

Executive Scrutiny Committee

A meeting of Executive Scrutiny Committee was held on Tuesday, 20th October, 2009.

Present: Cllr Robert Gibson (Chairman), Cllr Mrs Ann Cains, Cllr Dick Cains, Cllr David Harrington, Cllr Miss Tina Large, Cllr Colin Leckonby, Cllr Mrs Liz Nesbitt, Cllr Maurice Perry, Cllr Mrs Maureen Rigg, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Mr Frank (Diocesan Representative).

Officers: Judith Trainer, Fiona Shayler (LD); Debbie Hurwood (R).

Also in attendance:

Apologies: were submitted on behalf of Cllr Ken Dixon, Cllr Mrs O'Donnell, Cllr Smith, Cllr Stoker, Cllr Mrs Trainer, Cllr Woodhead, Mr Connaughton, Judith Robson.

EXC 30/09 **Declarations of Interest**

Cllr Cains declared a personal/non prejudicial interest in relation to Agenda Item No. 4 - EIT Review of Advice and Information Service further to being nominated to the SDAIS Management Board.

EXC 31/09 **Minutes - 22nd September 2009**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22nd September 2009 were agreed as a correct record.

EXC 32/09 **Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation (EIT) Review of Advice and Information Service**

Members were provided with a report that presented the baseline and initial challenge information relating to the EIT Review of Advice and Information. The report also outlined options for further investigation for the next stage of the review.

The current economic climate was resulting in an increase in demand for advice and information services, which was proving difficult to meet. At a time when the Council needs to support vulnerable households and seek to minimise the impact of the recession on local communities, it may not be appropriate to seek to make efficiencies that would reduce service provision, even though a number of the advice and information services provided by the Council are non-statutory. This review should therefore seek for ways of making better use of the existing resources that were expended on providing advice and information and how to join existing services together most effectively, whilst recognising that the higher than usual demand driven by the recession should reduce in the medium to longer term.

Legal Services Commission (LSC) funding was available in cases, such as welfare benefits and debt advice, where the person seeking advice and information was entitled to legal aid. The Council could do more to encourage residents to approach organisations such as Community Legal Advice that would be able to help these residents through LSC funding. This could then free up Council resources to support those residents that don't qualify for legal aid. Promoting the Community Legal Advice telephone service might also ease

the demand for SDAIS services.

Members were provided with a summary of different organisations and the types of advice and information they provided. There was considerable duplication of service provision around welfare benefits and maximisation of benefit income, with services available from the Council's own Welfare Rights Service (and to a lesser degree other internal advice and information providers), SDAIS, Community Legal Services and the Carers' Centre. There were also many sources of debt advice, but these were external to the Council. The Council was not under any statutory obligation to provide either of these services.

There was currently no comparator information for the cost of providing welfare benefits services in-house as opposed to commissioning them from the voluntary sector. Benchmark data was difficult to collect as the models of service delivery were quite different ie some centralised office and home visits (eg Welfare Rights) and others provided from a network of points across the borough (SDAIS).

There was a need for a comprehensive store of information about the availability of advice and information services across the borough to assist those who were regularly required to signpost residents to an appropriate service. A web-based directory of services, accessible to both residents and staff would be welcomed.

Approximately one third of SDAIS annual income comes from the Council. In addition to core funding there were a number of other "arrangements" for services provided by SDAIS, funded from different budgets. Many of these were yearly agreements sometimes due to funding uncertainties. The services provided under these arrangements were non-statutory. These short term arrangements led to uncertainties for SDAIS staff (resulting in staff turnover). There may be economies for the Council and more funding certainty for any external organisation delivering the services, if all these different arrangements were pulled together to be tendered and managed as a single contract.

Options for further investigation were as follows:-

Consolidation of all the advice and information services that the Council commissioned from external organisations into a single specification that could then be tendered. This would include the advice and information services that were currently included in the Core Funding Agreements that accompany allocations of grant from the Voluntary Sector Support Fund.

Discussions with Community Legal Services to understand their capacity for taking on additional cases and how the Council could best promote the national telephone advice line.

Further investigation to understand the reasons for the duplication of welfare benefits advice between the Council's Welfare Rights service and external advice and information agencies and whether this could be eliminated via an alternative service delivery model.

Consider a model for future delivery that ensures more joined up working

between all the different parties involved in advice and information giving across the borough.

Members held discussion on the options and felt that a web based service for general enquiries would be an option as well as understanding that there was a huge need for face-to-face advice. It was felt that training for staff in libraries and other public places might improve signposting.

