

THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE SERVICE DELIVERY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON MONDAY 18 JULY 2005

Present: Councillor D Raine (Chair)
Councillors S Bishop, D Chaytor,
H High, A J Holmes, Mrs E Huntington,
Mrs A Naylor, D J Taylor-Gooby and
C Walker

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors F Shaw, G Patterson, D Myers and Ms T Taylor.

2 THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING held on 27 June 2005, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.

3 THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE held on 5 July 2005, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were submitted.

RESOLVED that the information contained within the Minutes, be noted.

4 PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

There were no members of the public present.

5 WORK PROGRAMME ISSUES

(i) Energy Conservation Report

Consideration was given to the report of the Energy Conservation Officer which provided information on the annual progress made to date with fuel poverty and domestic home insulation grant schemes, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The Energy Conservation Officer explained that the District of Easington Warm Homes Campaign sought to maximise the uptake of fuel poverty grants within the district to reduce heating costs and provide warmer, healthier homes.

Details were given of schemes which assisted vulnerable households within the district.

(a) Warm Front Grant Scheme

Warm Front was the Governments national fuel poverty scheme aimed at helping the fuel poor within the district. 846 homes had been insulated by this scheme from April 2004 – March 2005.

(b) **Easington Over 60's Free Insulation Scheme**

The scheme was launched in February 2005 to provide free home insulation measures for the over 60's age group in the private sector. To date 487 homes had been insulated.

(c) **Durham Energy Savers Scheme**

The scheme provided substantial discounts of up to 80% to homeowners off the cost of home insulation measures to encourage them to insulate their homes. To date 423 homes had been insulated.

(d) **Insulation Scheme to Council Properties**

The scheme was funded through the Capital Programme providing cavity wall and loft insulation measures in Council properties. Settlements were targeted on a worst first basis using the Council energy database. The settlements targeted in 2004/5 were Horden, Wingate, Trimdon Station and Wheatley Hill and a total of 410 properties had been insulated.

(e) **Annual Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) Report**

HECA required local authorities to reduce domestic energy consumption by 30%. The target for reduction for domestic energy consumption was 18% and Easington's actual reduction domestic energy consumption was 25.1%.

Members queried the procedure if faults were found in a property prior to insulation. The Energy Conservation Officer explained that if the Surveyors found a problem the works would be reported to the relevant department and completed before insulation was fitted.

A Member queried if grants were available towards combi condenser boilers. The Energy Conservation Officer explained that since 1 April 2005, building regulations had changed and every boiler fitted needed to be a high efficiency boiler. Grants were still available but were reduced.

Members congratulated the Energy Conservation Officer on the hard work carried out to secure the level of funding and explained that residents were very happy with the work that had been completed.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(ii) **Sickness Monitoring**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Personnel which appraised Members of the current situation with regard to sickness monitoring across the authority, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The Head of Personnel explained that following the disappointing performance during 2003/4, an action plan had been devised and agreed by Members to address a worsening trend in sickness absence.

A number of initiatives had been implemented to aim to reduce sickness levels.

Members were advised that the corporate rate of sickness absence had reduced to 11.3 days per employee in the twelve months to the end of March 2005. Whilst this could be partly attributable to the transfer of craft workers to East Durham Homes, the Council was confident that the campaign was having a positive effect on the Council's performance.

Appendix A to the report detailed a league table which illustrated the number of days lost to sickness per employee in order from best to worst.

It was explained that East Durham Homes sickness statistics had shown a significant improvement. The overall sickness rate had reduced from 17.4 days per employee to 15.8 days.

The Head of Personnel explained that the latest figures he had available was that sickness had reduced yet again from 11.3 days to 10.7 days. The target for the current year was 10 days so there was still some work to be done to achieve the target.

The Chief Executive had written to staff who had no sickness in the past year to congratulate them and all other staff had received a letter thanking them for their efforts in reducing sickness.

A Member referred to a bonus scheme that had been in operation a number of years ago and asked if the scheme had made any difference to sickness. The Head of Personnel Services explained that the bonus scheme in refuse collection ceased a number of years ago. Initiatives which had the least effect were to remunerate staff and the most effective had been the return to work interviews. In 2003/4, 61% of days lost were short term absences compared to 2004/5 where this had reduced to 43%. It was felt that the return to work interviews were the reason for this.

A Member queried if it would be possible to include the number of staff involved in each service unit for future reports. The Head of Personnel explained that he would provide this information in future reports.

Members explained that they would like to thank employees of the District Council in their efforts to reduce sickness.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the information given, be noted;
- (ii) numbers of staff in each service unit be provided in future reports.

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period to the end of June 2005, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Appendix 1 to the report set out the Corporate Development Unit Work Programme together with all key tasks for the team during the year. Completed tasks were coloured in grey to give an indication of the team's progress in the first quarter of 2005/6.

Members were advised that since April, the unit had undertaken and delivered a number of key projects as part of the planned workload. Key achievements included the review, completion and publication of a Race Equality Scheme for both the Council and East Durham Homes and the publication of the Council's Corporate and Performance Plan for 2004/5. It was explained that the Best Value Review of Support Services had commenced in June but was slightly behind schedule, due to negotiations with the IDeA regarding their facilitation role.

Details were given of other notable achievements within the unit. A number of key areas of work were planned for the coming months and included the Best Value Review of Support Services, implementation of the Customer Contact Centre, review of the Community Strategy, revision of the Performance Management Arrangements, development in partnership of the Local Area Agreement and CPA consultation document.

Appendix 2 to the report gave details of the key performance indicators. At a recent team meeting it had been agreed to reduce the performance indicators to 11.

A Member referred to the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and asked if this was up and running. The Principal Policy Officer explained that the CRM was not yet fully operational. The pilot scheme had highlighted a number of issues that needed to be addressed. A more detailed update on the CRM system would be provided on the next report from the unit.

The Chair thanked the Principal Policy Services Officer for her report.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.