

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 12 September 2014 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor J Armstrong (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors P Stradling, A Batey, R Bell, J Blakey, J Chaplow, R Crute, B Graham, K Henig, A Hopgood, P Lawton, J Lethbridge, H Liddle, M Simmons, R Todd, J Turnbull and S Wilson

Faith Community Representative:

Revd K Phipps

Also Present:

Councillor L Pounder

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Hall, C Potts, A Shield and W Stelling.

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 17 June and 31 July 2014 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Chairman referred to the Combined Authority and reported that two scrutiny meetings had been held so far and a work programme was being explored. Leaders were yet to meet and it would take time to agree policies and implement them. Members were advised that regular updates would be provided to the Board.

In referring to points raised, the Head of Planning and Performance provided the following updates:-

Item 5 – it was confirmed that following the request of Councillor B Graham, a visit had been arranged to the multi-sensory facilities in Spennymoor on the 13 October.

Item 6 – Councillor R Bell had been advised of a cumulative figure regarding the Regional Growth Fund.

Councillor S Wilson had been provided with information on Free School Meals.

Item 11 – Councillor Hopgood had been provided with information on how many minority party representatives had attended the interviews.

The Head of Planning and Performance informed Councillor Liddle that she would provide an update about Witton Gilbert at the end of the meeting.

4 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 County Durham Drug Strategy 2014-2017

The Board considered a report of the Director of Public Health and presentation of the Commissioning Manager that highlighted details of the first County Durham Drug Strategy 2014-2017 (for copy of report and presentation slides see file of Minutes).

Mark Harrison, Commissioning Manager presented information on the Drug Strategy for 2014-2017 and highlighted the following points:-

- Development of the Strategy
- Vision
- National Policy Driver
- Local Policy Drivers
- Drug Misuse in County Durham
- Crime
- Prison
- Housing
- Carers
- Children Protection
- Definitions of Drugs and Recovery

He then informed Members about the Key Objectives of the Strategy, including:-

- Preventing Harm
- Restricting Supply
- Building Recovery

The Commissioning Manager concluded his presentation by advising about the following recovery outcome domains and what the evidence tells us we can expect:-

- Human Capital Recovery
- Social Capital
- Physical & Economic Capital
- Cultural
- Drug

Councillor S Wilson asked about the proportion of people affected by medicines on the controlled drug list and how much stigma was attached to the recovery in rehab. The Commissioning Manager replied that prescribed medicines such as tramadol and other controlled substances need looking at closely. He added that in a prison setting it had come to light that these medicines were being used as an alternative to methadone. Work was ongoing with GP surgeries about highlighting the dangers of these drugs. With regards to the question about recovery, the Commissioning Manager said that residential rehab was difficult to monitor as some people who move away to seek treatment tend not to move back to the County if it works.

Councillor K Henig asked if rehab was available repeatedly for patients and the Commissioning Manager advised that it is common for people to repeat treatment programmes. He continued that there was a menu of choices available and it was important to get the right treatment for the right person.

The Chairman thanked the Commissioning Manager for his presentation and said that a response would be drawn up on behalf of the Board.

Resolved:-

That the Board consider the information presented and prepare a response to Public Health by 30 September 2014.

6 Medium Term Financial Plan (5), Council Plan, Service Plans 2015/16 - 2017/18 and Review of the Council's Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme

The Board considered a joint report of the Corporate Director, Resources and Assistant Chief Executive that provided an update on the development of the 2015/16 budget, the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP (5)) and Council Plan/Service Plans 2015/16 to 2017/18 and a review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, which has been in place since 1 April 2013 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Head of Finance (Corporate Finance) reported that no extra funding cuts had been announced for Local Government in March 2014 and the authority had been concentrating on minimising the impact of savings until 2018-19 by the use of reserves. Members were informed that reserve levels were being used to control the savings required and that over the last four years £75m had been used, with £10m this year and £20-30m required for future years. He advised that there would be a comprehensive spending review next year but that the level of reduction was not yet known. This would make savings in the future more challenging. He continued that development of MTFP (5) would utilise the public feedback received during extensive consultation.

On answering a question from Councillor R Bell about the timetable, the Head of Finance (Corporate Finance) said that the Autumn Statement would be on 3 December and therefore a report would go to Cabinet mid December.

Councillor R Bell asked if there was an expiry date for Equal Pay claims and if there was a need to keep the Equal Pay reserve. He was advised that the County Council were using the Equal Pay reserve to delay the impact on the budget of the annual cost of the implementation of single status which had the Council £4.5m per annum.

With reference to Empty Homes, Councillor R Bell said he was surprised at the amount of funding available to bring them back into use and asked if they were actively managed. The Head of Finance (Corporate Finance) said that a company had been employed to specifically look at empty homes on the register and they visited every one. This generated an additional New Homes Bonus of £900,000. Councillor Bell said that he had concerns about those homes not on the register.

Councillor A Hopgood referred to the New Homes Bonus and as asked if the amount was too low given housing development was showing signs of improvement. The Head of Finance (Corporate Finance) said that the County Durham Plan should be approved by Summer 2015 and a number of planning applications are in the pipeline for new developments. He added that the County Council had been criticised in the past for not

having a New Homes Bonus built in, hence the reason for having a prudent figure of £750,000. The actual 2015/16 figure for New Homes bonus should be confirmed in December and in line with previous years will be brought into the budget.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

7 Co-op Bank Contract

The Board considered a joint report of the Corporate Director, Resources and Assistant Chief Executive and presentation of the Head of Finance (Corporate Finance) that provided information regarding to the changes to Durham County Council's banking provider (for copy of report and presentation slides see file of Minutes).

