

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING**  
**OF THE RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**HELD ON TUESDAY 28 OCTOBER 2008**

Present: Councillor A Burnip (Chair)  
Councillors Mrs M Baird, J Haggan  
D Maddison and Mrs J Maitland

Apologies: Councillors A Collinson and M Nicholls

1 **THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** held on 7 October 2008, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.

2 **THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE** held on 14 October 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 20 October 2008 which fell within the remit of this Committee.

**RESOLVED** that the information given, be noted.

5 **SERVICE UNIT PERFORMANCE REPORTING – DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Democratic Services which gave an update on the performance of the Democratic Services Unit, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The report provided an update on the progress of the Unit for the period June to October 2008 which comprised of the following service areas:

- Democratic and Member Services
- Elections and Electoral Registration

Members were advised that in March this year, following the final report of the Best Value Review of Support Services the Executive approved the restructuring of a number of corporate support services.

The restructure proposed 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 to allow a closer alignment between democracy and the agendas around community engagement

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

The District of Easington Scrutiny Annual Report 2007/08 was agreed by the District Council on 3 July 2008. The Scrutiny Committees' work programmes, in what was a transitional year to the new Council, concentrated on service unit performance reporting to ensure performance was maintained at the highest level together with monitoring of priorities identified within the Council's Transitional Plan. Key issues considered by each Committee were outlined in the report.

The County Durham Overview and Scrutiny Officer Network had comprehensively evaluated Overview and Scrutiny in County Durham. Using the Centre for Public Scrutiny's Evaluation Toolkit a number of Members had been either interviewed or surveyed as part of the process. The results of this work had been fed into the Democracy workstream which was looking at how Overview and Scrutiny would be undertaken within the new Council. Areas of best practice from existing Councils had also been identified as part of this process.

It was explained that as part of the adoption of the Council's Transitional Plan for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), organisational development work was refocused to support the needs of staff and Members through the period of transition.

As part of this process Member training and development activity was concentrated on activities to support elected Members through the transition. Notwithstanding this, learning opportunities would still be circulated to Members from the usual sources.

Within the ongoing LGR workstreams, officers had been involved in developing induction and training activities for the newly elected County Councillors. Further work was underway to ensure that Members of the new Council had received the necessary training in those areas previously undertaken by District Councils such as Development Control and Licensing.

The Unit had 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 in March 2008. Collectively, over 100 residents took part in the pilot meetings and residents were invited to leave contact details so they could receive information regarding the ongoing pilots.

Arising from the pilot meetings an "Agenda for Action" for each Forum was produced and presented to the Forums in May and June for approval. Subsequent meetings of the three pilot Forums had 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 had been subjected to an evaluation process during August and September.

B Garside advised that 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 24 October the overall response from households was 83%. Of those households who had responded 65% had responded by post and 35% by telephone. The second reminder stage, the "door knocking" exercise concluded on 26 October and it was hoped that by the time the Register was published on 1 December 2008 that last years overall total household response rate of 95% would be achieved.

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The Chair queried how residents would be able to register next year. B Garside advised that an options paper on “electoral services” had been produced and fed into the Legal and Democracy workstream. The paper set out proposals for arrangements following LGR. However, it was expected that as registration would need to start in June/July that in the short term residents would continue to register locally.

Transitional Regulations issued by DCLG in September required that by 30 November 2008, Durham County Council would need to appoint one of their officers as Local Returning Officer to discharge duties related to elections to the European Parliament to be held in June 2009. Mr D Smith, Sunderland City Council's Acting Returning Officer had been appointed as Regional Returning Officer for the North East Region. Planning and preparation for the Elections had commenced with District and County officers working together. Meetings with the Regional Returning Officer had been scheduled for the next 2 to 3 months.

Election staff had been involved in the management of an Election for Easington Village Parish Council on 21 August 2008. Turnout for the election was 20.47%. There had also been a vacancy for Trimdon Foundry Parish Council. Nominations closed on 17 October 2008 and as only one nomination was received the candidate was returned uncontested.

LGR had continued to feature heavily in the work of the team. Officers were involved in ongoing work related to constitutional, democratic and electoral issues in preparation for vesting day.

B Garside reported that effective sickness monitoring continued to be carried out in the Unit. The overall sickness rate for the Unit for the period 1 May to 30 September 2008 was 2.75 days. The Council's corporate target was 8 days.

Councillor Mrs J Maitland queried staff moral within the Unit. B Garside advised that staff moral had been good and as yet no staff had indicated they were leaving. However, as vesting day approached moral was effected by the uncertainty. All staff would be TUPE transferred on 31 March 2009 to the new Council.

**RESOLVED** that the information given, be noted.

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