

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON TUESDAY, 20TH NOVEMBER, 2007**

Present: Councillor A. Burnip (Chair)
Councillors Mrs M. Baird, A. Collinson,
D. Maddison, Mrs. J. Maitland, M Nicholls
R. Taylor and Mrs V.M. Williams

Apologies: Councillor J Haggan

Also Present: Councillor D Myers, Executive Member for Customer Services

1. **THE MINUTES OF THE LASTING MEETING** held on 30th October, 2007, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.
2. **THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE** held on 6th November, 2007, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were submitted.

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

3. **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

(I) **East Durham Community Development Trust (EDCDT)**

Councillor A Collinson requested further information with regard to the EDCDT particularly in relation to the monitoring arrangements in place to ensure Value for Money was being achieved.

The Scrutiny Support Manager advised that he would liaise with the appropriate officer and arrange to have a briefing note circulated to all Members of the Resources Scrutiny Committee in relation to the monitoring arrangements of the EDCDT.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Support Manager circulate a briefing note to all Members of the Resources Scrutiny Committee in relation to the monitoring arrangements of the EDCDT.

4. **PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

There were no members of the public present.

5. **FEEDBACK FROM SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**

The Chair advised that at the last meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board held on 12th November, 2007 the following issues were discussed.

- (i) Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places
- (ii) County Durham Overview and Scrutiny Network – Review of Public Transport

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

6. SERVICE UNIT PERFORMANCE REPORTING – e – GOVERNMENT AND INFORMATION SERVICES

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of e-government and Information Services which gave an overview of the operational tasks and development projects undertaken by the IS Unit over the last two months, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Councillor D Myers, Executive Member for Customer Services congratulated B Nicholson, Head of e-government and Information Services and his staff on the excellent work they had undertaken. It was pointed out that the Council's web site had been ranked first in the country above 461 other local authority sites in a survey which measured aspects of accessibility.

Members were advised that day-to-day requests from users, to solve problems with their IT Systems, were typically resolved within 4 hours. The Help Desk dealt with the day-to-day problems and queries and during the month of October they had dealt with and solved 698 incidents and processed 57 service requests.

It was explained that development of minor and major projects could typically take several weeks or months to complete. This type of work could vary from the development of a software package to a departmental or organisational move and included the following;

Applications Development

This unit dealt with the development and support of software packages, such as IBS the Revenues and Benefits software and ORCHARD the software used by East Durham Homes (EDH) for housing repairs.

Projects included: -

- Supporting People – redevelopment of the existing system used to quantify re-charge for services delivered
- Council Tax extract of citizens for populating CRM – loading citizen details i.e. name and address, into the CRM system used in the Customer Services Centre to enable Customer Services Advisors to identify callers quickly and effectively
- Database to capture and analyse responses from Equality and Diversity survey. Data capture web page designed and approval of questionnaire was awaited.
- EDH Morrisons Interface – Provided a system to transfer information from the ORCHARD system used by EDH to the IT systems used by Morrisons.

Systems and Networks Development

This unit dealt with the networks that the computers used to communicate with each other, e.g. Staff at EDH using ORCHARD software that was installed at the main Council complex, e-mail and Internet access and telephony.

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Projects included: -

- Transfer of Horden pathfinder to Lee House and Healthworks, Seaside Lane. This involved the design and implementation of communication links between these sites and the Council complex. Both projects were delivered on time and within budget.
- Review of IT disaster recovery arrangements.
- Upgrade of IBM AS400 – due to the age of this computer an upgrade was prohibitively costly.
- Additional server procured and installed to provide additional storage space for files.
- Customer Services Centre (CSC) – working very closely with CSC to provide telephony solutions to address issues of telephone queue waiting time.

Web site Development

This unit dealt with the day-to-day operation of the web site and its development.

- Easingtons web site had been rated first in the country above 461 other local authority web sites. SiteMorse assessed each web site on a monthly basis in respect of its accessibility and integrity.
- The Web site team had assisted Chester le Street District Council with the development of their web site. They had also assisted Murton Parish Council and the Easington Youth Forum with their web sites.
- MOSS 2007 - new Sharepoint

Information Management Development

- Final stages of Information Management Policy and Action Plan
- Working with partners in County Durham to pursue common approaches
- MOSS 2007 - new Sharepoint, in conjunction with the web site team the enhanced version was being assessed, if the trial was successful then a corporate project for Intranet-based collaborative features and document and records management would be pursued.

