

# OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

## SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE FOR STRONG, HEALTHY AND SAFE COMMUNITIES

7 June 2004

### NOTES OF A MEETING WITH COUNCILLOR JOHN DAVIES, CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND COUNCILLOR CHRISTINE SMITH, CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY CARE

1. The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Members to this informal discussion with Scrutiny Members. It was explained that, in developing the Scrutiny role, one of the issues identified was to forge positive relationships between Cabinet members and non-executive members. A number of questions had been provided in advance to form the basis of the discussion.
2. It was proposed that regular meetings between the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs of the relevant Sub-Committee and the relevant Cabinet portfolio holders, together with representatives from the appropriate services, might be a positive step for introduction.

### QUESTIONS

COUNCILLOR JOHN DAVIES, CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- a. **What plans are there to improve community engagement to demonstrate that a large authority can also deliver effectively at local level?**

Councillor Davies referred particularly to the recent submission by the County Council to the Boundary Committee which encapsulated the current approach. He explained that there were a number of strands to community engagement and his portfolio was very diverse. Improved community engagement was also a cultural issue for the whole authority both at officer and member level.

The issue of communication to the public was identified in the discussion as a key area for improvement by the County Council.

The recent introduction of regular meetings about highways issues for Member Area Panels was seen to be a positive initiative which did provide more focus and clarity for County Council services. The issue of a more localised, visible presence by the County Council was raised. It was suggested that the initiative relating to highways could, perhaps, be rolled out in other areas. The introduction of a 'one stop shop' contact point for all County Council issues was seen to be a positive way forward but there was an overall desire to communicate more effectively with the

public across the whole range of services provided by the County Council.

COUNCILLOR CHRISTINE SMITH, CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY CARE

- a. **In relation to the Children's Bill, there is a requirement to create a post of Director of Children's Services, what is the current thinking about how this is likely to be implemented?**

It was still too early to say how this important change would be implemented in the authority. It was noted that there was now a White Paper which had been issued by Government. The whole issue needed to be carefully considered and the experiences of authorities that had already gone down this route were being closely examined to inform the process in Durham.

**In relation to Modernising of Services for Older People, can you explain what progress has been made with Phase 2 of the Strategy?**

A re-assessment was underway and it was hoped that a clearer picture of the position would emerge later in the year. Since the introduction of Extra Care, there had been a substantial increase in private sector provision for the Elderly Mental Infirm. The role of the Primary Care Trusts and Priority Services NHS Mental Health Trust was also discussed in the light of the NHS consultation on revised mental health facilities in north Durham, as was the impact of enhanced continuing care facilities within the County Council's own provision.

**How is the modernising of services for older people strategy progressing? Have the necessary improvements in home care been introduced and is it possible to say yet whether the aims of this strategy are succeeding?**

There has been a recent presentation to the Scrutiny Sub-Committee explaining the current position relating to the older people's strategy.

One recent issue to be addressed is the likely reduction in grant by about 2.5% in relation to supporting people. This shortfall would need to be carefully considered. It was also noted by the Scrutiny members that there was a shortfall in relation to the savings to be derived as a result of the new strategy for residential care for older people. Both these issues were being carefully monitored but it was too early to come to any firm conclusions.

**Has the morale of County Council employees who deliver home care services improved?**

There have been two staff surveys. One took place about two years ago and this was followed up by a recent survey. There has been a marginal decrease in morale although this is very slight. The staff appear to be

more comfortable about job security but there are still issues about morale which need to be addressed. The service is working hard to try to improve in this area. Recent anecdotal evidence suggests that this matter is gradually being resolved as staff become more familiar with their new roles.

**What progress has been made to consolidate the administration of the Social Care and Health Service in County Durham Care and the rest of the Service?**

County Durham Care has a strong “image” which is well known to the public and users of services. Whilst the current intention is to keep existing structures as at present, there has been some integration of administration, including at a higher level in relation to strategy and finance.

**Other Issues**

**Billing Issues**

An issue was raised in relation to billing arrangements when home care services are provided by the private sector. This related to audit arrangements for ensuring that services claimed and paid for had been delivered.

**Valuing People**

A considerable amount of work was underway in relation to this area. The new regime placed considerable emphasis on the individual and individual needs. There was a need to look forward to improved ways of supporting individuals with specific needs.

**Dates Of Meetings:**

**5 March 2004**

Present: Councillor John Davies  
Councillor Christine Smith  
Councillor Morris Nicholls (in the Chair)  
Councillors Armstrong, Cordon, E. Hunter and Stradling

**18 May 2004**

Present: Councillor Christine Smith  
Councillor J Armstrong (in the Chair)  
Councillor E Hunter