

THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE SERVICE DELIVERY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON MONDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2006

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

Also Present: Councillor J Goodwin – Executive Member for
Community and Culture
Councillor Mrs J Freak – Executive Member for
Social Inclusion
Councillor D Myers – Executive Member for
E-government and Scrutiny Liaison
Councillor G Patterson – Executive Member for
Environment and Transport
Councillors B Quinn and R Taylor

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors D Chaytor and D J Taylor-Gooby.

2. **THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** held on 23 January 2006, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.

3. **THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE** held on 31 January 2006, 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) **Monitoring Performance of East Durham Homes**

Members of the Committee agreed that this item could be considered prior to other business.

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Housing Strategy which provided details of the performance of East Durham Homes for the third quarter of the current financial year, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Appendix 1 to the report set out performance against statutory Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI), locally agreed performance indicators (EDH) and the targets that had been set. Appendix 2 provided details of the Capital Works Programme for 2005/2006.

Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee – 13 February 2006

The Head of Housing Strategy explained that there were 52 indicators in all and 10 of these were reported annually. Of the 42 which were reported quarterly, 31% were on target, 19% were within the 5% target tolerance and 50% were not on target. In comparison to the outturn for 2004/2005, performance had increased in 12 of the indicators, dropped in 20 and remained the same in 5.

The key areas of concern were once again the void re-let times, some of the repairs responsive times and appointments for responsive repairs. The Head of Housing Strategy explained that delays had been encountered as a result of the introduction of the new allocations policy, new computer system, changes in the marketing strategy and a number of long term voids which had been re-let via the HRA Business Plan and urged caution with the figures. Paul Hardisty from the Housing Quality Network had confirmed that the number of voids awaiting works in December were 103 and were now down to 57. The manageable total was 40. The BVPI may suggest that there was a problem but void re-let times were improving.

Performance in specific areas relating to care services, homelessness, rent collection and response times for emergency repairs had increased and the targets set had been exceeded.

The Head of Housing Strategy explained that a mock inspection rating was carried out by the Delivery Plan Panel on 16 January 2006 which awarded the income management service three stars based on the current performance. The Delivery Plan Panel was made up of the Leader of the Council, Chair of East Durham Homes Board and Chair of the Tenants' Federation. Overall, the rating for all services managed by East Durham Homes was assessed as one star with promising prospects for improvement.

A Member queried if tenants had repairs completed when needed even though they were not on the planned maintenance schedule. The Head of Housing Strategy explained that in general, the District Council would expect a property to be suitable for the tenant and would urge Members to bring to his attention any individual cases of concern.

A Member commented that there were resources in the Housing Revenue Account and the Capital Programme and if the Council did not have the resources to carry out the programme in-house then work should be outsourced. He felt it would be beneficial if Members of the Committee had figures distinguishing lettable and non-lettable voids.

The Head of Housing Strategy explained he would provide a breakdown of lettable and non-lettable voids in the next report.

The Service Compliance Manager proceeded to take Members through East Durham Homes' performance indicators.

A Member queried the response time for the Mobile Wardens to reach the client within 20 minutes and asked the reason why this was not a higher percentage. The Service Compliance Manager explained that if the Mobile Warden was in one area of the District it would take longer than 20 minutes to reach the client at the other end of the District.

Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee – 13 February 2006

A Member commented that the inspector's document made strong comments that Care Services should find an additional 3,000 customers with no extra staffing resource and asked if this had been addressed. The Head of Housing Strategy explained that the Audit Commission had recommended that Care Services had capacity to take on more customers without employing additional staff. The main problem was that the Supporting People Team paid for 75% of the service and the contract was capped. A marketing campaign was currently being looked at and negotiations were ongoing with the Supporting People Team to raise the fixed capacity.

A Member referred to a tenant in his village who had repaired a door himself and was told that he was now responsible for that door. The Chair suggested that the Head of Housing Strategy investigate this further and report back to the Scrutiny Support Manager.

A Member queried if East Durham Homes had a Clerk of Works that checked work completed by partner organisations. The Head of Housing Strategy explained that all works that were carried out by partner organisations were quality checked by East Durham Homes.

Members raised concerns that 50% of the performance indicators were not on target and East Durham Homes would not achieve the 3 stars by 1st September. The Head of Housing Strategy explained that the District Council were concerned and had spoken to the Senior Management Team at East Durham Homes and the District Council's Management Team. This had been raised formally and the District Council was doing everything they could to support East Durham Homes to achieve the three star rating. There was also underlying reasons why some of the indicators were not on target.

The Head of Housing Strategy explained that he would look to produce a different format for reports for the end of the financial year which would include more detail as to why East Durham Homes had not met the targets.

A Member queried if East Durham Homes were using the Customer Services Unit. The Head of Housing Strategy explained that East Durham Homes were looking to relocate their offices and were investigating setting up their own Contact Centre. The Senior Corporate Development Officer explained that the situation was not resolved and East Durham Homes had not informed the Council of their decision. She believed that they were setting up their own Customer Service Centre for first level enquiries.

The Executive Member for E-Government and Scrutiny Liaison explained that the inspectors had indicated that there should be a clear separation between East Durham Homes and the District of Easington. Although the Government wanted a seamless service for the public, the priority was to achieve the three star status.

The Head of Housing Strategy explained that the future use of Customer Services was currently being considered by East Durham Homes and a decision would be made in April.

Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee – 13 February 2006

A Member referred to the planned maintenance programme and asked how this was progressing and how close they were to a 60/40 split. The Head of Housing Strategy explained that the 80/20 split had now moved much closer to 60/40. More information would be provided in the next report.

A Member queried if the three stars would be achieved on the planned maintenance if presented to date. The Head of Housing Strategy explained that there was a lot of work to be done and repairs and maintenance was to be considered at a meeting on 20 February. The contract with Paul Hardisty was to be extended until September 2006.

A Member queried why no work was being commenced in Bruce Place in Peterlee. The Head of Housing Strategy explained that he would investigate this and contact the Scrutiny Support Manager.

The Service Compliance Manager gave details of the breakdown of complaints received for East Durham Homes.

The Chair thanked the Head of Housing Strategy and the Service Compliance Officer for their report.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the information given be noted;
- (ii) queries detailed above be investigated and reported back to the Scrutiny Support Manager.

6. NEIGHBOURHOOD INITIATIVES – PERFORMANCE REPORT

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Neighbourhood Initiatives which updated Members on the progress of the Neighbourhood Initiatives Unit, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The report provided an update on progress of the Neighbourhood Initiatives Unit which comprised Community Safety, Youth Strategy, Social Inclusion, Sports Development and Arts.

The Head of Neighbourhood Initiatives gave an update on community safety which included CSP Structure, CSP Development Day, Supporting Young People Programme, Redeployable CCTV and Community First Project.

The Head of Neighbourhood Initiatives explained that the first quarter performance figures had produced a mixed picture. House burglary had decreased, vehicle crime was slightly above target, violent crime, robberies, total record crime and youths causing annoyance were all above target. The figures had been heavily influenced by changes in recording practices by Durham Constabulary which had resulted in minor incidents which were not previously recorded now being included in the figures. Discussions were being held with Government Office regarding the ability of the Council to meet what were now unrealistic targets because of the changes in recording practices.

The report detailed work that was ongoing with the Youth Strategy, Social Inclusion, Arts Development and Sports Development.

Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee – 13 February 2006

The report provided details of achievements and non-achievements within the Unit. In relation to non-achievements, it was explained that failure to produce a Sport and Recreation Plan and an Arts Plan was due to difficulties in identifying resources. A Section 17 Plan was to be produced in March 2006.

It was explained that evaluation data comparing arrest rates six months prior to engaging with the programme compared with six months post involvement had shown a marked decrease of 63% equating to almost 70 fewer arrests.

A Member referred to the decrease of 63% in crime and explained that the overall crime figures were conflicting. The Head of Neighbourhood Initiatives explained that the 63% were the top 200 people 'at risk' of offending and 4% of offenders were responsible for 25% of crime.

It was explained that following the success of a synthetic ice rink in Dalton Park before Christmas there were now plans for a permanent ice rink within the District.

A Member referred to anti-social behaviour in his village and explained that since an Anti-Social Behaviour Order had been granted against one individual, crime and anti-social behaviour activity in the area had reduced dramatically and was virtually non-existent.

Members complimented the Head of Neighbourhood Initiatives and his team on the work that had been completed.

The Chair thanked the Head of Neighbourhood Initiatives for his report.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

7. COMPLAINTS ANALYSIS REPORT

Consideration was given to the report of the Senior Corporate Development Officer which gave details of the number and nature of complaints received over the period July to September and October to December 2005, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Members were advised that individual units collated and monitored their own first level complaints under arrangements implemented by the Ombudsman. The Customer Services Team collated, analysed and reported all second level complaints and acted as an independent case examiner between the Council, the public, the Ombudsman, MP's and elected Members.

Complaints were recorded and monitored and, where possible, resolved following consultation with the appropriate Officer. Issues of a repetitive nature or clear trends which had emerged were discussed at the Quality Improvement Team Meetings and areas for improvement were agreed.

Due to changes in legislation, in particular the e-government agenda, the Customer Services Officers' role was a changing one. The Unit had become part of the Council's Contact Centre when it was established in December and all queries, complaints and requests for service were now directed through the Contact Centre using the CRM system. This should ensure a more efficient service to the customer.

Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee – 13 February 2006

The total number of complaints received during the period July to December equated to 54 over six months. When split into categories this showed that of the 54 complaints received, 8 were justified, 10 were policy related issues, 12 were third party issues and 24 were unjustified complaints.

Appendix 1 provided Members with a breakdown of complaints received within each service area for the period January to December 2005. Appendix 2 provided a breakdown of justified Ombudsman complaints received in the quarter in relation to previous quarters. Appendix 3 provided a breakdown thank you's received and Appendix 4 provided Members with an overview of general enquiries dealt with by the Customer Services Team. Enquiries received via the internet showed a decrease over the previous reported quarter.

The Senior Corporate Development Officer explained that the manager of the Contact Centre would be commencing his employment in March. She added that when thank you's were received by Members, they should be passed to the Customer Services so they could be recorded.

The Executive Member for E-government and Scrutiny Liaison suggested that this be drawn to the attention of the Management Team to remind staff that if any thank you's were received they should be reported to Customer Services.

The Chair thanked the Senior Corporate Development Officer for her report.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the information given, be noted;
- (ii) the Scrutiny Support Manager contact the Management Team and request that all Service Units report any thank you's received to Customer Services.