

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of the Scrutiny Sub-Committee to Promote Strong, Healthy and Safe Communities held at the County Hall, Durham On **Monday 1 September 2003** at **10.00 a.m.**

Present:

Councillor M Nicholls in the Chair

Members of the Sub-Committee

Councillors Armstrong, Barker, Blenkinsopp, Coates, Cordon, Ebbatson, T Forster, Mrs Hunter, G Hunter, Langham, O'Donnell, Priestley and Quigley.

Co-opted Members:

Councillor Ambler

Other Members

Councillors Firby, Hogan, Tennant and Watson

Observer:

Councillor B Ferguson

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs Fergus, Mrs Howarth, Stradling, Mrs Wright and Mrs Gibbon and Mr K Ibbotson (Co-opted Members).

A1 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 2 June 2003 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

With reference to Minute A2, Performance Management Tom Bolton, Senior Scrutiny Support Officer informed members that a request had been made at the previous meeting for a breakdown of the costs of residential care including management costs, to be given to members. This information had been circulated to members prior to the meeting, however, a further revised version had been received from the Social Services Department and was circulated to members during the meeting (for copy see file).

Peter Appleton, Operations Manager, Quality & Performance, (Social Services Department), commented that officers were now looking at costings for 2002/03 and suggested that members may want to work with officers on these figures. Councillor Coates agreed to assist officers in the compiling of the figures, and other members who wished to be involved were asked to submit names to the Chairman of Head of Overview and Scrutiny.

In relation to Minute A3, Audit of Services to children in need in Durham, Tom Bolton, Senior Scrutiny Support Officer advised members that an audit of services to children in need had been undertaken as an outcome of the Victoria Climbié enquiry and that a report had previously been considered by the Sub-Committee. The Audit report had now been submitted and Christine Mackay, Operations Manager, Children and their Families (North Durham) would provide an update.

Christine Mackay commented that in relation to the audit submission, the authority had been informed that this was an issue which would now be taken into account in the inspection to determine the star rating for the Authority. It was expected that this would receive a judgement of serving some people well, with promising prospects. The Director of Social Services had met with other Directors to discuss the Audit submissions and the various comments received from the Inspection process. The results of this discussion highlighted that some authorities had not been as accurate in their interpretation and presentation of the information and data to the inspectorate as the County Council have been. This resulted in the Director of Social Services meeting with the SSI Lead Inspector on 20 August 2003. At that meeting it was acknowledged by the Lead Inspector that the methodology used during the Inspection was flawed and Durham was commended for a robust response to the comments made and was offered another inspection. However, it was felt that the timing for a second inspection would not be beneficial. In relation to the action plan, the following issues were to be tackled, equity of service, management information, human resources, and integrated children information.

Councillor Armstrong requested as to whether the costs of implementing the proposals had been quantified.

Christine Mackay responded that costings have not been done in great detail and that there is a need to look at the various skill mix required.

Councillor Barker asked when the integrated information system would be operational.

Christine Mackay responded that the system has to be in place by April 2005, however, it was expected that parts of the system will be implemented ahead of 2005.

A2 Performance Management

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Director of Social Services concerning Performance Management (for copy of report see file of Minutes). Keith Newby referred members to the information which had been circulated and the revised information handed to members at the start of the meeting (for copy see file of Minutes). He continued that the focus of the report was PAF indicators and that the report provided up to date information on 23 of the 40 indicators. In relation to bandings, improvements have occurred in respect of 3 of the indicators. However, the bandings were worse now in respect of 2 of the indicators. One of the main difficulties was the DOH new changes to the criteria to be used. In relation to PAFC20 (percentage of child protection cases reviewed during the year) this would have a significant detrimental impact upon the Council's Star Rating.

Councillor Coates commented that in relation to indicator C18, (final warnings and convictions of children looked after) performance was getting worse.

Keith Newby responded that this had been highlighted by officers as an issue which would be targeted with more work to be done to identify the cause of the problem.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

A3 Carrier Bag Culture: Progress Report

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny concerning an update about progress in relation to the Carrier Bag Culture Working Group (for copy of report see file of Minutes).

The Head of Overview and Scrutiny, informed the Committee that any indicators from the project had to be accommodated within the agenda of the Community Safety Partnership which set priorities in relation to initiatives in the Easington area relating to disaffected young people. However, whilst the investigation had highlighted some tensions in relation to priorities it was still possible to pursue a number of issues within the overall priorities set by the Community Safety Partnership.

Perhaps the strongest message from the project was the need to build up dialogue with young people and involve them in the planning of any provision as a means of providing a more sustainable way forward to improve the lives of the young people.

Councillor Nicholls indicated that whilst the original group of young people who had been targeted had now moved on, the process was continuing with a younger age group who had different ideas as to what they wanted to see provided. He highlighted the need and importance of listening to young people to identify what they wanted. In relation to youth workers, he referred to demands on their time and there may be a need to look at youth worker provision across the County. Councillor Nicholls suggested that the report be circulated to local MP's so that they are aware of this project.

