

THE DISTRICT COUNCIL OF CHESTER-LE-STREET

Report of the meeting of Regeneration and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel held in the Conference Room 3, Civic Centre, Newcastle Road, Chester-le-Street, Co Durham, DH3 3UT on Thursday, 17 April 2008 at 6.00 pm

PRESENT:

Councillor Keith Potts (Chairman)

Councillors:

L Armstrong	A Turner
R Harrison	A Willis

Officers:

L Fisher (Housing Options Manager), J Scott (Senior Performance Officer), N Cummings (Scrutiny Officer) and M Fell (Democratic Services Assistant)

Also in Attendance: Councillor M Potts and three members of the public.

50. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors P H May and D L Robson.

51. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING HELD 7 FEBRUARY 2008

RESOLVED: "That the minutes of the proceedings of the Meeting of the Panel held 7 February 2008, copies of which had previously been circulated to each member, be confirmed as being a correct record, subject to the three members of the public being shown as in attendance at the meeting.

52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

There were no declarations of interest received from Members.

53. PUBLIC SPEAKING

The Chairman acknowledged the three members of the public in attendance and advised that he would invite them to speak at the appropriate times during the meeting.

54. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT APRIL 2007 - DECEMBER 2007. REPORT OF ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE.

In the absence of the Assistant Chief Executive, the Senior Performance Officer spoke in relation to the Corporate Performance Report for April 07 – December 07. This report provided a summary of key areas of performance including details of Best Value Performance Indicators and Local Performance Indicators for the quarter. Reference was made to Appendix 1 of the report, which summarised the document and included full details of performance on Best Value Performance Indicators for the year.

The Senior Performance Officer summarised the key issues of overall performance as set out in section 15.1 of the report.

Queries were raised by Members on the following issues:

- Staff Shortages – The Chairman enquired whether the disappointing performance for the Best Value Performance Indicators was due to staff shortages. The Senior Performance Officer clarified that some of the poor performance was as a result of staff shortages and staff involvement in the Local Government Review (LGR).
- Rent Collected – Councillor Turner enquired about rent collected. The Senior Performance Officer advised that the figure is not correlated till the end of the year, so the true figure will be shown then.
- Recycling – The Senior Performance Officer advised that there had been a delay in receiving the actual figures so some figures were estimated. Councillor Turner enquired as to whether the figures were a reflection of staff leaving the authority.
- BVPI 12 The number of working days/shifts lost to the Authority due to sickness absence – Councillor Turner stated that this indicator had been poor for a number of years. He enquired as to whether future reports will show Cestria staff sickness levels and whether the council's sickness levels would improve as a result of their departure.
- LPI CSS03 Percentage of telephone calls answered within 15 seconds – Councillor Turner commented that the figures shown were a good achievement and enquired as to whether the figures reflected the time taken to answer calls to the Civic Centre only or the whole of the Councils' offices including the depots. The Senior Monitoring Office advised that she would query this point and report back to members. She also commented that there were currently no figures available for the last three quarters due to a technical fault with the new telephone system and that the figure shown was the target for the year. She advised the Panel that the Council are investigating the fault with the aim of rectifying it for the next quarter. Councillor Turner stated that he had experienced difficulties in getting through to Sacriston Depot on the telephone and a member of the public also commented that he had experienced the same problems with Cestria Housing. Councillor

Armstrong enquired as to whether an itemised bill could be obtained for the depots to help establish how many calls they receive and how many are answered effectively. The Chairman agreed that this information would be helpful. (To be reported back on)

- MP Queries – Councillor Armstrong enquired as to how many MP queries the Council received during the year and how many of those queries were actual complaints. (To be reported back on)
- Formal Complaints – Councillor Turner queried the rise in the number of complaints relating to the Planning and Leisure Service teams' and the fall in complaints relating to the Property Service team. Councillor Harrison suggested that for future reports a more in-depth break down of the figures, detailing the nature of the complaints would be useful. The Senior Performance Officer noted this request for future meetings.
- Ombudsman Complaints - Councillor Armstrong enquired as to which service teams, the two other ombudsman complaints affected and requested more detail on the nature of the complaints for future meetings.
- BVPI 212 Average time (days) taken to re-let local authority housing – Councillor Armstrong commented about the increase in days taken to re-let local authority housing and queried whether we would still receive the BVPI from Cestria. The Senior Performance Officer clarified that these figures would no longer be available to the members.
- BVPI 199b The percentage of relevant land and highways from which unacceptable levels of graffiti are visible – Councillor Armstrong queried why the quarterly figure was almost double the target for the year and enquired whether this had been affected by staff shortages. (To be reported back on)

