

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 **Thursday 31 July 2014 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor J Armstrong in the Chair

Members of the Committee:

Councillors P Stradling, J Blakey, A Bonner, D Hall, K Henig, A Hopgood, P Lawton, J Lethbridge, H Liddle, C Potts, M Simmons, W Stelling, R Todd, J Turnbull, S Wilson, C Hampson (substitute for T Nearney) and P Oliver (substitute for A Shield)

Also Present:

Councillors O Johnson, A Laing, M Nicholls, M Wilkes and M Williams

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B Alderson, A Batey, B Graham, T Nearney, A Shield and Mr R Patel.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor C Hampson substitute for Councillor T Nearney and Councillor P Oliver substitute for Councillor A Shield.

3 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Review of Children's Centres in County Durham - Request for call in

The Board considered a request for call-in, in accordance with Section 17 (d) (ii) of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

The following documents were considered:- (for copy see file of minutes)

- (i) Statement of Request from Councillors Alderson, R Bell, Hicks, Hopgood and Simmons.
- (ii) Extract of Executive Decision of 16 July 2014 together with the report of Corporate Director, Children and Adults Services.

- (iii) Constitution and Extracts for reference
 - (a) Article 12 – Decision Making
 - (b) Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 17 – call in.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services explained the call-in procedure and the format of the meeting.

The Chairman clarified that only members of Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and members who signed the call-in notice could speak on the matter.

Councillor Hopgood spoke on behalf of those members who had signed the call-in notice and highlighted the reasons why they felt the consultation was flawed:-

- All stakeholders were not going to be consulted, in particular neighbouring authorities which may be carrying out similar reviews and could work with Durham County Council to provide cross-authority savings. Councillor Hopgood pointed out that the idea of a Combined Authority was to work together yet neighbouring authorities were not going to be consulted.
- The basis for the consultation does not take into account the geographically-based needs of the County. Councillor Hopgood fully supported the review however questioned the 15 clusters chosen to retain, in particular the reason for closing centres that had been identified in OFSTED inspections as good, and retaining one that was classified as requiring improvement.
- All Council members had not been treated equally, as required under the Constitution. Councillor Simmons expressed concern that as a group, they had only found out about the review when Cabinet papers were published on the 8 July 2014, and she understood other Council members from a different political group were informed 3 weeks previously.

Councillor Johnson, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People's Services advised that the consultation process was open and transparent with an aim to provide the best outcome for all children in County Durham.

The Corporate Director, Children and Adults Services provided the background to the Review of Children's Centres and advised that the new community delivery model proposed would provide the council with greater flexibility to deliver closer to where families live and concentrate resources where deprivation levels and needs were highest whilst achieving the necessary savings.

The Corporate Director, Children and Adults Services responded to points raised:-

- Consultation with neighbouring authorities was not considered necessary. 8 neighbouring authorities had already reviewed and reduced their service, and as far as she was aware, without consulting Durham. Any Ofsted inspection on Durham, would focus on Durham entirely, and therefore resources would be directed in that area, rather than on joint services with other authorities. Focus remains at local level and every effort would be made to ensure stakeholders representation is comprehensive.

- The methodology used when proposing which centres were to be retained had to be clear and a range of factors were taken into account. The consultation exercise would highlight any aspects that may have been missed or require further consideration.
- The Corporate Director, Children and Adults Service apologised on behalf of the service as all members should have received the information at the same time and gave her assurance that it would not happen again.

Councillor Hopgood in questioning the areas where centres were proposed to be retained, gave an example of the Bishop Auckland cluster and Woodhouse Close that had the highest proportion of children in the top 30% Super Output Areas (SOAs). She suggested that higher clawback figures would be incurred in respect of funding by retaining St Helens Auckland rather than Woodhouse Close. She requested scrutiny look at locations and clawback opportunities.

Councillor Stelling referred to clawback and asked if data would be provided in order to be able to review other aspects. In response the Head of Planning and Service Strategy confirmed this information would be available to members.

Councillor Simmons suggested it would be useful to visit the centres and see the range of activities that take place.

In response to a query from Councillor Liddle regarding the Durham and Chester-le-Street cluster, the Head of Planning and Service Strategy advised that the consultation document would be published in the public domain, and he would let the members know if the centres in the Witton Gilbert area had been contacted, to let the parents know so they can feed into the consultation.

The Corporate Director, Children and Adult Services advised that any comments or suggestions made from members taking part in the consultation would be considered.

Councillor Johnson referred to Councillor Hopgood's request to look at locations and clawback opportunities and advised that those matters would be fully considered as part the consultation and added that he had already raised the issue of Woodhouse Close with the Head of Early Intervention and Partnership Services.

The Chairman advised that the consultation outcomes would be considered by scrutiny before a final decision is made.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services explained the options and advised against referring to Full Council as the matter was an Executive Decision and Council could only refer the decision back to Cabinet.

Resolved:

That upon a vote being taken, the Board determined that having considered the information it would take no further action, in which case the decision made by the Cabinet would take immediate effect.