-Government and Scrutiny Liaison complimented the Head of Democratic Services and the Democratic Services Officers on the work that had been completed to enable members of the public access to minutes, agendas and reports.

With regard to legal and administrative services, the interim review had resulted in additional resources being employed and a revised temporary structure put in place.

The Head of Democratic Services and Administration explained that with regard to sickness, the average number of days lost per employee was 4.16 in comparison to the same period last year when there were a number of staff on long term sick and the sickness was 14 days per employee. The corporate target was 10 days.

A Member advised that he represented the Council on the Health Scrutiny Group and explained that there was a lot of development and changes in health services at the present time and queried how the information was fed back through the committee system. The Head of Democratic Services and Administration explained that the Scrutiny Support Manager attended inter-authority Scrutiny Officer meetings where information was discussed and shared.

A Member queried how Members reports on conferences were dealt with. The Head of Democratic Services and Administration explained that Members reports were forwarded to all Executive Members, the relevant Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees and Officers whom the conference impacted upon. It was then up to Officers to progress any issues that were outlined within the reports.

The Chair suggested that future reports could be considered for action by the Scrutiny Management Board and it was suggested that a standard heading be placed on the Scrutiny Management Board agenda titled 'Conference Reports'.

The Chair thanked the Head of Democratic Services and Administration for his report.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the information given, be noted;
- (ii) a standard heading be placed on the Scrutiny Management Board agenda titled 'Conference Reports'.

(iii) **Environmental Operations Quarterly Performance Report**

Consideration was given to the report of the Environmental Services Operations Manager which provided information on the performance of the Environmental Services Operations for the period April 2005 – August 2005, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Appendix 1 to the report provided details of progress to date in respect of the Green Waste Collection/Recycling Service, Street Cleansing, Horticulture, Best Value Performance Indicators, Strategy Documents together with other tasks and targets.

Appendix 2 to the report provided details of complaints received in relation to the Environmental Operations Service.

The Environmental Services Operations Manager explained that the Green Waste Collection Service was presently operating very satisfactorily with tonnages exceeding the original predicted weights which was contributing to improving the Council's recycling targets. A new vehicle would be used which carried a greater capacity, therefore reducing the number of journeys to the tip.

Following the slight delay in the grass cutting at the beginning of the year, the service was now running as programmed and summer bedding plants were now in full bloom.

The gully street cleansing operation was maintaining the set programme. Durham County Council had recently requested out of hours cover from the gully crews to accommodate for extreme weather conditions and this had been agreed.

The graffiti machine was now operating in the district and the pathfinder area and during the period, 402 sites in the pathfinder area and 279 in the remainder of the district had successfully had graffiti removed. A catalogue of before and after photographs would be placed in the Members' Room.

With regard to the bus shelter maintenance programme, this had been reviewed and a local performance indicator had been introduced. Systems were now in place to respond to emergency repairs within 24 hours and routine work within 7 days. All reports should be logged, monitored and reported to the Director on a monthly basis. Street Wardens were to support the system by reporting any defects or maintenance problems whilst patrolling the district. Street cleansing crews had been issued with a defect report booklet which should be used for recording the daily condition.

A Member referred to the gullies in Shotton and explained that it seemed the whole system was about to collapse as the drains were full and blocked. The Environmental Services Operations Manager explained that the gullies were cleaned on an agency basis for Durham County Council and any defects found were reported to them. Durham County Council had invited him out on an inspection in Shotton and a number of the traps were missing and had been asked to design some traps from fibreglass. Two thousand traps had been replaced throughout the district the previous year and Shotton was a particular problem as they had a different type of outlet.

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The Chair suggested that the Environmental Services Operations Manager, Councillor High and a representative of Durham County Council arrange an inspection of the problem areas in Shotton.

A Member asked if the green waste recycling was to be expanded in other areas of the district. The Director of Community Services explained that the service needed to be reviewed together with potential costs and presented to Members for consideration.

A Member referred to a bus shelter in Blackhall Rocks and explained that the roof was missing. He had reported this on numerous occasions. The Environmental Services Operations Manager explained that he would ascertain whether the works were outstanding.

A Member queried if the good work that was being done throughout the district was publicised enough. The Director of Community Services explained that a lot of publicity had been carried out over the last six months although more could be done. The Executive Member for Environment and Transport explained that he had been interviewed on radio that day regarding a scheme that was to commence in Peterlee Town Centre which involved the Street Wardens issuing fixed penalty notices.

The Environmental Services Operations Manager explained that the Hartlepool Mail had been in touch regarding the graffiti machine and an article would be placed in the near future.

T Taylor queried if many complaints were received regarding charging for special collections. The Director of Community Services explained that initially there had been a number of complaints although this was as people were getting familiar with the new changes. There was no adverse effect on fly tipping.

The Chair thanked the Environmental Services Operations Manager and the Director of Community Services for their report.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.