

**Durham County Council**  
**Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**At the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to Promote Strong and Healthy and Safe Communities** held at the County Hall, Durham on **Monday 6 December 2004 at 10.00 a.m.**

**Present:**

**Councillor M Nicholls** in the Chair.

**Members:**

Councillors Armstrong, Barker, Blenkinsopp, Cordon, Douthwaite, E Foster, Lethbridge, O'Donnell, Stradling and Quigley.

**Other Members:**

Councillor Pye.

**Co-opted Member:**

Mr K Ibbotson.

**Apologies for absence were received from:**

Councillors Hunter, Marshall, Priestley and Wright.

**A1 Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2004 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

With reference to Minute A2, Aids and Adaptations, Tom Bolton, Senior Scrutiny Support Officer, informed the Sub-Committee that a further meeting of the Working Group was to be held on 31 January 2005 at which representatives from the County Durham Service Users and Carers Forum would be present.

**A2 Performance Management**

**(a) Star Rating**

The Sub-Committee received a report from the Acting Director for Social Care and Health about the Commission for Social Care Inspection, Annual Performance Rating Assessment for Durham County Council and for other Local Authority Social Services Departments (for copy see file of minutes).

Peter Appleton, Head of Service, informed the Sub-Committee that the Authority had received a 2 star rating on 18 November 2004. The judgements for services were that in relation to children, the authority is 'serving most people well' with the capacity to improve of 'promising' and in relation to Adult Services, the Authority was 'serving most people well' with the capacity to improve of 'excellent'.

With reference to the judgement of serving 'most people well' for Children's Services this was an improvement from 2003 and the judgement of 'excellent' in terms of capacity to improve for Adult Services was again, an improvement from 2003.

Councillor Armstrong commented that the report showed good progress. However, he highlighted the position regarding a shortage of beds in North Durham and Derwentside areas and asked that this be monitored.

**Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

**(b) Performance Management**

The Sub-Committee considered a report from the Performance Monitoring Manager providing an update on performance information within the second quarter 2004/05 and up to date information on user feedback (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Councillor Cordon referred to the measures in connection with assessment for aids and adaptations. Councillor Nicholls advised that this would be one of the issues discussed at the review meeting of the Aids and Adaptations Scrutiny Working Group.

Keith Newby commented that although the banding for this service was light green there were still some 8 to 9% of clients who did not receive the required standards of service.

Councillor Armstrong highlighted that there was a need to prioritise services and this service should have a high priority. He continued that in relation to BVI7 (Fostering/Adoption), the Authority was providing a good service in what is a very sensitive area of provision.

**Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

**(c) Presentation by Corporate Policy**

The Sub-Committee received a report from the Head of Corporate Policy updating members on performance (for copy of report see file of minutes).

**Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

**A3 Suicide Prevention in County Durham and Darlington**

The Sub-Committee considered a report and presentation concerning Suicide Prevention in County Durham and Darlington (for copy of report and slides of presentation see file of minutes).

Neil Johnson, County Durham and Darlington Priority Services Trust highlighted the following issues during the presentation: -

- Suicide Audit – locality Map (figures relate to 1999-2001)
- Suicide Audit – county wide.

**Suicide Audit Countywide**

- 205 cases over the audit period (inc. other verdicts)
- County Durham and Darlington population 591,308 (2001 census)
- Suicide rate 11.6 per 100,000 population
- Derwentside rate 10.6 (Consett east 43.1)
- Durham Dales rate 9.7 (Coundon 30.9)
- D'ham & CLS rate 10.1 (Cassop 35.8)
- Easington rate 11.7 (Seaham Harbour 37.9)
- Sedgfield rate 9.2 (Broom 27.5).

**Suicide Audit – Age Range**

- 39.5% under 35 – Male
- 34% under 35 – Female.

**Suicide Audit – Primary Care**

- 89% (n=131/147) < 1 year of death
- 66.7% (n=98) <3 months of death
- Most common non-mental health condition
  - Low back pain 51.7% (n=76).

**Suicide Audit Derwentside Profile**

- Younger, unemployed, history of migration and homelessness, poor social support.
- Recent bereavement, abuse or family suicide.
- Mental Health – 48% in contact <1 yr death.

