

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
SERVICE DELIVERY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON MONDAY, 19TH FEBRUARY, 2007**

Present: Councillor D. Raine (Chair)

Councillors S. Bishop, H. High, A.J. Holmes,
Mrs. B.A. Sloan and D.J. Taylor-Gooby

Also present: Councillor D. Myers - Executive Member for Customer Services
Councillor Mrs. J. Freak - Executive Member for Social Inclusion
and Culture
Jack Fletcher - Youth Forum

1. **THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** held on 29th January, 2007, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.
2. **THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE** held on 6th February, 2007, 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**

The Chair welcomed Jack Fletcher from the Youth Forum to the meeting.

4. **WORK PROGRAMME ISSUES**

(i) **Neighbourhood Initiatives - Performance Report**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Neighbourhood Initiatives which updated Members on the progress of the Neighbourhood Initiatives Unit, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The report provided an update on progress of the Neighbourhood Initiatives Unit which comprised Community Safety, Youth Strategy, Social Inclusion, Arts Development and Sports Development.

The Community Safety Partnership was co-ordinating three over-arching areas of service improvement approved through the LSP. These related to targeted interventions aimed at reducing repeat offending, tackling anti-social behaviour and addressing low-level environmental crime and the links between poor environmental conditions and a high level of fear of crime. The total value of programmes was £4.8m with an NRF contribution of £616,000.

The Head of Neighbourhood Initiatives advised that during the last quarter, Operation Milkshake was put into place to address crime and anti-social behaviour issues in Wingate, Wheatley Hill, Thornley, Station Town and Trimdon. The multi-agency initiative which involved the Police, District Council, Fire Service and the DVLA proved highly successful with six arrests and recovery of £188,000 of illegal drugs, 38 fixed penalty notices, 68 pieces of

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graffiti removed and customs and excise seizures of illegal cigarettes. During Milkshake, Fire Service officers also visited 796 homes to raise awareness of fire safety. This resulted in 181 requests for a follow-up visit. Following the success of the operation it was planned to hold further operations on a regular basis targeting hotspot areas across the District.

Pride in Easington was about identifying the links between low-level environmental crimes such as graffiti and litter and high levels of fear of crime. It operated on four levels. Community education and awareness initiatives would be developed including schools programmes and promotional campaigns, community involvement and participation would be encouraged through grant schemes and initiatives which directly involved local people in maintaining their neighbourhood environment. The Council's operational work had been reviewed with a new system of zoned working. This would be integrated with the new Neighbourhood Policing Agenda later in the year. Finally, where education and community involvement failed, a proactive policy of enforcement using the full range of available powers would be applied.

In the last quarter, 23 applications had been received from community organisations under a criteria to improve the environment, reduce fear of crime or build community spirit. The successful applicants must deliver the activity before 31st March.

The installation of a four camera fixed system for Easington Colliery and ten camera redeployable system to monitor anti-social behaviour hotspot areas was now complete and undergoing a test phase.

The Head of Neighbourhood Initiatives referred to the quarterly performance figures and explained that as previously advised, changes in recording practices by Durham Constabulary had had an effect on performance indicators however there had been an increase in domestic burglary and vehicle crime during the quarter, although the overall trend remained good. Burglary had fallen by 23% and vehicle crime by 20%.

The Youth Strategy Team co-ordinated the delivery of the District's Youth Strategy and supported the development and administration of the Youth Forum. The Youth Forum continued to meet on a monthly basis. All seven secondary schools in the District had representation on the Forum which operated through six sub-groups.

The Social Inclusion Team worked in partnership with statutory and voluntary service providers to address the causes of social exclusion in the District. The Polish Residents Support Group offered a family support service for Polish residents within the District. The first meeting of the group was held on 9th January, 2007. The Group would explore the development of an Action Plan to address issues of isolation.

The Arts Team were continuing to develop a creative range of cultural activities for local people to enjoy and experience which contributed towards the delivery of some of the Council's corporate objectives. Activities in the last quarter were detailed in the report.

The Head of Neighbourhood Initiatives explained that during the October half-term holidays, a varied programme of activities was organised throughout the District at various venues. Activities included gymnastics, trampoline, netball, football and basketball. A total of 294 young people attended the activities.

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An initiative to increase the number of people taking part in swimming in the District by providing free sessions at Peterlee Leisure Centre had proved to be successful with over 500 young people attending the sessions. Further free-swim sessions had been arranged to take place during the February half-term school holiday week.

The report also provided details of achievements and non-achievements within the Unit.

A Member queried if Operation Milkshake would take part in other areas of the District. The Head of Neighbourhood Initiatives explained that resources were targeted in hotspot areas. Additional Officers were brought in to carry out the operations, therefore, other areas of the District did not suffer.

A Member referred to numerous incidents in his village and queried if his village had been deserted. The Head of Neighbourhood Initiatives explained that Street Safe Boards were held which covered every area. A decision was made where an operation needed to be put into practice.

