

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 20 November 2007.

PRESENT: Councillor Carr (Chair), Councillors Biswas, Cole, Cox, Dryden, Ismail, Mawston, Sanderson, Ward and Williams.

OFFICIALS: B Baldam, J Bennington, G Brown, P Clark, A Crawford, J Ord and E Williamson.

**** PRESENT BY INVITATION:**

Councillor Mrs B Thompson, Executive Member for Children, Families & Learning.

Councillor N J Walker, Executive Member for Resources

North East Ambulance Service NHS Trust:

Colin Cessford, Director of Strategy & Clinical Standards

Mark Cotton, Head of Communications

Graham Robinson, Control Room Manager

Katharine Shenton, Public Relations Officer

Phil Bain, Emergency Planning Officer

Dennis Finn, Emergency Planning Officer

UNISON: J Cozens, S Farrar and S Martin.

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Bishop, G Rogers and Rooney.

**** 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 23 October 2007 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

NORTH EAST AMBULANCE SERVICE – CONTACT CENTRE PROPOSALS

The Chair welcomed representatives from the North East Ambulance Service NHS Trust (NEAS) and UNISON and in his introductory remarks explained the function of the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

A report of the Scrutiny Support Officer had previously been circulated regarding the information to be sought from representatives of NEAS concerning proposals for ambulance contact centres in the North East of England. A copy of the NEAS consultation document had been circulated to the Board.

The Tees Valley Health Scrutiny Joint Committee at its meeting held on 29 October 2007 had considered a presentation from NEAS concerning its review regarding the location of ambulance control centres. The Joint Committee had agreed that the matter should be referred to its constituent authorities the views from which would be considered by the Joint Committee at its meeting to be held on 10 December 2007.

The reasons for change included the recent merger of Ambulance Services which was part of a wider improvement of ambulance services to respond quicker to those in need. This together with recommendations from reports commissioned by the Department of Health for adopting a minimum of two contact centres within an operational area had resulted in the Trust working with

Catalyst IT Partners, contact centre and change management consultancy. A number of existing sites and potential new locations for contact centres to take 999 and urgent calls had been evaluated.

The main objectives of the proposals were as follows: -

- i) to improve the resilience of A & E ambulance contact centres in the event of a natural disaster, technical failure or terrorist attack;
- ii) to provide an uninterrupted service from the contact centres in the event of a major incident;
- iii) improve the provision of patient transport services across the North East;
- iv) reduce risks associated with the NEAS responsibilities under the Civil Contingencies Act.

It was pointed out that although the current operation included two contact centres they operated as a single unit and 40% of the 999 calls from Middlesbrough were being picked up by Newcastle. The Board was advised that there was insufficient spare capacity at the current Middlesbrough facility to expand in order to cope with future demand.

Given the investment over recent years in establishing Bernica House in Newcastle as the Trust's new headquarters NEAS proposed that this would be the prime location for a contact centre operational later in 2007.

Details were provided of a range of options examined for the operation of contact centres. The preferred option was to establish two independent contact centres which would evenly spread the functional capability of the contact centres. The aim was to have no disruption of service during an incident by ensuring that all roles and responsibilities involved with call handling was mirrored at both sites.

The factors taken into account in identifying potential sites included: -

- business continuity to ensure that the working contact centres had sufficient capacity to accommodate the failure of any other centre and be able to manage a major incident within the region;
- the second contact centre needed to be close enough to the Newcastle contact centre to properly manage and share resources quickly and relocate staff swiftly between sites but be far enough apart in the event of a disaster in the area;
- in the event of a need to relocate staff there was a requirement to ensure that the skilled workforce was retained for daily operations;
- ensure that the contact centre was based in an area to appropriately recruit;
- value for money.

Based on aggregate scores on a number of factors for suitability the top site was identified as Hebburn (South Tyneside) the proposals from which would improve resilience; provide an uninterrupted service; and reduce risk.

As part of the background information provided on the operation specific reference was made to a number of key performance indicators relating to call handling and comparative statistics of Middlesbrough, Durham, South and North areas.

Reference was made to the national standard for 95% of 999 calls to be answered within five seconds. If the current contact service remained the Trust considered that there would be a significant and increasing risk that they would not be able to respond suitably to the normal 999 calls it received in the event of a major incident.

A list of public meetings, which had been arranged between October and November, were given and contact points for comments.

It was confirmed that no decision had been made and comments were being sought up to 11 January 2008 following which the Board of NEAS would make a decision on the way forward.

