

# Item no

Report to: **Resources Scrutiny Committee**  
Date: **18 September 2007**  
Report of: **Head of Democratic Services and Administration**  
Subject: **Democratic Services and Administration – Performance Report**  
Ward: **All**

## 1 **Purpose of Report**

1.1 To update Members on the performance of the Democratic Services and Administration Unit.

## 2 **Consultation**

2.1 In preparing this report I have consulted with the Executive Member for Resources and staff within the Unit.

## 3 **Background**

3.1 The report provides an update for the previous six months on the progress of the Unit which comprises the following service areas:

- **Democratic and Member Services**
- **Elections and Electoral Registration**
- **Legal and Administration Services**
- **Risk Management**

## 4 **Position Statement**

4.1 In my previous reports to the Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee, I advised Members that temporary staffing arrangements had been put in place to provide additional resources needed to meet the current demands placed upon the Unit and to cover vacancies. These arrangements continued longer than envisaged because of the delay in the Best Value Review of Support Services (BVRSS).

4.2 The BVRSS is now completed and has been the subject of a detailed report by the Assistant Chief Executive.

4.3 The BVRSS identified that the Council needs to create more capacity to respond to key future needs such as community engagement, improving public participation in democratic and electoral processes, training and development, support for proactive work in risk management, insurance and legal services.

4.4 It was recommended that a Unit review should be undertaken to address these issues and create a clear focus for service delivery by looking at the separation and transfer of specific functions.

4.5 The review also takes account of the requirements contained within the Electoral Administration Act 2006, the Local Government and Involvement in Health Bill, Audit Commission Use of Resources Assessment, Corporate Plan and the Council's review of Community Engagement.

## 5 **Democratic and Member Services**

### 5.1 **Political Management Arrangements**

5.1.1 Since my last report, work has continued in respect of reviewing the Council's Political Management Arrangements. A report was agreed by the District Council in April which reviewed the Council's Scrutiny function. Three new Scrutiny Committees have been established based around Executive Portfolios as follows:-

**Community Services Scrutiny Committee** – Liveability, Neighbourhood Engagement and Communications and Social Inclusion and Culture

**Regeneration Services Scrutiny Committee** – Housing, Health and Regeneration

**Resources Scrutiny Committee** – Resources, Improvement and Customer Services

5.1.2 Revised Terms of Reference were also produced for the Scrutiny Committees and the revised structures were approved at the Annual Meeting of the Council in May 2007 and thereafter implemented.

### 5.2 **Scrutiny**

5.2.1 The District of Easington Scrutiny Annual report was agreed by the District Council on 5 July 2007. The Scrutiny Committees' work programme identified the following issues for high priority, namely :-

#### Regeneration Services

- The review of Hospitals North and South of the Tees
- Easington Health Profiles

#### Community Services

- The Waste Strategy for England
- The Easington Dog Control Order

#### Resources

- The Best Value Review of Support Services
- Value for Money Strategy

### 5.3 **Member Training and Development**

5.3.1 Training and Development events continue to be arranged based upon both the needs identified by Members themselves as well as those arising from Council priorities.

5.3.2 The under-mentioned training and development initiatives have been delivered:-

- Bespoke Scrutiny Training and Development session delivered by INLOGOV on 27 June 2007. A “post Training” pack with evaluation sheets for completion were produced and distributed to members.
- An extensive Member Induction Programme was delivered during June and July 2007 covering all of the Council’s service Units and activities, culminating in a Tour of the district by new members.
- A Licensing Training session for new and existing Licensing Committee members was delivered on Friday 7 September 2007 using Internal Licensing Officers and the Council’s Legal Services provider Crutes.
- Code of Conduct Training was provided for all members on 22 June and 26 July 2007
- A Training Roadshow for Standards Committee members was held on 12 June 2007
- Further Training for Standards Committee members was held on 27 June 2007

## 6 **Electoral Services**

### 6.1 *Elections*

- 6.1.1 Members will recall that I wrote to them in February regarding new regulations contained within the Electoral Administration Act relating to postal voting procedures.
- 6.1.2 An exercise was undertaken which required collection of signatures and dates of birth from approximately 13,500 existing postal voters and 10,500 new applications. This resulted in 16,000 confirmed postal voters.
- 6.1.3 Further applications were confirmed in the run-up to the May elections which resulted in 17,158 confirmed postal voters. This equated to 23% of the total electorate. New regulations also required postal voter statements to be scanned on receipt to match signatures and dates of birth.
- 6.1.4 Ten District Wards and five Parish Council Wards were contested at the Elections and this involved verifying 7956 Postal Voter Statements. This equated to a 63% return of eligible postal votes for the Wards contested.
- 6.1.5 Overall, turnout from the District Elections was 30%.
- 6.1.6 This year, in managing the District and Parish Council Elections, the complexities of the legal framework and the electoral timetable with its tight deadlines created real challenges for electoral staff and placed a great strain on systems and resources.
- 6.1.7 New legislation for postal voting has caused an ever-increasing reliance on external suppliers/contractors.

