

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held at County Hall, Durham on **Monday 21 April 2008** at **10.00 a.m.**

Present:

Councillor J Armstrong in the Chair

Members:

Councillors Barker, Chapman, Davies, Douthwaite, Foster E, Foster NC, Gray, Henderson, Magee, Martin, Mason, Pye, Simmons, Southwell, Stradling, Walker and Williams

Co-opted Members:

D Bates, B Birch, D Easton, M English, K Ibbotson, J Lee, M Sands and B Scott

A1 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 February 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 'Light Touch' Reviews

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny which presented the final reports from the Light Touch Review Groups and provided the opportunity for Overview and Scrutiny to examine specific issues relevant to the Council and its partners (for copy see file of Minutes)

The Reviews focussed on the following areas:

- Bullying
- Gypsies and Travellers
- Pre-School Provision
- Regional Spatial Strategy
- Skills Development
- Stress in the Workplace

The Head of Overview and Scrutiny informed the Committee that the Light Touch Reviews would be shared with the New Durham County Council in the new municipal year. In addition, the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme in the New Durham County Council would reflect issues raised and build into the process systematic review mechanisms in order to measure progress in the areas under review.

Councillor Martin referred to the bar charts in the appendices to the Stress in the Workplace report which made little sense as the data presented was not correctly labelled. The Chairman replied that the data labels on the bar charts would be corrected.

Referring to the Network Maintenance Light Touch Review, the Head of Overview and Scrutiny informed the Committee that a presentation had been made to the Looking After the Environment Scrutiny Sub-Committee on 17 March 2008, following which it was decided that the issue should be suggested as a potential Overview and Scrutiny project for the New Durham County Council.

Resolved:

- (i) that the Committee extend its thanks to the Members of the Working Groups and officers from the respective service areas who contributed and supported the process
- (ii) that the findings from each of the Light Touch Review Working Group Reports be approved with a view to sharing them with the New Durham County Council post May 2008
- (iii) that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the New Durham County Council receives information as part of a six-monthly review to determine progress in the project areas.

A4 Report of Working Groups looking into Transport and NEET's

The Head of Overview and Scrutiny provided the Committee with a verbal update on the work undertaken by the Working Groups looking into Transport and NEET's.

The Head of Overview and Scrutiny informed the Committee that a partnership approach for both subjects had been adopted to examine what were complex areas. Referring to Transport, a partnership of the County Council and District Councils had

considered the challenges faced by both public and private sector providers. A report on transport would be presented to the new County Council post 23 May.

Referring to NEET's (Not in Education, Employment or Training), the Head of Overview and Scrutiny informed the Committee that consideration had been given to the challenges and issues to 14-19 year olds. A report from the NEET's Group would be presented through the New Durham County Council's Scrutiny arrangements.

A5 Year End Report

The Committee received a presentation on the Scrutiny Year End Report (for copy of slides see file of Minutes)

The presentation covered the following areas:

- Cross cutting Working Groups
- Light Touch Reviews
- Budget
- Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny
- Evaluation of Overview and Scrutiny in County Durham
- Regional Scrutiny
- The Future of Scrutiny

A copy of the end of year report was circulated to Members. The Chairman referred to the Comprehensive Performance Assessment quote on page 2 of the report, which said that "...the Council's Scrutiny arrangements function well and are effective. The Scrutiny function is open, displays appropriate challenge and Scrutiny committees include a wide range of partners....", and thanked the Vice-Chairman of Scrutiny and the co-opted Members for their work throughout the year.

Councillor Davies referred to the impartiality shown by the Chairman throughout the year and thanked both the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Scrutiny for their work.

The Chairman of the Committee was of the opinion that the following item of business was of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration because of the need to keep Members informed of the proposed Interim Constitution of the New Durham County Council

A6 Interim Constitution

The Committee noted a report of the Acting Director of Corporate Services which was to be considered by Cabinet on 25 April 2008 regarding proposed revisions to the County Council's existing Constitution which would serve in the interim for the County Council in its transitional phase to becoming a Unitary Authority (for copy see file of Minutes)

Councillor Martin informed the Committee that on 1 May 2008 the New Durham County Council would become a transitional authority and asked why there was no mention in the interim constitution of transitional scrutiny. The Head of Overview and Scrutiny replied that there was currently a Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee which considered LGR, and although this would be disbanded post 1 May, the terms of reference of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee could include the overview of LGR.

Mr Bates asked whether any discussion had taken place regarding the devolvement of powers to local town and parish councils. The Head of Overview and Scrutiny replied that this was part of one of the transitional workstreams and work was ongoing.

Resolved:

That the report be noted, and that Cabinet be informed the terms of reference of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee should include the overview of LGR.