

4 July 2008

Scrutiny Work Programme

Report of Head of Overview and Scrutiny

Purpose

1. At the meeting of the Committee held on 16 June, 2008, Members began the process of planning their work programme for the coming year. It was agreed that, as part of this process, a report giving a brief outline of previous scrutiny investigations would be prepared for consideration at a special meeting of the Committee to be convened at a later date.
2. In particular, further information was requested about fear of crime issues and young people. Fear of crime was previously the subject of a scrutiny investigation which reported in April, 2005 and has been the subject of subsequent review. A fuller outline of the Fear of Crime report is included below with specific reference to the young people's issues identified in the report.

Previous Scrutiny Projects

Aids and Adaptations (2000)

3. This scrutiny investigation was undertaken in 2000, in advance of the new Constitutional arrangements following the Local Government Act 2000. It examined the aids and adaptations services provided to assist people to remain in or return to their homes. Key findings/recommendations related to:
 - **Need for a one-stop shop/single point of contact for users**
 - **Joint purchasing and joint equipment stores**
 - **Reviews of waiting times for equipment**
 - **Development of county-wide criteria including minimum standards**
 - **Pooled budgets and team working to be explored**
 - **Integrated care packages**
 - **Arrangements for dissemination of best practice**
 - **Effective networks of users to contribute to service development/improvement.**

Improving Road Safety in relation to Child Deaths and Injuries (2002)

4. The background to this scrutiny investigation (which consisted of a seminar) was to explain to members the background to Target 8 in the Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) which sought to reduce the numbers of people (including children and young people) killed or seriously injured (KSI) in road accidents. There were particular concerns about the levels of KSIs linked to children in County Durham. Members were advised of some of the actions being undertaken to address the issues including child pedestrian training. It was agreed further monitoring of the LPSA target should be undertaken at a future meeting.

Carrier Bag Culture (2002)

5. This scrutiny investigation looked at the issues of disaffected young people gathering on street corners in Easington District. The reference to carrier bags in the title of the project reflected the perceptions of local people that many young people had carrier bags containing alcohol or drugs. The aim of the project was to look at how young people could be assisted to reintegrate into local communities. Key findings/recommendations were:
- **There was no simple solution to what was a complex problem**
 - **There was a lack of community facilities for young people – crime and drugs initiatives did not address these issues**
 - **There had been increases in anti-social behaviour locally**
 - **Transport (to access events in other villages) was an issue**
 - **Positive community policing needed (including a possible a surgery with the police for young people to discuss issues)**
 - **A multi-disciplinary officer group to be established to consider further in consultation with young people the findings of the investigation, with a view to reporting back on practical solutions to the issues identified during the project.**

Minding the Gap (2003)

6. This investigation was undertaken because of issues identified by members about the perceived inadequacy of local provision for young people with mental health needs. The investigation looked at the level and adequacy of support for 16-25 year olds with mental health problems in County Durham, with a view to considering:

How far support met the needs of users of services and their carers
 Whether it was timely and proportionate
 Whether it was correctly targeted

And to raise awareness of the issues and, if necessary, make recommendations for improvement.

7. Key findings and recommendations related to the following areas:
- **Early identification and intervention** - where mental health needs were present in young people
 - **Services designed around young people's needs**
 - **A Greater Role for Young People** – in how services were designed, delivered and assessed
 - **Education about mental health issues** – in schools and amongst the wider population
 - **Looked After Children** – mental health support for this group
 - **Joined-up Services** – Ensuring an holistic approach and smooth transitions between children's and adult mental health provision
 - **Funding and training issues** – for staff
 - **Carers** – support for those caring for young people with mental health needs
8. A key outcome of the project was the incorporation of many of the Working Group recommendations into the design of the Transitions Service for young people with mental health needs which was subsequently established.

