

Durham County Council

At a meeting of the Scrutiny Sub-Committee to Promote Strong, Healthy and Safe Communities held at the County Hall, Durham on **Monday 5 June, 2006** at **10.00 a.m.**

Councillor D Bowman in the Chair

Members of the Sub-Committee:

Councillors Barker, Cordon, Douthwaite, Fergus, Freeman, Marshall, Smith, Stradling, Trippett and Wright.

Other Members:

Councillors Coates, Chaplow, Chapman, Gray, Iveson, Knox, Magee and Meir.

Co-opted Members:

Mr K Ibbotson and Councillor M Iveson.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Nicholls and Southwell and Mrs H Gibbon (Co-opted Member).

A1 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2006 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

A2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

A3 Any items from Co-opted Members or interested parties

There were no items from Co-opted Members or interested parties.

A4 Terms of Reference of the Sub-Committee

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny explaining the Terms of Reference of the Sub-Committee (for copy of report see file of Minutes).

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

A5 Aids and Adaptations Service

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny explaining that a further review meeting with Service Users and Carers had taken place to consider progress in relation to the Aids and Adaptations Service (for copy of report see file of Minutes).

Members were informed that regular meetings had taken place with Service Users and Carers and Scrutiny to review the progress made. The latest meeting had been held on 12 May 2006.

During the meeting, it was explained that whilst the service is doing well, there were a number of issues which were highlighted mainly:

- More assistance from the County Council in seeking funding for key equipment for the sensory impaired, particularly for those with impaired sight
- The need to join up the services provided to those with sight impairment with the National Health Service using a different assessment than the County Council in relation to individuals. In addition reference was made to the SuperNova Initiative introduced in the County Durham libraries, there was a need to address the training needs of staff.
- Inequality of Service - inequality in provision across County. There was no waiting list in Derwentside and yet in Easington and Sedgefield areas there was a considerable waiting list for assessments.
- Interest Free Loans - for those individuals who did not qualify for services from the County Council.
- Fire Alarms - for those with hearing impairment. There was an effective scheme in place under the 'First Alert' in conjunction with the Fire Service and District Councils, however not all District Councils were involved in the scheme.
- Telephone Reporting of Incidents - a need for the Service to be of a high standard and supportive of those people who are using the Service.

- Service Level Agreement - the Service Level Agreement was coming to an end between the Service User and Carer Forum and the County Council, this was to be investigated by the Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny.

Councillor Trippett commented that the problems relating to waiting lists in Sedgefield and Easington had existed for some time.

The Sub-Committee was informed that there has been significant improvement in provision in these areas in the last 10 years. However these areas do have a high level on demand and there has been a problem with staff sickness although an advertisement has recently been placed for an additional Occupational Therapist for the Easington area.

Councillor Cordon referred to the complexity of provision across the county.

John Thornberry, Head of Adult Services, Social Care and Health, informed Members that he had recently held a meeting with representatives from Chester-le-Street District Council where a combined approach was agreed, and he confirmed there was a need for a consistent approach across local authorities.

He continued that there is a commitment from the Challenge Neighbourhood Group to establish an agreed practice between District Councils to ensure a consistent approach across the County.

Councillor Robinson suggested that a report should be prepared for a future Sub-Committee meeting showing how the specific existing problems in Sedgefield and Easington were to be addressed.

The Sub-Committee was informed that there had been a proposal recently to establish a small peripatetic team, but this had not been progressed due to lack of funding.

Mr K Ibbotson, Co-opted Member commented that in relation to Easington and Sedgefield Districts, these were the two areas which do not have a hospital within their geographical area, the problem of provision of service often seems to occur when hospitals are not located within the area.

John Thornberry highlighted that the Service performed well nationally, but a report would be provided to Members identifying issues on a locality (Easington/Sedgefield) basis.

Councillor Coates suggested that reports might also be provided to future meetings of the Easington and Sedgefield Member Area Panels showing the progress made in relation to the provision of Aids and Adaptations.

Councillor Smith requested that any such reports include costings of the provision.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

A6 Sickness Absence Update

The Sub-Committee considered a report from the Head of Service, Quality and Performance, Social Care and Health providing an update on the current position and future actions to reduce sickness absence levels within Social Care and Health (for copy of report see file of Minutes).

The Sub-Committee was informed that there has been a steady reduction in the sickness absence rate over the last 4 years from 8.6% to the current rate of 6.59% for 2005/06. The main reduction has been in Adult Services which has fallen from 9.6% in 2003/04 to 7.6% in 2005/06 but this has been offset by a rise in the sickness absence rate for Childrens Services (5.9% up to 6.8%). There has also been a change in the main reason for absence with a continuing shift from musculo-skeletal absences to depression and stress absence. It was highlighted that the new Sickness Absence Training for Management is ongoing and encourages the active management of sickness absence, with a scheduled monthly meeting with Corporate colleagues to discuss long-term sickness absence.

