

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

HELD ON TUESDAY 15 JULY 2008

- Present: Councillor C. Patching (Chair)
Councillors R. Burnip, Mrs. A.E.
Laing, T. Longstaff, Mrs. S. Mason
and T. Unsworth
- Also Present: Councillor A. Naylor - Executive Member for Neighbourhood
Engagement and Communications
- Apologies: Councillors D. Milsom, P.J. Campbell
and B. Burn

1. **THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** held on 24 June 2008, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.
2. **THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE** held on 1 July 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 7 July 2008, the following issue was discussed:-

County Durham Overview and Scrutiny and Member Network

RESOLVED that the information given be noted.

5. **POST OFFICE LIMITED NETWORK CHANGE PROGRAMME - AREA PLAN PROPOSAL FOR TYNE AND WEAR WITH NORTHUMBERLAND AND DURHAM**

Consideration was given to the report of the Scrutiny Support Manager which advised of the Post Office Limited Network's Change Programme Area Plan Proposal for Tyne and Wear with Northumberland and Durham and its implications for residents of the District, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The Scrutiny Support Manager explained that a letter had been sent to the Postmasters of the three Post Offices which were recommended for closure, to invite them to the meeting.

In March 2007, the District Council considered a report from the Executive Member for Social Inclusion and Culture which highlighted the Department of Trade and Industry's Consultation Document regarding the future of the Post

Community Services Scrutiny Committee - 15 July 2008

Office Network. The Document described the Government's future funding and structural plans for both urban and rural post offices.

In responding to the Consultation Document, the Leader of the Council and the Scrutiny Management Board raised a number of concerns in respect of the Network Review which were detailed in the report.

When developing the Area Plan Proposal for Tyne and Wear with Northumberland and Durham, Post Office Limited analysed a number of factors which included the proximity of the Post Office branches proposed for closure to other nearby branches, the number of customers currently using a particular Post Office branch, the size and ability of nearby branches to absorb extra customers and the commercial implications of any decision for Post Office Limited.

The local public consultation on the Area Plan Proposal commenced on 1 July 2008 and the closing date for feedback was 11 August 2008. Subject to the feedback received as part of the consultation, no changes would be implemented before October 2008.

The list of Post Offices to be retained within the affected areas was attached as Appendix A. Arising from the Area Plan Proposals three facilities had been identified for closure;

- Easington Colliery, Lower Seaside Lane, Easington Colliery;
- Salters Lane, Salters Lane, Shotton Colliery;
- Yoden Road, Yoden Road, Peterlee.

Attached as Appendix B was the Post Offices Limited Branch Access Report in respect of the branches identified for closure as well as the alternative branches which had been suggested.

The Scrutiny Support Manager explained that he had received comments from the Postmaster at Salters Lane Post Office in Shotton Colliery and she felt that the number of residents did not justify two Post Offices and accordingly supported the closure of her branch.

Durham County Council had invited the District Council to a meeting with Post Office Limited on 24 July 2008 to discuss the closures. Three public meetings would be held, Shotton Hall, Peterlee 22 July; St. Patrick's Hall, Consett 24 July and County Hall, Durham 26 July.

A Member commented that it was disappointing that the Post Office in Easington Colliery was to close. There was a massive regeneration programme on colliery houses and he thought that there was a demand for it.

The Chair referred to the branch access reports and explained that the nearest branch and availability of public transport was not necessarily the same as accessibility and these two issues need to be raised. Disabled access to bus services was not guaranteed and he queried if an hourly bus service was a reasonable provision.

RESOLVED that

- (i) representations be made prior to the end of the consultation period;
- (ii) the invitation to Durham County Council's meeting be accepted.

6. **SERVICE UNIT PERFORMANCE REPORTING - COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING**

Consideration was given to the report of the Communications and Marketing Manager which updated Members on the performance of the Communications and Marketing Unit, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The Communications and Marketing Manager explained that the Unit's plans continued to be significantly affected by the impact of Local Government Review. The Council's Communications Unit continued to publicise locally, plans for Unitary Governance to increase the understanding of staff, residents and other stakeholders about the transition process and the impact of organisational change.

The Unit had led a recruitment of four hundred residents to the Council's new Community Advisory Panel, providing local people from communities right across the whole of the District the opportunity to have a say on Council services, issues affecting their daily lives and neighbourhoods they live in. A consultation programme had been set up and the first newsletter had been distributed to new Members.

The number of news releases issued by the Communications Unit was up 27% on the year and the number of media enquiries received was up over 38%. Media coverage of regeneration activities was significantly higher year on year.

For the first time this year, they had assessed the overall value of newspaper editorial coverage on Council services, activities and events based on equivalent cost of advertising space in various publications, all coverage achieved would have cost the Council an estimated £750,000.

The Chair thanked the Communications and Marketing Manager for his report.

RESOLVED that the information given be noted.