THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

HELD ON TUESDAY, 1 APRIL, 2008

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

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

1.   **THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** held on 11 March, 2008, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.

2.   **THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE** held on 18 March, 2008, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were submitted.

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

3.   **PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

       There were no members of the public present.

4.   **FEEDBACK FROM SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**

       The Chair advised that there were no issues considered at the Scrutiny Management Board meeting held on 26 March, 2008 which fell within the remit of this Committee.

       RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

5.   **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 details of an IT training programme which aimed to provide all staff with basic IT skills, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

       Members were advised that the basic IT skills covered by the training included, operating systems, word processing, spreadsheets, databases, presentations, e-mail and Intranet/Internet use.

       It was explained that there had been a significant increase in the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) across the Council, particularly as a result of e - government systems and the introduction of new technology which included:

       •   new telephone switchboard

       •   increased use of blackberry's

       •   increased use of e-mail system

       •   development of the Intranet

- on-going development of the Council website

- online planning system

- online benefits calculator

- CRM

- electronic procurement system

Whilst specific training had been provided for each of the new technologies, this was based on the assumption that staff were familiar with the use of the basic underlying systems, details of which were outlined.

However, based on the number and types of requests for support received by the IT Helpdesk from staff, this assumption was inaccurate, and whilst the majority of staff had some knowledge and skills in these areas, it was patchy. As new technology became critical to the overall business needs of the authority it was essential that staff were fully trained to get the best use from the developing technology.

In delivering an IT training programme to all staff, the following issues would need to be addressed:

- content of the course modules

- providing staff with the time to undertake the training

- the impact of training delivery on departmental resources

- should in-house training be provided or more formal accredited training and certification

- should training be made compulsory for all staff

In order to provide a more informed view of the issues the Head of IT and IT Training Officer implemented two pilot training schemes. The first comprised of 12 staff enrolling on the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) course, delivered via the LearnDirect, on-line route. The second was in-house training delivered by the IT Training Officer to East Durham Homes (EDH) staff.

LearnDirect supplied the ECDL training course, through a partnership between the Council and East Durham and Houghall Community College. The course was government funded, however this had since changed and funding was no longer available. The course provided training and assessment in a number of modules, details of which were outlined in the report.

Staff accessed the training on-line and the college and LearnDirect provided external assessment through electronic multi-choice papers. The overall time spent on the training and assessment was 2 hours a week averaging 3 months to complete all seven modules. Consultation with staff undertaking the ECDL, had identified the following issues:

- the course content was too wide ranging and contained some training
  elements that were of little value to the Council

- the amount of time required to complete each module and the overall training course was significant. In the main this was a direct result of the above

- provision of a quiet location in which to go through the training elements

The in-house training was provided by the IT Training Officer and delivered through a series of one day workshops, each concentrating on a specific subject area. The course work level was determined by carrying out a skills analysis and staff were assigned an overall score which determined the training group they were placed in. Consultation with the Board and Management of EDH also helped provide an indication of the Company's needs in respect of IT Training for staff.

A schedule of learning was then produced and agreed with staff, line managers and the Management Board. Training was then delivered to the relevant staff and prioritised by those who had little or no IT skills.

Each session had its own assessment/examination, which had to be passed at greater than 60% to achieve an overall pass grade. This was assessed and marked by the IT Training Officer.

The total time taken by each member of staff to complete all modules in the in-house training was 7 working days, although this was spread over a number of weeks. It was therefore easier for line managers to cover for the one day in every fortnight, where the particular member of staff would be training. The in-house training was well received by staff and managers of EDH and the overall success rate was very high.

Details of the costs had the Council decided to purchase external training and take on an accredited formal qualification, such as the ECDL or it's NVQ level 2 equivalent, were outlined in the report.

In conclusion it was explained that in-house training could be directly tailored to the users own needs and the business needs of the Authority and delivery could be arranged to suit the resource needs of individual departments.

Councillor D Myers reiterated the benefits of providing in house training as opposed to external wide ranging training, which contained elements that were of little or no value to the user or the Council.

Councillor A Collinson pointed out the importance of all staff undertaking the IT training which would improve their opportunities in the new Unitary Council.

Councillor Mrs J Maitland queried what the EDCL training entailed. B Nicholson advised that the training was a government led course, which focused on delivery training. It was a recognised qualification delivered throughout the country. However it was a general training course, which covered a wide range of modules, which were not always needed.

The Chair pointed out the importance of Members elected to the new Unitary Council improving their IT skills to enable them to undertake their new roles.

Councillor Mrs J Maitland asked why the training was not compulsory for all staff when it was so important. B Nicholson advised that whilst the training was important it was not intended to force people to undertake training. This matter would however be raised with Heads of Service in an attempt to encourage all staff to take the opportunity of the training on offer.

RESOLVED that:

(i)   the commencement of an in-house training programme in ICT for all staff be noted;

(ii)   the management of all departments be requested to make every effort to facilitate the release of staff to attend training.

JT/PH com/resources/080401
1 April, 2008