

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP- LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT REVIEW

At a Meeting of The Overview and Scrutiny Working Group to look at the Local Area Agreement Review was held at County Hall, Durham on Tuesday 7 October 2008 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:

Councillor J Armstrong in the Chair

Members:

Councillors Blakey, Burn, N Harrison, Hugill, D Myers, M Plews, Tennant, AH Turner, Allen Turner and M Wilkes.

Co-Opted Members:

Ms E English, Ms M Fish, Mrs B Howarth, Mrs M Sands and Mrs P Spurrell.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Brookes, Temple, Wilkinson, and Zair.

1 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2 Local Area Agreement- Review

The Working Group considered a report and received a presentation from the Head of Policy and Improvement regarding the approach to the Local Area Agreement (LAA) Review (for copy of report and slides of presentation see file of Notes).

The Working Group was advised that the Government does not expect many of the LAA targets to be renegotiated during the three year lifetime of the LAA unless there are compelling reasons for this. County Durham has the maximum number of 35

designated indicators, and it was pointed out that should partners wish to introduce a new indicator one would need to be removed.

Negotiations to amend the LAA would need to be concluded by 16 January 2009 in order to reach agreement by the start of the new financial year. However any change made by this Authority would need to be identified by the end of November in order for these to be submitted into the County Council's budget process.

The Head of Overview and Scrutiny advised that Overview and Scrutiny had a duty to scrutinise the LAA, and was working closely with the Head of Corporate Policy to ascertain the best way in which this role could be undertaken. The Chairman and Head of Overview and Scrutiny were to attend a meeting of the County Durham Partnership on 20 October to advise of the work of Overview and Scrutiny and how they would undertake their monitoring role. In addition an event is to be held on 31 October where Overview and Scrutiny can provide their partners with a better understanding of their role.

The Working Group considered the list of 35 LAA Indicators (for copy see file of Notes) and noted that there were emerging issues in relation to:-

- Demographic / geographic issues
- Issues for continued monitoring:
 - Child poverty
 - Breast Feeding
 - Early Years – Readiness for school
- New issues to be monitored:
 - End of life care
 - Counter terrorism
 - Children with complex needs

Upon consideration of the indicators the following comments were made:-

Economic Wellbeing- there was concern at the effect that the current economic climate would have on the indicators within the economic wellbeing theme, and whether the targets would be realistic. It was felt that the indicators should remain however they may like to look at setting a realistic target in-line with the economic situation.

The Group stressed the importance of alleviating homelessness in the county. Although major improvement had been made in increasing the number of additional homes it was argued that in order to keep up the momentum it should be kept as an indicator. It was pointed out that although the indicator did not specifically refer to the homeless, this was contained in the detail to the indicator, and the Delivery and Improvement Group would not lose sight of this.

The emerging issues in relation to Child Poverty, Breast Feeding, and Early Years – Readiness for school were issues for Sure Start although as not every part of the county has Sure Start, it was felt that these would be taken on board by the Children's Boards.

There was discussion on the highway maintenance issue, and that this should be addressed. Although a strong signal had been sent to the Executive that scrutiny would like the state of the highways to be made a priority, they would also be asking that this be addressed through the budget process. Along with an improvement in the state of the highways and footpaths, the number of accidents and insurance claims against the Authority would fall. It was felt that this could be made a local indicator although it was accepted that Partners would have to agree to this. There was sufficient evidence to show this on an outcome basis. Access, accessibility, social inclusion, rurality, RTA`s, litigation/personal injury claims were given as some examples of outcomes. As a target was required to be attached to it would need to be appropriately resourced and therefore must be part of the budget process.

The Working Group agreed with the LAA Priority Indicators however made the following comments:-

1. It is suggested that negotiations with Government Office North East (GONE) must reflect the present Economic downturn and the likely impact on all LAA priority indicators and in particular the Economy well-being priority indicators. GONE need to be reminded that delivery on these will be even more challenging. Furthermore, discussions with GONE may yield a list that are more realistic and achievable within the present economic climate.
2. That a political aspiration for the area would be to reflect Highway Network Maintenance as a local LAA priority indicator. Discussion focussed on the need for evidence and clear outcomes. Access, accessibility, social inclusion, rurality, RTA`s, litigation/personal injury claims were given as some examples of outcomes. In addition this be looked at as part of the budget process.
3. The Blueprint presents the Councils political vision and aspirations for the area.
4. The list of emerging priorities for example Child poverty, end of life care, members agreed that these should be closely monitored and that the Overview and Scrutiny have a significant role to play as part of the monitoring process. This role is being developed with LAA partners.
5. A copy of the slides of the presentation and list of LAA Priority Indicators be sent for the information of every Member of Overview and Scrutiny.