

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a Special Meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held at the Comeleon Centre, Tanfield on **Monday 11 February 2008** at **10.00 a.m.**

Present:

Councillor J Armstrong in the Chair

Members:

Councillors Barker, Bowman, Burlison, C Carr, R Carr, Chaplow, Coates, Davies, Holroyd, Ord, Pye, Simmons, Stradling, and Walker.

Faith Communities Representative

M Sands

Co-opted Members:

Mr D Bates

Parent Governor Representatives:

Mrs A Tallentire

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bell, Henderson, Robinson, Southwell, and Williams, and Mr B Birch, Rev N Chittenden, and Mrs M Robinson.

A1 Minutes

The Minutes of the meetings held on 12 November 2007 and 28 January 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

A2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

A3 Overview and Scrutiny Systematic Review of Recommendations

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny on the progress that had been made to date in relation to the recommendations of the various Overview and Scrutiny projects undertaken during 2006/07. The Working Groups looked at the following County Council Service Improvement priorities namely:

- Alcohol and Drug Misuse amongst young people;
- Improving the health of vulnerable people with a focus on Domestic Violence;
- Footways in Better Condition;
- Better Key Stage 4 Results;
- Investing in our Community Buildings;
- Reducing the level of Worklessness.

For the purpose of monitoring and recording the progress which has been made in relation to the recommendations a template had been produced for each of the above Working Group reports (for copy of templates see file of Minutes).

In relation to the report on Alcohol and Drug Misuse amongst young people, Feisal Jassat advised that the reports prepared by the Working Group had assisted partners and organisations to be more focussed. Funding has been secured for an alcohol commissioner post, more funds are still required however there are constraints with national funding. It was pointed out that DAAT continues to work with the PCT, and the LAA will be an important driver.

In relation to the Domestic Violence report, Angela Sheen, Senior Community Safety Officer, advised that in the last 6 months there had been some tremendous strides in the county to move this forward. One being the development of the Executive Group which was at Chief Officer level, this meant that Domestic Violence was linked into every strategic body in the county. Changes had been made to her post in that she was now based in adult and commissioning services, and the main focus of her work is now domestic violence. A number of staff are to be appointed to the Adult Safeguarding Board. The Child Protection procedures have been re-written, and an action plan is to go to all agencies to seek their contribution. She was pleased to report of the key achievement being that as it will now feature in the new LAA it will be a national indicator.

In response to a question from Councillor Bowman whether the Domestic Violence Policy had been brought to the attention of its own staff, Angela replied that it was within the HR work stream, and they have to ensure that the legal requirements are fulfilled. In relation to another recommendation for their to be member involvement in addition to the cabinet portfolio holder as domestic violence champions they were waiting for partner members of the County Durham Domestic Abuse Forum Executive Group to respond to this proposal.

Councillor Burlison enquired about the resources required to fund hidden abuse, and pointed out that they may need further input of resources to create safe places for children to share information.

In response to a question Angela advised that there are protocols in place to exchange information between organisations however some is restricted through the Human Rights Act.

Footways in Better Condition

Geoff Race, Section Manager, Highway Management advised that the additional one off funding of £500k would be targeted on footpaths in category 1 and 2, and that following this work those footpaths should be brought back into the 3rd quartile of the national indicators. The additional £500k on category 3 and 4 footways would make a big difference to those footpaths in local communities.

In relation to identifying funding to promote jointly with District/ Borough Council partners for additional verge hardening schemes, northern area schemes are progressing at various stages, however southern area is to raise the issue again at their next District Council Liaison meetings.

Councillor Ord welcomed the funds received however this was a very small amount compared to what was required to put footpaths right. He advised that in his area he had the highest amount of dropped kerbs and this was causing a danger as vehicles tend to park on the dropped kerb making it dangerous for pedestrians to cross the road. He questioned what had happened to the savings made from insurance premiums.

Geoff Race pointed out that 67 schemes overall had been assisted by this money so it was welcomed. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had requested that any insurance premiums be put back into the budget, and he advised that the number of claims had reduced dramatically.

Councillor Coates advised of his disappointment that no progress being made on 11.4 of the report in relation to community highways speed scheme.

Councillor C Carr believed that part of problems on housing estate roads were due to the roads being too narrow to have lay-bys. He suggested that this be looked at by the new authority, and that new housing estates have more space to park cars and that grass verges should not replace footpaths.

