

Arts Leisure & Culture Select Committee

A meeting of Arts Leisure & Culture Select Committee was held on Thursday, 23rd February, 2012.

Present: Cllr Mrs Jean O'Donnell(Chairman), Cllr Eileen Johnson(Vice-Chairman), Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Gillian Corr, Cllr Evaline Cunningham(Vice Cllr Nigel Cooke), Cllr Alan Lewis, Cllr Mick Womphrey

Officers: Jane Humphreys, Shaun McLurg(CESC),Graham Birtle, Michell Jones, Sarah Whaley(L&D)

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Cllr Nigel Cooke, Cllr Ray McCall

1 Evacuation Procedure

The evacuation procedure was noted.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes for signature - 1st December 2011

Consideration was given to the minutes from the meeting which was held on the 1st December 2011.

AGREED that the minutes be signed.

4 Draft minutes - 4th January 2012

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting which was held on the 4th January 2012.

AGREED that the minutes be approved.

5 EIT Review of Children's Social Care

Consideration was given to the draft final report of the Efficiency Improvement and Transformation(EIT) Review of Childrens Social Care.

The Head of Children and Young People Operational Service, presented Members with the draft final report and highlighted the following key points:

Background

- The strict legislative and policy framework limited the scope for transformation of services.

- The increased workload pressure which Stockton had encountered, following such cases as the much publicised tragic death of Peter Connelly, which had resulted in an increased upsurge in referrals meant that cash savings were unlikely from the review.

Methodology

- It was noted that some aspects of children's social care services had been covered by previous overlapping EIT or other service reviews.
- A development day was held in November 2011 allowing a wider cross section of staff to have an input into the review.

Service Evaluation

- The most recent inspection outcomes were discussed including the criteria Ofsted used to grade the inspections. Significant improvements had been made since 2010 and the service was focused on further improvements prior to the next round of inspections.
- A new inspection framework was to be introduced in 2012/2013. Members heard that this would consist of a 2 week unannounced inspection, and would concentrate on safeguarding and not looked after children.
- File audits were undertaken by the Corporate Director and Head of Service on a monthly basis which generally highlighted improving practice from social workers.
- Complaints received were fairly typical in children's social care. The most prominent of complaints received from service users were delays and frequent changes of social workers.
- There were excessive amounts of paperwork following the introduction of the Integrated Children's System which was overly bureaucratic and resulted in less time being spent with families. Just recently however the requirements for using the system had been relaxed.

Findings

- There had been a unanimous decision amongst staff that a team be set up to focus on children living away from their families.
- The Head of Children and Young People Operational Service, reported an improved ability to recruit social workers in Stockton and a higher level of staff retention. It was concluded that recruitment and retention incentives may not be required in the future to attract and keep the best staff.
- Support had been offered to staff who were taking work home enabling them to come in on weekends and receive pay as and when needed.
- Agency staff were being used on a regular basis however recommendations had been made to reduce the reliance on this due to the expense involved.

Options

- To move away from the distinction between specialist and targeted social work teams as officers felt this was having a negative impact on staff development.

- To spread more evenly experienced staff across the service.
- The possibility of a permanence team for Looked After Children aged between 0 - 13.
- To develop a family support team.
- Progress high quality staff to become fully qualified social workers.
- Support staff to have a flexible approach to working hours to help families who need support outside of the standard working day.
- All social workers to have the opportunity to progress to grade M within the authority.

The Committee were informed that Stockton Borough Council had provided additional support of around £330K per annum. The aim of the proposed service structure would be to reduce the need for this additional funding to approximately £80K with a view to managing within allocated budget in the longer term.

Members considered each recommendation and agreed the final report be submitted to Cabinet on the 8th March.

AGREED that the final report be accepted and forwarded to Cabinet for approval.

6 Scrutiny Development Session

The Scrutiny Officer informed Members that with the Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation(EIT) Reviews coming to a close, the process which had been used prior to EIT would now be re-introduced.

Members received a presentation highlighting the necessary tools and ingredients needed for a successful scrutiny review.

It was explained that Members could have the opportunity to evaluate the work which they had carried out, review the process and look at the outcome of the recommendations.

Members highlighted that suggestions in the past had not always been fully received by officers when working on reviews and hoped the process outlined in the presentation would eliminate this.

The Committee also indicated that where a review was within a particular Cabinet portfolio remit, the Cabinet Member should be invited to the Scrutiny Committee meetings enabling them to have a valued input. In addition to this, Members highlighted that as well as senior officers providing evidence in scrutiny reviews frontline officers could also add value by offering their views and experience when gathering evidence.

AGREED that

1) the information noted

2) Members suggestions be taken into account when embarking on new reviews as detailed above.

7 Quarterly Progress Updates on Previously Agreed Recommendations

Consideration was given to progress of the implementation of previously agreed recommendations. There were outstanding recommendations from the reviews of:

- EIT Review of Sport, Leisure & Recreation
- EIT Review of Highways, Lighting & Network Management
- EIT Task and Finish Review of Finance
- Review of River Based Leisure

The Review of Tees Active having achieved all the recommendations set, no longer required to be monitored.

AGREED that

1) the Progress Updates be noted and the assessments for progress be confirmed.

2) the Review of Tees Active be signed off as all recommendations had been fully achieved.

8 Work Programme

Members were informed that the Scope and Project Plan for the 'Marketing of Stockton Visitor Offer 2012-2013' would be presented at a future meeting of this Committee.

AGREED that the information be noted.

9 Chairs Update

There was no update.