

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON TUESDAY, 8 JANUARY, 2008**

Present: Councillor R Burnip (Chair)

Councillors B Burn, P J Campbell,
Mrs A E Laing, T Longstaff, Mrs
S Mason, D Milsom and T Unsworth

Apologies: Councillor C Patching

1 **THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** held on 11 December, 2007, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.

2 **THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE** held on 18 December, 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**

There were no members of the public present.

4 **FEEDBACK FROM SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**

The Scrutiny Support Manager advised at the last meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board held on 4 January, 2008 the following issue was discussed:-

Proposals to establish a Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee which would deliver the accountability arrangements for the Implementation Executive. The Council's representative on the Committee would be Councillor A. Burnip, Chair of the Scrutiny Management Board.

RESOLVED that the information given be noted.

5 **SERVICE UNIT PERFORMANCE REPORTING - 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 1 April 2007 to date was outlined in Appendix 1 and 3 to the report. Tables showed a national quartile performance from previous years as comparatives.

The Principal Council Tax Officer 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

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per chargeable dwelling. Members were advised of the overall performance of the unit together with details of recorded complaints.

With regard to sickness monitoring, the figures had increased because of one long term member of staff and a number of staff had loved ones with serious illnesses. In spite of this the performance figures had still improved. There was an error in the report and the number of staff should be 28 and not 278.

In 2005 the Government had compiled a separate table which allowed for the deprivation factor and the District had moved up into the top twenty five percent.

The Revenues Section would be carrying out a Single Person Discount Review throughout the District which involved using an external agency to compare data to provide addresses where the information may be incorrect.

The Benefit 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. The average time taken to calculate new benefit applications for the month of December was 23.1 days and the average time taken to calculate a change in circumstances for December was 5 days.

Appendix 3 showed grades for relevant performance figures, the grades were set by the Department of Works and Pensions at 1 to 4, where 1 was poor and 4 was excellent, the levels were set out in Appendix 4.

The Council had launched an online Saturday morning benefits application service where members of the public rang and a Benefit Officer completed a benefit application giving benefit entitlement instantly. Details of initiatives were also outlined in the report.

The Benefit service faces major changes in regulations relating to rental levels paid to private landlords. A programme of information events scheduled for February 2008 has been arranged. These involve road shows in the district, mobile displays, press releases and tailored training and information presentations. Members will be updated and information given over the coming months.

In respect of fraud, during the financial year there had been 12 cases prosecuted and 40 formal cautions issued.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their report.

RESOLVED that the information given be noted.