A Member commented that members of the public asked him to make complaints on their behalf. This was only logged as one complaint when dozens could have complained to him. The Head of Neighbourhood Initiatives explained that he would encourage people to report incidents otherwise resources were not concentrated in that area.

A Member referred to binge drinking and the partnership working with the PCT and queried if any difference had been seen since the new County Durham PCT had been established. The Head of Neighbourhood Initiatives explained that there had been an impact although the District Council was the first area of the County to produce an Alcohol Strategy. There was a lot of changes within the PCT and difficulties would arise.

A Member queried if there were many Polish residents in the area. The Executive Member for Social Inclusion and Culture explained that there were 15,000 Polish residents in County Durham but was unable to give the number of Polish residents in the District.

A Member commented that he felt an article should be placed in Infopoint encouraging the public to report any incidents of antisocial behaviour direct to the Police.

A Member queried what Learn East was. The Executive Member for Social Inclusion and Culture explained that Learn East was based in Peterlee Town Centre. She had been asked to support the Group to help them obtain charitable status for family learning.

The Chair thanked the Head of Neighbourhood Initiatives for his report.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

(ii) Customer Service Centre – Quarter 3 update

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Customer Services which provided information on the progress of the performance of the new Customer Service Centre in the period to the end of December 2006, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

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The Head of Customer Services explained that after reviewing the migration of calls from other service delivery units, several areas were highlighted where the CSC could aid the performance of some departments. These calls would be migrating to the CSC in January, (Council Tax and Planning and Building Control) after all Customer Service Assistants had been trained. The continued development of the CRM system would also enable a smooth transition of these services to the CSC. Calls from other service units would then be migrated to the CSC during 2007. The aim was to achieve as many calls as possible being answered at the first point of contact.

The performance of the CSC had continued to improve since the merging of the old switchboard and Customer Service Teams in mid-March. Statistics showed the percentage of calls that were answered within 20 seconds, how quickly calls were answered and that the percentage of calls dissuaded were all performing better than targets. The percentage of abandoned calls was still not achieving the target of 3.9%, however the year to date figure had continued to improve significantly even through a period of substantial training of the Customer Service Assistants.

The complaints report for quarter 3 was appended to the report but the number of complaints had consistently reduced during the period as Customer Services no longer dealt with East Durham Homes complaints. Recruitment was now complete with all Customer Service Assistants and Supervisors having completed their induction training in December.

The Customer Service Assistants would staff the main reception for the site in building 9 from 29th January, 2007. This would involve all Customer Service Assistants staffing the reception on a rotation basis. Work was completed on the re-recording of messages played to customers if they were held in a queue. The messages had all the same Easington voice.

The Head of Customer Services explained that surgeries were to be held once per month in the Members' lounge.

The Chair queried if East Durham Homes becoming a separate entity had made a difference to the Customer Services Unit. The Head of Customer Services explained that staff still received calls for East Durham Homes and could then be put through although they were encouraged to write the number down. The number was becoming more widely known.

A Member queried if Customer Services received complaints about services from East Durham Homes. The Head of Customer Services explained that the District Council dealt with all Ombudsman complaints and passed them to East Durham Homes to investigate as the Ombudsman did not deal with ALMO's. If a Member of the public felt they had no justice through East Durham Homes then the District Council would deal with the complaint through the Head of Housing and his team.

Members congratulated Officers on the Customer Service Centre.

The Chair thanked the Head of Customer Services for his report.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

5. REPORTS FROM PANELS/FORUMS/ BOARDS/WORKING PARTIES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Service Delivery Anti-Social Behaviour Working Party held on 27th October, 2006, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.

6. ADDITIONAL URGENT ITEMS 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. POST OFFICE NETWORK CONSULTATION (AOB)

The Chair explained that correspondence had been received from Post Watch regarding the Government's consultation on the future funding and structure arrangements of the Post Office network. Consultation was a crucial exercise as it would help determine the long term role Post Offices played in rural and urban communities throughout the UK. The key proposals were detailed in the consultation document.

The Chair explained that the Scrutiny Support Manager had drafted a response to the consultation document which would be returned before the 8 March 2007 deadline.

The Executive Member for Social Inclusion and Culture explained that she was concerned about the Pension Credit take-up. Elderly residents had been encouraged to open a Post Office account. She had attended a meeting with the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) and they were not aware of the proposals and the impact this would have on pensioners. Officers from the DWP were discussing this with supervisors to see if they could assist and support the District Council for the retention of the Post Offices.

A Member commented that elderly people would be poorer as they would have to use their money from benefits to travel to Post Offices if they moved from rural communities. The local shops would close as they would spend their money elsewhere.

The Executive Member for Social Inclusion and Culture explained that it would be helpful if the District Council knew in advance which Post Offices were selected for closure. There was a consortium in the west of the District that had been to Westminster and met the MP's to lobby for their support.

The Chair explained that a letter would be sent to the local MP's for the area asking for their support.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Support Manager be authorised to respond to the consultation document.