

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 3 December 2007 at 10.00 a.m.**

COUNCILLOR J DAVIES in the Chair

Members of the Sub Committee:

Councillors Armstrong, Barker, Bowman, Douthwaite, E Foster, Marshall, Shuttleworth, Stradling, and Wright.

Other Member:

Councillors Chapman, Coates, NC Foster, Gray, Iveson, Nicholls, and Simmons.

Co-opted Members:

Ms M English, and Mr K Ibbotson.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Robinson, Mrs H Gibbon, and Mr M Iveson.

A1 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2007 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Tom Bolton advised that following the issues that arose at the previous meeting about safeguarding vulnerable adults and referrals of first time entrants to the youth justice system presentations would be made to members at the meeting about these issues.

In relation to item A5, Paul Hebron from the Community Education Service advised that the Service had not stopped doing outreach work. He explained that sometimes there were changes in the programmes but these were kept to a minimum. He went on to advise that the Service had, in fact, continued to invest in detached work and this would continue. The Sub-Committee endorsed Councillor Wright's suggestion that more outreach work be undertaken, and that Cabinet be asked to support this approach.

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 Employment Opportunities for People with a Learning Disability

The Sub-Committee received a report from the Head of Social Inclusion regarding the performance of WorkAble Solutions and the methods used by the Service to forecast targets for potential employment opportunities and matching of people to prospective employers (for copy of report see file of Minutes).

Nerise Oldfield-Thompson, Deputy Manager Operational and Partnership, and Fiona Faill, Service Co-ordinator, WorkAble Solutions, gave a presentation to the Sub-Committee regarding their work. This included the process flow which detailed the services they offer, referrals, initial screening, vocational profile, development plan, the job search log, job analysis, work skills assessment, health and safety agreement, monitoring, the support to employers, and then a case study (for copy of slides of presentation see file of Minutes).

Councillor Barker requested the statistics of those who have gained employment in his area. The figures would be broken down and passed on to him.

In response to Councillor Mrs Iveson, it was explained that clients become aware of the services provided by WorkAble Solutions either via word of mouth, or the leaflets and posters that are available at job centres, and doctors surgeries.

Although the case study presented to the Sub-Committee had been a success story, Councillor Stradling asked about those cases which failed and what the causes were when this happened. Nerise explained that there were many reasons why a placement might fail, however the most common were through mental health problems, and prejudice by employers. She explained that some people were placed 3 or 4 times before they found a job that was sustainable. It was reported that occasionally there is some exploitation by employers (i.e. failure to pay minimum wages) and they tackled each case individually.

Once employed they monitor the situation with both the client and the employer, and at first this may be on a weekly basis after which they would monitor at least once every three months.

Peter Appleton, Head of Planning & Performance advised that the County Council was a large employer and it was necessary for the authority to question its own approach and attitudes of its own staff to supporting people into work.

In response to a further question from Councillor Stradling, it was explained that the predominance of jobs are paid minimal wage or just above. There are however some post graduates who have been assisted by the programme, and so far there has been no effect on matching people to posts, nor any perceived impact on availability of placements due to the migration of foreign workers to the area.

A5 Quarter 2 2007/08 Performance

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Head of Corporate Policy which provided an update of the quarter 2 performance for the authority's priorities for improvement and the Best Value Performance Indicators relevant to the Corporate Aim of Promoting Strong, Healthy and Safe Communities (for copy see file of Minutes).

In response to a question from Ms English, Bev Stobbart advised that there are indicators relating to the adoption of children and there has been much work on moving children out of the Looked After System into adoption.

Peter Appleton, Head of Planning & Performance, Adult and Community Services responded to a question from Councillor Barker about the measures in place to look into the situation where a child in the looked after system had been placed three times for adoption however these had failed. Peter advised that a review would be undertaken of the individual's case. Members accepted that there were difficulties in some cases in placing a child.

