

**DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**  
**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**At a Meeting** of the **Scrutiny Sub-Committee for Developing Lifelong Learning** held at the County Hall, Durham on **Monday 26 June 2006** at **11.20 a.m.**

**Present:**

**Councillor N Wade** in the Chair

Councillors Burlison, Coates, Ebbatson, N C Foster, Graham, Gray, Holroyd, Iveson, Meir, Simmons, Tennant and Williams

**Co-opted Members:**

Mrs A Atkinson, Mrs A Tallentire and Councillor M Robinson

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Barker, Chaplow, Hodgson, Porter, and Mr J Dormer, and Rev S Bamber.

**A1 Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2006 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**A2 Terms of Reference**

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny about the terms of reference of the Sub-Committee (for copy see file of Minutes).

**Resolved:-**

That the information be noted.

### **A3 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **A4 Scrutiny Report: Opportunity Age in County Durham?- Lifelong Learning for Over 50s**

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny regarding the report of the working group of the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Sub-Committee about opportunities for over 50s in County Durham (for copy see file of Minutes).

Councillor Ebbatson commented that in relation to the last recommendation promoting volunteering how had that originated, as volunteering in Durham was pro-active amongst the older age group. The Committee was informed that these issues had been raised by Age Concern and Social Care and Health. He suggested that it should be recognised that volunteering is already taking place and the approval should be to encourage further volunteering.

#### **Resolved:-**

That the report be approved.

### **A5 Reviews**

#### **a. Modern Foreign Languages - Update**

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny regarding a report from the Modern Foreign Languages Specialist Inspector which provides an update about modern foreign languages teaching in County Durham (for copy see file of Minutes).

Margaret Bell, General Inspector with responsibility for Modern Foreign Languages outlined to the Sub-Committee the progress that had been made in seeking to redress the falling trend in the take-up of Modern Foreign Languages at 14.

Through the activities that have been initiated there is an increased awareness of the opportunities available to motivate pupils to continue language learning post 14. She explained the activities that have been undertaken in accordance with the Action Plan, and pointed out that although the activities will not result in a substantial increase in the number of language learners in Durham, support for schools is robust, the models of good practice are replicable and there will be further developments.

Councillor Ebbatson suggested that where areas of take up are low, schools could support each other in providing language learning, and that the local authority could determine how this can be achieved.

Councillor Ebbatson asked for a breakdown of the take-up, the languages offered, the size of staff involved and pupils in individual schools.

Mrs Bell advised that as a promotional resource she had a DVD to show parents and governors to encourage the take up of MFL.

Councillor Stradling suggested that a MFL be made a requirement for entry into university.

The Head of Overview and Scrutiny advised that this was a national curriculum challenge.

The Sub-Committee welcomed the progress that had been made.

### **b. School Meals - Update**

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny regarding a review of school meal provision which had taken place since the scrutiny study the previous year (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Sub-Committee noted that in general, against the national trend, the take-up of schools meals in Durham had shown an increase.

Councillor Coates believed that there was still along way to go in terms of the quality of food provided. In response to his question about the position with schools who had opted out of the Scolarest Contract, the Head of Overview and Scrutiny reported that a number of there schools had wanted to get back into the contract.

It was suggested that school meals continue to be sampled by members and governors.

That the report be noted and it was agreed to re-visit the situation annually.

### **A6 Items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties**

Councillor Mrs Robinson raised an issue about the community associations funding and courses. She explained that Community Associations are being advised that the Learning and Skills Council are moving towards 30 week accredited courses. The proposed changes from 10 week accredited or non-accredited courses had many implications.

In addition to the 10 week courses community associations have also run first aid training and food hygiene courses. These are vital to volunteers and residents alike however now they would have to be run on a commercial basis. Community Associations have a limited number of rooms for hire and many may be unable to release these for 30 week courses. She questioned

whether it would not be better to have the 30 week course based in educational establishment.

She then asked how the Council is going to ensure that the need to provide initial training experiences, development of the thirst for learning, and maintenance and development of community association activities are balanced, non being detrimental to the other.

The Head of Overview and Scrutiny advised that the matter would be looked into and he would report back to the member. He did advise that the authority is looking into community associations and their funding

#### **A7 Performance Management**

The Sub-Committee noted a performance management report for lifelong learning for the end of year performance (for copy see file of Minutes).

Councillor Coates gave credit to those areas that are improving however referred to those areas that are highlighted as deteriorating, and asked that future reports give the full rationale why they have deteriorated.

#### **A8 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.

#### **A9 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.

#### **A10 Dates of Future Meetings**

The dates of future meetings were noted.