

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 30 May 2006.

PRESENT: Councillor Carr (Chair), Councillors Booth, Harris, Robson, Rooney, T Ward and Wilson.

OFFICIALS: J Bennington, G Brown, J Cooke, P Clark, A Crawford, J Ord, I Parker, P Slocombe and E Williamson.

**** PRESENT BY INVITATION:** Councillor N J Walker (Executive Member Resources).

**** APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Dryden and Mawston.

**** DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made at this point of the meeting.

**** MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 25 April 2006 were submitted and approved.

VULNERABLE CHILDREN BUDGET PRESSURES

In a report of the Head of Vulnerable Children the Board was advised of additional information regarding the budget pressures within Vulnerable Children Services (Children, Families & Learning).

Since 1996 when Middlesbrough became a Unitary Authority the profile and provision of services had changed significantly. Whilst numbers of Children Looked After (CLA) were currently relatively stable the profile of need of such a group had significantly increased over the past 5 years, with a corresponding increase in provision required and cost.

Since 2001 there had been a reduction in 'in-house' fostering primarily due to the increase in Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) and the development of a competitive 'market'. The reduction in residential provision had been the result of a Best Value review and recognition that the outcomes for young people were significantly better within foster care or small 'domestic style' homes.

The high level of CLA had led to a number of 'validation' exercises, reviewing assessments and thresholds for admission into the 'looked after' system including cross-authority work with Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council.

Approximately, 60% of CLA had a Care Order, which lasted until a young person was 18 years unless discharged by the Court. It was noted that there had been evidence of increased Court activity, which had resulted in financial pressures on the legal costs budget as an increased number of cases now required a barrister to be appointed owing to the complexities of the cases.

Since 2004 there had been further use of Secure Orders (4), ranging 6-9 months with an average weekly cost of £4,500. Such an increased use was as a result of a changing view in the Courts and wider society about the approach to young people, which had led to an increased propensity to use legal measures and sanctions.

An additional factor resulting in budget pressures had arisen from the Court's direction to increase contact visits, which involved transport costs for the child to a contact venue and a member of staff supervising the contact.

It was noted that Middlesbrough was also currently a 'high performer' in the number of adoption placements, which had resulted in budget pressures. The Leaving Care Act 2000 had also

impacted on overall figures with its focus on ensuring local authorities maintained young people in placement post 16 years.

In-house fostering provision had reduced, therefore IFA placements had taken place for capacity reasons, rather than for a need for a specialist provision resulting in significant budget pressure.

In 2001/2 an increase in numbers of CLA had been recorded and as a result £1.2m had been added to the Children's budget (02/03) which had been allocated as follows: -

£200,000 for external residential placements;
£800,000 to fostering - £400,000 to in house fostering to support new payments scheme; and
£400,000 to IFA placements;
£200,000 towards adoption fees.

Placement costs had risen by 16% since 2004 and external fostering costs by 22% in the same period.

The current level of finance did not cover placement costs at the current rate and had not allowed for a significant increase in foster carer allowances which had led to reduced recruitment and therefore more use of external IFA placements.

Preventative services previously in place, had been reduced in 2003, which had increased pressure on the overall system.

Savings had been made on other parts of vulnerable children services but largely within staffing by holding vacancies. Such action had reduced the services, which may impact on numbers entering the CLA system, which could result in emergency placements incurring higher costs than is via IFA.

In conclusion it was noted that the most recent data suggested a decline in child population but levels of need continued to increase including disability. The results of the work which had been undertaken so far including the examination of options for provision had not demonstrated that the care of such a vulnerable group could be provided at any significant reduction in cost.

In response to a Members' suggestion to encourage more in-house fostering to alleviate budget pressures it was confirmed that IFA's were currently being used more for capacity reasons rather than a need for specialised provision although a range of options were currently being explored.

Given the evidence of increased Court activity including a preference for a Legal Order rather than a Supervision Order, which had resulted in increased financial pressures, a suggestion was made for representations to be made to the Government in this regard.

NOTED

WHO CARES FOR CARERS? – SERVICES FOR ADULT CARERS – SOCIAL CARE AND ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

The Chair of the Social Care and Adult Services Scrutiny Panel presented the findings of the Panel's scrutiny investigation to assess how the Council was helping to support adult carers in Middlesbrough.

The Board considered the following recommendations of the Panel: -

- a) That the Social Care Department actively seeks new and innovative ways to identify more 'hidden' carers. In order to assess progress with this recommendation the Panel would like to receive an update on the comparison between the numbers of carers that are currently known to the Social Care Department with the numbers in March 2008.
- b) The Panel was supportive of the Council's 'Carers ' Week' initiative and in addition to that, the Panel would like to see a campaign which raises the profile of carers and their achievements.

