

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the Developing Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee
held at the County Hall, Durham on **Monday 7 July 2008** at **10.00 a.m.**

PRESENT

Councillor J Blakey in the Chair

Members:

Councillors Armstrong, A Bainbridge, B Bainbridge, Brookes, Dixon, Holroyd, Iveson, C Potts, Shiell, Simmons, Stradling, and B Wilson.

Co-Opted Members:

Ms L Bailey and Mrs O Brown.

Faith Community Representative:

Mr P Mackie

Parent Governor Representative:

A Tallentire

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Arthur and Bailey and Rev S Bamber.

A1 Welcome from the Chairman

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Developing Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee.

A2 Terms of Reference of the Committee

The Committee noted a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny regarding the Terms of Reference of the Committee, Membership for 2008/09 and the Dates of Meetings (for copy see file of Minutes).

A3 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 31 March 2008 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Councillor Armstrong, referring to paragraph 3 of Minute A4 asked whether the BSF process would be progressing with only one bidder. The Director of Children and Young People's Services replied that DCfS had approved this with safeguards, however, the Treasury would not confirm its approval until the end of the process.

Referring to paragraph 5 of Minute A4, Councillor Dixon asked whether the communications issue had been addressed. Councillor Armstrong replied that the Director of Children and Young People's Services and the Cabinet Portfolio holder had been requested to provide regular updates.

A4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest

A5 Items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties

There were no items raised from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties.

A6 Children and Young People's Services – Overview of Directorate Priorities

The Committee received a presentation from David Williams, Director for Children and Young People's Services, on the Overview of the Directorate Priorities (for copy of slides see file of Minutes)

The Director for Children and Young People's Services explained to the Committee that what was once referred to as the LEA was now the Children's Services Authority. Children and Young People's Services was set up in 2006 and encompassed all former Education, Children's Social Care and Youth Engagement Services. In addition, from April 2008 the Service took on the Connexions Service which provided advice and guidance to 13-19 year olds, and from 2010/11 would take on many functions of the Learning and Skills Council.

The scope of Children and Young People's Services included 292 schools, 11 children's homes, secure services at Aycliffe, 65 youth and community centres, field offices, approximately 14,000 staff (approximately 10,000 fte staff) and a gross revenue budget of £545m.

The Vision for the Service reflected the national Children and Young People's Strategy, and targets were set by national strategies. The Vision was that all children, young people and their families will

- Be healthy
- Be safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Have economic well being

The Vision was to ensure that all children, young people and their families were listened to, a full part of decision making, comfortable with the decision making process, aware of the opportunities to be involved, and treated with the same respect, dignity and status as adults.

Under the Children's Act, there was a statutory duty to work with partners, including the Learning and Skills Council, Connexions, Police Authority and Durham Constabulary, Probation Board, Local Safeguarding Children's Board, District Councils, Primary Care Trust, Youth Engagement and the Voluntary Sector.

The Director of Children and Young People's Services informed the Committee that a major inspection of the Service had taken place last year, which reported that the Service was "good with outstanding features" and added that the County Council was a beacon Council for school improvement.

In terms of the Every Child Matters aims, the following were priorities, which could be subject to slight change due to ongoing work:

- Be healthy – reduction of childhood obesity; reduction in teenage pregnancy – although still poor, there had been an improvement in this area; addressing the misuse of alcohol; improving emotional wellbeing and access to CAMHS
- Be safe – improve support services for families who were just below the threshold for intervention; reduce bullying; reduce youth crime; improve integration of services
- Enjoy and achieve – raise educational achievement and narrow gaps – last year the Service achieved the national average for school performance after 5 years of improvement; improve the number of places to go and things to do – the County Council had provided an extra £½m for youth services.
- Make a positive contribution – help young people feel respected, for example, through better media presentation
- Have economic well being – ensure young people are actively engaged in education, employment and training

Councillor Dixon thanked the Director of Children and Young People's Services for his useful overview of the Service. He referred to the statutory duty to work with partners, particularly District Councils, which would be abolished post March 2009. The Director replied that the partners were listed in the Children's Act, and that representations on the Children's Trust were currently undergoing review to ensure that localities were represented on the Local Children's Board. There were also opportunities through LGR to link in with, for example, leisure services, to deliver on aims.

