

Item no

Report to: **Resources Scrutiny Committee**
Date: **11 December 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 three 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 **Democratic and Member Services**

4.1 *Political Management Arrangements*

4.1.1 Since my last report, the Unit has been heavily involved in ongoing community engagement work, some of which has related to the Council's existing Area Engagement activities. Staff have worked in conjunction with Durham Constabulary to examine the potential of joined-up working in this area. This follows a series of Community engagement events at which the views of the community were invited regarding the Council's current activities in this area. It is also a feature of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act which received Royal Assent in October 2007.

4.1.2 Development work in this area is ongoing and it is anticipated that a report on options for reviewing the Council's area engagement activities will be brought before members early in the new year.

4.2 *Scrutiny*

4.2.1 Progress against the Scrutiny Work Programmes is as follows: -

Regeneration Services

Representatives of County Durham PCT gave a presentation to the Committee on Monday 29 October 2007 regarding the new "Healthworks" facility at Easington Colliery.

Representatives from One North East, County Durham Development Company and Durham County Council attended the Committee on 19 November 2007 to discuss traffic management problems at Bracken Hill and Whitehouse Industrial Estates.

Community Services

The Committee have reviewed the effectiveness of the "no side waste" policy recently introduced and have also held discussions around the potential to visit the recycling stations at Thornley Crossings (Kerb-it) and Coxhoe (PARC It) as part of an on-going review of recycling.

Resources

The Committee have received the first in a series of reports which examine the "Value for Money" assessments of services. The latest report concerned the Horticultural service and highlighted the scoping work done to date as part of the assessment and the statistical data analysis that was being undertaken to inform the VFM process for this service.

4.2.2 There are a number of county-wide Scrutiny initiatives in which the Council is involved by virtue of having members "at the table".

4.2.3 A Press release was issued on behalf of the Council seeking community views in respect of the County Durham Overview and Scrutiny network review regarding Public Transport in County Durham. The Scrutiny Support Manager is leading the collation of community responses to the review and the next meeting is scheduled to be held at Easington on 7 December 2007.

4.2.4 Arrangements for Scrutiny of the County Durham Children's Trust have been developed with the Council represented by Councillor Audrey Laing. The first issue to be considered by the Scrutiny Working Group is Young People not in Education, Employment or Training with the first group meeting having been held on 12 November 2007.

4.2.5 The Council has also changed its representation of the Joint Health Scrutiny Sub Committee with Councillor Joyce Maitland being replaced by Councillor Viv Williams.

4.3 *Member Training and Development*

4.3.1 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.

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

- 2 members enrolled on the IDEA Leadership Academy.

- Attendance at NEREO Courses arranged for members in the following areas: -
 - Community Leadership
 - Charing Skills
 - Case work and Surgeries advice
- Media skills training has been arranged for 12 Members.

4.3.3 The Member Development Steering Group will reconvene to discuss the Council's approach to Member Development in light of Local Government Review and linked to this will be the review of Member Personal Development Plans.

4.4 *Local Democracy Week/Community Engagement*

4.4.1 The Unit took a lead role in organising a Political Speed dating event held at The Glebe Centre, Murton on 17 October 2007 during "Local Democracy Week".

4.4.2 As part of the event, six members of the Council's Executive answered questions posed by young people from the District of Easington Youth Forum, East Durham Positive Inclusion Partnership and Dawdon Community Centre. The event gave young people the chance to learn about how local government works in the District but also the democratic process as a whole.

5 **Electoral Services**

5.1 *Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places*

5.1.1 The Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced a duty on Councils to review all polling districts and polling places by the end of 2007.

5.1.2 The aim of the review was to ensure that:

all electors have reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances; and as far as is reasonable and practicable polling places are accessible to all electors including disabled people.

5.1.3 A comprehensive consultation process was undertaken and a Working Group was established to consider the authority's proposals together with representations received.

5.1.4 Final proposals were prepared and were considered and approved by District Council on 23 November 2007.

5.2 *Electoral Registration*

5.2.1 The annual canvass was again carried out by post, however, for the first time we provided a telephone registration service which enabled householders to confirm "no change" registrations.

5.2.2 This was undertaken on our behalf by Electoral Reform Services. A total of 9233 households (22%) responded by telephone.

5.2.3 A door-to-door canvass of those households who had not responded (after the initial request and the first reminder) was carried out during the last two weeks in October.

5.2.4 Following the door-to-door canvass, a final letter was sent to remaining non responders.

5.2.5 Prior to publishing the Register, the overall total household response rate was 95%.

6 **Risk Management**

6.1 A quarterly progress report is provided to the Audit Committee on the Council's approach to managing risk and the implementation of the Council's Risk Management Strategy to provide assurance that the Council effectively manages its risks.

6.2 A Risk Management Performance Workplan has been developed for use as a tool to measure performance and progress initiatives and actions within the risk management function and corporately across the Council.

6.3 In relation to the Corporate Risk Review for 2007/2008 Service Plan risks have now been completed and the Risk Register has been fully updated to take account of these. A desktop corporate risk review will be carried out involving Executive and Management Team to re-profile existing corporate risks and to consider new and emerging risks that have arisen from the Service Plans. It is hoped that this will be completed before the end of the year.

6.4 It is felt that most risks are being effectively managed and risk management is well embedded. There are however still difficulties updating action plans and in the use of the Risk Register software. A comprehensive range of support continues to be provided to ensure that this is managed effectively.

6.5 A Member Awareness Training Session was held on 22 November and specific Audit Committee Member training is scheduled for 12 December.

7 **Sickness Monitoring**

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

7.2 Sickness figures for September to November 2007 for the Unit are 4.18 days.

7.3 The overall sickness rate for the Unit for the last 12 months is 4.83 days. The Councils corporate target for 2007/8 is 8 days.

8 **Local Government Review**

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

8.2 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.

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

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

9 **Implications**

9.1 Financial Legal, Policy

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

9.2 Risk

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

9.3 Communication

9.3.1 There are no communication implications arising from this report.

10 **Corporate Implications**

10.1 Corporate Plans and Priorities

10.1.1 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.

10.2 Equality and Diversity Implications

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

10.3 E-Government Implications

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

10.4 Procurement Implications

10.4.1 There are no Procurement Implications arising from this report.

11 **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

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28 November 2007