

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the Scrutiny Sub-Committee to promote Strong, Healthy and Safe Communities held at the County Hall, Durham on Monday 28th November 2005 at 10.00 am.

Present:

Councillor M Nicholls in the Chair

Members of Sub-Committee:

Councillors Armstrong, Barker, Bowman, Douthwaite, Lethbridge, Robinson, Southwell, Stradling and Vasey.

Other Members:

Chapman, Henderson and Iveson.

Co-opted Members:

M Williams and M English

A1 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 5th September 2005 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

A2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

A3 Items from Co-opted Members or interested parties.

There were no items raised.

A4 Performance Management

(a) Report of Director of Social Care and Health

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Director of Social Care and Health updating members of the performance information for the second quarter of 2005/06 (for copy of report see file of Minutes).

Keith Newby, Quality and Performance Monitoring Manager, informed the Sub-Committee that in relation to Adult Services the indicators are grouped as follows:-

- 8 very good (dark green)
- 3 good (light green)
- 2 acceptable (yellow)
- 4 ask questions (orange)
- 1 not banded

In total, nine out of seventeen indicators that can be banded at this point in the year are in the top banding.

It was highlighted that action was being taken to improve performance against the appropriate indicators.

With reference to Children's Services the Sub-Committee was informed that the groupings are as follows:-

- 7 very good (dark green)
- 2 good (light green)
- 3 acceptable (yellow)
- 2 ask questions (orange)

In total, nine out of fourteen indicators that can be banded at this point in the year are in the top banding with action taken to improve performance against the appropriate indicators.

In relation to PAF C63 Councillor Armstrong asked whether the child was invited to give their views at each review stage.

Keith Newby responded that systems are improving to allow young people to feed in their views and it is anticipated that performance against this indicator will improve quarter on quarter.

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 concerning the half year performance update (2005/06) for Best Value Performance indicators relevant to the Corporate Aim, Promoting Strong, Health and Safe Communities (for copy of report see file of minutes).

It was highlighted that at the half year point the majority of indicators are performing to target.

With reference to BV127 (Violent Crime) there had been a further increase in reported violent crime this quarter and this reflects the upward national trend, however, part of this increase is attributable to better recording.

Councillor Robinson commented in relation to violent crimes whether there is any flexibility to relax the target in the light of the new drinking laws.

The Sub-Committee was informed that the authority does not have direct control over this indicator and it is set in conjunction with the police.

Councillor Southwell commented that the District Council had significant input in relation to licensing and have regular contact with the police. He continued by asking whether the County Council was held accountable for input when they had no part in the control process.

The officer confirmed that the County Council would be held accountable for these indicators.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

A5 Aids and Adaptations Review

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny providing details of a further review meeting with Service Users and Carers to consider the progress in relation to the Aids and Adaptations Service (for copy of report see file of minutes).

The issue of the contact number for Social Care Direct was raised and concern that clients had to repeat the nature of a problem to numerous people often with no follow up contact being made.

Bob Morland, Contact Centre Manager, Social Care Direct, commented that the service is a first point of contact, not a "One Stop Shop" and therefore the person taking the call often has to refer the individual caller on another member of staff who could deal with the problem.

John Thornberry, Head of Adult Services, highlighted that the current system is not set up as a “One Stop Shop” although he recognised that there is a need for a member of staff to take ownership of the call he suggested that there maybe a need to extend the staffing of Social Care Direct if a full “One Stop Shop” Service was to be introduced.

Councillor Southwell indicated his view that staff should take ownership of any call taken.

Councillor Armstrong requested clarification about the additional benefits obtained through the work of Welfare Rights. He understood that additional benefits had an impact on the overall financial settlement for the Authority. He considered that additional government funding might be applied to the aids and adaptations service.

Mrs English, asked whether the Authority had care co-ordinators who would look at each client separately and assess their needs.

John Thornberry responded that the Authority does have the equivalent of care co-ordinators although their title is different.

Councillor Barker highlighted that significant delay is caused by the need for a case to be assessed by an occupational therapist and he suggested that many cases do not need to be assessed in this way. It was explained that normally an assessment was required.

The issue of the number of abortive calls to Social Care Direct was raised.

Bob Morland responded that there are very few abortive calls and that in relation to calls answered successfully, the figures are 95% for January, 92% for April and 91% for July.

It was highlighted that there is a need for users to have confidence that someone will follow up any query.

The Head of Overview and Scrutiny, made reference to a recent meeting between Scrutiny Members and Service Users and Carers where the following issues were raised:-

- Further consideration of the performance of the Social Care Direct ‘One Stop’ Telephone Service. There was a feeling from some Service Users that it was not ‘direct’ and that a ring back service might be more appropriate sometimes.
- A need to engender a feeling of confidence in the caring services particularly for those Service Users and Carers who have significant needs.
- A need to reinforce the importance of informing Service Users and Carers where there will be a delay in the delivery of services.

- A need to assist Service Users and Carers to choose the appropriate contact for their service needs which might be a direct approach to a provider such as the Home Independence Centre.
- A need to reduce waste and inefficiency.
- A need to consider the equity of services across the County and, in particular, the disparity of waiting times for occupational therapy assessments.

These issues were noted as important comments from Service Users and Carers.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

A6 Sickness Absence Review

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny providing an update about the latest review of the Sickness Absence Scrutiny recommendations (for copy of report see file of minutes).

It was highlighted that currently the sickness absence rate for Social Care and Health is on target to hit 6.5% in 2005/06 compared to 8.6% per annum in 2002/03.

In addition best practice was also being looked at in other local authorities.

It was suggested that Scrutiny now take on a general monitoring role in relation to this project.

Mrs English, asked whether there is a counselling service available for staff to use.

Peter Appleton, Operations Manager, Quality and Performance confirmed that there is provision available to an external counselling service via telephone and in addition Social Care and Health have a staff care unit which provides counselling on a confidential basis.

Mrs Gibbon, Co-opted Member, asked whether any health promotion work was undertaken with staff.

Peter Appleton responded that a proactive approach was being taken in Social Care and Health.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

A7 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).

Resolved:

That the report be received.

A8 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.