In addition it was highlighted that the new Sickness Absence procedures incorporate trigger points for managing short-term persistent absences. Members were also informed that there was an ambitious aim for 2006/07 to achieve a reduction in the sickness absence rate to 6%. In relation to budget savings, the reduction in sickness absence for 2005/06 produced a £201,481 saving.

Councillor Marshall commented that there was an increase in 2003/04 in the sickness absence rate and asked whether this was due to the announcement of the closure of care homes. It was not felt that this had been a direct cause.

Councillor Coates commented that in relation to the increase in stress related absence a policy has been developed to be implemented shortly.

Councillor Trippett commented that in relation to the 6% target for 2006/07 this still represented 16 days absence, and in the private sector this would not be accepted.

The Sub-Committee was informed that the figures produced by the authority are accurate, whereas doubt often surrounds the figures produced by the private sector and some other local authorities.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

A7 Performance Management

(a) Report of Performance Monitoring Manager, Social Care and Health

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Performance Monitoring Manager, Social Care and Health providing an update on performance information for 2005/06 (for copy of report see file of Minutes).

Keith Newby, Performance Monitoring Manager informed the Sub-Committee that in relation to Adult Services eleven out of twenty seven indicators were in the highest banding. In relation to PAF C72 (Adults aged 65+ admitted on a permanent basis in the year to residential or nursing care per 10,000 65+ population) is in the red banding with 119.4 admissions per 10,000 65+ population. This is a new indicator for 2005/06. The high rate of admissions is being addressed by Adult Services with an action plan developed and local targets set to reduce the number of admissions across the County.

In relation to Children's Services, Keith advised the Sub-Committee that ten out of seventeen indicators that can be banded are in the top banding that can be achieved.

Councillor Mrs Smith congratulated officers on the performance indicators but asked if there was any more information in relation to PAF C72.

The Sub-Committee was informed that this is a new indicator for 2005/06 and it was highlighted that Government Policy is currently to keep older people in their own homes for as long as possible and avoid residential care, the indicator does not reflect this policy.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

(b) Report of Head of Corporate Policy

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Head of Corporate Policy providing an end of year performance update (2005/06) for Best Value Performance Indicators relevant to the Corporate Aim, Promoting Strong, Healthy and Safe Communities (for copy of report see file of Minutes).

In relation to BV99 Road Safety, Councillor Marshall asked if the statistics show where accident 'black spots' are located.

Members were informed that further data would be gathered on this issue and presented to a future meeting of the Sub-Committee.

Councillor Barker asked whether in relation to BV49 (the percentage of children in care 3+ placements), the authority was improving.

The Sub-Committee was informed that the authority is improving on a year on year basis.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

A8 'A+dding Value' - Report of the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children Scrutiny Working Group

The Sub-Committee considered the presentation together with the report and Executive Summary from the Scrutiny Working Group which had carried out an investigation into the education of Looked After Children in County Durham (for copies of reports and slides of presentation see file of Minutes).

Councillor Bowman, Chairman of the Working Group gave a presentation during which the following issues were highlighted:

- Background to the Scrutiny Project and Terms of Reference
- Why do Looked After Children not achieve?
- Working Group conclusions

Tom Bolton, Senior Scrutiny Support Officer then highlighted to Members the recommendations contained in the report of the Scrutiny Working Group which are as follows:-

- Recommendations

4 Themes around which recommendations are based

- Role and function of the Council as a corporate parent
- Designated Teachers and Governors
- Foster Carers
- Support of LAC/Achievement

Councillor Coates made reference to the recommendations, in relation to the role of the Council as a corporate parent paragraph (b) and requested that reference be made to the non County Council Members who carry out Regulation 33 visits. In addition with reference to the Regulation 33 visits paragraph (d) Councillor Coates informed Members that there was an item that relates to Education on the paperwork to be completed when undertaking visits and he suggested that this be expanded.

Resolved:

It was agreed that the report (with suitable amendments in relation to the Corporate Parenting Panel) be approved for submission to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and then to Cabinet.

A9 Forward Plan

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny with updated details of the sections of the Council's Forward Plan falling within its jurisdiction (for copy of report see file of Minutes).

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

A10 Work Programme

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

The Senior Scrutiny Support Officer commented that work programmes for the individual Sub-Committees for the coming year would be determined at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 26 June 2006.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.