

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At the Annual Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at the County Hall, Durham on Monday 14 May 2007 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:

Members:

Councillors Armstrong, Barker, Bowman, Burlison, C Carr, R Carr, Chaplow, Chapman, Davies, Douthwaite, N Foster, Gray, Henderson, Holroyd, Iveson, Magee, Manton, Marshall, Martin, Mason, Morgan, O'Donnell, Ord, Pendlebury, Priestley, Shuttleworth, Stradling, Tennant, Wade and Walker.

Parent Governor Representatives:

Mrs S McDonnell

Co-opted Members:

Reverend A Letby

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bell, Cordon, Ebbatson, Pye, Southwell, Young and Mrs Tallentire (Co-opted Member).

A1 Election of Chairman

It was agreed that Councillor J Armstrong be elected Chairman.

Councillor J Armstrong in the Chair

Councillor Armstrong thanked Members for their support in electing him as Chairman of the Committee and continued by paying tribute to the work carried out by Councillor Wade the previous Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

A2 Election of Vice-Chairman

It was agreed that Councillor P Stradling be elected as Vice-Chairman.

A3 Election of Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the Sub-Committees

That the following Members be elected as Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the respective Sub-Committees.

Sub-Committee	Chairman	Vice-Chairman
Developing Lifelong Learning	Councillor A Barker	Councillor G Burlison
Strong, Healthy and Safe Communities	Councillor J Davies	Councillor D Bowman
Looking after the Environment	Councillor G Tennant	Councillor N Foster
Building a Strong Economy	Councillor E Mason	Councillor P Graham
Corporate Management Issues	Councillor K Henderson	Councillor B Walker
Health	Councillor J Priestley	Councillor J Chaplow

A4 Current Membership of Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committees

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny identifying the current membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Scrutiny Sub-Committees (for copy of report see file of Minutes).

The Head of Overview and Scrutiny referred Members to a revised list of memberships (for copy see file of Minutes) which had been circulated showing the proposed membership for the various sub-committees for the forthcoming year.

Resolved:

That the revised list of memberships be approved.

A5 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5 April 2007 were confirmed as a correct record signed by the Chairman.

A6 Any Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

A7 Presentation by Mark Lloyd, Chief Executive – Durham County Council Corporate Plan and the Direction of travel

The Committee considered a presentation by Mark Lloyd, Chief Executive concerning the Corporate Plan and the direction of travel (for copy of presentation see file of Minutes).

During the presentation the following issues were highlighted:-

Introduction

The Chief Executive highlighted that 'now' is a period of change presenting significant opportunities for Local Government. He continued by emphasising the need to work with partners, engage Local Communities and provide equality of access and value for money in relation to service provision.

Corporate Plan

He continued by stressing the role of the Corporate Plan in contributing to the County vision by focusing on priorities for improvement and outcomes.

Ambition - County Vision

In relation to ambition and the County vision, Members were informed that work had been undertaken and will continue in relation to Children Centres, Building Schools for the Future, the Transport Strategy, Strategic Housing, Tourism, Netpark and the Durham City Vision all contributing towards the vision for the County.

Achievements

He highlighted only a few of the numerous achievements of the Authority including the Adoption and Fostering Service achieving 'excellence level', level 3 had been achieved by the Authority in relation to the Equalities Standards. In addition he emphasised that the Charter had been achieved for Member Development.

Outcomes

In relation to outcomes he emphasised that for each priority for improvement specific outcomes are identified together with areas of risk with performance monitored on a quarterly basis.

Managing performance and resources

He stressed that this process is about monitoring and driving action forward with a major role for Overview and Scrutiny in this process.

Direction of Travel

He continued that this involves looking at 'Where the Authority is now', reviewing the priorities for improvement, looking forward (a background/forward look), and identifying where the Authority wants to be.

Members were informed that the Authority is still a 'top rated Authority' in the top 32% performing Authorities in the Country.

Review of improvement priorities

In relation to Best Performance Indicators, 28% of the Authorities indicators are in the top quartile however it was emphasised that work is in progress to improve performance and reduce the number of indicators in the red and orange banding (currently 9% of indicators in red banding).

With reference to public satisfaction in relation to public transport, Museums and Libraries it was emphasised that this had fallen however work is being undertaken to improve satisfaction levels in these areas.

From CPA to CAA

In relation to the Corporate Performance Assessment Members were informed that this is now scheduled for October 2007. It was emphasised that the Government is now moving from the CPA process to CAA (Comprehensive Area Assessment), where the Government will carry out an assessment if the Authority is not delivering.

Overview and Scrutiny role

With reference to the role of Overview and Scrutiny he emphasised that in relation to policy development and review there is a need for it to be proactive, challenging and robust with a focus on outcomes. He highlighted that there is a need for Overview and Scrutiny to be resourced effectively in order to undertake such a wide remit.

It was emphasised by the Chief Executive that overview and Scrutiny has a significant role to play by challenging the County Council to do more in relation to the Local Government White Paper. In addition it was suggested that Overview and Scrutiny should look at the level of support required for Members as a result of their increased role in the Local Government White Paper (comment in Peer Review).

Concern was expressed in relation to the ranking of priorities. It was highlighted that this does not tell the true story, too much emphasis is placed on comparisons with other Authorities, there is a need to recognise what Local Authorities are doing on an individual basis.

In addition there is now the issue of Authorities being 'called to account', which will cause Local Authorities to 'play safe' and not place themselves in a position to fail.

The Chief Executive responded that a high indicator is not always negative, however where comparison indicators are useful is when Authorities are investing similar sums of money. In relation to Comprehensive Area Assessments and the issue of Authorities being bold in the projects/subjects that they tackle, it had previously been confirmed by Government that Authorities would not be penalised for being too ambitious.

With reference to engaging with communities it was stressed that the authority must have a bottom up approach which could be achieved by bringing together the Work of the Community Development Partnerships and the Local Area Agreements.

The issue of funding was raised and the need to look at the various partnerships within the region to identify the various funding streams available tackling the same issues, then look at combining the various funding sources.

It was suggested that Overview and Scrutiny could look at the various funding streams available via a 'light touch'.

Resolved:

That the presentation be noted.

A8 Report on the Overview and Scrutiny Working Groups with specific reference to recommendations with funding implications

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny detailing the response to the Leaders request to the Chair and Vice-Chair of Overview and Scrutiny to supply Cabinet with information on Overview and Scrutiny reviews/investigations that may help to inform any future decision on spend from the recent dividend received from the County Council's investment in Newcastle Airport (for copy of report see file of Minutes).

Resolved:

That the report be approved with Overview and Scrutiny members kept updated on future deliberations in respect of possible 'spend' in relation to Overview and Scrutiny projects.