

THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON TUESDAY 7 OCTOBER 2008

Present: Councillor A Burnip (Chair)
Councillors A Collinson, J Haggan
R Liddle, D Maddison and Mrs J Maitland

Apologies: Councillor Mrs M Baird

- 1 **THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** held on 16 September 2008, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.

- 2 **THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE** held on 23 September 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 29 September which fell within the remit of this Committee.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

- 5 **SERVICE UNIT PERFORMANCE REPORTING – CORPORATE DEVELOPMENT UNIT**

Consideration was given to the report of the Assistant Chief Executive, which detailed the performance of the Corporate Development Unit for the period February to September 2008, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

J Brindle advised that since February the Unit had continued to undertake and deliver on a number of key projects as part of the planned workload, as well as play key roles on the Workstreams set up to consider and progress the arrangements for the new Council in line with Local Government Review (LGR). Progress against the units work programme was outlined in Appendix A to the report.

It was explained that the Council's last Best Value Performance Plan was published in June 2008. The Plan outlined the achievements of the Council for 2007/08, in terms of the outcomes described in the Corporate Plan and also how well the Council performed against the national performance framework (Best Value Performance Indicators) and the local indicators. The Council, once again, showed improvement in a number of key areas and reported its best year as far as Top Quartile Positions for the Best Value Performance Indicators were concerned, achieving 37%. Particularly notable were achievements in Planning, Benefits, Housing and Street Cleanliness.

Resources Scrutiny Committee – 7 October 2008

The team coordinated the implementation of the new National Performance framework, introduced by central government, from 1 April 2008. The new national indicator set included a number of new indicators; therefore Officers had worked on the data quality issues of the new indicators, ensuring that they were being measured in line with national guidance. Some areas, such as fuel poverty and carbon emissions had previously not been subject to any measurement in terms of performance indicators.

The results of the Council's corporate performance for the first quarter of 2008/09 were reported to Management team, Working Executive and Audit Committee. As the majority of data was new, and had no relevant baseline information, the report gave an additional focus to explaining the new Indicators and their impact on the work of the Council. It was worth noting that the areas of Planning, Housing and Benefits continued to show improvement.

The team had coordinated the Council's input into two countywide Audit Commission inspections on Sickness Absence management and Access to Services. Feedback on the sickness absence arrangements highlighted Easington as best practise in a number of areas. Discussions between the Councils and the Audit Commission around the emergent findings of the Access to Services inspection were currently taking place

The Value for Money review of Horticultural Services was completed, and the outcomes had been reported to the Scrutiny Committees. The project team had analysed costs, consulted customers and staff and tested the market by carrying out a competitive tendering exercise for work undertaken on behalf of EDH. The Council was successful in retaining the work and the review resulted in the Council having an improved understanding of cost, performance and satisfaction in these areas.

An external evaluation of the East Durham Local Strategic Partnership, by ECOTEC, to assess how well Neighbourhood Renewal Funding had been managed in line with the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, had been completed and the final report was expected in October. Initial findings confirmed the success of the Partnership in implementing initiatives and programmes which had made a difference in terms of outcomes for communities.

The team had coordinated a further review of the Council's Transitional Plan to focus on the Council's key priorities for the remainder of 2008/09 leading up to LGR.

The Sustainable Community Strategy was now at final draft stage and in the process of going through the decision-making process.

LGR continued to feature heavily in the work of the team. J Brindle was co-leading the countywide Areas and Participation workstream, and other team members were involved in the Customers and Access, Equality and Cohesion, Health and Policy and Performance workstreams.

The team had played a key role in the coordination of the arrangements for the county wide consultation exercise on the geographical make up of the Area Action Partnerships and the name of the new Council.

The team had contributed to the work of the organisational development sub group. Employees from all of the Durham councils would be asked to participate in a cultural survey, to determine the alignment of personal behaviours and values of individuals with those of the new Council. The survey would take place in mid October, and was being carried out by Integration International.

Resources Scrutiny Committee – 7 October 2008

In line with the recruitment timetable for the new Council, the team had helped coordinate delivery of a range of sessions on career transition, facilitated by Solace. Strategic and Operational Change Management workshops would also be held with Managers across all the Durham Councils during the next two months.

The team continued to take a lead role in supporting the Countywide Local Area Agreement project team. The new Local Area Agreement was signed off in May 2008.

J Brindle continued to lead the Governance workstream and progress the arrangements in relation to the Voluntary and Community Sector infrastructure and thematic partnership working. The team also continued to support the County Durham Partnership in terms of risk management.

Work on the Authority's approach to Community Engagement continued to gather pace and particular focus had been given to:

- Engaging with the Community Advisory Panel to help inform service design and engage residents on a range of key issues. The Communications Manager and Head of Customer Services were leading this work. The latest piece of work with the Panel had involved gathering views on affordable housing. All Panel members received a newsletter in June, containing details of the consultation exercises carried out so far and the actions resulting from them.
- Pilots of the new Neighbourhood Forums were in the process of being evaluated. A report detailing this evaluation with a view to determining a way forward would be brought to Members for consideration.
- Work with the Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder on piloting "performance through residents' eyes" had progressed and local residents received regular updates on progress made against the priority areas identified. An evaluation of this work would be considered by the Community Engagement Group.

The Equality and Diversity Officer continued to provide support to EDH with recent work focusing on Impact Needs Assessments, building up the Customer Profile and reviewing key policies and procedures.

With regard to organisational development the team had facilitated Change Management Workshops with Managers. Senior Management Team and Heads of Service had received coaching and support from a Management Consultant, to equip them with a range of skills to deal with the challenges of organisational change caused by LGR. Further sessions on carrying out Welfare/Appraisal Interviews had been arranged to ensure that these skills were carried forward to the new Council.

To conclude Members were advised that whilst LGR work was anticipated it was engaging an increasing amount of the team's capacity and additional support continued to be provided to EDH. However, there had been no unplanned slippage on the work programme during this quarter.

With regard to the work on affordable housing the Chair asked who had been consulted within the private sector. J Brindle advised that the Community Advisory Panel was made up of members of the public and the Head of Housing was consulting with private landlords in the area. Councillor Mrs J Maitland asked if residents were happy to take part in this area of work given concerns about the "credit crunch". J Brindle advised that residents were happy to take part.

Councillor J Haggan referred to the Councils Transitional Plan and key priorities and queried if the Council was working with the other Durham Districts and did they all share the same priorities. J Brindle advised the Transitional Plan was specific to Easington and outlined those things which the Council wanted to see completed prior to LGR. With regard to shared priorities these were being developed through the LGR workstreams, and Easington was well represented on those to ensure we had an input. Through the “business as usual” process the new authority had to sign off our key priorities to ensure nothing was overlooked. Priorities for Easington were being put forward however all prioritisation would be subject to the new Council’s policy and budget processes.

Councillor A Collinson asked if the reduction in the number of performance indicators had helped. J Brindle advised that in the long term the reduction would help however in the short term there were many new indicators which had created more work.

The chair thanked J Brindle for her attendance at the meeting and wished her well in her now position at the Fire Service.

RESOLVED that the progress made by the Unit and the work plans for the coming months be noted.

6 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 following item of business, not shown on the Agenda, be considered as a matter of urgency.

7 VISIT TO HACKWORTH ROAD DEPOT (AOB)

The Chair advised that only three Members had attended the site visit to Hackworth Road depot on 5 September 2008. Members were advised that the visit had been informative and the Chair hoped that any future visits would be better attended.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.