

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

**AT A MEETING** of the **Scrutiny Sub-Committee for Lifelong Learning** held at County Hall, Durham on **Thursday 3 January 2008** at **10.00 a.m.**

**PRESENT**

**Chairman:** Councillor Tennant

**Members:**

Councillors Burlison, Ebbatson, E Foster, Holroyd, Manton, Simmons, Walker.

**Co-Opted Members:**

Mrs Tallentire, Mr P Mackie, PH Taylor

**Other Councillors**

Councillors NC Foster, and Pye,

Apologies were received from Councillor Vasey

**1. Outcome of Joint Area Review**

Members received a verbal report of Neil Charlton, the Head of Business Services, Children and Young People's Service on the outcome of the Joint Area Review of services for children and young people.

Members were informed that the Service received notice that it would be subject to a Joint Area Review and on 1 April 2007 and were dismayed with this decision as they felt that it was too early having first been advised by OfSted that such a review would not take place until 2008. They were inspected in May 2007 based on the services that were in place at the time although some services were still to be put into place and some were in need of further refinement.

Whilst there was an overall positive outcome to the inspection there were some difficulties with the processes followed during the inspection and after a great deal of consideration it was decided to lodge a formal objection to the way in which the inspection had been done. This was a difficult decision to make but the service managers felt strongly that the inspection had not been carried out in accordance with their own criteria.

OfSted investigated the complaint and called for further information but eventually decided none of the objections could be sustained although they provided no information on their reasoning for this decision.

The main points of the Review were as follows:

- Arrangements for safeguarding children and young people are good. The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) discharges its responsibilities effectively and collaboration between the agencies to prevent abuse and neglect is good.
- Investment in high quality preventative work and family support services has reduced the number of children on the child protection register and the number of looked after children
- The quality of social care assessments is improving with more robust systems in place to tackle inconsistencies
- Services make a good contribution to improving outcomes for looked after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Some practice is outstanding.
- Good progress has been made in developing and establishing a comprehensive CAMHS across the county, which is improving outcomes for most children and young people although some gaps remain in provision for looked after children.
- Support for school improvement is outstanding. Very effective monitoring, challenge, and support to schools has brought about improved educational outcomes for children and young people in primary and secondary schools
- The strategy for educating and training young people aged 14-19 is good. There is a cohesive and inclusive 14-16 curriculum and educational achievement of 14-16 year olds compares well with national averages. There are good localised initiatives for 16-19 year olds but these have not had time to impact at a county-wide level and the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training is above average
- The youth service is good and, in conjunction with partners, delivers consistently high standards in a wide range of provision
- Directors and managers of local services have good knowledge of strengths and weaknesses in provision and prioritise effectively. They have a good and, at times, outstanding track record of improvement on many outcomes. The capacity for further improvement is good.

The Service is now meeting to develop an action plan which will soon be submitted to cabinet for consideration and approval before being sent to OfSted

Councillor N Foster commented that it was pleasing to see that lessons had been learnt and that the investments made by the Authority were starting to pay back dividends. We now need to look at investing in quality youth workers and place them in local scenarios where they can be best used.

Members were informed that a full version of the JAR would be circulated shortly.

## **2. Academies Consultation**

Members were informed by Neil Charlton, the Head of Business Services that he was not in a position to add to the report as expressions of interest were still being assessed. The service was also considering issues raised following consultations in local areas.

He referred to the adverts placed in local and national newspapers seeking potential sponsors and Members were informed that no other local authority has done what Durham did in setting out the prospectus, the criteria for selection and the baseline for the specifications when they are received. The names of all potential sponsors have now been published.

Councillor Pye referred to some slippage in the programme and expressed his hopes that when the report did come out that the process could be seen to be transparent and clearer than the reports presented concerning the consultation meetings which appeared to be 'woolly'.

Councillor Manton asked how successful the adverts had been in reaching sponsors that might have not have been reached without such open advertising. Neil Charlton replied that at this stage the success cannot be determined. However, Councillor Vasey had visited both Sunderland and Manchester to investigate how their process worked before we started our advertising. We will have to wait and see whether the process was successful but it was important to remember the Government is committed to an annual review of academies and that this was a political argument.

Councillor Walker referred to the selection of sponsors and the importance of maintaining educational standards. He also asked if the funding would be available upfront and whether this was a relevant issue and whether we would be investigating where the funding was coming from.

Neil Charlton explained that the Children Services Network are also involved in assessing the success of the academies programme. However, this was one of the complications of the relationship between the public sector and the private sector and where the funding is coming from.

Our portfolio sets out what we are looking for from potential sponsors and sets out the admissions criteria that is to be reflected in the area of special education needs and looked after children. The Government have also moved to change the rules to ensure that academies have to take looked after children and special educational needs children if they are the appropriate schools for the pupils.

Councillor E Foster expressed the gut feeling that this whole process was taking away the autonomy of local authorities. Neil Charlton agreed that

whilst he shared Cllr Foster's concerns we have to comply with Government guidelines and he asked that they retained faith in the staff involved.

### **3. Funding Issues – Adult Education**

Members received a presentation from Dave Emmerson, Education in the Community Manager. He informed Members that the last report on this issue was given just after there was a 40% reduction in funding and that at the time some difficult decisions had to be made. Since then the news is that there has been a stabilisation of the budget by way of a standstill budget from LSC which in real terms is a cut due to wage increases which have to be funded from within this budget. However, there is good working relationship between the service and local officers at LSC.

Overall the result in real terms has been a 27% reduction in services provided since 2001. The LSC and Government view is that the local authority should make up the reduction in funding by increased fee charging. Whilst this is an issue for Durham County Council to consider we have to keep in mind the learner's ability to pay.

He then provided details of LSC funding for the various provision in 2007/08 .

- Personal & Community Development Learning – reduced from £1.6 m to £1.439m although there was some dispute as to which services are included within this heading.
- Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities - £321,000 in revenue budget and £192,576 in capital funding and we operate a very transparent policy on this issue. David referred Members to a recent report presented to Sedgfield MAP.

The other three headings, Skills for Life; Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy; and Wide family learning were funded by two funding schemes.

The service sees Family Learning as an important part of their work and secondary schools have taken this on board and they have been commended in this process by various inspection reports.

The total package of LSC funding is £3,052,182.

The Principle influences on funding are:

- Learning number targets of 8971 – this is achieved by working closely with the voluntary community
- Performance at Inspection – in 2005 the service was rated as good and a new inspection is due in March 2008. However, the inspection process has been amended and they are now subject to a multi-faceted inspection through OfSted. Whilst they are aware of the scope of the inspection there were some concerns and work is in hand to

meet the requirements and a report will be presented to CMT in the near future.

- Skills/employability agenda and vocational courses – National Test and Vocational courses. LSC have and high expectancy on the introduction of accredited learning where the emphasis on skills and employability has freed up some resources
- Future of LSC funding – looking to develop through Local Area Agreements (LAA) and CDC and the service is still looking at how this will pan out but we are still working with partners on this issue.

We need to be certain that within the new authority that Adult Learning still receives the appropriate recognition and funding. He informed Members that following Members will be kept informed of the result of inspection to be carried out in May.

#### **4. Quarter 2 2007/08 Performance**

Members were asked to note the report of the Head of Corporate Policy.