Neil Charlton, Deputy Director of Education said that he had attended a meeting of Easington LSP the previous week where a high percentage of the bids coming forward under the Community Safety heading were for provision for young people. In addition an Issues Strategy Officer had been appointed by the District Council to help identify provision for young people. The officer had already carried out an audit of what was available which had identified that there are a lot of agencies receiving money from many different pots. A report was to be submitted to a future meeting identifying how provision can be joined up. He continued that at a recent meeting a grant had been approved for a youth pod which would be transported to various areas within Easington where there is currently little or no youth provision.

He emphasised that there were some groups of young people who did not wish to be 'organised' and referred to previous research in this area.

Councillor Ebbatson commented that the "Carrier Bag Culture" initiative could be used throughout the County. However, there was a need for support. He highlighted the need to use the LSP's to ensure proper dialogue with young people. Reference was made to the Hear by Right pilot project in Durham and the role young people could play in highlighting issues for the sub-committee.

Councillor Armstrong commented that in relation to youth service provision, this was not always available and there were historical reasons for this. There was a need to look at provision to identify whether a redistribution needed to take place.

The Head of Overview and Scrutiny in summarising indicated that the project had been beneficial. However, there is a need for someone locally to drive this type of process forward. In addition, there is a need for flexibility in how we consult and the nature of the schemes provided.

Resolved:-

That the report be noted; the lessons from this project be considered in other parts of the County; and a report be submitted to Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee. .

A4 Aids and Adaptations Review Report

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny concerning an update about the latest review of the Aids and Adaptation Service in the County (for copy of report see file of Minutes).

The Head of Overview and Scrutiny, informed the Sub-Committee that in December 2000 the Scrutiny Group had made recommendations about improvements in the Aids and Adaptations Service in relation to five areas.

A number of review meetings had taken place with representatives of the Service Users and Carers who assisted Members with the original investigation.

The latest meeting took place on 1 July 2003 and was well attended with eight representatives of the Service Users and Carers, nineteen Council Members and one District Council Officer. At the meeting John Thornberry, Head of Adult Commissioning in the Social Services Department gave a progress report and explained that in terms of performance indicators the delivery of items costing less than £1,000 delivered within three weeks had moved from 72.8% to a current figure of 92% with the target for the current year of 95% although it was noted that the performance indicator criteria was changing.

In addition it was highlighted that 1 in 5 people receive services/equipment from the Home Loan Service.

With reference to the improvements in the Home Equipment Loan Service these were explained by Paul Allison, Manager of the Service.

It was confirmed that there had been a considerable improvement in the recycle rates of equipment when it was no longer required by service users. In relation to decontamination, the service was recognised as a centre of excellence.

In addition, the backlog of bath lifts had recently been tackled and referrals for Occupational Therapy assessments had generally improved.

With reference to future provision, Jane Hartley from Newton Aycliffe Pioneering Care Partnership explained the vision from the Community Education Board in relation to the Aids and Adaptations Service.

He concluded by highlighting the views from service users and carers as follows:-

- The need for a fast track team to deal with difficult or complex cases.
- The need to improve communications with service users particularly where there might be delays.

- The possibility of using equipment on a trial basis to ensure that it was suitable.
- The need to address backlogs.
- The possibility of introducing a 'feedback' from service users about specialist equipment.

Councillor Armstrong highlighted that service users had noticed a significant improvement in service provision.

Councillor Barker commented that members need to be informed of and be aware of provision within their particular area.

Councillor Coates responded that he understood John Thornberry was to provide this information on an individual member basis via the Member area panels and asked if the Sub-Committee could receive countrywide data. Peter Appleton agreed to progress this.

Resolved:-

That the report be noted and that members revisit the service provision again in approximately six months.

A5 Mental Health Issues Progress Report - Supporting 16-25 Year Olds with Mental Health Problems

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny concerning a progress report on the Scrutiny project which has currently looking at support for vulnerable 16-25 year olds with mental health problems and their carers (for copy of report see file of Minutes).

Councillor Armstrong referred to the need not only to report to cabinet, but to ensure that the fundings of the Working Group are circulated widely, including County Durham MP's.

Resolved:-

That the progress made by the Working Group be noted.

A6 Forward Plan

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny giving details of the sections of the Council's Forward Plan which are contained within the Sub-Committee's jurisdiction (for copy of report see file of Minutes). An updated version of the relevant sections of the Forward Plan was circulated (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved:-

That the report and section from the Forward Plan be noted.

A7 Work Programme

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny (for copy see file of Minutes) to update Members about the Work Programme for the Sub-Committee.

Resolved:-

That the report be noted.