It was pointed out the other Durham authorities were also trying Sharepoint which could have potential benefits following Local Government Review.

Councillor A Collinson referred to customers who rang the Contact Centre during peak periods and were advised to ring back at a less busy time. B Nicholson advised that Monday mornings were the busiest time and customers were advised to ring during quieter periods to reduce the likelihood of queuing. It was explained that whilst the figures showed that many calls were abandoned this was often the same caller repeatedly calling and hanging up.

Councillor Collinson requested an update on the street Kiosks. B Nicholson advised that the authority received a monthly report in relation to the kiosks located

throughout the district. Generally they were performing well, those located in doors tended to be less well used than those located in the street. The Kiosks located in Seaham, Peterlee and Horden had approximately 900 to 1,000 visits per month. The Kiosk in Haswell had suffered vandalism to such an extent that the company responsible were considering its removal or relocation.

Councillor Mrs J Maitland asked if the Authority still received external grants and if the unit charged external organisations for work undertaken on their behalf. B Nicholson advised that the authority had not received any external grants since December 2005 and all work undertaken for external organisations was charged for.

Councillor Mrs V M Williams queried in the event of an IT disaster how long it would take to have all the systems up and running and would it be cheaper if the authority had reciprocal arrangements in place with a neighbouring authority. B Nicholson advised that under the present arrangements it would take approximately 36 hours. It may be slightly cheaper and quicker if reciprocal arrangements were in place with a neighbouring authority, however it would depend on the systems used.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

7. VALUE FOR MONEY REVIEW OF HORTICULTURAL SERVICES

Consideration was given to the report of the Operations Manager which gave details of the Value for Money (VFM) project plan for Horticultural Services, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Members were advised that the Council aimed to ensure that all the services delivered and operations undertaken provided Value for Money (VFM). Following the need to review and develop a corporate approach to assessing and improving VFM in key service areas the management team developed a programme of priorities for VFM analysis.

The horticultural service was the first key service programmed for review from April 2007 to assess if VFM was being achieved. VFM was achieved when costs were low, performance was high, outcomes were successful and satisfaction was high. An assessment of this service found that costs were high but performance and satisfaction was average.

A VFM toolkit, developed by the Corporate Support unit, had been used to develop a project plan, which would be used to determine outcomes in the review. The central purpose was to use these assessments to consider ways that VFM could be achieved.

Details of progress made on the project plan were outlined in Appendix 1 to the report.

The project plan set out a framework to determine costs, performance and satisfaction. Project progress would be monitored along with risks and any other issues encountered during the review to ensure the project was delivered on time.

Overall progress to date was good however there had been slippage and the plan had been amended to accommodate obstacles. The team were confident to deliver the findings of the review as programmed in the plan.

Councillor Mrs J Maitland asked if there were problems related to recharging external organisations for work undertaken. P Penman, Operations Manager advised that there were no problems in this area.

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Councillor R Taylor asked what the response had been to the customer satisfaction surveys. P Penman advised that there had been a 30% return from the business survey and the results of the residents survey were still awaited.

M Devine, Principal Corporate Development Officer advised that the formula used by the Audit Commission to assess VFM was a cost per head count model i.e. cost of service divided by population. This was a relatively crude formula which resulted in costs appearing high. Therefore in order to provide a fairer comparison it was agreed to take part in an APSE performance network.

The Chair pointed out that there was no reference to the collection of leaves at OAP complexes in the project scope. P Penman gave an assurance that this was included along with many other items not specifically listed.

Councillor A Collinson queried sickness levels in the Horticultural unit. P Penman advised that sickness levels were below average however there were problems related to staff that were unable to use some of the equipment due to industrial disease.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

8. **ADDITIONAL URGENT ITEM OF BUSINESS**

In accordance with the Local Government Act, 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, Section 100B(4)(b) the Chair, following consultation with the Proper Officer, agreed that the following item of business, not shown on the Agenda, be considered as a matter of urgency.

9. **PETERLEE HOTEL FEASIBILITY STUDY (AOB)**

Councillor A Collinson requested an update on the Hotel Feasibility Study for Peterlee.

The Scrutiny Support Manager advised that S James, Principal Economic Development Officer, had provided an update to the Resources Scrutiny Committee in April 2007.

As the matter now came under the remit of the Regeneration Services Scrutiny Committee it would be referred to that Committee and the outcome would be reported back to this Committee for information

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Support Manager refer the issue to the Regeneration Services Scrutiny Committee.