

# Item no

Report to: **Resources Scrutiny Committee**  
Date: **28 October 2008**  
Report of: **Head of Democratic Services**  
Subject: **Democratic Services – Performance Report**  
Ward: **All**

## 1 **Purpose of Report**

1.1 To update Members on the performance of the Democratic Services 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 period June-October 2008 on the progress of the Unit which comprises the following service areas:

- **Democratic and Member Services**
- **Elections and Electoral Registration**

## 4 **Position Statement**

4.1 In March this year, following the final report of the Best Value Review of Support Services the Executive approved the report of the Executive Members for Improvement and Resources which set out proposals for the restructuring of a number of corporate support services.

4.2 The report suggested that there should be a separation of the Democratic Services and Legal Services/Risk Management/Insurance functions to establish a clear focus for each. The Democratic Services function transferred to the Assistant Chief Executive's team so that there is a closer alignment between democracy and the agendas around community engagement and corporate development.

4.3 The Legal, Risk and Insurance functions transferred to the Directorate of Finance and Corporate Services.

## 5 **Democratic and Member Services**

### 5.1 **Scrutiny**

5.1.1 The District of Easington Scrutiny Annual Report 2007/8 was agreed by the District Council of Easington at its meeting held on 3 July 2008.

- 5.1.2 The Scrutiny Committees' work programmes in what is a transitional year to the new Unitary Council concentrates on Service Unit Performance reporting to ensure that Council Performance is maintained at the highest level together with monitoring of those priority issues identified within the Council's Transitional Plan. Key issues considered by each Committee thus far are

*Regeneration Services*

- Momentum – Pathways to Healthcare project
- Support to East Durham Homes

*Community Services*

- Recycling and Waste Services
- Post Office Ltd Network Change Programme – Area Plan proposal for Easington

*Resources*

- Development of Customer Services and IT support mechanisms

- 5.1.3 The County Durham Overview and Scrutiny Officer Network has taken the opportunity to comprehensively evaluate Overview and Scrutiny in County Durham. Using the Centre for Public Scrutiny's Evaluation Toolkit a number of members have been either interviewed or surveyed as part of the process. The results of this work have been fed into the Democracy workstream which is looking at how Overview and Scrutiny will be undertaken within the new Council. Areas of best practice from existing Councils have been identified as part of this process.

**5.2 Member Training and Development**

- 5.2.1 As part of the adoption in February 2008 of the Council's transitional Plan for Local Government Reorganisation, organisational development work was refocused to support the needs of staff and members through the period of transition.
- 5.2.2 As part of this process member training and development activity is concentrated on activities to support elected members through the transition. Notwithstanding this, learning opportunities are still to be circulated to members from the usual sources including the North East Regional Employers' Organisation.
- 5.2.3 Within the ongoing Local Government Review workstreams, officers have been involved in developing Induction and Training activities for the newly elected County Councillors. Further work is underway to ensure that members of the new Council have received the necessary training in those areas previously undertaken by District Councils such as Development Control and Licensing.

**5.3 Community Engagement**

- 5.3.1 The Unit has been heavily involved in the Neighbourhood Forum Pilots in Seaham, Murton and South Hetton. Working with East Durham Trust, the initial pilot meetings were held on 17, 18 and 19 March 2008. Collectively, over 100 residents took part in the pilot meetings with residents invited to leave contact details so that they could receive information regarding the ongoing pilots.

- 5.3.2 Arising from the meetings an "Agenda for Action" for each forum was produced and presented to the Forums in May and June 2008 for approval. Subsequent meetings of the three Pilot Forums have considered reports by officers of the Council, Durham Constabulary, Durham County Council and County Durham PCT on progress in addressing the priority action areas. The new forums have been subject to an evaluation process during August and September.

## **6 Electoral Services**

### **6.1 Electoral Registration**

- 6.1.2 The Electoral Registration canvass commenced in August when registration forms were posted to all households in the district. First reminders were sent to non-responders in September and as at 10 October the overall response from households was 73%.
- 6.1.3 Of those households who have responded 65% have responded by post and 35% by telephone.
- 6.1.4 The second reminder stage, the "door knocking" exercise has commenced and will continue until 26 October.
- 6.1.5 The Register will be published on 1 December 2008.

### **6.2 European Elections – 4 June 2008**

- 6.2.1 Transitional Regulations issued by DCLG in September require that by 30 November 2008, Durham County Council shall appoint one of their officers as Local Returning Officer to discharge duties in relation to elections to the European Parliament to be held in June 2009.
- 6.2.2 Dave Smith, Sunderland City Council's Acting Returning Officer has been appointed as Regional Returning Officer for the North East Region.
- 6.2.3 Planning and preparation for the Elections has commenced with District and County officers working together. Meetings with the Regional Returning Officer have been scheduled for the next 2/3 months.

### **6.3 Casual Vacancies**

- 6.3.1 Election staff were involved in the management of an Election for Easington Village Parish Council on 21 August 2008. Turnout for the election was 20.47%.
- 6.3.2 There is currently a vacancy for Trimdon Foundry Parish Council. Nominations close on Friday 17 October.

## **7 Local Government Review**

- 7.1 Local Government Review has continued to feature heavily in the work of the team. Officers are involved in ongoing work relating to constitutional, democratic and electoral issues in preparation for vesting day in April 2009.

## **8 Sickness Monitoring**

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

- 8.2 The overall sickness rate for the Unit for the period 1 May 2008 to 30 September 2008 was 2.75 days. The Council's corporate target is 8 days.

## 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 There are no risk implications arising from this report.

### 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 **Local Government Review Implications**

- 11.1 There are no proposals in this report which impact on Local Government Review. Reference to staff involvement is made in paragraph 7.

## 12 **Recommendations**

Members are requested to note the work of the Democratic Services Unit and note the progress made.

**Background papers/documents referred to:**

Unit files  
Service Plan  
Work Plans  
Local Government Review documents

BG/MA/adm gen/081001  
16 October 2008