

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 20 March 2015 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor J Armstrong (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors P Stradling, A Batey, R Bell, J Blakey, A Bonner, J Chaplow, K Corrigan, R Crute, B Graham, K Henig, P Lawton, J Lethbridge, T Nearney, C Potts, L Pounder, M Simmons, R Todd, J Turnbull, S Wilson and M Wilkes (substitute for A Hopgood)

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Hopgood, H Liddle, A Shield and Revd K Phipps.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor M Wilkes, substitute for Councillor A Hopgood.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 13 February 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Head of Planning and Performance referred to Item 5 of the minutes of the meeting held on the 13 February regarding Councillor R Bell's query on social care spend. She advised that work was still ongoing, however a meeting had been arranged with Councillor Bell and the Head of Policy and Communications and details would be available then.

Referring to item 6 of the minutes regarding Citizen Advice Bureau's and management of welfare issues, The Head of Planning and Performance advised that she had contacted the Revenue and Benefits Manager and he confirmed that formal arrangements were in place.

Referring to item 7 of the minutes regarding clarification on LEP funding, the Head of Planning and Performance advised that details of the July spending announcement had been forwarded to Councillor Hopgood.

4 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Quarter 3 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 third quarter of 2014/15 covering the period October to December 2014. A presentation was given by the Head of Planning and Performance (for copy of report and slides, see file of minutes).

Councillor Wilson referred to Job Seeker Allowance claims and the impact of zero hour contracts. The Head of Planning and Performance advised that there had been an increase in zero hours contracts and advised that the performance team were in the process of doing an analysis. The Chairman requested that the information be taken to the Economy and Enterprise Committee when available.

Referring to the statistics on sickness absence, Councillor Wilkes expressed concern regarding the length of time taken for the review process to be set up and asked if there was an alternative way to speed the process.

Members discussed apprenticeships and reasons why a number of young people do not complete the courses. Councillor Batey expressed concern that the apprenticeship scheme statistics did not reflect the number of young people becoming qualified. Councillor Crute advised that the matter would be taken to Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Committee.

Councillors Batey and Blakey referred to the 26% increase in shoplifting and asked if information was available on the type of items being stolen and the age range of the offenders. The Chairman advised that the information would be gathered and would be forwarded to members.

In response to comments regarding the use of food and clothes banks, the Chairman reported that Area Action Partnerships received extra welfare assistance funding that a number had used to expand support, which demonstrates an increase in demand.

Discussions took place regarding the increase in suicides and the possible reasons behind the rise. The Chairman commented that reasons were very complex and could not be pinpointed to any one issue as there were many contributing factors including family matters, jobs and mental health problems. He added that scrutiny were currently reviewing the issue of self-harm.

Resolved:

That the information contained in the report be noted.

6 Update on the Delivery of the Medium Term Financial Plan 4

The Board considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive that provided an update on the progress made at the end of December 2014 on the delivery of the 2014/15 to 2016/17 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP 4) (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of Policy and Communications reported that Delivery of the MTFP programme continues to remain challenging and the savings for 2014/15 represent an increase of 10% on the savings required in 2013/14. By 31 December 2014, over 96% of the target had been met, an increase of 14% on the last quarter. £3.2m of savings were achieved in the third quarter meaning the Council had delivered over £22m of savings for 2014/15 which amounts to almost £136m of savings since 2011.

Councillor Wilkes referred to the forecast of reserves that were predicted and asked for assurance that suggestions from scrutiny committees would be taken into account and that alternative proposals be looked at during the year with the possibility of being implemented. The Chairman advised that scrutiny can always ask the question, however the decision would be made by Cabinet.

Resolved:

That the information contained in the report and the progress being made in delivering the MTFP4 be noted.

7 Council Plan and Service Plans 2015 - 2018

The Board considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive that provided a draft Council Plan for 2015-18 for consideration and comment before being submitted for approval by Council on 1 April 2015 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager reported that the plans cover a three year timeframe in line with the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and set out how corporate priorities and key actions will be delivered to support the longer term goals set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS). He further highlighted proposed changes and rationalisation to some outcomes which were detailed in Appendix 3 of the report.

In response to a question from Councillor Wilkes, the Chairman commented that all members had an interest in the County Durham Plan, and agreed to feedback to the Cabinet member the interest in ensuring that all members be briefed in due course.

Councillor Crute suggested that the increase in jobs in the region was a reflection of part-time and zero hour contracts which could be picked up by the Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Committee. Councillor R Bell asked that data on the quality of employment be looked at.

Resolved:

- (i) That the content of the draft Council Plan as approved by Cabinet on the 18 March 2015, prior to submission to full Council be noted;
- (ii) That the content of the draft service plans be noted.

8 Notice of Key Decisions

The Board considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services that 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 since the last update there had been the following movement in items being considered at Cabinet:-

- Bishop Auckland Regeneration Framework Review – deferred pending clarification
- County Durham Plan Interim Inspectors Report – moved from April to June
- Housing Stock Transfer – moved from May to June
- 2016/17 General Fund Revenue and Capital Budget MTFP 6 and Council Plan and Service Plans – new to the plan for July.

Councillor Wilkes referred to the Housing Stock Transfer and expressed concern with the lack of information available on decisions being made regarding development sites and land being transferred. The Chairman commented that local members should be kept informed on everything that takes place in their areas and advised that he would raise the issue with the Cabinet portfolio holder.

Resolved:

That the information contained in the report be noted.

9 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 from 26 January 2015 to 6 March 2015 (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the information contained in the report be noted.

10 Any other Business

The Chairman informed the Board that Councillors J Buckham, P McCourt, S Guy and B Harrison recently resigned from the Authority and took the opportunity to thank them for all their hard work and wished them well for the future.