## **Lessons to be learned: countywide**

- Information – sharing between agencies
- Suicide **IS** a local priority
- Development of local plans
- Committee to receive updates
- Committee members to actively promote suicide prevention.

Councillor Nicholls suggested it would be helpful if updates on an area basis could be provided in future.

Councillor Douthwaite asked whether the figures produced included suicides in the prison system. Neil Johnson responded that the figures did not include this data.

Councillor Armstrong commented that most of the areas where high levels of suicide occur are areas of multiple deprivation. He commented that there was a need to work with Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP's) to help to tackle the issues. Neil Johnson explained that work was being progressed in this area, but, initially, some LSP's had been reluctant to engage.

Tom Bolton, Senior Scrutiny Support Officer responded that the information was relevant in relation to two issues that had previously been subject to scrutiny investigations - the 'Minding the Gap' project looking at young people's mental health and the Sickness Absence Scrutiny project, as the authority is a large employer with a number of staff absent from work with stress/depression.

Peter Appleton commented that he was concerned that 52% of those who committed suicide were not in contact with a professional and suggested that this was probably due to the stigma associated with Mental Health.

Councillor Mrs Howarth emphasised that many young people leaving prison do not have friends or peers to provide support once they leave the system and highlighted the need for these ex-prisoners to be supported.

Councillor Armstrong made reference to the 'Minding the Gap' report where early identification had been identified, as being critical, if earlier support was provided then surely the suicide figures would reduce.

Councillor O'Donnell commented that he thought debt was a major issue in relation to suicides. Neil responded that 1 in 7 of those who committed suicide had financial problems.

Councillor Armstrong suggested that the Health Scrutiny Sub-committee should receive up-dates of information relating to suicides. He also emphasised the need to make suicide prevention a high priority.

**Resolved:**

- (i) That the report and presentation be noted.
- (ii) That the Health Scrutiny Sub-Committee receive information relating to up-dates of information regarding suicides/suicide prevention.

**A4 Service User and Carer Forum Countywide meeting 24 August 2004**

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny concerning feedback from attendance at the Countywide Forum for Service Users and Carers in August as part of the Strategy to build up links with key organisations (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Tom Bolton informed the Sub-Committee that the main purpose of the exercise was to permit a dialogue between Scrutiny members and Service Users and Carers without a formal agenda.

Councillor Armstrong commented that he had attended the event and that communication processes had improved, although there were still further improvements to be made.

Ken Ibbotson, Co-opted Member responded that he was glad that Overview and Scrutiny members were attending meetings of the Users and Carers Forum, however he emphasised the need for a 'one stop shop' which users and carers can contact to get clear information. There is confusion about who to approach concerning various service provision.

**Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

**A5 Fear of Crime Scrutiny Project**

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny giving an update on the progress of the Scrutiny project looking at the Fear of Crime in County Durham (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Tom Bolton informed members that although the project was still at an early stage, consultation had already identified some of the following issues as local factors in fear of crime. These would be explored in more depth as evidence was taken over the coming months:

- Anti-social behaviour
- Physical state of the environment (i.e. graffiti and litter)
- Reporting in the media
- Fear of people about reporting crimes (reprisals)
- Police response times to calls (urban and rural)

- Rurality issues (sparsity of housing/people)
- Public perceptions that offenders not dealt with appropriately
- Joint working (both between agencies and local communities)
- Community Cohesion
- Young people's fears about crime.

Councillor Douthwaite commented that the police non-urgent telephone contact number was not widely known. Councillor Cordon responded that the number had been published in all local papers. Councillor Armstrong suggested that there was a need for the number to be published in the Countywide magazine.

Councillor Cordon also emphasised the need for pro-active strategies. More youth workers in local communities would help to tackle issues at an early stage.

## **A6 Forward Plan**

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny about the section of the Council's Forward Plan, which is within the remit of the Sub-Committee (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillor Armstrong suggested that there was a need for the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Panel to consider as to whether mental health issues for older people should be a future project for a Working Group of the Sub-Committee.

### **Resolved:**

That the report be received.

## **A7 Work Programme**

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny about the current work programme (for copy see file of minutes).

### **Resolved:**

That the programme be noted.