

# Scrutiny Sub-Committee for Promoting Strong, Healthy and Safe Communities



6 March 2006

## Meeting with the Cabinet Members for Strong, Healthy and Safe Communities Issues

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### Report of Head of Overview and Scrutiny

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#### Purpose of Report

1. To explain the areas covered in a discussion between members of the Strong, Healthy and Safe Communities Scrutiny Sub-Committee and relevant Cabinet Portfolio Holders.

#### Background

2. One of the Scrutiny roles is to seek to “hold the Executive to account”. As part of this process, a series of meetings have been arranged between Scrutiny Sub-Committee Members and relevant Cabinet Portfolio Holders to provide the opportunity for discussion and debate about key issues.
3. A meeting with Councillors John Davies (Portfolio Holder for Community-based Services) and Christine Smith (Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health) took place on 17 February 2006.
4. To structure the discussion, a number of areas had been identified in advance. The issues raised and the responses are set out below:

#### Communities

*The Government’s emphasis on community engagement is challenging Councils to do more to consult with and empower local people and communities and deliver services that are truly local.*

- *What is the Council doing to ensure that local people have a greater say in how services are shaped, delivered and assessed?*

**Answer** – The Council's new community strategy for engagement and development will require a culture change in how the Council goes about its business. The Council needs to become more focused on listening to local people and taking their views into consideration in the design, delivery or commissioning of services.

- *How will the Council’s Community Engagement Strategy be implemented in practice to improve our services?*

**Answer** - The Strategy will introduce new ways of working aimed at empowering local people and providing them with a greater say in decisions. Work is underway at present in relation to how this might operate in practice, i.e. engagement about specific issues with relatively small numbers of people, or more formalised arrangements for ongoing engagement, such as Community Boards. This might also include budgets being devolved to a more local level. Any new arrangements should build upon the existing strengths of the County Council, i.e. its ability to act effectively in relation to strategic issues.

- *How will the Council's Community Engagement Strategy be implemented in practice to improve our services?*
- *What ICT developments are taking place to ensure that local people can communicate more easily with the County Council and its partners?*
- *How can the Council ensure that the services it delivers are truly community-based?*

**Answer** – The e-govt. partnership between the County Council and District/Borough Councils will have an important role to play in ensuring that local people have seamless access to services, regardless of who provides them. The customer relationship management (CRM) system being developed by the partnership should ensure that members of the public only have to ring one telephone number to gain access to services across both tiers of local government. Community hubs, one-stop shops and access points will also help local people engage better with service providers. A pilot scheme for video conferencing is currently running at five locations in County Durham, enabling members of the public to communicate privately with officers in the Council using video links. Discussions are also underway with a number of organisations about rolling this initiative out into the wider community. Use of ICT is central to these developments.

- *What is the Council doing to:*
  - *Support Community Centres and promote their use*
  - *Ensure that young people are supported in playing a full role in our local communities and that the necessary resources are available to do this?*

**Answer** – The Council has shown its commitment to Community Centre provision by providing financial support in recent years, following the creation of the Learning and Skills Council and the subsequent impact on funding for Centres which resulted. It is hoped that this support will continue, but there will, at some future point, be a review of buildings. In relation to young people, the recently launched “Respect” agenda appeared to identify young people in terms of anti-social behaviour. However, localism requires us to engage with young people, as well as adults, and to have respect for young people. One

area which needed to be developed was intergenerational work to close the gap between older people's perceptions of young people and vice-versa. It was also important to recognise that some young people did not like to participate in organised activities such as youth clubs. Agencies had to be more innovative about how young people were engaged and where appropriate, diverted from anti-social behaviour. As regards issues such as young people drinking on the streets, this required a multi-agency approach.

## **Social Care and Health Issues**

*The Council's new services for Children and Young People and for Adults will shortly come into being, presenting the Council with a number of challenges. In relation to Adult Services:*

- *How will the transition be managed to ensure minimal disruption to front-line services?*
- *How will the existing benefits that derive from the current integrated services be maintained and what measures are being taken to ensure that people do not fall into the gaps between Children and Young People's and Adult Services?*

**Answer** – Migration towards the new services has required careful planning. A transitions team to oversee the process has been established and a number of seminars have been organised for staff, to which relevant members have also been invited. One of the key aims of the changes will be to overcome silo working and remove any barriers between previous Service areas.

- *What vision do you have about the way in which the new arrangements will improve services for Adults*

**Answer** – Much of what we do will be driven by the Government's agenda in relation to issues such as Independence, Well-being and Choice concerning older people, but budgets will also be a factor as well. The new Corporate Directors will have an important role in advising members about how the new Services should be shaped and deliver and discussions will be held with the Directors at an early stage.

- *What vision do you have about the way in which the new arrangements will improve services for Adults?*

Again, independence, well-being and choice will be an important driver. There will be a change of emphasis towards supporting older people to live at home amongst family and friends for as long as possible. We need to think ahead and ask, in terms of service provision, what would we like, either for ourselves, or those we love and care for, in old age? Ensuring that people stay healthy, play their full role in local communities and have equity of access to services are key factors in delivering this agenda. The Council may not

always be best placed, in terms of direct service provision, to achieve these aims.

Another key issue is that of communicating the Council's role as service provider. It is a little known fact that the Council, as a commissioner of services, provides access to care beds in the independent sector for almost 3,000 people in County Durham. The Council needs to consider how it can better "brand" the services it commissions via the independent sector to highlight its role.

Learning disabilities is another area which merits attention. It is important that provision for people with learning disabilities is easily accessible, yet many people with these specific needs spend a significant amount of time on transport to day centres distant from their place(s) of residence. This needs to be tackled. The Council also provides day care for a significant number of people with learning disabilities who are over retirement age. Consideration needs to be given about whether they should be encouraged to receive service provision as part of the older population of the County.

*Overview and Scrutiny Members have taken a close interest in Aids and Adaptations issues, following a scrutiny project in 2000 and a number of subsequent reviews.*

- *What is the current position in relation to Aids and Adaptations and in particular, waiting times for assessments and for the provision of equipment?*

**Answer** – There have been overall improvements in recent years, but funding will always be an issue and there have been some problems recently linked to PCT finances. There have also been difficulties with a backlog of assessments in two areas – Sedgefield and Easington, caused by a variety of factors, including sickness absence and maternity leave of occupational therapists. However, the Home Independence Shops are working well.

### **Additional Issues**

5. The following additional issues were raised during the discussion:
  - Communication – the Council not only needs to be a good listener, but also to provide feedback about what happens following consultation exercises.
  - Consistency of approach is important. Some community or interest groups, such as the Service User and Carer Forum find that consistency of approach to aspects of service delivery can change when officers move on and are replaced.
  - It was suggested that another way to enhance ongoing dialogue with the Executive would be for Cabinet Portfolio Holders to give occasional

presentations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee about issues impacting on all members.

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**Members Present:**

**Scrutiny Members**

Councillors Armstrong, Bowman, Gray, Hunter and Southwell.

**Co-opted Member**

Mr K Ibbotson.

**Cabinet Members**

Councillors Davies and Smith.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Nicholls.