

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
SERVICE DELIVERY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON TUESDAY, 3 JANUARY, 2006**

Present: Councillor D Raine (Chair)

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

Also Present: Councillor D Myers – Executive Member for
e-government and Scrutiny Liaison

Apologies: Councillor D Chaytor

1 **THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** held on 5 December, 2005, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.

2 **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

(i) **Planning and Building Control - Quarterly Performance Report
Ridgemount House
(Minute Number 3(ii) refers)**

Consideration was given to an e-mail received from the Engineering Services Manager which provided information with regard to the road closure adjacent to Ridgemount House in Peterlee. It was reported that the road had now been re-opened.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

3 **THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE** held on 13 December, 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) **Corporate Development Unit and Customer Services Unit Quarterly
Performance Report**

Consideration was given to the report of the Assistant Chief Executive which provided information on the performance of the Corporate Development Unit for the period July to the end of December 2005, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The Assistant Chief Executive advised that since the last quarterly report the Team had reviewed and reduced the number of performance

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indicators it worked to with the intention of focusing on key areas of performance. The report showed progress against the Team's indicators in Appendix A and also against its work programme for the second two quarters of 2005/6 in Appendix B.

Between July and December 2005 the Unit had undertaken and delivered a number of key projects as part of the planned workload. In addition, during the months of November and December the Team facilitated the CPA Corporate Assessment Pilot, a task which was unplanned at the beginning of the year. This had caused slippage in some areas but she expected that work would be back on target early in the New Year.

She advised that the Team had been working in its current form for nine months and would be augmented in 2006 when the new post of Head of Customer Services became part of the Team's remit. The Team would also be hosting a new partnership post to support training and development across District Councils in Durham and Northumberland, which was due to commence in April/May 2006.

The report provided details of key achievements since July 2005 together with the tasks where there had been some slippage.

Once these areas had been delivered there were a number of key areas of work planned for the rest of 2005/6, and these were set out in the report for Members' consideration. Members would be advised as to progress in these areas in future reports.

A Member asked the reasons for the reduction in the number of performance indicators. The Officer responded that it was felt that the indicators relevant to the Team needed to be more specific and focus on key areas of performance.

With regard to Local Area Agreements she advised that at present one day a week of her time was spent on this. The purpose of this was to improve working arrangements between Councils and partners across the County and there was evidence that this was now happening.

In response to a question in relation to the risk assessment referred to in the report, she advised that the main risk identified was the additional work caused by the CPA Pilot. This and the Local Area Agreements had put pressure on the Team but she was confident that they would still be able to deliver what was required by the end of the year.

The Chair thanked the Assistant Chief Executive for the report.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(ii) **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.

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Details of performance from 1 April – 30 November 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 sections, the average time for completing changes in circumstances and the amount of benefit paid directly. Turnaround for new applications for this period was 34 days which was a reduction of three days on the year 2004/5.

Details were also provided in the report of the key issues with regard to revenues including 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.

The recent CPA report for Easington had adjusted the 2004/5 collection rate by a deprivation factor and as a result this placed Easington in the best quartile with prospects for improving.

Members were advised of the overall performance of the Unit together with details of recorded complaints. The workload in the Benefits Section was now at a manageable level, turnaround times for new applications had improved and the Council was in the second quartile with change in circumstances and in the top quartile for accuracy of processing.

He advised that the Council continued to work jointly with the Pension Service in respect of local surgeries and in conjunction with Durham County Council Welfare Rights, the Pension Service and other service providers, work was continuing with the Pension Credit Take Up Campaign. A Member asked if eligibility for other benefits could be affected in respect of those people who qualified for pension credit. The Benefits Manager confirmed that in certain circumstances the receipt of pension credit could have an impact on other benefits received.

In line with the Government initiative to encourage Council Tax Benefit take up, the Council was currently part of a joint take up event in the District involving Officers from the Council and other Agencies.

A Visiting Officer had recently been appointed to visit prospective new claimants in their homes to complete application forms. An Officer had also been appointed who was responsible for benefit matters in relation to the homeless.

With regard to the Best Value Service Improvement Plan details of this were set out in Appendix 2 to the report. He advised that progress continued with the Plan and these improvements complied with the e-Government Strategy, met a recommendation from the Best Value Inspector and left scope for the development of future partnership working with other local authorities in the region.

Members acknowledged the improvement made by the Team over the last year and congratulated the staff on their efforts.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(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 Unit for the period August 2005 to November 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 and Strategy documents together with other tasks and targets.

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

The Environmental Services Operations Manager advised that in relation to domestic refuse collections, because of inclement weather the catch up days planned over the Christmas and New Year holiday period had not been met, however, arrangements had been made and collections would be back on target. Otherwise collections had been operating as programmed.

The Green Waste Collection Service had now been suspended for the season with the last collections undertaken on the week ending 10 December 2005 and would resume in mid March 2006. The collection of green waste had been successful in collecting significant tonnages which had contributed to improving the recycling targets in 2005/6.

The new vehicle would be delivered in mid January 2006 which would help the operation to run more efficiently and allow a modest expansion of this service to an additional 200-300 residents.

A draft Local Collective Agreement in relation to zonal working and the 4 day week had been agreed with the refuse workforce following an extensive consultation process and this would now be submitted to Executive for approval on 10 January 2006.

In relation to horticulture the grass cutting operation ceased on 11 October 2005. The service had performed well over the year and the Council had produced a good standard of presentation to the grassed open spaced areas. Winter maintenance was now being undertaken by grounds maintenance crews on hedge cutting, shrub beds, edging on grass verges and minor tree works.

21 horticultural staff had been re-deployed from 5 – 9 December 2005 on a large scale clean up in the Wembley area of Easington when 17.84 tonnes of waste had been collected. During this period other environmental improvements were carried out on a number of sites in the District as detailed in the report.

The gully cleansing operation was maintaining the set programme and following a successful design of outlet trap covers by the District Council for road gullies in the Shotton area, Durham County Council

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Highways Department had ordered a number of this type of cover for road gullies that were causing problems with blockages and rats using the outlet pipes.

The graffiti machine had been operating in the District and the pathfinder area from June 2005 and during this period 485 sites in the pathfinder area and 586 sites in the remainder of the District had successfully had graffiti removed.

A district wide spring clean up was being programmed for the week commencing 16 January 2006 which would be carried out using an integrated approach from operational and enforcement service units with the support of East Durham Homes Estate Officers and Estate Assistants.

The Best Value Performance Indicators on street cleansing and recycling were detailed in the tables in the report for the first two quarters of the current year. Street cleansing was still in the bottom quartile nationally, however, it had improved and the new proposed working arrangements would help to further improve this indicator. Recycling targets were progressing well and it was envisaged that they would meet the set targets for the current year.

Members made reference to problems experienced particularly with drainage when the responsibility for the works did not rest with the District Council but with other agencies. The Officer advised that a three monthly meeting had been established comprising of representatives from the District Council, Durham County Council and Northumbrian Water to discuss problem areas such as road gullies. It was hoped that the situation should improve as a result of these meetings.

It was suggested that the Environmental Services Operations Manager provide an update to Members on progress with this joint meeting in the next quarterly report.

Following discussion it was **RESOLVED** that the information given be noted.