

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee** held at County Hall, Durham on **Tuesday 6 January 2009** at **10.00 a.m.**

Present:

Councillor J Armstrong in the Chair

Members

Councillors Alderson, Arthur, Avery, Burnip, Boyes, Blakey, Chaplow, Hopgood, D Maddison, N Martin, J Moran, D Myers, B Ord, R Ord, C Potts, Stoker, Stradling, Tennant, K Thompson, Wilkes, and Wilkinson.

Other Members:-

Councillors Hancock, and Simmons.

Faith Community Representatives

Rev Keith Phipps, and Mrs M Sands.

Co-opted Members:

Ms M Fish, and Councillor B Howarth.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Campbell, Iveson, and Southwell, and Mrs L Bailey and Mr B Birch.

A1 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

A2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

A3 Items from Co-opted Members

There were no items from Co-opted Members.

A4 Local Safeguarding Arrangements

Gail Hopper, Head of Safeguarding and Specialist Services gave a presentation to the Committee on the Local Safeguarding Arrangements (for copy of presentation see file of Minutes).

Her presentation included the background to current arrangements, responsibility for safeguarding, the role of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board, priorities for 2008/09, performance indicators, impact of Baby P Case in Durham, governance, and opportunities.

The Chairman suggested that as every member of the Authority was a corporate parent it may be opportune for this presentation to be given to the full Council. Gail Hopper would discuss this with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder.

In response to questions Gail Hopper advised that removing a child from the family home was a not a decision made by a social worker in isolation, and each case is assessed individually. Usually a family will co-operate and release a child however if they need to go to court this can be done within 24 hours. Following the Baby P case it was pointed out that some social workers had too large a workload. Gail pointed out that in Durham a social workers workload is agreed with their manager and these vary depending on the complexity of a case. There are referrals through Sure Start, nurseries, GP's, neighbours, and families.

Gail advised that there was a gap in scrutinising the work of the links with broader governance, and that DCfS were to address this however there is no definite date when the new guidance would come into operation. It was suggested that until new guidance comes into operation this could be part of the remit of the new Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee post LGR.

A5 Area Action Partnerships

The Committee received a presentation from Gordon Elliott, Head of Partnerships and Community Development, and Councillor Brian Stephens, Portfolio Holder for Local Partnerships with an update on Area Action Partnerships.

Gordon Elliott advised that the consultation period had concluded the previous day and therefore there were still some responses yet for him to consider thus he did not have the complete picture in which he could advise the Committee.

He advised that he was to report to the Cabinet on 22 January 2009 with a recommendation on the way forward in developing the Area Action Partnerships which would take into account the results from the consultation. He pointed out that the Authoity needs to set some parameters on the way they will operate however

over time they would develop and therefore nothing would be set in stone. He stressed the importance in giving the Partnerships the power to take action.

The consultation document had four areas that required a response which included geographical areas, functions, governance arrangements, and funding. Gordon pointed out that the vast majority of areas had now given a steer on the geographical areas. There had been very little response on the functions, however structured functions would be on engagement, empowerment, local action, and performance review. In relation to the Governance Arrangements there was general agreement that there was to be large forum where the public could be involved and a Board. The Forum would be the mechanism in which they could engage with the public. Funding is yet to be finalised.

It was expected that the Area Action Partnerships would be in operation in April, however there was much work still to be undertaken, including appointing the co-ordinators, accommodation, area profile, performance measures, how to enthuse the public to attend, protocols for meetings, and training for those people who serve on the Boards. They would need to give publicity to this in order to make the public aware of the mechanisms in which they can get involved.

Councillor Hopgood referred to the work undertaken by Durham City Council on community development and suggested that this could be shared with the Authority in order to prevent duplicating work. Councillor Burnip pointed out that there had been a pathfinder in the Easington area and he suggested that the Authority look at this. Councillor Stephens advised that they were looking at best practice and welcomed receiving this information.

Councillor Burnip enquired how they would engage with the public and would this be through the Parish Councils. Councillor Stephens advised that the Partnerships would determine the role of the Parish Councils. He pointed out that they will be talking to the Parish Councils about their role.

Councillor Boyes pointed out that in Easington there would be one Partnership for the whole area, and as there would be only 8 elected representatives on the Board, as there were 12 divisions 5 councillors would not have a seat on the Board. Councillor Stephens advised that this point had been made in the consultation. He pointed out that as the Forum was open to members of the public, councillors would be able to attend. He pointed out that most decisions are made through consensus and therefore the public could be involved in taking most decisions.

Councillor Martin pointed out that they should focus on community development, then good community engagement would follow.

In response to a question from Councillor Blakey about the co-ordinators posts, Gordon Elliott advised that the posts should be advertised shortly. Members felt that it was very important to get the right people into those jobs, as they would be the connection between the public and the Authority.

In response to a question from Councillor Moran about the members initiative fund, Councillor Stephens advised that the decisions to be made on how this was to be

spent were with the individual member. However it may be that they wished to use the funds or part of the funds on a project identified by the Partnership.

The Chairman in response to a question from Councillor Howarth advised that the report that Cabinet would consider would be placed on the website, and therefore Parish Councils, if they so wished, would be able to view it.

Resolved:-

That a Special Meeting of the Committee be held prior to the Cabinet meeting, in order to consider the report that is going to Cabinet about the Partnerships. The Committee would then be able to make any comments to Cabinet.

A6 Area Based Overview and Scrutiny

The Committee received a discussion paper from the Head of Overview and Scrutiny that set out proposals for area based arrangements for Overview and Scrutiny (for copy see file of Minutes).

Members were asked to consider the document which would be discussed at a future meeting.

Councillor Hopgood advised of her concerns that the local member would not be involved in the area based overview and scrutiny task and finish process, and suggested that the local member could declare an interest if there were any issues of conflict.

A7 Local Petitions

The Committee received a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny that provided an update in relation to issues of local petitions received by the local authority (for copy of report see file of Minutes).

A8 Scrutiny Event

The Committee received a report of the Head of Overview and Scrutiny relating to the Scrutiny Event on 31 October on 'Partners, People, and Place Shaping' (for copy of report see file of Minutes).

The Chairman agreed that due to the urgency of the next item it could be considered.

A9 Winter Salting

The Chairman informed the Committee of a letter he had received from Councillor Martin. He referred to the recent cold weather and that the streets around city

centres and schools had not been gritted in many parts, and that as the Authority had no policy on this, Overview and Scrutiny Committee should take this forward.

Councillor Martin suggested that the Authority should aim to have a policy in place for the forthcoming winter.

Resolved:-

That the Chairman of the Environment Scrutiny Committee ask his Committee to consider this issues as part of its work programme for next year, and to ask Cabinet that it put in place a policy.

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Signed by the Chairman of the Meeting held on 9 February 2009