

Cabinet Briefing

24 April 2007



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

Report of Feisal Jassat , Head of Overview and Scrutiny

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To respond to the Leaders request to the Chair and Vice Chair of Overview and Scrutiny (OS) to report to Cabinet, with information on OS reviews/ investigations that may help inform any future decision on spend from the recent dividend received from the County Council's investment in Newcastle Airport.

- 2 In line with this request to:
 - (a) Provide an up-date for Cabinet on earlier OS reviews (2004/05 and 2005/06) with recommendations for spend, namely: -
 - Access to the Coast (2004/05)
 - Access to the Countryside
 - Tourism in County Durham
 - Opportunity Age
 - Educational attainment of Looked after ChildrenPlease see Appendix 1.

 - (b) Inform Cabinet of key findings, key conclusions and recommendations for spend from the working group projects for 2006/2007, namely: -
 - Footways (Pink attachment)
 - Alcohol and Drug misuse by young people (Orange attachment)
 - Improving the health of vulnerable people (Domestic Violence) (Green attachment)
 - Educational attainment at Key Stage 4 (GCSE) (Buff Attachment)
 - Reducing Worklessness (Employability) (Blue Attachment)
 - Investment in our Community Buildings (Purple Attachment)

- 3 To facilitate a debate between Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny on how best to respond to those Overview and Scrutiny recommendations that have financial consequences.

Information

- 4 County Councils improvement priorities set the context for the Overview and Scrutiny working groups.
- 5 A summary of OS reviews (with relevant recommendations) for work between 2004 and 2006 is shown at appendix 1.

Cabinet have approved the recommendations for all of these projects.

Discussions have taken place with service leads (who have a lead responsibility within their service for the areas under discussion) in informing the proposals.

Each proposal has an indicative amount identified.

Any proposal that receives support in principle from Cabinet will be required to submit a detailed business case before a final decision to go ahead is made. This principle applies to all proposals.

Proposals

- **Tourism in County Durham:**
To fund a feasibility study looking at promoting the growth of business tourism in the area by providing world class conference facilities- £50k.
- **Access to the Coast:**
To support the construction of a car park at Lime Kiln Gill - £60k;
To support the work of the Heritage Coast Partnership – £20k.
- **Access to the Countryside:**
To support the production and distribution costs of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan - £10k.

To provide support for the Parish Paths Partnership Scheme (including publicity) - £40k.

To provide contingency funding for an expected public inquiry cost - £50K.
- **Looked after Children:**
To support the continuation of the successful academic mentoring programme for 2007/08 - £20k.

Sub Total: - £250K

NOTE: In order to systematically review progress against all of the recommendations for the projects in Appendix 1, an analysis of “action against recommendation” was initiated in August 2006. Respective service leads have responded positively to the review detailing proposed action within a given timescale. (Information on all reviews is available through the Head of OS).

- 6 A report from each of the working groups (2006/07) is attached and colour coded for ease of access (See above). The same principle of informing proposals and approval applies as in 5 above.

The report presents key findings and key conclusions, with recommendations that look specifically at one –off funding opportunities.

Cabinet has not yet had an opportunity to consider the final reports from OS working groups for 2006/07 but will do so in due course. Work to finalise all the reports is in progress.

Proposals:

- Footways:
To support improvement work - £500K.
- Alcohol and Drug misuse by young people:
To support a lifestyle survey with a focus on young people’s health and social care needs - £50k.
To support social marketing approaches that raise awareness of the dangers of alcohol and drugs misuse - £50k.
- Improving the health of vulnerable people (Domestic Violence):
To support awareness raising, development/training/publicity and research about domestic violence – £50k.
To support the development of specialist perpetrator programmes - £50k.
- Educational attainment at Key Stage 4 (GCSE) –
To support work that helps identify the priorities for Post 16 learning with an associated action plan for how best to deliver on these priorities - £50k.

To support the work of the Copelaw Activity Team (CAT`s), Community Support Team and STEPs project through identified activity in schools delivered directly to children, young people and families in support of the rolling out of the Family Support Strategy; and to identify support for officer time focused on senior leaders in schools to engage them in development of integrated services - £100k to deliver on both;

To support infrastructure costs to establish up-to-date IT facilities with broadband Internet access within all the Impact centres -£30k.

