

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

SPECIAL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a Special Meeting of **Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Monday 5 September 2016 at 10.00 am**

Present:

Councillor C Potts (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors J Armstrong, D Bell, K Corrigan, K Dearden, C Hampson, J Hart, D Hicks, A Hopgood, K Hopper, J Lethbridge, S Morrison, M Simmons, H Smith, M Stanton, P Stradling and J Turnbull

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors T Nearney, M Nicholls, L Pounder and Mr D Kinch.

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute Members in attendance.

3 Declarations of Interest, if any

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Any items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties

No items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties were received.

5 Concessionary Travel Arrangements for Disabled Residents and their Carers

The Chairman agreed to change the order of business and therefore item no. 6 was considered.

The Committee considered a report from Corporate Director of Regeneration and Economic Development which gave details of Concessionary Travel Arrangements for Disabled Residents and their Carers/Companions.

The Sustainable Transport Manager referred to the information contained in the report which Members had requested at a previous meeting, regarding benchmarking and potential costs of issuing a companion pass for a disabled child. Members had also asked for an Equality Impact Assessment to be carried out.

Members were advised that national guidance indicated the government's intention that the concession applied to passengers of fare paying age and that children under the age of five travelled free on local buses.

The Sustainable Transport Manager advised that of the 122,000 active passes issued 17380 had been issued on disability grounds and one in four of those passes issued included the plus companion element of travel.

Members learned that there were 280 under 5s eligible for the higher rate of disability allowance and depending on variables including take up and usage there was a potential cost of £56000 to the Council.

The Legal Manager PPP confirmed that he was asked to consider the issue of Concessionary Travel Arrangements was first raised and he was satisfied that the Council were acting lawfully and in accordance with government guidelines. He added that following the benchmarking exercise it was apparent that Durham County Councils current scheme was consistent and in fact better than some other local authorities.

Councillor Hopgood had raised the issue following a query from one of her constituents who had moved to Durham from York, where they had received a concessionary pass for their disabled child and a companion. Although this was a discretionary scheme, she referred to the moral obligation of the Council for other schemes, such as the Council Tax reduction scheme, which was a non-statutory scheme that the Council felt was morally correct to offer. She referred to the pressures of the family to attend medical appointments and the cost of using public transport to travel long distances. The report referred to a potential cost of £56k however it was highly unlikely that every person eligible would take up the offer considering that many people would use their own transport. Considering the Council paid millions into other schemes, Councillor Hopgood stated that the money was not a great deal overall.

The Chairman referred to para 23 of the report and highlighted that no other authority, including York, offered Concessionary Travel passes to children under fare paying age.

Councillor Armstrong referred to the generosity of the scheme considering that it was a non-statutory arrangement. He raised the question of where the additional funding could be found considering the Councils targeted savings of £29m from the 2017/18 budget. Councillor Armstrong confirmed that any additional cost would have to be subsidised by the Council and with services already being considered for reductions, it would not be wise to put an additional burden on the service.

Councillor Potts stated that the authority needed to find further savings to meet targets in the Medium-Term Financial Plan and would be looking at the non-statutory elements of the current scheme. The likelihood was that the provision of concessionary travel for carers accompanying over 5s would come under scrutiny.

Councillor Hart considered that the expense to an individual family was a considerable amount, but it was not a considerable amount to the Council. However he was not confident that the Cabinet would support such a scheme.

Councillor Hopper confirmed that she was aware that in some areas of the County, including North West and South Durham, a volunteer taxi service operated for attending hospital appointments however, there was a charge.

The Sustainable Transport Manager confirmed that volunteer transport was available for a charge, however it may be reimbursed by the NHS. Councillor H Smith confirmed that to her knowledge the NHS did reimburse patient travel costs.

Councillor Lethbridge confirmed that although the Council had excellent moral standards and attempts were always made to stand for what was right and good, the fact remained that the ability to provide services was being stripped away by austerity. Should the Committee support such a proposal, there would inevitably be a service which would suffer due to the cost implications.

The Chairman agreed to a request from Councillor Hopgood that the Committee vote on a report of the findings being put forward for consideration by Cabinet and Councillor Hopgood moved a recommendation which was seconded by Councillor Simmons.

Councillor Armstrong moved that the report be noted and that no further action be taken which was seconded by Councillor Lethbridge.

Upon a vote being taken it was,

Resolved:

That the report be noted and no further action be taken.

6 Youth Support Review Consultation Process

The Committee considered item no. 5 on the Agenda, report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services, which provided Members with background information relating to the presentation on the Youth Support Review consultation process (for copy, see file of minutes).

The Committee received a presentation from Strategic Manager, Children's Services Reform (for copy, see file of minutes).

In response to a query from Councillor Armstrong, the Strategic Manager, Children's Services Reform, confirmed that Members briefings were taking place in order to ensure the outcome of the consultation was communicated and the findings were also being distributed to AAP's.

Councillor Hart queried whether officers were any closer to taking a view on how AAP funding was to be distributed. The Strategic Manager responded that money would be shared equitably over the 14 AAPs.

Resolved

That the report and presentation be noted.

7 Stronger Families Programme - Phase 2 Update

The Committee considered a report of Interim Corporate Director of Children and Young Peoples Services, which provided an update relating to Phase 2 of the Stronger Families Programme (for copy see file of minutes).

The Strategic Manager, Think Family Services presented the report to Members and highlighted the relevant points in relation to phase one and two of the Stronger Families Programme.

The Chairman described the report as being positive and praised the efforts of the team for being on target for the second phase of the programme.

Councillor Hopper queried cuts to services and the effects that staff shortages may have on the programme. The Strategic Manager confirmed that there was a national shortage of Social Workers and recruitment was taking place in order to address that in Durham, with the Councils Social Work Academy assisting with learning and development of newly qualified SW's. She confirmed that Durham had not recruited staff specifically to work on the programme and instead utilised existing staff, however it was acknowledged that should there be a reduction in staff, it may be difficult to continue operating in such a positive way.

Councillor Armstrong confirmed that a meeting was being held with the Interim Corporate Director of Children and Young Peoples Services where the future activity of Overview and Scrutiny and Corporate Parenting Panel would be considered.

For information, Councillor Armstrong confirmed that a presentation would be provided to the Committee following Ofsted inspection, which focused on the number of Social Workers, their caseloads and how they prioritised work.

The Strategic Manager concluded that although many services were being reduced, it had not affected partnerships, which remained strong – particularly that with Durham Constabulary.

Resolved

That the report be noted.