

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES**

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 8<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2006

Present: Cllr Mrs Y Clarkson (Chair); E Brennan; A Johnston; A Norwood;  
P Watson.

Apologies were received from Cllrs M McVeigh; J Jackson; K Young

Also present: Cllr Ms E Woodburn, Leader; R Salkeld

Officers: L Gallagher, Chief Executive; Ms J Salt, Head of Customer Services; Mrs K Corby, Revenue and Benefits Service Manager; T Capper, Democratic Services Officer, Ms J Murray, Scrutiny Support Officer.

**Minutes**

The minutes of the meetings held on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2006 were agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

**OSC-PR116 Revenue and Benefits Monitoring**

(Cllr A Norwood declared a personal interest in Council Tax Discounts).

The Head of Customer services explained that outstanding actions from the Benefits Fraud Inspectorate Report had been incorporated into the Service Plan for 2006-07. During discussion of the Service Plan, the following points were made:

- There was an extensive training programme which would take up time and resources, but considered essential to the long-term efficiency of the service. It took 12-18 months to train an assessor. It was acknowledged that there was currently a limited training budget.
- The underlying trend on performance was up and meeting or close to the targets set. This was known from the ring-fencing of the backlog which took place in October. There was, however, an issue with resilience – there was adequate staff to cope with the day-to-day business but no capacity to allow for training (there was a constant flow of new directives from the DWP), for annual leave or new initiatives.

- With respect to these capacity issues, there was to be a report to Executive to request additional staff and a move to generic working, but this involved additional training in the short term, and the accuracy rate would require to be maintained.
- The Council had been given access to the DWP computer system by remote access terminal for which there were strict guidelines. This had involved further training.
- An analysis of a day in the life of a claim was the next step to process improvement and members were invited to visit the department.
- There was a move for the service to become verification framework compliant after which the Council could provide training to registered social landlords to enable them to do carry out documentation checking.
- The service was processing 4,000 bits of paper monthly. The Academy system was bedding down and there was now little downtime.
- Assurance was given that all pre-employment checks were carried out appropriately – this was a requirement of the DWP.
- Management were continuing to monitor the working conditions in the atrium, re-installing thermometers and monitoring noise levels. Exit interviews had not shown any specific problems contributing to staff turnover – it was felt that it was more to do with people moving away from the area.
- Members received an assurance that the fact that Copeland Direct were now taking on some of the initial processing was not interfering with the call-handling system as this was being done by frontline staff on the desk.

**RESOLVED:** That Members accept an offer to visit the service and explore the day in a life of a claim.

That Members of this committee should continue to monitor progress and that the Head of Customer Services be invited back in six months.

**OSC-PR117 Complaints' Monitoring**

The Head of Customer Services presented the monitoring of complaints for the last six months of 2005-06. In response to questioning, it was noted that compensation was paid in accordance with a suggested scale from the Local Government Ombudsman. It was also noted that the complaints handling had been modified to encourage services to take responsibility for their own complaints in the first instance. However, a review of the new system was pending to evaluate the success.

**RESOLVED:** To note the report.

**OSC-PR118 Forward Plan**

The Forward Plan of key decisions to be taken by the Executive was received and noted.

**OSC-PR119 Work Plan**

The work plan of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees was received and noted and the following additions to this Committee's work plan were submitted:

- That monitoring of the customer service commitments, in particular the response-handling times, be added to the work plan for 2006-07.

**OSC-PR120 Sub-groups**

**RESOLVED:** That Cllr Anne Bradshaw be co-opted to the IT Sub Group and membership was confirmed as Cllrs Anne Bradshaw; Keith Hitchen; Alistair Norwood

That Cllrs Mrs Yvonne Clarkson; Michael McVeigh (subject to his agreement); Eddie Brennan and Alistair Norwood be appointed to the Restructure Review sub-group.

The meeting closed at 3.55pm.

Signed:.....  
Date:.....