Councillor Coates enquired about progress to meet the target relating to primary schools achieving the new National Healthy Schools Status. Bev Stobbart advised that as far as she was aware this was due to be met by 31 December 2009 - there had been some slippage, however she was not aware that the target would not be met. Councillor Coates asked whether the Children and Young People's Service could provide a report on this to the next meeting. Councillor Coates advised that staff should be congratulated on meeting 32 of the 34 indicators where it had been possible to provide a year-end predication.

Resolved:-

That the report be noted, and that subsequent quarterly performance progress reports be received.

A6 First Time Entrants to the Youth Justice System

The Sub-Committee received a presentation from Gill Eshelby, Acting Head of County Durham Youth Engagement Service regarding the first time entrants to the Youth Justice System (for copy of presentation see file of Minutes).

The presentation included the LAA Stretch Target, the Offences brought to Justice/PSA Target, statistics of the regional FTE performance of 2005/06 and 2006/07, FTE by CDRP, Age of FTEs by District, types of offences, and opportunities and challenges.

Gill pointed out that Durham Constabulary has the lowest number of first time entrants FTEs per 10-17 population in the region. She advised that children can be in the youth justice system from the age of 10 years, and if they were to receive a reprimand or final warning this means their details would stay on the Police National Computer (PNC) for 5 years after the age of 18. Many, however, do not go further into the system than a first warning.

The fact that details stayed on the PNC can have an impact on rehabilitation of some FTEs, as, often, they would have to declare this in the employment market. Some may have committed a one-off offence when they were very young and it stayed as a criminal offence until they were 23.

Gill suggested that there was a need to do something radical about protecting vulnerable young people. The LAA had given her responsibility for tackling this and she had been working with Durham Constabulary on a solution. She was submitting a paper to her management team next week about proposals for a pre-reprimand process, and hoping to have this ready for April next year. The Office for Criminal Justice Reform was keen for this to be developed, with the intention that it be used as a model for other agencies to follow.

There was a discussion about the need to break the cycle in families and to target parents to try and change behaviour. It was reported that there were strategies in place for working with parents, however there was much to be done. Services needed to link together to change this and it was suggested that closer working with SureStart, which would hopefully be rolled out across the county would assist and that there would be more services provided through youth clubs and more detached youth work.

Members discussed the situation of alcohol and how this affected behaviour, and how young people were managing to access alcohol at such a young age. Ms English advised that through DAAT she was undertaking a piece of work on reducing the consumption of alcohol on 11-14 year olds, and suggested that they link in with the Youth Engagement Service on this work.

Tom Bolton reminded the Sub-Committee that a joint health scrutiny working group had looked at the issues of alcohol abuse and how young people were able to obtain alcohol. A number of recommendations had been made by the Group and these would be reviewed early next year.

It was felt important for members to be involved in discussions about tackling these sorts of issues and reference was made to the Turning the Curve programme which aimed to put members at the heart of communities. Reference was also made to one of the key improvement priorities in the Children and Young People's Plan being to reduce alcohol consumption by young people.

Ms English advised that she had been exploring the possibility of every child having a free pass for access to a leisure centre on a Friday and Saturday evening. In addition to the resourcing of this there were difficulties in that they centres were not usually open at these times, and often leisure centre staff did not want young people in centres, so there would need to be structured access. Members of the Sub-Committee supported this initiative.

In response to a question from Councillor Coates about the fall in some authority's figures between last year and this year, Gill explained that there was to be a regional meeting shortly where the variance would be discussed. It appears that there were some differences in recording; however Durham's figures had been checked and were correct.

Councillor Bowman commented that many young people in the youth justice system were unable to read and write. Gill explained that this had been identified as an issue, and was often caused through disruption in a child's education, which may be due to their home life and they are unable to function properly. The importance of the LAA in bringing together funding streams and promoting cross cutting work was emphasised.

The Sub-Committee endorsed the challenges ahead and supported 'learning the curve'. A request was made that a presentation about the programme be made to a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that the Executive be asked to support the programme.