RESOLVED: "That the comments of the Panel on the progress of improvements in the Corporate Performance Report and the contents of the Performance Report in Appendix 1 be noted."

55. HOMELESS AND PREVENTION MONITORING RETURN - REPORT OF HOUSING OPTIONS MANAGER.

The Housing Options Manager briefed Members on the Homelessness Performance Indicators report. She spoke in relation to the two performance indicators that were currently not performing on target ie. BVPI225 – percentage of overall provision and effectiveness of LA services in relation to Domestic Violence and HSST24 - % of routine appointments offered within 10 working days and gave explanations, reasons and actions to improve on this.

Questions in relation to these indicators were addressed by the Housing Options Manager.

The Housing Options Manager informed Members that for future reports a new performance indicator will be recorded under the title of temporary homelessness and a homeless bulletin will be provided at the next meeting.

RESOLVED: "That the homelessness performance indicators be noted."

56. LOCAL PETITIONS, CALLS FOR ACTION AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT - AN UPDATE FROM SCRUTINY OFFICER.

The Scrutiny Officer provided the Members with a presentation on Local petitions, calls for action and community empowerment, which had been provided by Rosie Milner from the Department of Communities and Local Government. He advised the members that a Councillor Call for Action had replaced a Call for Action and that the flow chart included in the presentation, showed how this would work.

The Scrutiny Officer made reference to the consultation questions that had been set at the end of the presentation and advised members that the County and Unitary Councils Officer Overview and Scrutiny network had formulated a response to these questions. He proceeded to give a verbal update of these responses in relation to each question.

Questions in relation to the presentation were addressed and answered by the Scrutiny Officer.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted".

57. SCRUTINY EVALUATION FRAMEWORK - REPORT OF SCRUTINY OFFICER.

Consideration was given to a report provide by the Scrutiny Officer which evaluated the findings from a recent countywide exercise conducted into scrutiny. He informed the members that the aim of the exercise was to provide an overview of scrutiny across the county highlighting good practice and areas for improvement in order to begin developing an effective scrutiny model for the new authority.

The Scrutiny Officer advised the members that the review had been commissioned by Durham County Council (DCC) and had been carried out by a PhD student from Northumbria University, who had been working with Overview and Scrutiny at DCC. He informed the Panel that Members of Chester-le-Street District Councils Overview and Scrutiny Panels were involved in the exercise and questionnaires were sent to the Chairs of the Panels, as well as the Assistant Chief Executive and one of the Executive Members.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that the information provided was used to:

- Benchmark scrutiny in County Durham (Durham County and the District Councils)
- Identify and provide evidence for best practice throughout the County
- Inform the development of scrutiny in the new authority by producing an explicit set of priorities for improvement planning
- Provide a model of scrutiny for the new authority; which is fit for purpose; will support members; and deliver improvement in services for local people in our local communities.

Discussion ensued in relation to the survey findings, in particular how they will affect the development of scrutiny for the New Unitary Authority.

During the discussion a member of the public stated that the amalgamation of the District Councils with the County Council would encourage new relationships to be established although this might result in the loss of small local groups. The Scrutiny Officer advised that the new Authority would look at this.

Councillor Armstrong commented that it was a good report and that many District Councils don't have a dedicated Scrutiny Officer so joint working will be of a benefit to them.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that the Scrutiny Officers had already established various networking groups across the District and work well together as a team, which has paved the way for the new authority.

The Chairman commented that Chester-le-Street District Council was fortunate to have a good Scrutiny Officer working for them.

RESOLVED: "That the comments made be noted".

58. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED: "That the next Meeting of the Panel be held on 15 May 2008 at 6.00pm."

The meeting terminated at 7.15 pm

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