

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

HELD ON TUESDAY 3 JUNE 2008

Present: Councillor C. Patching (Chair)
Councillors B. Burn, R. Burnip,
Mrs. A.E. Laing, D. Milsom and
T. Unsworth.

Apologies: Councillors Mrs. S. Mason. P.J.
Campbell and T. Longstaff

1. **THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** held on 22 April 2008, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.
2. **THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE** held on 20 May 2008, 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**

At the last meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board held on 27 May 2008, the following issues were discussed:-

**Momentum : Pathways to Healthcare - Consultation
District of Easington Scrutiny Annual Report 2007/08**

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 the 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 a comparative.

The Benefits Operations Manager gave details of the issues with regard to benefits, and in particular, performance on benefit claims, the average time for completing changes in circumstances. A new combined indicator 'right time indicator' replaced days to process new claims and days to process change of circumstances had been implemented from 1 April 2008.

Appendix 3 gave details of benefits performance from 2008/9. It showed grades for relevant performance figures, the grades were set by the Department

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of Works and Pensions at 1 - 4 where 1 was poor and 4 was excellent. The levels were set out in Appendix 4.

The Benefits Operations Manager explained that he had circulated a DVD which promoted benefit take up.

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 per chargeable dwelling. The cost of collecting Council Tax per property was £13.75 which showed that the District Council was one of the cheapest authorities in terms of administration.

Although the Council Tax collected was a decrease of 0.3% on the previous year, this still represented the second best rate the Council had collected. The District Council continued to pursue earlier year debt.

A Member referred to the business rate debt for the Byron Place shopping centre and queried how this worked. The Principal Council Tax Officer explained that non-domestic rate was collected similar to Council Tax. The shopping centre's rateable value was not calculated until later in the year, therefore, putting them in arrears. The arrears and the current year would be collected during the financial year 2008/09.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their report.

RESOLVED that the information given be noted.

6. **POST OFFICE LIMITED NETWORK CHANGE PROGRAMME - AREA PLAN PROPOSAL FOR CLEVELAND WITH SOUTH DURHAM AND RICHMOND**

Consideration was given to the report of the Scrutiny Support Manager which advised on the final decisions made by Post Office Limited in respect of their Network Change Programme Area Plan Proposal for Cleveland with South Durham and Richmond and its implications for residents of the south of the District, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The Scrutiny Support Manager explained that Post Offices Limited had determined that, notwithstanding the representations made during the consultation exercise, they were progressing with the closure of the Hutton Henry branch. Post Offices Limited had considered all responses received during the local public consultation and a review of the proposal had been undertaken. The Post Office Hutton Henry branch was open for a relatively small number of hours per week. The nearest alternative branch, Post Office Wingate, was less than two miles away and had parking facilities available outside. An hourly bus service ran from near Post Office Hutton Henry branch to a bus stop within two hundred yards of Post Office Wingate.

Notification had been received that the Tyne and Wear with Northumberland and Durham Area Plan Proposal would be out to consultation on 1 July 2008. Once the Area Plan booklet was received, the Council would be contacting local Ward Members, Parish Councillors and community groups for their comments regarding the proposals.

A Member queried if the Government had given them an undertaking that access to Post Office would not be further away than one mile. The Chair explained that

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there were different parameters depending on whether the Post Office was urban, rural or a city location.

The Scrutiny Support Manager explained that the criteria was one and a half mile for urban Post Offices.

A Member queried if Post Office Limited considered the waiting time in Post Offices. The Scrutiny Support Manager explained that the Area Plan booklet had given an indication of the amount of customer assistance and listed the amount of counter transactions.

RESOLVED the information given be noted.

7. ANY 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.

8. DISTRICT OF EASINGTON SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2007/08 (AOB)

Consideration was given to the report of the Scrutiny Support Manager which sought approval of the District of Easington Scrutiny Annual Report 2007/08, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The report highlighted the work undertaken by the Community Service, Resources and Regeneration Services Scrutiny Committees during 2007/08 and set out the proposed areas of work that would form part of the work programme for 2008/09 which were drawn from the Council's Corporate Plan and Transitional Plan which detailed Council priority areas of work over the coming year.

The Chair drew Members attention to the re-cycling and waste service, in particular to recent reports regarding the issues relating to Premier Waste.

RESOLVED that the District of Easington Scrutiny Annual Report 2007/08 be approved and submitted to Full Council for endorsement.