

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
SERVICE DELIVERY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

HELD ON MONDAY 23 APRIL 2007

Present: Councillor D. Raine (Chair)
Councillors S. Bishop, J. Goodwin,
H. High, A.J. Holmes, Mrs. B.A. Sloan
and D.J. Taylor-Gooby

Also Present: Councillor G. Patterson - Executive Member for Liveability

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors D. Chaytor and W.R. Peardon.

2. THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING held on 2nd April 2007 a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.

3. THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE held on 10th April 2007 a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were submitted.

RESOLVED that the information contained within the Minutes, be noted.

4. PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

There were no members of the public present.

5. WORK PROGRAMME ISSUES

(i) Position Statement - Revenues and Benefits

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Financial Management which provided a Position Statement in respect of the Revenues and Benefits services, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Details of performance from 1st April 2006 to 31st March 2007 with references to earlier financial years, were outlined in Appendix 1 to the report.

The Revenues Manager gave details of the key issues with regard to revenues, including the percentage of Council Tax collected in the year, the percentage of business rates collected and the cost of collecting Council Tax per chargeable dwelling. Members were advised of the overall performance of the Unit together with details of recorded complaints.

The Revenues Manager explained that the table relating to sickness levels in the report was incorrect. The total number of sick days was 713.5 for the period 1/4/06-31/3/07.

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The collection rate for 2006/2007 was 96.55%, an increase of 0.3% on the previous year. This was the highest collection rate that had been achieved. Arrears for previous years had also been reduced by approximately £1.3m, (33%).

The Council had replaced over 93% of the existing bus pass database and added a further 4,250 new passes to reach a new database total of approximately 15,700.

The Revenues Manager explained that he was still awaiting more detail on the National Travel Scheme to be introduced by April 2008. This would enable bus pass holders to use their pass free of charge on local bus services in any area of England. Legislation was progressing but reimbursement details for authorities was proving difficult to resolve.

Members congratulated the Revenues Manager on an excellent report. The service was continually improving thus improving the Best Value Performance Indicators.

The Benefits Manager gave details of the key issues with regard to benefits and in particular, performance on benefit claims, the average time for completing changes in circumstances and the amount of benefit paid correctly. Turnaround times for new applications had reduced compared to the previous year.

The District Council continued to work jointly with the Pension Service in respect of local surgeries in conjunction with Durham County Council's Welfare Rights, the Pension Service and other service providers had launched a Council Tax benefit take up campaign with events throughout the District.

Members were advised that when a person died, up to seven different agencies needed to be informed of the death. Agreement had been reached with the Pension Services and the Council had been given authority to verify information. It was hoped that this service would commence in the near future.

Bookmarks were circulated to Members which promoted the Benefits Section. They would be distributed throughout the District in libraries, doctors surgeries and community centres etc.

Throughout the year to date, the District Council had prosecuted 16 cases and issued 64 formal cautions in respect of fraud. This BVPI was measured and put the Council in the top quartile for 2006/7. The BVPI for the number of visits carried out by the Verification Framework Team and the Fraud Team was also in the top quartile.

The On-line Benefits Application System had now gone live. This meant that residents of the District could apply for Housing and Council Tax benefit through the Council's website.

Details of the Best Value Service Improvement Plan were set out in Appendix 2 and achievements and non-achievements were detailed in Appendix 3.

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Members congratulated the Benefits Manager on the excellent report.

RESOLVED the information given be noted.

(ii) Environmental Operations Quarterly Performance Report

Consideration was given to the report of the Environmental Services Operations Manager which provided information on the performance of the Environmental Services Operations for the period from December 2006 to March 2007, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Appendix 1 to the report provided details of complaints received in relation to Environmental Operations Services.

The Refuse Collection Service had operated as programmed throughout the District with minimal service interruptions due to the mild weather over the winter period. Only the Christmas week needed service changes, which allowed the service to return to normal the following week. Easter collections all moved forward one day and all residents in the District were informed of the changes via a leaflet.

An additional new refuse collection vehicle and two operatives had now been introduced. The vehicle had been operating since January 2007 and was smaller than normal vehicles which allowed it into streets where access had been restricted on regular occasions to larger vehicles. Due to resources alignment between Street Cleansing and Refuse, the expansion to the service had been able to be achieved at an annual cost of £17,000. Two new replacement refuse vehicles were introduced into the service in March and had been well received by the drivers.

The Green Waste Service commenced collections on Tuesday 20th March. The first collections had not produced significant amounts, however, the service was presently operating to capacity and was producing some good tonnages.

The pilot scheme Parc-it was to be introduced during May 2007 to dwellings in the west of the District.

Members were advised that the spring clean ran from Monday 15th January until 30th January 2007. The Clean and Green Teams along with the Estate Officers from East Durham Homes worked across the District collecting litter and fly tipping. The Pride in Easington officers also co-ordinated litter picks with residents groups and school children during the period. 67.62 tonnes of rubbish was collected from the District. This tonnage was a lot less than the previous year's total of 121.21 tonnes. It felt this was due to improved service delivery.

A total of 63 linear miles of footpaths in the District had been cleaned and this had greatly improved the appearance of the District and helped to improve the BVPI 199 annual set target.

The graffiti removal machine continued to operate successfully in the District and pathfinder area and received regular support from the

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Probation Service and the Environment Agency. The service had now received approval for mainstreaming which had created a full time post. The recruitment process was currently on-going and the position should be filled shortly. The total graffiti removed from 1st June to 31st March 2007 was outlined in the report.

