

## ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2007/08

### Significant Governance Issues: Progress Update September 2008

#### Progress of Significant Governance Issues identified in initial Annual Governance Statement submitted to Council in June 2008

##### **1. Poor attendance and contribution, in some instances, at partnership groups, needs to be addressed.**

Executive lead members attend LSP thematic groups appropriate to their lead roles. Lead Member reports reporting on LSP thematic group progress go to Executive Committee every eight weeks.

As part of Use of Resources, key partnerships have been identified, each with an identified lead officer and lead member:

1. Teesdale Partnership
2. Rotters
3. County Durham eGovernment Partnership
4. 2D Council for Voluntary Service
5. Enterprise Agency
6. Barnard Castle Vision
7. Groundwork West Durham
8. Housing Benefits Shared Services Partnership
9. Teesdale Citizens Advice Bureau
10. Teesdale Housing Association

Progress against Council priorities are monitored on a six monthly basis and reported to Full Council (June and December of each year).

##### **2. More effective management of the scrutiny function is needed to ensure that energies are channelled into supporting achievement of the Council's priorities, management of performance, policy development and value for money.**

Increased senior officer support continues to be provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee by the Interim Deputy Chief Executive.

The Annual Report of the Committee was agreed by the Executive Committee in August and the 2008/09 work programme was finalised.

O&S is now much more actively involved in performance management through representation at the Improvement and Performance Board. The Committee has established 'task and finish' groups to examine performance in Development Control and Environmental Health and are currently undertaking that work.

O&S is finalising its consideration of the 2008 CPA report and has identified all weaknesses referred to by the Audit Commission and is ensuring that each of these has already been rectified or that work is in hand to do so. In instances where it will not be possible for the Council to address weaknesses before its demise in 2009 these will be passed on to the new Unitary Council for attention. This work acknowledges that the Council has made a policy decision to concentrate upon the 'Areas for Improvement' identified by the Audit Commission.

Monthly meetings between the Chair and Vice Chair of the O&S Committee with the Leader and Deputy Leader are scheduled and have been underway for several months. The Chief Executive and the Interim Deputy Chief Executive attend. They are proving to be effective in sharing information informally, and enable the participants to be more aware of developing issues than has been the case in the past. The meetings enable the Leader to explain forthcoming reports to the

Executive Committee and for the Chair of O&S to do likewise. The aim is for the roles of the Executive Committee and of O&S to be properly conducted but in the spirit of 'no surprises'. Hence O&S can be made aware of any policy development work in the offing and can indicate if they are interested in contributing to the work as it progresses or to scrutinise it when completed.

### **3. Build on recent improvements in the promotion of equality and diversity, by ensuring that all minority groups have the opportunity to participate in local priority setting.**

Equality Standard – Reached Level 2 of the Equality Standard in March 2008. This position is being consolidated in 2008/9 through ensuring that our programme of Equality Impact Assessments are done and actions arising from these actioned throughout the year. The programme is being managed by the HR & Improvement Team and monitored by the Assistant Chief Executive and Interim Deputy Chief Executive through quarterly service planning/performance clinics.

Teesdale Youth Forum has met four times. It is an independent organisation working in partnership with the Council and 2D. It was set up so young people can raise matters of concern and get it fed back to the relevant people. It also means young people can be consulted with on youth issues. There are currently 24 representatives from 19 groups aged between 13-18. To date the forum has had training on team work, have taken part in British Youth Council Training and have finalised the constitution. An official launch took place at an AGM in July.

### **4. Ensure that staff concerns over strategic leadership are fully tackled.**

Principal focus now on maintaining staff and member awareness and output where directly related to the involvement of the authority in Local Government Reorganisation and maintaining services.

Staff satisfaction survey action plan being executed and monitored regularly by the CMT and managers' forum and has seen the following achieved to date: Increased awareness of Member Roles by employees by the regular inclusion of a Member Profile in 'Mailbox'; Regular LGR communications distributed to staff in accordance with programme protocol; Job shadowing commenced – limited take-up but some completed; Change management programme/seminars delivered and feedback being analysed; Annual Staff Briefing and awards undertaken in July.

The Chief Executive is now leading on Monthly 'Teesdale Talks Shop' full staff briefings and monthly LGR Member Workshop briefings.

The Improvement and Development Agency have been engaged to provide support in CV preparation, interview skills and counselling and development funding has been reprioritised to staff needs.

Upcoming Staff one-to-ones and PDR reviews are to focus on preparation for local government reorganisation.

**5. Ensure that action plans are sufficiently robust so that outcomes are improved, and clear, achievable but challenging targets are set.**

Service planning, including transition planning and target setting was led by Assistant Chief Executive and Interim Deputy Chief Executive. Meetings were held with each directorate to go through service planning process to ensure plans were robust, targets were challenging and that everyone was aware of performance management system for the new National Indicator set and Local Indicators. The actions and targets from the service plans were used to inform the transition plan for 2008/9.

Quarterly 'clinics' are scheduled with each directorate to review progress.

**6. Effective arrangements for dealing with asset management need to be put into place.**

Considerable progress has been made over recent months in respect of asset management following the completion of the property surveys. This provided the information required to be able to revise the Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plan (approved by Council in August 2008) and produce detailed repairs and maintenance plans.

Two new policies for dealing with asset transfers (Town/Parish Councils, Community Organisations) were also approved by Council recently (April and May 2008).

The Asset Management Group is also meeting regularly and coordinating the repairs and maintenance activity and other asset issues as they arise.

Asset management was self-assessed as performing adequately for the Use of Resources Key Lines of Enquiry 2008 in August and, although the Audit Commission's assessment is not yet complete, the Council's auditors appear satisfied with progress being made in this area.

Asset management is no longer considered to be an outstanding significant control issue.