With regard to matters relating to debt it was suggested that the public should be directed to the National Debt Helpline. However, it was noted that it was free to call the National Debt Helpline from a landline but many people only had a mobile phone and this would incur a charge.

It was felt that information and advice should be more wide spread into community/family centres and local libraries etc. Services should have clear titles so that the general public know who to contact.

RESOLVED that the information received be noted and the further options highlighted be investigated further.

EXC 33/09 Environment Select Committee - Final Report - Carbon Management

Members were informed that the Final Report on Carbon Management by the Environment Select Committee would be deferred to the next meeting.

RESOLVED that the report be deferred to the next meeting.

EXC 34/09 Forward Plan

Members were provided with the Statutory Forward Plan for 1st October 2009 - 31st January 2010.

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan be noted.

EXC 35/09 Chairman's Update

Corporate, Adult Services and Social Inclusion Select Committee

The Committee was undertaking a review of Communication, Consultation and Engagement as part of the EIT programme. The Committee had received all of their evidence and had formulated draft recommendations. The Committee would be meeting on 27 October 2009 to agree their final report.

The review was scheduled to report to Cabinet and Executive Scrutiny Committee in November 2009.

Arts, Leisure and Culture Select Committee

The Committee would be providing independent challenge to the following three "gateway" reviews as part of the EIT programme:

- Adult Operations
- Highways, Lighting and Network Management

- Property and Facilities Management

The Committee had undertaken challenge of baseline information in respect of each of the reviews and would be receiving information in relation to options appraisal for each of the three reviews.

Housing and Community Safety Select Committee

At the meeting of 8 October, the Committee considered the baseline information for Development Control and Building Control.

Xentrall were providing information on the potential uses of ICT in relation to delivering efficiencies.

The Committee would be discussing potential EIT options at the meeting on 19 November, 2009. The review was on track to report to Cabinet 11 March, 2010.

At the meeting of 27 August, 2009 the Committee received progress updates for the reviews of Choice Based Lettings and Registered Social Landlords.

Environment Select Committee

The final report on Carbon Management had been delayed slightly to be presented to Executive Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in November 2009.

The Committee would meet the Cabinet Member, Corporate Director and Heads of Service to receive an overview of the environment service in December. A meeting date was yet to be confirmed.

The Committee received updates for recommendations from its reviews of rats and pigeons, and waste management on 5th October, 2009. It was felt that the progress on the review of rats and pigeons was disappointing due to no funding being received.

The Committee would receive updates for recommendations from its reviews of cemeteries, and animal welfare on 16th November, 2009.

Regeneration and Transport Select Committee

At the meeting of 5th October, 2009 the Committee considered the potential options for efficiency and improvement, selecting the best options to take forward for recommendation. The committee also received the report on Dial a Ride from Stockton-on-Tees Local Involvement Network (LINK) and recommendations from their report were taken into account.

The Committee would be considering their final report on Monday 2nd November, 2009. The report was on track to be presented to Executive Scrutiny and Cabinet in November, 2009.

The initial progress reports for Highway Network Management and Pavement Parking would be presented to the Committee on 16 November, 2009 along with quarterly updates on outstanding recommendations from previous reviews.

Children and Young People Select Committee

The Committee had received all baseline information from the 5 workstreams identified to cover all aspects of this review.

The Committee would be receiving information from Outcomes UK on 11th November, 2009 to complete stage three of the process. It was suggested that this invitation be extended to all Council Members.

The review was projected to be completed on 11 March 2010.

The Committee held an all member seminar on 22nd September to receive further information on the EIT reporting in review on Youth Service Provision from Peter Seller.

The Committee would be meeting with the Cabinet Member, Corporate Director and Heads of Service on 28 October, 2009 to receive the overview of the Children, Education and Social Care service. The Committee would also receive monitoring reports at this meeting.

Health Select Committee

The Committee was surveying other authorities in order to gain from their experiences of applying the FACS bandings. On 14 September, 2009 the Committee met with representatives of North Yorkshire and Sunderland Councils in order to benefit further from the experience of other authorities.

Work on data regarding the numbers of clients in each FACS banding, and associated costs, was ongoing and would be used to inform the committee's decision making process, and the Committee continue to monitor developments related to the Care and Support Green Paper.

The Committee was scheduled to discuss potential options at its meeting of 26 October. The FACS review was scheduled to report to Cabinet in February 2010.

NHS Stockton had requested attendance at the meeting on 26 October to discuss Transforming Community Care.

Members were encouraged to attend the Safeguarding Adults Seminar that had been arranged.

RESOLVED that the Chair's updates be noted.