The Head of Finance (Corporate Finance) informed Members that in November 2013 the Co-operative Bank advised that they were withdrawing from the Local Government banking market. He advised that negotiations took place to extend the current contract until April 2016 and work is now ongoing to find a suitable alternative supplier. A formal procurement process starts in September with tenders being evaluated in November, and the award of contract in December 2014. A range of informal discussions have already taken place with five major banks and the authority would seek to find the best deal possible. Transition arrangements would be significant with opening new bank accounts, organising signatories, a courier service and transferring standing order and direct debit payments. There would be costs associated with replacing the stationery, schools would need to move to a cash collection courier service from a health and safety viewpoint and the cost of a new cashpoint machine at County Hall were excessive. The authority were also looking at the social value and community benefits that a new contract could bring.

Councillor A Hopgood asked what options the authority had in terms of the ATM at County Hall. She said that the local post office at Newton Hall receive funding to host an ATM with no charge for their customers. She also suggested that a cashless system could be introduced at the canteen, similar to that use in schools. The Head of Finance (Corporate Finance) replied that options were being explored including smart cards for the canteen. He added that as it stood replacing the existing ATM was too costly for the authority to consider.

Councillor R Bell referred to cash in schools and said that the introduction of a courier service may not work for some, especially if the cost of the courier was greater than the amount being collected. He suggested that cashless schools would be a better option to explore for smaller schools. The Head of Finance (Corporate Finance) said that this issue would be debated at the Schools Forum and Internal Audit would be involved in saying what was a reasonable sum of money which should be held in a school, depending on the size of the school.

On answering a question from Councillor J Lethbridge, the Head of Finance (Corporate Finance) said that the Co-operative Bank had withdrawn from the market even though the business is profitable.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Finance (Corporate Finance) for his informative presentation and re-iterated the point that there was a long run in period for the transition so that the best deal possible could be achieved for the authority.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

8 Quarter 1 2014/15 Performance Management

The Board considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive which presented progress against the council's corporate basket of performance indicators (PIs) and reported other significant performance issues for the first quarter of 2014/15. A presentation was given by the Head of Planning and Performance (for copy of report and slides, see file of minutes).

Councillor R Bell said that there was no clear evidence of where Job Seekers Claimants go to when they come off the list. Councillor H Liddle asked if the JSA figure was reduced because claimants had found employment, been removed and what effect this has on claims of housing and other benefits.

Councillor S Wilson asked for breakdown of the hate crimes reported. The Head of Planning and Performance said that these details would be obtained and passed through the Safer and Stronger Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Referring to fly tipping Councillor R Bell said that it was cheaper to use the Council's removal services and people should be made aware of it. The Chairman said that the majority of fly tipping was carried out by builders and private businesses and fines had been issued recently. He added that some people may not be able to afford the Council's fee for removal but that communities should be encouraged to club together for one collection.

On answering a question from Councillor A Hopgood about the drop in children in need referrals, the Head of Planning and Performance said that the issue could be explored and fed back through Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Members discussed the decline of performance appraisals being carried out and advised that the way numbers are reflected should change. The Head of Planning and Performance explained that if a person changes a job the performance appraisal process starts from scratch as a person was appraised on the post they held.

Councillor A Batey suggested that the reasons for contaminated waste in recycling could be due to ignorance and people not knowing how to do it. She added that it might be appropriate to speak to private landlords so that information was on hand to new tenants. The Chairman confirmed that this does happen and was an ongoing battle.

Councillor J Blakey and Councillor B Graham raised their concerns about fly tipping and the regular hot spots being used by some residents and builders. The Chairman said that Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee would look at this area and that evidence was required to prosecute.

The Chairman stated that the Board and the Overview and Scrutiny Committees would never be complacent when considering child safety and needs, following a concern raised by Councillor J Chaplow about children self-harming.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Planning and Performance for her presentation.

Resolved:

That the information contained in the report be noted.

9 Request for Call-In - Durham Villages Regeneration Ltd

The Board considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services that advised a request for call in of a Cabinet decision and of the decision made by the Vice Chairman of the Board not to call in the decision (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved:

That the information contained in the report be noted.

10 Notice of Key Decisions

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

The Head of Planning and Performance reported that since the last update there had been the following movement in items being considered at Cabinet:-

- A report on Housing Stock – Principles of Land Transfer, TUPE Issues and SLAs was moved from July to September;
- Added to the Plan for October is Proposed Designation of Local Nature Reserve at Easington Colliery;
- New to the plan for December, are items on Housing Stock – Transfer Update, and 2015/16 General Fund Revenue and Capital Budget MTFP 5 and Council Plan and Service Plans

Councillor A Hopgood raised concern about the lack of information about important decisions being made by the authority that were not included in the Notice, such as the Children Centre consultation. The Head of Planning and Performance said that the Notice only contained Key Decisions. Members agreed that it would be helpful to have sight of important decisions coming forward for Cabinet.

Resolved:

That the information contained in the report be noted.

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

The Board considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive that provided an update of overview and scrutiny activity between May and August 2014 (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the information contained in the report be noted.