Social Services Sickness Absence (2004)

9. This project was instituted following issues raised by members in the light of proposed savings of £500,000 from reductions in sickness absence, identified by the then Director of Social Services during the Council's budget deliberations for 2003/2004. The Terms of Reference of the Working Group were to review the nature and extent of sickness absence within Durham County Council's Social Services Department and the actions being taken to address this issue with a view to making recommendations, where appropriate, for any improvements.
10. Key findings and recommendations related to the following areas (the first three bullet points were Social Services specific, the remainder were addressed to all Services):
 - **Better training for social services staff in lifting, carrying and handling techniques; appropriateness of equipment for use in client homes; and a review of risk assessment procedures**
 - **Mechanisms to promote a more cohesive service in relation to home care staff with improved contact with managers; improved sickness reporting and speedier access to treatment for musculo-skeletal injuries**
 - **Reviewing allowances payable when staff are off sick**
 - **Sickness absence data to be regularly considered by services management teams and Corporate Management Team**
 - **Better training in sickness absence management for managers**
 - **More consistency (via corporately produced guidance) across all services in relation to sickness management**
 - **Further development of policies and procedures to encourage staff health and well-being**

Who's Afraid of Crime? (Fear of Crime) (2005)

11. This project was initiated by members because of concerns about the level of fear of crime in County Durham, which was disproportionately high, compared with actual crime levels. The project was consistent with the Strategic Vision for County Durham in relation to reducing overall levels of fear of crime, crime and anti-social behaviour. The investigation was broad in scope, as fear of crime issues are complex (there is even debate about whether fear is the correct terminology and "concern" or "anger" might more accurately reflect how people feel). The investigation was aided by the findings of the extensive community safety survey undertaken in the autumn of 2004 in County Durham and Darlington.
12. The key findings of the report concerned:
 - **Communications** – Opportunities for Crime and Disorder Partnership to promoting "positive" issues and rebut incorrect reporting in the media
 - **Increasing understanding** – breaking down barriers and promoting social inclusion to tackle hate crime and also enhance understanding between younger and older people
 - **Increased assessment of performance and evaluation of outcomes** – do schemes to tackle anti-social behaviour or crime and disorder make a difference?
 - **More engagement with young people** – youth workers, diversionary activities

- **Supporting initiatives to tackle anti-social behaviour** – better street lighting, speedier remedial work where graffiti, vandalism and fly tipping, better information for local people about those subject to ASBOs and bringing breaches of ASBOs more quickly to Court
- **Enhancing community engagement, capacity building and raising confidence in our local communities** – County Council policies which promote social cohesion and inclusion; an Awards scheme to recognise individuals or community groups who tackle crime and fear of crime; re-invigoration of Police Community Consultative Groups; continued financial support for Community Centres (and particularly those who engage with young people)
- **An enhanced role for members as reassurance ambassadors** – within their local communities; signposting the public to appropriate support services
- **More joined up working** – membership of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships to be expanded
- **Other policing issues** – “approachability” of police officers; police response times; proper feedback to the public who report issues to the police.

13. Members asked specifically about aspects of the scrutiny report in connection with young people’s issues. The recommendations pertinent to young people covered the following issues:

- **Promoting inter-generational work between older and younger people, i.e. in schools and local communities (including greater links between Education in the Community Service; the Youth Engagement Service; and Community Development Team, with Age Concern)**
- **County Durham Youth Engagement Service to evaluate the effectiveness of local restorative justice programmes**
- **Cabinet to ask for a report about closer working between the Council’s own youth services and other agencies about closer working to provide leisure and recreational (diversionary) activities for young people (the report also to examine difficulties in recruiting and retaining youth workers and sustaining schemes which engage with young people)**
- **Opportunities to be explored for developing community based mentoring schemes for young people**
- **Suggested principles when the County Council develops or considers community based services for young people**
- **Police authority and Chief Constable to consider the feasibility of a Safer Schools Partnership Initiative in County Durham**
- **Consideration of how positive achievements of young people can be promoted and celebrated (including a high profile Award Scheme)**
- **Issues about bullying (school transport) and intimidation by former pupils at school gates to be investigated**
- **Support for community youth shelters (subject to appropriate community consultation)**

A+dding Value? Educational Attainment of Looked After Children (2006)

14. This investigation was initiated by members because of concerns about the educational achievement of Looked After Children in County Durham, which, whilst improving, at that time was still low compared to national targets. The project also supported one of the Council’s priorities linked to improved life chances for children. The investigation was broad in scope, as, at the outset, members decided to take a holistic view of support for Looked After Children.