The main points arising from the ensuing discussion included the following: -

- a) given the elements of risk Members expressed concerns that the views of the Joint Cleveland Emergency Committee had not been sought prior to the formulation of any proposals;
- b) confirmation was given that the proposed two sites would be secure and that as an alternative site Hebburn was regarded by Catalyst as providing the most secure site to improve resilience, reduce risk and improve responses to major incidents;
- c) although it was acknowledged that the new build costs at Hebburn were significantly reduced as the site was owned by NEAS confirmation was given that this was only one of a number of contributory factors taken into consideration by Catalyst in determining that Hebburn was the preferred option as a second site;
- d) although it was noted that the two suggested sites had separate utilities Members questioned the siting of two contact centres approximately 9 miles apart especially having regard to the Consultant's report which advocated that such centres should not be less than 15 miles apart or 5 miles or nearer to COMAH sites;
- e) NEAS representatives stated that they wished to retain the experienced staff and referred to the Consultant's report available on the website in terms of the detailed evidence relating to recruitment and retention factors;
- f) in response to concerns raised regarding the possibility of persons working 12 hour shifts having regard to the potential increased travelling distances to work it was confirmed that although formal negotiations would commence with human resources and the staff side once a decision had been made by the Trust informal discussions had already commenced with the trade unions.

Trade Union representatives voiced concerns in terms of the proximity of Hebburn to Newcastle in the event of a major incident and questioned the implications of relocating staff especially in terms of an additional two hours of travelling each shift. Concerns were also raised at the likely loss of experienced staff as recent indications had shown that only 7 of the current 25 staff at the Middlesbrough site had expressed a willingness to travel to Hebburn.

Despite technology advances the trade union representatives stressed that local knowledge was still of paramount importance.

ORDERED that a further report based the discussions be formulated and considered by the Board at its meeting to be held on 29 November 2007 prior to submission to the Executive.

EXECUTIVE MEMBER – CHILDREN FAMILIES AND LEARNING

Councillor Mrs B Thompson thanked the Board for the invitation to attend and opportunity to outline the work and scope of the portfolio of the Executive Member Children, Families and Learning which covered the areas of early years and childcare, schools, lifelong learning, and plans to improve education in Middlesbrough.

The main areas of responsibility included the following: -

- a) in terms of the policy framework the Education Development Plan/ Integrated Plan for Education, Youth Justice Plan, Children's Services Plan and Early Years Development/ Childcare Plan;

- b) other plans and strategies including the Adult Learning Plan, Asset Management Plan for Schools, Behaviour Support Plan, Connexions Business Plan, ICT Strategy and Development Plan, Middlesbrough Learning Partnership Strategic Plan, Ofsted Inspection Action Plan, School Organisation Plan, Strategy for Inclusion, Youth Plan, Education Service Plan, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Plan;
- c) in terms of services and functions, Inclusion, Policy and Resource (Information and Planning), Education Standards, Community Education (Lifelong Learning), Voluntary Sector Grants, Connexions, Youth Offending Service, Building Schools for the Future, Vulnerable Children, Surestart, Early Years and Childcare.

An indication was given of the reporting and monitoring arrangements which included briefings with the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Informal Executive meetings, relevant Heads of Service, press and specific briefings on BSF.

The Board was advised of the current work programme the key areas of which included: -

- Children's Trust - an evolving process – focussing on working in partnership;
- BSF a major area of work within a tight timescale;
- statutory training for Family Placement Panel meetings;
- extensive work with school Governors;
- Primary School Review;
- Extended Schools Programme;
- Foster Carers Review;
- Attendance at Schools;
- development of a Youth Council;
- programme of visits to schools;
- improved KS3 results;
- as a representative on several Outside Bodies.

ORDERED that the Executive Member Children, Families and Learning be thanked for the information provided.

SECOND QUARTER REVENUE BUDGET OUTFURN 2007/2008

The Director of Resources submitted a report on the second quarter's review of revenue expenditure against the current year's Revenue Budget. The projected outturn position for 2007/2008, based on the second quarters review was a net saving of (-£168,000).

A summary was provided of the overall outturn variances from budget. The Board's attention was drawn to some areas of fluctuation and potential pressures. The report outlined the proposed action to be taken to address such issues.

Members expressed concern that the Board had not been given the opportunity to consider and comment on the report prior to determination by the Executive.

NOTED

SCRUTINY REVIEW – RECOMMENDATIONS IMPLEMENTATION

A report of the Senior Scrutiny Officer had been circulated which outlined progress achieved in relation to the implementation of agreed Executive actions resulting from the consideration of Scrutiny reports.

ORDERED that consideration of the report be deferred to the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board scheduled for 18 December 2007.

SCRUTINY REVIEWS - CONSIDERATION OF REQUESTS

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

SCRUTINY PANELS – PROGRESS REPORTS

A report of the Chair of each Scrutiny Panel had been circulated which outlined progress on current activities.

ORDERED that consideration of the reports be deferred to the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board scheduled for 18 December 2007.

CALL IN REQUESTS

It was confirmed that in accordance with the Council's Call-In procedure arrangements had been made for a meeting of the Board to be held on 29 November 2007 to consider a decision made at a meeting of the Executive held on 13 November 2007 seeking support to proposals for Erimus Housing to set up a new Group Structure with Tees Valley Housing Group.

NOTED

ANY OTHER BUSINESS – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

The Chair referred to a meeting of the Board, which was to be held on 22 November 2007 to consider the closure and relocation of Middlesbrough main Post Office to W H Smith premises in the Mall shopping centre.

NOTED