Better Key Stage 4 Results

Julie Rimmer, the 6th Form Co-ordinator highlighted issues from the report. She pointed out that in 2007 the results for 5 A-C's was 60.2%, and this was the best ever results in Durham. The Authority was placed 40th out of 150 Local Authorities. The Authority has made huge strides in improving key Stage 4 results.

The BETT Team have continued to support, and now there is strong emphasis on english and maths. They have had 1500 Year 11 pupils take English GCSE early and it looks like have 65-67% gained A-C grades.

It was disappointing that the A level results were not improving in line with those in Key Stage 4. She pointed out that they had submitted a request for funding of £40k to improve results however this had not yet been received.

She reminded the Committee that Durham was a beacon authority for this, and was receiving national recognition for the work done. Improvements have been made through value added by those young people at the lower end of the achievement scale. It was disappointing that the impact service had not yet received funding to enhance the e-learning facilities.

Councillor Burlison asked for more support for vulnerable young people, and suggested that there be a virtual head teacher to support all vulnerable young people, and then they could look at and monitor the progress. Julie Rimmer advised that there are some initiatives for Looked After Children through mentoring programmes, and that the 14-19 team work part time with vulnerable groups, in that they work with them on programmes of study to help them to achieve.

In response to a question from Councillor Mason, Julie pointed out that the results were an average of the schools in the county as a whole. She pointed out that there are differences between schools, but all schools were doing the best they could so there was now nowhere of real concern.

Investing in our Community Buildings

Craig Morgan, Community Development Manager advised that in terms of asset transfer the process is beginning and they have been successful in receiving Development Trust Association funding. There is whole range of issues with the transfer, and they have made a strong commitment not to transfer liabilities to communities. The Community Buildings Consortia have been invited to take the lead role in facilitating discussions with stakeholders but it is in a state of flux and they need to clarify the future direction.

Dave Emmerson, Education in the Community Manager advised that it would be difficult to undertake a business case as there were more issues than those of the County Council to consider. There are issues relating to the development of the criteria in terms of the current programme, and that he is working with Bill Pike on achieving a generic SLA.

In response to a question from Councillor R Carr about rents for these buildings and whether they have peppercorn rent, it was pointed out that looking at all buildings was to be a work stream of the implementation executive and therefore no costs had been assigned to them yet.

Worklessness

John Banks, Rural Officer, Economic Development and Regeneration reported that funding from CDEP Economic Inclusion Activity 2008-13 had been secured. There

had been a substantial amount of work undertaken on promoting 'Work Able solution' locally. They have been involved in drawing up contracts for the BSF programme and successful in that those contractors would have to draw employment from the local labour market. In relation to progress with the Neet's work this has been commissioned with Durham Education Business Partnership and a strategy document had been prepared.

In response to a comment from Councillor Barker suggesting that the County Council is the main driver for Neet's, John advised how the LAA could play into this. John pointed out that One North East is considering the future regional approach to this issue through the implementation of the Regional Employability Framework.

Resolved:-

The Committee noted the progress made to date in relation to the recommendations resulting from the six Overview and Scrutiny projects undertaken during 2006/07.

A4 Presentation on DurhamNet

Alan Hodgson, The Chief Executive of DurhamNet gave a presentation to the Committee on DurhamNet (for copy of slides of presentation see file of Minutes).

His presentation included the background to DurhamNet, how it was established, their customers, funding received, expansion in neighbouring local authority areas, the budget and profits, the BSF programme and the customers it will bring, the Aspirations Begin at Home project, and the future for DurhamNet.

He explained that the BSF programme would increase the number of customers of DurhamNet, currently there are 6,000, however the first wave of BSF will bring a further 9,000 and eventually through BSF there will be 46,000 pupils. He pointed out that 10% of the budget in BSF was on new technology, they were to have new modern schools that used sophisticated technology, and gave the example that each pupil would have their own solid state pc. The Aspirations Begin at Home project in Stanley was about family learning and had been a success.

He advised that they have to be careful who they trade with as they are mainly a public sector provider. He advised that they were looking to develop a business model for wimax and looking to One North East for funding.

He was unsure what steer the new authority would have for DurhamNet, if it was to be changed to trade with the private sector also, they would be able to do this through a company set up by Service Direct, an arms length company of the County Council.

He pointed out that there are some problems with licensing issues, and they would like more access to the spectrum. They had asked for a meeting with Mp's to discuss this.

He advised that most large companies spend 4-6% of its turnover on technology but county council spends only 1% therefore more investment would be required.

The Committee welcomed the presentation and a tour of the Tanfield Data Centre. It was suggested that a similar presentation be given to members of the Committee later in the year once the new authority was in operation.