15. The Working Group felt that there were good levels of provision for the education of Looked After Children in County Durham, with committed and dedicated staff and carers, but that more could be done. The main themes of the report were:
- **The role and actions of the Council as Corporate Parent** – role of the Corporate Parenting Panel to be codified and included in the Constitution; more members to be recruited; more events for corporate parents and looked after children to interact; regulation 33 visits to specifically consider educational provision issues (amongst other matters); better information for young people about the role of corporate parents
 - **The functions of Designated Teachers and Governors** – better information and support for governors as “champions” for looked after children; greater opportunities for teachers to access training/development
 - **The role of Foster Carers** – better procedures for links between schools and carers; less use of jargon; IT equipment for all carers homes where not already present; training for carers about modern teaching methods and about specific conditions (dyslexia/dyspraxia)
 - **Support for Children who are Looked After and Recognition of Achievement** – ensuring stability in school placements, or more support when moves had to take place; more effective support in appealing against school exclusions; “quiet” study areas and “quiet times” in children’s homes; greater opportunities to access vocational training; incentives for looked after children to perform well; greater student mentoring; the Council as an employer to consider how it can support looked after children into work.

A Hidden Truth? Domestic Abuse (2007)

16. The focus of this investigation was on the support provided to victims who flee domestic abuse; the impact of domestic abuse on families and particularly children; and abuse of the elderly.
17. The key findings and recommendations were:
- **Stronger leadership on domestic abuse issues by the County Council** – Senior Officer and Member champion appointments, greater clarity around the role of existing officers in relation to domestic abuse; a vulnerable adults Panel to be established.
 - **Promoting Greater Awareness of Domestic Abuse Issues** – Member/Officer seminars and briefings about domestic abuse (including LGBT and BME issues); regular data provided to Members; signposting of victims via published information and websites (including information for groups where English is not the first language); review of information provided in schools; a domestic abuse policy for the Council’s own staff
 - **Improved Data about Domestic Abuse** - Better analysis of existing data; gathering data about abuse in the LGBT and BME communities; more robust data gathering about abuse of vulnerable adults
 - **Better Partnership Working** – Greater involvement and leadership from the County Council within partnership forums and encouragement of greater minority representation in forums; strengthened Local Area Agreement re domestic abuse; providing opportunities for victims of domestic abuse to access services in a holistic fashion

- **Improved Support for victims and Perpetrators** – Greater opportunities for victims to shape service provision; development of perpetrator programmes for specific groups; consideration of whether safeguarding children provisions are sufficient to meet anticipated need following legislative change; Drugs and Alcohol Action Team to review support to victims/perpetrators of abuse where substance misuse is a factor/symptom.

Gypsies and Travellers (2008)

18. The main focus of this Light Touch Review was on conditions on authorised Gypsy and Traveller Sites. The key findings and recommendations were:
 - The need for urgent refurbishment of authorised sites
 - Support for the multi agency traveller task group
 - A series of seminars/development opportunities to raise awareness of gypsy and traveller issues with Members post May 2008
 - The identification of potential areas of land within the control of the new Unitary Council after 1 April 2009 which may provide **temporary** provision for seasonal gypsy and traveller encampments
 - Better arrangements for members to obtain advice and guidance in relation to gypsy and traveller issues in cases of urgency.

Recommendation

19. That the Committee note the above previous scrutiny projects, consider the key areas for potential scrutiny outlined at the previous meeting and determine which area(s) it wishes to investigate in the coming months.

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