

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

At a Meeting of **Overview and Scrutiny Management Board** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Friday 11 October 2013 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor J Armstrong in the Chair

Members of the Committee:

Councillors B Alderson, A Batey, R Bell, J Blakey, A Bonner, D Boyes, J Chaplow, B Graham, D Hall, K Henig, A Hopgood, P Lawton, J Lethbridge, H Liddle, C Potts, A Shield, M Simmons, J Turnbull and S Wilson

Faith Community Representative:

Revd K Phipps

Co-opted Members:

Mr D Kinch

The Chairman announced that Mr A J Cooke, Co-opted Member was in hospital, and a message of best wishes be sent to him and his family on behalf of the Management Board.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Crute, T Nearney, P Stradling and Mr A J Cooke.

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute Members in attendance.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 13 September 2013 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

In relation to item 6, regarding an alternative way of reporting performance figures for housing providers, the Head of Planning and Performance confirmed that the data would be treated as a tracker until the year end.

The Head of Planning and Performance confirmed that it was not possible to separate out individual and team appraisals data, and although the Children and Young Peoples

suicide figures could be separated out this could not be reported due to small numbers which lead to potential data protection issues.

The other two issues in the minutes in item 6, would be reported at the next meeting.

In relation to item 7, regarding a helpline being provided for people affected by the Welfare Reform, the Head of Policy and Communication had advised that measures are already in place and contact details are published on the Councils website.

In relation to arrears information for retired people, the Head of Planning and Performance advised that the comment would be taken into account.

The Head of Planning and Performance confirmed that Councillor Hopgood's concerns as detailed in minute 9, regarding the Durham City Masterplan had been relayed to the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Economic Development.

4 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

5 **Any items from Co-opted members or interested parties**

There were no items from Co-opted members or interested parties.

6 **Implications for Durham County Council of the Government's Policy Programme**

The Board considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive that provided an update on the implications of the Coalition Government's policy programme, major policy developments and announcements and provided an analysis of the implications for the Council and County Durham (for copy see file of minutes).

The Assistant Chief Executive highlighted the most significant announcements since the last report to Members which relate to the following:

- Spending Review
- Local Government Finance Settlement Consultation
- Investing in Britain's Future
- The Future of High Streets
- Transport Funding
- Regional Growth Fund
- European Funding
- NHS Reform
- Care and Support Reform
- Integration of Health and Social Care
- Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill
- Children and Families Bill
- National Curriculum Review

- Primary Education Reform
- Education Qualifications Reform
- WRAP Funding Review
- Public Services Reform
- Transparency
- Local Government Pensions Reform
- Employment Tribunals and Judicial Review

Councillor S Wilson referred to the capping of legal aid and enquired if any further detail was available on the impact this would have. The Assistant Chief Executive replied that the impact had been considered and detailed in a previous report which she would provide him with a copy.

Councillor R Bell commented on the Local Government finance settlement consultation and the top slicing of Local Authorities Revenue Support Grants which was risking driving deeper cuts than necessary. The Assistant Chief Executive advised that there was a general passing of risks to local authorities and gave examples of council tax benefit and business rate retention. The Chairman expressed concern regarding the pressure officers are under to second guess the risks associated with the settlement.

In response to Councillor Shield's comments regarding the Local Council Tax Support Scheme and the process for appeals against decisions to refuse payments, the Assistant Chief Executive referred to the detailed Welfare Reform report that was considered by Cabinet on 11 September 2013 where the recommendation to Council would be to extend the current scheme for a further year for 2014/15.

Resolved:

That the information contained in the report and the actions taken to anticipate and respond to the government's reforms be noted.

7 County Durham Partnership Update

The Board considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive that provided an update on issues being addressed by the County Durham Partnership (CDP) including summaries from the Board, the five Thematic Partnerships and all Area Action Partnerships (AAPs). The report also includes updates on other key initiatives being carried out in partnership across the County (for copy see file of minutes).

In response to Councillor A Hopgood expressing her disappointment regarding AAP coverage in the report, the Assistant Chief Executive would look into this as the intention was for all 14 to be included. Councillor Hopgood commented on the success of Credit Unions adding she was actively involved in promotion and encouraging young people to start saving by using their pocket money to set up accounts. The Assistant Chief Executive added that a number of AAPs are very active in promoting Credit Unions and the report gives an illustration of what is happening but it is not exhaustive.

In relation to Participatory Budgeting, Councillors Shield and Alderson both felt that due to the rural nature of their areas, they had difficulty competing against the bigger areas for funding in their AAP. Councillor Shield advised that it was felt that due to ward partnerships being extended and through road shows and funding packages, interest had been stimulated.

The Assistant Chief Executive informed the Board that the first trial for the Budget Consultation public events would be held at Burnhope, which would then be rolled out to the rest of the AAPs. The Chairman suggested that the events be analysed and the findings be reported back to a future meeting.

Members discussed their experiences with the AAPs, the majority of Members felt that they were kept well informed. Councillor Blakey added that she found the partnership meetings very informative and felt it was useful to know what was happening in other areas of the County, however a couple felt that more was being done in some areas than others. Co-ordinators meet regularly to share best practice but it was felt that communication could be improved. The Assistant Chief Executive advised that consideration would be given as to how communication channels could be improved.

Resolved:

That the information contained in the report be noted.

8 Support for Children and Young People with Mental Health Issues

The Board considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive which looked at the support for children and young people with mental health issues. A presentation was given by the Overview and Scrutiny Officer (for copy of report and slides, see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the information contained in the report and presentation be noted.

9 Notice of Key Decisions

The Board considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which provided a list of key decisions which were scheduled to be considered by the Executive (for copy see file of minutes).

The Committee Services Manager reported that there had been a number of Regeneration and Economic Development decisions moved to a later date due to the volume of key decisions being made in October, and that the Camera Enforcement of Parking and Bus Lane report had been deferred for further consideration due to new legislation.

Resolved:

That the information contained in the report be noted.

10 Information update from the Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees

The Board considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive which provided an update of overview and scrutiny activity between July and October 2013 (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the information contained in the report be noted.

The Chairman agreed that in order to keep members informed, the next item of business could be reported.

11 Overview and Scrutiny Presentations

Councillor Hopgood raised the issue of curtailing the length of presentations at Overview and Scrutiny meetings as more business is being discussed at Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The Chairman replied that he would be reluctant to curtail presentations. Officers have different styles of presenting and the amount of information to get across may dictate the time taken.

Councillor Boyes commented that as long as the presenting officer is aware that they have a certain amount of time for the presentation followed by questions, it works very well.

Councillor R Bell pointed out that he finds it useful to be guided through the report as long as focus is given to the key points.

The Chairman agreed to look into ways of improving the way information is presented.