

Executive Scrutiny Committee

A meeting of Executive Scrutiny Committee was held on Tuesday, 5th January, 2010.

Present: Cllr Robert Gibson(Chairman), Cllr Miss Tina Large(Vice-Chair), Cllr Mrs Ann Cains, Cllr Dick Cains, Cllr Ken Dixon, Cllr David Harrington, Cllr Colin Leckonby, Cllr Mrs Jean O'Donnell and Cllr Mrs Maureen Rigg,

Officers: M.Waggott, M. Henderson (LD); M.Batty (DNS)

Also in attendance: Chris Nestor (Standards Committee observer)

Apologies: Cllr Maurice Perry, Cllr Michael Smith, Cllr Mick Stoker, Cllr Mrs Allison Trainer, Cllr Bill Woodhead and Cllr Julia Cherrett

1 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **Minutes for Signing - 20th October 2009**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20th October 2009 were signed by the Chairman.

3 **Draft Minutes - 15th December 2009**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20th October 2009 were agreed.

4 **Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation Review - Domestic Violence**

The Committee received a report that updated it on progress in relation to the EIT Review of Domestic Violence.

The Committee had previously considered baseline/challenge information on this review.

Members noted that Council spend on domestic violence services, in 2009/2010, would be approximately £558k, broken down as follows:-

£k		
(a)	services provided by Harbour	400
(b)	specialist team in CESC	142
(c)	50% cost of Domestic Violence Co-ordinator in Community Safety team (shared with Hartlepool BC)	16
		558

It was explained that the Audit Commission inspection team for Comprehensive Area Assessment had noted, via the Housing Inspectorate, the rise in caseload of approximately 20% over the last two years (i.e. 2007 to 2009) and had stated that it intended to examine the issue in more detail as part of the second year of the CAA. The Audit Commission predicted that there would be increases in domestic violence, nationally, as the recession developed. During discussion the Committee was informed that OFSTED had arrived at the Council, that day, to undertake a two day unannounced inspection of Children's Services.

In November 2009 the Government launched its new National Strategy on Violence Against Woman and Girls. Although this was a slightly different categorisation from 'Domestic Violence', there was a substantial overlap: recent figures from Harbour showed that 98% of clients were female. The Strategy detailed 75 'key actions' and would lead to a significant increase in expectations of requirements from local authorities and some of their key partners. A schedule of the key actions, together with initial comments was provided to the Committee.

The Committee was informed that with regard to the Specialist Team working in Children, Education and Social Care (CESC), Managers had identified that internal arrangements were

not optimally efficient and effective. It was explained that a broad review of the role and remit of the Domestic Violence Team would be undertaken and should be completed by February 2010, with recommendations for improvement to be made to Children's Trust Management Team and the Safer Stockton Partnership.

The Committee was provided with spend analysis and benchmarking for Stockton and other Tees Valley Authorities and information surrounding future funding issues.

It was explained that the review process had identified the the insufficiency of refuge capacity which had resulted in a significant number of referrals being declined. In view of this a task group had looked at the possibility of establishing a cluster of intermediate accommodation within close proximity of the existing refuge. The Supporting People Manager had given a preliminary indication that a further 40k to 50k of Supporting People funding may be available for a strong proposal that would reduce 'bed blocking' at the refuge and assist service users to return to independent living more quickly.

The Committee noted initial proposed recommendations.

Members considered the report and discussed a number of issues with officers:-

*Reference was made to the £400,000 given to Harbour each year and it was queried whether it had been established that this represented the best value for money. Could the services be delivered by the Council at less cost?

* Officers provided information on the amount of work undertaken for Stockton by the joint funded Domestic Violence Coordinator (shared with Hartlepool).

*Members highlighted Government indications regarding the introduction of equality training in schools. It was noted that this issue was referred to in the National Strategy on Violence Against Woman and Girls (see key action 9 of appendix to the report).

* It was noted that those people who were referred to the refuge but could not get access, because of lack of space, would access other general accommodation e.g Tristar Housing, homelessness hostels. Members suggested that other Registered Social Landlords may be able to assist with accommodation outside the refuge.

* Members queried the availability of funds from Supporting People and noted that the indication of availability had come from the Manager.

* It was anticipated that any provision of intermediate accommodation would reduce the average length of stay at the refuge from 6 to 3 months.

* Members referred to other funding that may contribute to dealing with domestic violence. It was noted that the scope of this review had been limited to dedicated Domestic Violence services.

* Men could not be accommodated at the refuge but currently constituted a small percentage (2%) of cases.

* Key point 16 of the National Strategy on Violence Against Woman and Girls indicated that School Governors would be supported and trained to address gender equality. Members suggested that this could be started now and asked officers to progress.

* Noted that Harbour produced a performance report which identified where referrals originated.

The Committee indicated that it wanted the report to come back to its February meeting including information demonstrating why Harbour was considered to offer best value for money to the Council. It was requested that, if timing allowed, outcomes from the review of the Specialist Team in CESC should be included in the report. It was also requested that a representative from Harbour attend the February meeting.

RESOLVED that:-

1. the report be submitted to the Committee's February meeting taking account of comments made.
2. a representative from Harbour attend the February meeting.
3. comments relating to the provision of training to School Governing Bodies be taken forward.

5 Forward Plan

Members noted the statutory forward plan.

The Committee queried the position with regard to the scrutiny work programme 2010/2011. It was noted that proposals for EIT reviews were being finalised and Members would be contacted shortly and asked if they wished to propose topics. Scrutiny Liaison Forum would meet in February and this Committee would consider the programme in March.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

6 Chair's Updates

Members were provided with an update from each of the Select Committees.

Particular reference was made to:-

The Committee's previous decision that Youth Services Review should be member led. The Committee reaffirmed this.

Issues surrounding the timing of consultation relating to the Fair Access to Care review.

The Chair complimented the Select Committees' work and officer support on all of the reviews and indicated that savings had been identified.

RESOLVED that the updates be noted.