

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

21 February 2007

COMMUNICATIONS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

1. The Communications Overview and Scrutiny Committee has met once since the last full Council meeting.

In-depth topic

2. The County Council has a duty to consult and consider the needs of all its service users and the wider community. The working group examining the County Council's arrangements for engaging with 'hard to reach' groups, led by Cllr Hault, has had two useful meetings since it was formed in January. Members met David Walker to discuss engagement/consultation with BME groups, migrant workers and people at risk of social exclusion. Members have also met Avril Hunter to discuss how the Supporting People strategy helps vulnerable groups of people to communicate their needs.

Members also had an interesting session on disability awareness that focussed on how we can make Council publications, meetings, events and points of contact fully accessible to disabled people. We will keep this in mind as part of our ongoing monitoring of the NY Times and the Contact Centre.

Overview and monitoring

3. **Contact Centre**
Four committee members visited Gateshead Council's contact centre on 31 January to find out how it operates and lessons that can be learnt by NYCC in the implementation of our own contact centre. Gateshead use the same Customer Relationship Management system as will be used at NYCC. We were impressed with how the system and the customer advisors work to capture, record, and progress customer enquiries. We heard that it had taken longer than predicted for the contact centre to complete the roll-out and move to the second phase of implementation because of the amount of work involved. Gateshead have achieved a balance of staff who previously worked for the Council and externally-recruited staff, and all advisors are trained to deal with any type of enquiry. It was emphasised that customer satisfaction is the key factor, rather than increasing the volume of calls handled and that although call handling time targets are being introduced, these will be sensible.

Members heard about a range of issues that are relevant to the implementation of the NYCC contact centre including contingencies for outages, how sensitive and confidential calls are handled, and plans to adapt the system to receive text messages as well as phone and email. Members also had the opportunity to sit with a customer advisor to listen to calls as they came in and talk to the advisor about how they are dealt with. Overall, it was a very worthwhile visit and will help us to understand the challenges and opportunities in implementing our own contact centre.

4. **NY Times**

The Committee has an ongoing role in monitoring the newspaper's performance and the impartiality of its content. At our last meeting, Cllr Les updated members on the six month distribution contract with the Royal Mail. It is hoped that distribution will improve following this change, and the NY Times will now reach residents in all parts of the county.

5. **Staff focus groups**

At our last meeting we were briefed by the Chief Executive on the outcomes of the focus groups he had held with staff over the past year. The Committee welcomed this approach as an effective way of informing staff of current and future plans, and of getting views and feedback from staff.

County Councillor Helen Swiers

Chairman – Communications Overview and Scrutiny Committee

12 February 2007