The gully cleansing service along with the three staff and two vehicles were transferred back to Durham County Council on Monday 2nd April 2007, as they had not been prepared to increase funding to maintain two cleanses in the District. The new cleaning proposals meant that most gullies throughout the District would now only receive one cleanse per area with a selected number of problem areas receiving two cleanses, which they had indicated to be around 25%. He believed that the cuts would lead to increased blockages and flooding which may affect properties and highway safety in the District.

The BVPI indicators on street cleansing and recycling were detailed in the performance tables in the report. Both of the indicators had exceeded annual set targets.

A Member referred to the missed bins and missed pull outs and queried the reason for the high figure. P. Penman explained that the missed pull outs could be down to a different crew on the service. Most missed bins and pull outs were collected the same day and all within 24 hours. Missed bins were often due to residents not putting their bins out. The refuse operatives had been supplied with cameras to take photographs where bins had not been pulled out.

The Director of Community Services explained that there had been 116 missed bins in the quarter and compared to the number of bins collected in that timescale, was a very small proportion. A lot of other local authorities did not include missed bins that were then emptied the same day.

A Member congratulated the Graffiti Removal Team who had done a great job in the District. He referred to hot spots in the area and explained that an area in his Ward was often cleaned of litter/glass and was no better by the evening. He queried if there was any process of sharing information with the Street Wardens and the Police.

The Environmental Services Manager explained that hot spot areas would be added to the programme. The youths needed to be moved on and he could co-ordinate this with the Street Wardens.

The Director of Community Services explained that the Council did try to share intelligence with the Police and other agencies. The Executive Member for Liveability had attended the Street Safe Boards on a number of occasions where hot spot areas were discussed. Warning signs would be erected, then followed up with enforcement activity or mobile cameras.

The Environmental Services Operations Manager explained that meetings had been held between the operatives and the Environmental Wardens and a pro-forma would be used on a regular basis to be fed back to the Street Wardens to try to get operations and enforcement linked together more tightly.

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The Environmental Services Operations Manager referred to an area in Seaham where building rubbish was blowing over the road and into the Docks area. He had spoken to the Site Engineer to inform him that any litter blowing off the site was his responsibility.

The Chair expressed his concern that the gullies would only be cleaned once per year. He enquired what was happening with the storage of the blue bins as he had been informed that there was some problem with storage.

The Environmental Services Operations Manager explained that the Council had 3,500 spare blue bins. They had been storing them until a decision was made on whether to extend the Green Waste Scheme. The Green Waste Scheme would not be extended until a decision was made in 2008 on how best to continue the Kerb It Scheme.

The Director of Community Services explained that Executive had debated at great length on the various options for extending the Green Waste Scheme. There was an uncertainty about the future costs of the existing Kerb It Scheme and Members did not want to commit to the extension until this was resolved.

A Member queried if the free compost from Durham County Council would be available and if water butts could be provided for further recycling.

The Environmental Services Operations Manager explained that the compost had come from Premier Waste. They had sent double the amount to this Authority than to other local authorities. It was very hard to gauge how many people would actually come to collect it. There could have been another 10 ton made available which would have gone.

The Director of Community Services explained that water butts were very useful but was not sure if they could be obtained at a discounted rate.

A Member commented that she felt it was unfair that not everyone had a blue bin for the Green Waste Scheme. The Environmental Services Operations Manager explained that special collections would collect three bags of green waste per household and green waste could also be put into the green bin.

A Member queried who had cut back the trees on Horden Bank as they had been butchered. The Environmental Services Operations Manager explained that trees had been cut by Durham County Council. Any tree works which the District Council carried out was done via the Tree Officer.

The Chair thanked the Environmental Services Operations Manager for his report.

RESOLVED that the information given be noted.

6. DISTRICT OF EASINGTON SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2006/7

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Consideration was given to the report of the Scrutiny Support Manager which sought approval of the Draft District of Easington Scrutiny Annual Report 2006/7, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The Scrutiny Support Manager explained that under Article 6 of the Council's Constitution, Scrutiny Committees had to report annually to Council on their work and make recommendations for future work programmes.

The report had been produced jointly on behalf of the three Scrutiny Committees and aimed to demonstrate the principle that the Scrutiny Committee's worked together in assuring that they complemented the strategic work of the Executive and that the corporate priorities and performance targets agreed by the Council were met.

The report detailed the principles behind effective scrutiny within the Council, highlighted the co-ordinating role of the Scrutiny Management Board, reviewed the work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committees, set out proposed areas of work which formed the Scrutiny Committees future work programme for 2007/8 as far as they had been determined to date and proposed further ways through which the scrutiny process would be developed.

The Annual Report highlighted the relevant Service Unit Position Statements that would be considered by the new established Community Services, Regeneration Services and Resources Scrutiny Committees during 2007/8. Executive Portfolio Holders would also be required to report to the appropriate Scrutiny Committee to report on the formal partnerships and partnership working that was undertaken within the Portfolio.

The Annual Report also detailed the challenges and areas of future development that would be faced by the Scrutiny Committees arising from both the Local Government White Paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities" and the Police and Justice Act 2006, particularly where they related to the proposals to establish "Community Calls for Action".

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the District of Easington Annual Scrutiny Report 2006/7 be agreed subject to any amendments and submitted to full Council for endorsement;
- (ii) the report be submitted to the first meeting of the new Scrutiny Committee for finalisation of the 2007/8 work programme.

7. CHAIR'S COMMENTS

The Chair thanked Members of the Committee for their co-operation and support throughout the year. He wished everyone standing for re-election, every success and those who were leaving, a happy retirement.

RESOLVED that the information given be noted.

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CERTIFIED TRUE RECORD

CHAIR.....

DATE.....

JC/CB/COM/SER.DEL/070402
25.4.07