## 6.2 *Electoral Register 2008 – Canvass*

6.2.1 The annual canvass is again being carried out by post, however for the first time we are undertaking a telephone registration service which enables householders to confirm "no change" registrations.

6.2.2 This is being undertaken on our behalf by Electoral Reform Services. To date 7,500 households (17%) have responded by telephone. Total householder response so far is 52%. The follow up canvass, second reminder stage will again be a door to door canvass and will commence on 12 October.

## 6.3 *Review of Polling District and Polling Places*

6.3.1 Members have been made aware of the ongoing review I am undertaking of Polling Districts and Polling Places. Election staff are liaising with the Council's Public Buildings and Equality and Diversity Officers and a report is being prepared for the Returning Officer which will go out to consultation.

6.3.2 It is not envisaged that this will result in many changes.

## 7 **Land Charges**

7.1 The BVRSS was guided by a Business Process Mapping exercise which recommended that efficiencies could be gained by consolidating the Land Charges function within the Planning and Building Control Service.

7.2 Consequently, on 3 July 2007, the Executive approved a review of the Planning and Building Control Service Unit which agreed the transfer of the Land Charges function. The impact of this change was that one FTE post (Grade 3) was transferred from Democratic Services and Administration to Planning and Building Services.

## 8 **Risk Management**

8.1 There continues to be some slippage in the completion of the Management Action Plans and use of Risk Register by Managers; however this has been dealt with as part of the Corporate Planning and Service Planning and review processes. Management Team and Executive Members are re-enforcing the need for these to be completed.

8.2 It is clear that most risks are being effectively managed and that risk management is well embedded. There are still some difficulties updating action plans and difficulties in fully utilising the "Risk Register" software. However, a comprehensive range of support has and continues to be provided to ensure that this is managed effectively. Service risks will be captured as part of this process and a subsequent Corporate Risk Review will be undertaken once our Risk Register has been fully updated to take account of the Service Plans.

8.3 We are currently developing a comprehensive training programme for all Members, Officers and Staff which will result in a menu of various training options that can be provided "in house".

8.4 A Risk Management performance work plan is being developed which takes account of all the work that is undertaken in the Risk Management Function.

8.5 This will be used as a tool by the Audit Committee to measure performance and progress on initiatives and actions.

## 9 **Sickness Monitoring**

9.1 Effective sickness monitoring continues to be carried out in the Unit.

9.2 Sickness figures for April to August 2007 for the Unit are 2.21 days.

9.3 The overall sickness rate for the Unit for the last 12 months is 6.01 days. The Councils corporate target for 2007/8 is 8 days.

## 10 **Slippage**

10.1 As mentioned in my previous report resource issues and Team Leader vacancies have meant that developing work plans and performance improvements have slowed. Tasks and projects which have been identified in work plans which have been affected, include the development of local PIs, benchmarking, customer satisfaction surveys, staff one to ones.

10.2 As mentioned earlier, the Unit review will establish a structure which will enable a clear focus for service delivery to be established with effective performance management arrangements.

## 11 **Local Government Review**

11.1 Management Team have given consideration to the single unitary decision and its impact on Council priorities and work streams.

11.2 The Council will be fully involved in shaping the new unitary and in order to do this additional capacity may be required during the next 18 months and this will be reviewed as implementation evolves.

11.3 It may be necessary to "de-prioritise" current objectives within my Service Plan.

11.4 A copy of the current delivery plan included within my Service Plan is attached for members' information (Appendix 1).

## 12 **Implications**

12.1 Financial Legal, Policy

12.1.1 There are no financial, legal or policy implications arising from this report.

12.2 Risk

12.2.1 A risk assessment has been carried out and action put in place to manage these risks.

12.3 Communication

12.3.1 There are no communication implications arising from this report.

## 13 **Corporate Implications**

13.1 Corporate Plans and Priorities

13.1.1 It is considered that the proposals are consistent with the Council's mission, priorities and objectives. In particular, the proposals are consistent with:-

Priority 1: Quality Services for our people

QS1 To provide and promote accessible, customer focussed crosscutting services with achieve e-government targets.

Priority 2: Striving for excellence in the workplace

SFE1 To ensure effective recruitment, development motivation, recognition and rewarding of staff.

SFE2 To develop the capacity to achieve in the organisation.

13.2 Equality and Diversity Implications

13.2.1 There are no Equality and Diversity Implications arising from this report.

13.3 E-Government Implications

13.3.1 There are no E-Government Implications arising from this report.

13.4 Procurement Implications

13.4.1 There are no Procurement Implications arising from this report.

## 14 **Recommendations**

Members are requested to note the work of the Democratic Services and Administration Unit and note the progress made.

### **Background papers/documents referred to:**

Unit files  
Service Plan  
Work Plans