

THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON TUESDAY 16 SEPTEMBER 2008

Present: Councillors Mrs M Baird, A Collinson,
J Haggan and D Maddison

Apologies: Councillors A Burnip, Mrs J Maitland
M Nicholls and A J Holmes

1 ELECTION OF CHAIR

In the absence of the Chair and Vice Chair of the Resources Scrutiny Committee nominations were sought for a Chair for the meeting.

RESLOVED the Councillor A Collinson be elected as Chair.

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

3 THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE held on 2 September 2008, 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 FEEDBACK FROM SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

The Chair advised that at the last meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board held on 8 September, 2008 the following issues were discussed.

DCLG Consultation - Local Petitions and Calls for Action - Government Response

DCLG Consultation - Communities in Control - Real People, Real Power

A copy of the consultation on Communities in Control had been circulated to Members with a request for representations to be forwarded back to the Scrutiny Support Manager who would produce a composite response.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

6 SERVICE UNIT PERFORMANCE REPORTING – CUSTOMER SERVICES

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Customer Services, which provided an update on the progress and performance of the Customer Services unit, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Resources Scrutiny Committee – 16 September 2008

Members were advised that following a period of poor performance during the summer of 2007 action was taken to alleviate the issues identified and several longer-term solutions were implemented.

It was reported that the performance of the Customer Service Centre had improved throughout 2008 and temporary extra resources were identified to prevent a reoccurrence of the poor performance experienced in 2007.

Details of the current performance levels for June, July and August 2008 were outlined in the report. Particular reference was made to the percentage of calls answered in 20 seconds, which had increased from 85% in June to 93% in August. In addition the number of abandoned calls had dropped from 6.5% in June to 0.9% in August.

All Customer Service Advisors (CSA's) now handled information requests and gave advice on over 20 services (including Council Tax, Planning & Development Control, Environmental Services, Sports Development and Asset & Property Management) as well as taking credit and debit card payments, sending out relevant forms and completing requests for service for a number of services e.g. bin deliveries, bin removals, missed bin collections, bin repairs and assisted pull-outs.

Customer Services also dealt with e-mails, letters and faxes from customers as well as the main switchboard number for the council. They also staffed the reception area of Building 9 which was now the main reception area for customers on the site.

During mid-2008 the corporate Post Room function was transferred to Customer Services and the department was working with Internal Audit to improve security and processes for the handling of incoming and outgoing post.

Customer Services also dealt with, and investigated all formal complaints about the council's services and all complaints received from the Local Government Ombudsman.

The department was also the point of contact for all requests for information via the Freedom of Information Act and Data Protection Act, which was an area of work that was growing month by month.

During the spring of 2008 the Audit Commission inspected the council on the quality of Access to Services for customers. The final report was still awaited but any recommendations would be used by the Customers and Access work stream of the LGR programme when they were designing the service for the new council.

From 1 September 2008 the Concessionary Travel section had transferred to Customer Services and customers were now able to use Building 9 to apply for a bus pass rather than Building 5. This helped customers with mobility issues as there was parking directly outside the building, it had flat access, and was nearer to the bus stop for those using public transport.

It was unlikely that any further services would be migrated to Customer Services, due to the LGR process.

The Head of Customer Services was heavily involved in the Customers and Access work stream and was leading on several key projects which included a new complaints process, a new customer charter, service standards and accreditation of the new customer service function within the new authority. It was expected that this workload would increase as the LGR process moved towards Vesting Day and therefore some

Resources Scrutiny Committee – 16 September 2008

aspects of the day to day management of the Customer Services department would be handled by the Supervisors.

Councillor D Maddison asked if in the lead up to LGR it was envisaged that Customer Services would receive more calls. D Payne advised that it was anticipated that more calls would be received in the coming months from clients wanting to know the current situation. The new council number would also be advertised in April 2009 following the issue of council tax bills in March.

Councillor A Collinson queried if the number of calls coming through Customer Services for East Durham Homes (EDH) had fallen. D Payne advised that 8% of all calls received were for EDH. The 0800 number, which had been in operation for a number of years, was still not used as often as it could be. It was thought that for those calling from a mobile it was cheaper to ring the council and request to be transferred to EDH rather than ring the number direct.

The Chair thanked D Payne for his attendance at the meeting.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

CERTIFIED TRUE RECORD

DATE.....

CHAIR.....

JT/PH com resources/080901
16 September 2008