

Item no

Report to: **Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee**

Date: **29 January 2007**

Report of: **Head of Democratic Services and Administration**

Subject: **Democratic Services and Administration – Performance Report**

Ward: **All**

1 **Purpose of Report**

1.1 To update Members on the performance of the Democratic Services and Administration 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 2nd and 3rd quarters of 2006/7 on the progress of the Unit which comprises the following service areas:

- **Democratic and Member Services**
- **Elections and Electoral Registration**
- **Legal and Administration Services**
- **Risk Management**

4 **Position Statement**

4.1 In my previous reports to this Committee, I advised Members that temporary staffing arrangements had been put in place to provide additional resources needed to meet the current demands placed upon the Unit and to cover vacancies. These arrangements have continued longer than envisaged because of the delay in the Best Value Review of Support Services (BVRSS).

4.2 The BVRSS is now nearing completion and will result in an Improvement Plan that will allow me to review the Unit's Service Plan and the structure of the Unit.

5 **Democratic and Member Services**

5.1 Political Management Arrangements

5.1.1 Since my last report in September 2006, we have produced a follow up report to Political Management Working Group (PMWG) which examined the potential options for reviewing the Council's scrutiny function.

- 5.1.2 Members will be aware that the PMWG agreed in principle to continue with three scrutiny committees and an overarching Scrutiny Management Board. My team was charged with working up further options for modelling the Scrutiny Committees around Executive Portfolios.
- 5.1.3 Revised Terms of Reference were also drafted for the Scrutiny Committees.
- 5.1.4 A further PMWG will be held on 31 January 2007 to consider an updated report with a view to revised structures being implemented from May 2007.
- 5.2 Scrutiny
 - 5.2.1 The Department for Communities and Local Government published the White Paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities" in October 2006.
 - 5.2.2 The paper contains a number of issues which will impact upon the Council's Scrutiny function.
 - 5.2.3 Accordingly, the Scrutiny Support Manager has reported to the Scrutiny Management Board in relation to these issues and in conjunction with the ongoing review of Scrutiny referred to in Section 5.1, further reports detailing the implications of the White Paper for the Council's Scrutiny Committee are being prepared.
- 5.3 Member Training and Development
 - 5.3.1 Training and Development events continue to be arranged based upon both the needs identified by Members themselves as well as those arising from Council priorities.
 - 5.3.2 The Licensing committee members have received further training regarding the Gambling Act 2005 and the impact of the Act upon the Licensing Committee.
- 6 **Elections and Electoral Registration**
 - 6.1 Annual Canvass
 - 6.2 The annual canvass for the Electoral Register was undertaken between August and November.
 - 6.3 The Government placed new duties on Electoral Registration Officers to be more proactive during the annual canvass in order to maintain the register and increase registration levels. This included sending more than one canvass form to a residential address; making more than one visit to a residential address; making contact with any persons by such means as the registration officer deems appropriate.
 - 6.4 Easington also provided an incentive payment to canvassers for completed forms returned.
 - 6.5 In my previous report to this committee in September 2006 I reported that new electoral software had been purchased. Implementation of the project required reallocation of resources and reprioritisation to ensure new operational procedures were established and training and testing were completed before live running commenced.

6.6 I am pleased to report that thanks to the hard work of staff the process ran smoothly and the Electoral Register was published on 1 December 2006.

6.7 The return rate for the canvass was 97%. This is an improvement on 91% in 2005 and 92% in 2004.

6.8 Casual Vacancies

Whilst undertaking the electoral canvass resources also had to be utilised to undertake election processes in respect of vacancies in the County Electoral Division for Dawdon and the Passfield Ward of the District. Polling was conducted on 19 October and turnout for Dawdon was 18.72% and for Passfield was 15.37%.

6.9 New Absent Voting Procedures

6.10 I have recently written to Members regarding new regulations relating to absent voting procedures. You will therefore be aware that currently I am undertaking a process which requires collection of signatures and dates of birth from approximately 14,000 existing absent voters and approximately 10,500 new applications. This process is due to be completed by the end of February 2007.

7 **Local Land Charges Searches**

7.1 From 1 April 2006, BVPI – 179 (Percentages of Standard Searches carried out within 10 working days) ceased to be a statutory PI but will continue to be a local PI.

7.2 Performance for this year is as follows:

1st Quarter	2nd Quarter	3rd Quarter
92%	94%	82%

7.3 The reason for the drop in performance in the 3rd quarter was as a result of IT problems in the Planning and Building Control Unit.

8 **Risk Management**

8.1 An updated Risk Management Policy and an updated Risk Management Strategy were adopted by District Council on 17th October 2006.

8.2 The Council are continuing to roll out the corporate risk software. "Risk Register" effective from 1 April 2006, however there has been some slippage in this area.

8.3 As part of the 'rollout' of the software, further training and development has been identified and undertaken. Arrangements are being made to provide additional collaborative training with regard to the practical use of Risk Register and the use of 'STORM' (Strategic and Operation Risk Management) methodology for managing risks.

8.4 The Council will be reviewing its Corporate Risks over the next few months and work is currently ongoing to update and develop effective management action plans.

8.5 The Best Value Review of Support Services has identified the need for additional resources for the Risk Management Function.

9 **Sickness Monitoring**

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

9.2 Sickness figures for the 2nd quarter of 2006/7 showed 6.74 days lost per member of staff and for the 3rd quarter 10.83 days.

9.3 The overall sickness rate for the Unit for the last 12 months is 8.27 days. The Council's corporate target for 2006/7 is 8 days.

9.4 A member of staff who has been on long term sickness returned to work in December and it is expected that this will improve sickness figures in the future.

10 **Slippage**

10.1 As mentioned in my previous report resource issues and Team Leader vacancies have meant that developing work plans and performance improvements have slowed. Tasks and projects which have been identified in work plans which have been affected, include the development of local PIs, benchmarking, customer satisfaction surveys, staff one to ones.

10.2 There has also been slippage in the work involved in achieving the North East Charter for Member Development. It has been acknowledged by the Member Training and Development Working Group that a corporate training resource is essential to achieving this target and this issue is being addressed in the BVRSS.

11 **Implications**

11.1 Financial Legal, Policy

11.1.1 There are no financial, legal or policy implications arising from this report.

11.2 Risk

11.2.1 A risk assessment has been carried out and action put in place to manage these risks.

11.3 Communication

11.3.1 There are no communication implications arising from this report.

12 **Corporate Implications**

12.1 Corporate Plans and Priorities

12.1.1 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.

12.2 Equality and Diversity Implications

12.2.1 There are no Equality and Diversity Implications arising from this report.

12.3 E-Government Implications

12.3.1 There are no E-Government Implications arising from this report.

12.4 Procurement Implications

12.4.1 There are no Procurement Implications arising from this report.

13 **Recommendations**

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

Background papers/documents referred to:

Unit files
Service Plan
Work Plans