To support a pilot project with a focus on “e” learning which would be to increase capacity for out-of-hours learning using on line teaching - £60k.

- Investment in our Community Buildings:

To support a repairs and maintenance programme for our buildings and contribute to capacity building for the Trustees who manage our buildings - £500k to deliver on both.

Sub Total: £1,440k

Total: - £1,690k

- 7 Chief Officers have been circulated with the information (23 March) and have had an opportunity to discuss this paper (10 April).
- 8 Chairs and Vice Chairs of all the OS working groups have received a copy of all the attached reports and have commented accordingly. Respective OS working groups will be reconvened in early May to sign off the final report before it is presented for approval to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 14th May.
- 9 In order to demonstrate its objectivity and rigour, the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny invited the County Treasurer to a meeting of the OS Coordinating Panel (27 March) –a meeting of Chairs and Vice Chairs of OS sub committees – seeking advice on how the proposals fit with the County Councils strategic financial plan.

The County Treasurer informed the Coordinating panel that the County Council will need to make savings in the order of £20m in 2008/09; and that pressures within the system have been identified. These are reflected in the Medium Term Financial plan (MTFP).

Principles of “Invest to save” should be welcomed. The following brief analysis of some of the OS recommendations can be seen in this context. For example:

- Community Buildings and discussions on the Transfer of Assets will save the County Council money in future years;
- Alcohol and Domestic Violence proposals deal with raised awareness and targeted support. This could alleviate the need for services thereby reducing demand on services (Prevention is better than cure concept);
- Investing in Better key stage 4 will lead to better opportunities long term for young people to engage in more constructive relationships through their lives;
- Footways can be seen as black hole but safe paths may reduce any prosecutions we may face and reduce the insurance costs we have to foot.

10 In highlighting recommendations that have financial consequences it should be acknowledged that the Chair and Vice Chair of Overview and Scrutiny recognise that funding of the OS recommendations (albeit through the one –off opportunity we have in the dividend) represents short-term gain with potentially significant impact on front line services which may have to bear the brunt of savings in future years with an ongoing challenge to keep the precept at the lowest level possible. That said, they accept that these pressures exist irrespective of opportunities to support service improvements as and when the opportunities arise, in this instance through the dividend.

11 The Chair of OS is aware too, that investments in some of the areas OS have identified have already received some growth through the budget process for 07/08. For example: -

- £378k to be allocated to Members allowance for environmental schemes for 2007/08 only;
- A Community Buildings Transition fund of £250k for 2007 /08 only;

Conclusion

Until now, financial consequences for implementing OS recommendations have never been articulated. It has been assumed that OS recommendations would be implemented from within existing service budgets.

The request from the Leader, for OS to report to Cabinet, has raised an important issue about how OS recommendations that identify financial consequences, can be effectively supported, as they relate to the County Councils corporate aims and service improvement priorities.

It is essential that OS should in future aim to articulate the financial consequences of its recommendations so that Cabinet can consider the impact of the recommendations within the context of the County Councils strategic financial plan.

Finally

Cabinet are asked to comment on the recommendation from the OS Coordinating panel (27 March) in its (Cabinet) deliberations about the issues raised in this report.

The OS Coordinating panel concluded:

- That the Overview and Scrutiny Coordinating Panel agree, within the context of available resources, to support the proposals informed by OS recommendations, with indicative amount of spend identified, pending a more detailed business case for each area proposed.
- That the Overview and Scrutiny Coordinating panel report to Cabinet on the outcome of progress in line with the Councils Corporate aims and priorities and its strategic financial plan, with recommendations that identify priorities for investment, based on work to date.
- That the Overview and Scrutiny Coordinating panel through the Chair of the OS report back to an Overview and Scrutiny committee (OSC) (14 May) on the outcome of discussions with Cabinet Briefing.

Recommendation

That Cabinet note the report and consider the issues raised within.

That Cabinet, in discussions on the Medium Term Financial Plan, reflect on the contribution from Overview and Scrutiny in shaping and informing investment priorities informed by recommendations from its work.

That based on the request from the Leader inviting OS to report to Cabinet, that Cabinet consider the information from OS reviews in its deliberations on how best to spend any available resource.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance

Staffing

Equality and diversity

Accommodation

Crime and disorder

Sustainability

Human rights

Localities and Rurality

Young people

Consultation

Health