- c) That the Department continues to promote carers' assessments to ensure an increase in the number of assessments that are undertaken. The Panel would like to receive comparative information on the take up of carers' assessments and the progress with the LPSA stretch target in March 2008.
- d) The needs of carers can change through time, for example when altering the level of support provided to the service users. With this in mind, carers should be informed that they are entitled to a review of their carers' assessment to ensure that their changing needs are taken into account.
- e) The Panel thought that the term 'carers' assessment' could be misleading and dissuade people from undertaking one. The Panel would therefore like the Department to consider an alternative name for the term. As the focus for the assessment is about supporting carers the Panel was in favour of the term support plan.
- f) Carers have a wealth of knowledge; the Panel would like the Department to ask carers, as part of their carers' assessment, if they receive any support which may be unknown to the Department and to check if other carers would benefit.
- g) The Panel welcomes the new Carers' Leave policy and the Panel would like the Council to publicise the scheme to employees as widely as possible, the suggestion to inform all staff via their payslips was welcomed by the Panel. The Panel would also like the Council to provide a best practice lead in Middlesbrough and provide advice to other employers, in other sectors such as health and education, where appropriate.
- h) That the Department continues to improve its communication and information sharing and investigates new and innovative methods for distributing information to carers. For example issuing hospitals with the Carer's Pack in order that health professionals can distribute it to people when they leave hospital, where people may perhaps be caring for someone for the first time.
- i) That the Department considers the merits of establishing a 'buddying' system for newly identified carers and to draw up a list of volunteer carers who would be willing to participate.

In discussing the Panel's recommendations, in particular the publicity proposals to raise the profile of carers, the Board suggested that an appropriate informative article be placed in Middlesbrough News.

ORDERED that the findings and recommendations of the Social Care and Adult Services Scrutiny Panel be endorsed and referred to the Executive.

ONE STEP AT A TIME – STREET WARDEN SERVICE – COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LEISURE SCRUTINY PANEL

The Chair of the Community Safety and Leisure Scrutiny Panel presented the findings of the Panel's scrutiny investigation into the Street Warden Service.

The Board considered the following recommendations of the Panel: -

- a) That the relocation for the Warden Control Centre be assessed against the Panel's proposals to ensure it is easily accessible for the public while allowing the wardens to access their patrol areas with relative ease.
- b) That the new premises have a secure room to create the appropriate Intelligence room required for their effective operation of the Warden Service.
- c) That the Mayor, Executive Member for Social Care and Health and Executive Director for Social Care attend a meeting of the Panel in six months time to report on the progress resulting from the changes.

- d) That the management of the Service, present to the Panel in twelve months time, an overview of the Service and its achievements since the managerial review.
- e) That a survey be constructed during 2006 by people with knowledge of the service and that the proposed questions be presented to the Panel for consideration before the survey is undertaken towards the end of 2006.
- f) That the budget identified for the warden service is ring fenced to ensure it is not drawn into the main Social Care budget.

Members sought clarification on a number of areas, in particular, the operation costs of the service and the change of managerial responsibility to the Department of Social Care linking to the direction of greater community liaison.

ORDERED that the findings and recommendations of the Community Safety and Leisure Scrutiny Panel be endorsed and referred to the Executive.

SCRUTINY REVIEWS - CONSIDERATION OF REQUESTS

It was confirmed that no requests for scrutiny reviews had been received from the Executive, Executive Members, Non Executive Members and members of the public since the last meeting of the Board.

NOTED

SCRUTINY PANELS - PROGRESS REPORTS

A report of the Chair of each Scrutiny Panel was submitted which outlined progress on current activities.

NOTED

REVENUE OUTTURN 2005/2006

The Director of Resources submitted a report, which outlined the final outturn position for expenditure against the 2005/2006 Revenue Budget.

A detailed breakdown was given of each Service areas' outturn position together with a summary of the position relating to corporate costs and central provisions.

The overall service outturn variances from budget were summarised as follows: -

	£'000s
Children, Families and Learning	-43
Environment	-318
Regeneration	- 37
Social Care	-133
Corporate Services	-1,304
	1,835

Although a number of budget pressures within certain Service areas were highlighted it was noted that no Department had exceeded their respective budgets.

NOTED

CAPITAL BUDGET 2005/2006 – FINAL OUTTURN

The Chair confirmed that the above item had been withdrawn from the agenda.

NOTED

CALL IN REQUESTS

The Chair confirmed that in accordance with the Council's Call-In Procedures a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board had been arranged for Monday 12 June 2006 commencing at 10.00 a.m. The Call –In related to proposals outlined in the report entitled Housing Renewal Policy Review considered at an Individual Executive Decision Making Meeting – Economic Regeneration and Culture held on 19 May 2006.

NOTED

ANY OTHER BUSINESS – SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME DISCUSSION

The Chair encouraged attendance at the informal Members' meeting, which had been arranged for 1 June 2006 to discuss possible scrutiny topics for inclusion in the Scrutiny Work Programme 2006/07.

NOTED