

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 2 April 2013.

PRESENT: Councillors Brunton (Chair), Arundale, Cole, Dryden, Harvey, C Hobson, Kerr, Mawston, McIntyre, Sanderson, J Sharrocks, J A Walker and Williams.

OFFICERS: J Bennington and J Ord.

AN APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE was submitted on behalf of Councillor J Sharrocks.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest made at this point of the meeting.

MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD 5 AND 14 MARCH 2013

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 5 and 14 March 2013 were submitted.

In response to a Members' query it was confirmed that the recommendations of the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel in respect of the Future of Local Authority Involvement in Academies were being actioned including a request for further information regarding the ownership of some of the Oakfields Academy site by Hustler Trust in particular an all weather pitch details of which would be made available to Members in due course.

ORDERED as follows:-

1. That the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 5 and 14 March 2013 be approved as a correct record.
2. That the Executive Feedback in respect of the Final Reports including further information regarding Oakfields Academy Site be submitted in due course.

WELFARE REFORMS - EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE - TERMS OF REFERENCE AND LINES OF ENQUIRY

Employment and Support Allowance The Scrutiny Support Officer submitted a report which outlined draft terms of reference and possible lines of enquiry to direct an investigation into the topic of Employment and Support Allowance in Middlesbrough.

Taking into account the Board's initial discussion on the topic at its meeting held on 15 March 2013 Members considered the following draft terms of reference:-

- (i) To develop a detailed understanding of the Employment and Support Allowance and to receive advice from whomever the Board feels appropriate to assist in this.
- (ii) To establish the aims of the policy.
- (iii) To investigate and establish what the Employment and Support Allowance and the associated processes around it, mean for demand on local authority services.
- (iv) To investigate and establish the nature of the contractual relationships in place, to deliver the Employment and Support Allowance policy.
- (v) To investigate and establish how the performance in those contracts will be judged.
- (vi) To investigate and establish how the medical and appeal process is provided and managed.
- (vii) To investigate and consider the impact of the policy on Middlesbrough residents.

(viii) To prepare conclusions and recommendations as the Board sees as appropriate.

In terms of future witnesses it was confirmed that whilst every endeavour had been made for senior representatives of the local team from the Department of Work and Pensions to attend this meeting they were unable to do so because of prior commitments but had confirmed their availability for the meeting of the Board scheduled for 30 April 2013 in order to gain further information around the policy and some of the wider issues pertaining to Welfare Reform.

Members discussed the attendance of other suggested representatives including the contracted provider of the medical assessments, ATOS; the Independent Tribunal representatives; Citizens Advice Bureau as well as relevant local authority Officers. It was suggested that Officers explore the possibility of gaining information on case studies in order to demonstrate some of the problems that claimants had encountered. Members also suggested gaining an insight from Tandem which had been set up to provide general money advice and guidance to all Erimus Housing tenants.

Members referred to a whole range of possible Welfare Reform related topics for future scrutiny investigation. In order to complete the current scrutiny investigation at the earliest opportunity it was agreed that arrangements be made for additional meetings of the Board to be organised in consultation with the Chair.

ORDERED as follows:-

1. That the draft terms of reference for the scrutiny topic in respect of the Employment and Support Allowance in Middlesbrough as outlined above be approved.
2. That senior representatives of the local team from the Department of Work and Pensions be invited to attend the meeting of the Board scheduled for 30 April 2013.
3. That representatives of Welfare Rights and the Citizens Advice Bureau be invited to attend future meetings of the Board when considering matters relating to the current scrutiny topic in respect of the Employment and Support Allowance.
4. That representatives from ATOS, the Independent Tribunal, Tandem and relevant Local Authority Officers be invited to attend future meetings of the Board as part of the overall investigation and that endeavours be made to seek further information on case studies in order to clarify some of the problems currently being experienced by claimants.
5. That a list of other Welfare Reform related topics for possible future scrutiny investigation be submitted to the next meeting of the Board.