Councillor Stradling thanked the Director for his presentation, adding that many priorities raised at the Strong Health and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee held on Friday corresponded with the priorities identified in the Director's presentation. The Director replied that there were many areas of work which linked in with other parts of the County Council and partners, and it was important to ensure that the appropriate linkages were in place.

Councillor Potts, referring to the 'Be safe' priority, asked whether there were any policies in Durham to reduce knife crime. The Director replied that there were no specific policies in schools regarding knife crime, and although there were Government initiatives for metal detectors to be introduced into schools, the problem in Durham was not the same as it was in inner city areas. The issue would be considered in more detail if it was raised as a concern.

Councillor Wilson asked the Director questions relating to access to the Connexions service, the percentage of people aware of the service provided, and the ethics of tackling teenage pregnancy by providing contraception to young people. The Director replied that a big issue was trying to reach the most hard to reach families. Regarding access to the Connexions service, the Director informed the Committee that all young people aged 13 – 19 years had access to the Connexions service which was provided within schools, as well as through local offices. Referring to the teenage pregnancy issue, the Director informed the Committee that the lead agency on this was the PCT, and a great deal of emphasis was placed on the education of young people.

The Head of Overview and Scrutiny suggested the following work programme for the Committee for 2008/09:

- Academies
- BSF
- Primary Capital Strategy
- Investing in Youth Services/Provision
- Performance Monitoring (quarterly)
- Relevant Systematic Reviews, for example Key Stage 4

Resolved:

- (i) That the presentation be noted
- (ii) That the work programme as suggested by the Head of Overview and Scrutiny be approved.

A7 Overview of Local Area Agreement (LAA), Sustainable Communities Strategy, the Corporate Plan and Performance Framework

The Committee received a presentation from Donna Jefferson, Senior Corporate Policy & Performance Officer which gave an overview of the Local Area Agreement, the Sustainable Communities Strategy, the Corporate Plan and Performance Framework, particularly focussing on lifelong learning (for copy of slides see file of Minutes).

Ms Bailey referred to the role of the County Council as an employer and the opportunity for it to act as a role model for employers to invest in their workforce. Councillor Armstrong agreed, adding that each member of staff should have a Personal Development Plan. Mr Mackie added that it may be possible also for schools to play a role through apprenticeship schemes.

A8 Young People not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny regarding an overview and scrutiny review that looked into young people who were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) (for copy see file of Minutes)

The Head of Overview and Scrutiny informed the Committee that 16-19 year olds who were known to be Not in Education, Employment or Training were a major priority for the Children Trust. The priority led itself well to challenge, as NEET's in County Durham were an issue that needed addressing.

A Joint Overview and Scrutiny Working Group was established, with Members from Durham County Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and representatives from the District Councils overview and scrutiny arrangements to 'scrutinise' NEET's. The purpose of the Working Group was:

- To consider the actions that needed to be taken to ensure that young people in County Durham enjoy a better opportunity to participate in the labour market and ultimately contribute to their economic well-being
- To consider what actions needed to be taken to retain young people in education and/or training post 16
- For the NEET's project to act as a pilot for overview and scrutiny and support the development of scrutiny arrangements for the Children's Trust Executive Board.

The challenge to be addressed included:

- County Durham remains one of the 20 'hotspot' areas nationally
- Significant resources have been deployed to address factors in order to prevent young people becoming NEET at 16, and a wider range of provision was available 16-18 to attract young people into full-time learning
- A detailed Action Plan had been produced, which was monitored on a quarterly basis
- Government have produced a strategy to reduce NEET's and advice to schools on their contribution to reducing NEET's
- Sustained reduction was required to achieve the Nov-Jan 2010 target of 8.8%

These challenges were to be achieved by a range of activities, including the following:

- Preventative work with young people pre-16
- Support for transitions to post 16 learning
- Improved retention of young people on programmes for 16-18 year olds
- Greater opportunities provided by employers to enable young people to continue their training in vocational areas

The recommendations from the Working Group were as outlined from page 48 in the report.

Resolved:

That the recommendations contained within the report to Cabinet on 31 July 2008 be endorsed.