

THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON TUESDAY 6 JANUARY 2009

Present: Councillor A Burnip (Chair)
Councillors Mrs M Baird, A Collinson,
and J Haggan

1 **THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** held on 9 December 2008, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member, were confirmed.

2 **THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE** held on 16 December 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 **SERVICE UNIT PERFORMANCE REPORTING – E – GOVERNMENT AND INFORMATION SERVICES**

Consideration was given to the briefing note prepared by the Head of e – Government and Information Services, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The briefing note provided an overview of the operational tasks and development projects undertaken by the IS Unit.

Members were advised that the level of development work for the Council had fallen as a result of LGR and the main area of work was now focused on East Durham Homes (EDH). However, the day to day requests the unit received from users to solve problems with their IT systems remained at the same level.

As well as the routine day to day work the main developments regarding the Help Desk included the introduction of new processes, which were the result of the Best Value Review of Support Services. This involved the introduction of processes as specified in the IT Best Practice framework (ITIL) and included:-

- Introduction of Service Desk as a Single Point of Contact (SPOC)
- Incident Management – whether minor or major
- Service Level Agreements (SLA's) – to measure performance
- Service Targets

These were completed on target in October 2008

Development work included minor and major projects that typically took several weeks or months to complete, the type of work could vary from the development of a software package to a departmental or organisational move. Much of the work was now concentrated on helping EDH achieve 2 star status.

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Staff working in the Applications Development Unit dealt with the development and support of software packages, i.e. IBS the Revenues and Benefits software and Orchard the software used by EDH for housing repairs.

Recent projects included:-

- Development of Archouse Plus CRM module – initial scoping day with Orchard
- EDH complaints database – development ongoing and data to be transferred from old database

Development work to support LGR included:-

- Developing interfaces with the Councils systems i.e. Benefits and Council Tax with a new single financial system for the new council. This was complete and was now entering the test phase

The Systems and Networks Unit dealt with the networks and computers used to communicate with each other, i.e. Staff at EDH Meridian Court using ORCHARD software which was installed in the main computer room at Seaside Lane, e-mail and internet access and telephony.

Development work to support LGR included:-

- Linking of all networks across County Durham – the first phase was complete and the system was ready to go live.

It was explained that with regard to LGR the workload of the IS Unit had increased and staff were heavily involved with the various workstreams.

Additional work for EDH included:-

- Advice on the repairs and maintenance contract
- Assisting on the new EDH website – to assist with the inspection
- Implementation of new handheld devices used by maintenance staff

The Chair queried what would happen to the computers at the Easington site. M Reynolds advised that in the short term they would remain insitu, longer term they could be moved to Tanfield.

Councillor A Collinson expressed concern that the Councils Customer Services still received calls for EDH rather than customers ringing the 0800 number direct. M Reynolds advised that he would investigate and contact Councillor Collinson following the meeting.

The Chair thanked M Reynolds for his attendance at the meeting.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

5 **SERVICE UNIT PERFORMANCE REPORTING – PERSONNEL SERVICES UNIT**

Consideration was given to a briefing note prepared by the Head of Personnel which gave details of performance and achievements in the Personnel Services Unit, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

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With regard to the 2008/09 Service Plan L Mason, Personnel Services Officer highlighted the following achievements.

Members were advised that the Council continued to provide “shared services” to the Town/Parish Councils. The Unit offered personnel and health and safety services for a fixed annual fee. It was hoped that this service would be viewed as best practice and transferred to the new authority.

Reference was made to Appendix 2 of the report which gave details of the corporate sickness absence rates from 2000/01 to 2008/09. In 2000/01 the sickness absence rate was 12.5 days per employee. Performance during 2006/07 was 8.5 which had almost achieved top quartile. In the second quarter of 2008/09 sickness increased to 9.1 days which was disappointing but still good. It was explained that regular monitoring of sickness continued to be undertaken.

In order to reduce costs e-recruitment was introduced. All vacancies were now advertised on the Councils website and an application for employment could be downloaded direct from the website. Savings were difficult to quantify as the Council were not recruiting due to LGR.

Members were advised that employee turnover remained very low. Turnover was 5.34% which was low compared to the national average of 10 to 11%.

The Council had been set a Government target to reduce the number of reportable accidents at work by 30% by 2010. To date this target had been surpassed and the initial figure of 27.5 accidents per 1,000 employees had been reduced to 17.3 in 2008/09. In addition no enforcement notices had been served.

Councillor A Collinson queried if the majority of reportable accidents were minor or major. L Mason advised that in the main they were minor and mostly from the manual side. A further breakdown of the reportable accidents could be provided if requested.

The Health and Safety Strategy for 2008/09 had been agreed and good progress was being made.

Members were advised that due to LGR there had been some slippage on the issuing of new Statements of Particulars to all employees, this was basically a contract of employment, which set out employee’s terms and conditions of service. This would however be completed before 1 April 2009.

L Mason outlined areas of work the Unit was involved in regarding LGR. It was explained that there was still 650 staff at Easington and “business as usual” arrangements would continue to 31 March 2009. All staff had now been transferred under TUPE arrangements to the new authority.

L Mason outlined areas of work that the Unit was involved in regarding LGR, which included work streams and project/work groups.

With regard to recruitment all of the Councils had agreed to keep positions open for staff that might be displaced to avoid possible compulsory redundancies, this was being achieved through acting up arrangements, secondments and the placing of job adverts in a common “job spot” which was open to employees of the eight councils.

The Trade Union Forum continued to be heavily involved in the shaping of the new authority and was consulted by the various work streams. It was pointed out that the

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Tripartite working arrangements currently in place at Easington were an example of best practice and would hopefully be adopted by the new unitary.

Recruitment of Heads of Service had commenced and it was hoped that the second phase would be completed by the end of January 2009.

With regard to job evaluation baseline information was being gathered and interim pay arrangements had been agreed. Authorities were at varying stages and the County Council had appointed Consultants to look at harmonising job evaluation across the board. Work was due to commence 5 January 2009 and it could take 2 years to complete.

Draft guidance had been prepared for managers regarding 'Business as usual' staffing matters that were to be followed between now and 31 March 2009. The authority had a Management of Change Policy which set out the process for managing change and the protection arrangements that were in place for employees. A draft harmonised policy had been produced and consultation was underway with the Trade Unions.

A Payroll Sub Stream had been established as a new payroll system would need to be up and running for the new council on 1 April 2009. Prior to 31 March 2009 the new system would run in parallel with the existing one. A Health & Safety Sub Stream had also been established to look at how health and safety would be delivered across the county.

Councillor A Collinson queried how many jobs would be available at the new authority and how many employees would need to be accommodated. L Mason advised that to date structures had only been released to Head of Service level. It was hoped that a slotting in process would be implemented by the end of February 2009.

The Chair thanked L Mason for her attendance at the meeting.

RESOLVED that the information given, be noted.

CERTIFIED TRUE RECORD

DATE.....

CHAIR.....

JT/PH com resources/090101
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