



ANNUAL REPORT OF THE NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES 2011/12

Northumberland County Council has four Overview and Scrutiny Committees to monitor the way that services are provided and to make recommendations as to whether new policies or changes to policies are needed. Issues of public concern are considered and changes to improve matters are recommended. These Committees consider and, where necessary, question decisions made by the

Executive. This is an essential part of the good governance of the authority and does rely on the participation of the Executive and of the Council's officers.

Successful scrutiny: "Provides a "critical friend" challenge to the executive as well as external agencies; reflects the concerns of the public and community (actively engage the public); takes the lead in scrutinising on behalf of the public (community leadership), and makes an impact on the delivery of public services (contributes to performance)."

Over the last year each one of our four Scrutiny Committees has been very active in ensuring that the interests of our county's residents are being addressed, not just by Northumberland County Council, but by the various organisations that provide the wide range of services that they rely upon. Some examples of the scrutiny work are:

- Work with the Environment Agency on flood prevention and the examination of the social housing services available in Northumberland.
- Engaging with tourism providers on the new arrangements for Northumberland tourism and scrutinising plans for the introduction of high speed broadband.
- Working with the North East Ambulance Service to improve the provision of emergency services in Berwick and Haltwhistle and working with the Health Trusts on improved provision of health services in Northumberland.
- Supporting progress in reducing teenage pregnancy in Northumberland, and scrutinising the implementation of changes to the provision of children's services.

I would like to thank those who have contributed to our work and present the key highlights of issues investigated over the past year.

Councillor Peter Jackson

Chairman: Overview and Scrutiny Chairmen's Working Group

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

1. ECONOMIC PROSPERITY AND STRATEGIC SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



**Councillor Gordon Castle
Chairman**

1.1 The Committee continues to make a valuable contribution to the work of the council by closely examining policy areas of special interest and particular economic importance. The committee's main purpose is to assist the Executive make good decisions by providing informed recommendations on a cross party basis. On the whole, the Committee's recommendations and comments have been well received and generally acted upon. Although the committee has the power to call in decisions that have caused concern, it is rarely necessary to do so and good scrutiny works best when it has time to work properly. Meetings are well attended by Executive members and officers, for which I am particularly grateful. Outside bodies and organisations are frequently

invited to make a contribution. This strengthens the democratic legitimacy of the council by fostering a wider sense of participation and engagement in the decision making process. Whilst the forward planning process itself requires further refinement, there is evidence in the past year of a greater understanding and acceptance of the potential of scrutiny to make decision making easier for Executive members.

- 1.2 I would like to thank my colleagues on the committee for their close cooperation and support over the past year and also the scrutiny officers who make it work as well as it does.
- 1.3 The **Bus Subsidy Working Group** – was established to consider the existing policy to ensure that the subsidies provided by the County Council represented value for money. The aim of the Group was to therefore to update the County's Bus Subsidy Policy and to agree a formula for granting public travel subsidies to ensure value for money for the limited resources available. The Working Group made ten recommendations to the Executive, which were accepted, including the withdrawal of some heavily subsidised, but scarcely used bus services; support for community based services; to examine whether public and school transport could be combined, and to agree more rigid criteria to be applied for financial support to a new service.
- 1.4 **The Bus Services Working Group** – was established to consider issues relevant to Northumberland of the Competition Commission investigations into the bus industry and proposals by Nexus for Bus Quality Contract Scheme. The Working Group is in the process of gathering evidence from interested parties and is scheduled to make its final report to the Executive in June/July 2012.
- 1.5 **The Transport Asset Management Plan (TAMP) Working Group** has been re-established to review the output from the previous Working Group and to gather

evidence and where appropriate make recommendations with regard to: maintenance strategy for all assets; service standards to maintain that strategy, and performance measures to monitor strategy delivery. In addition, the Council's draft Street-Lighting Policy has been referred to the Working Group for further examination. The Working Group has met on five occasions and is due to make its final report to the Executive in June 2012.

1.6 Many other issues have been covered during the last year:

1.6.1 **Broadband** – The Committee have consistently pressed for broadband to be extended to the rural areas of Northumberland to improve economic prosperity for businesses and tourism, and educational opportunities across the county and in February 2012, supported the bid for BDUK funding.

1.6.2 **Regeneration** – The Committee were concerned that proposals to re-organise the Council's regeneration function would have an adverse impact on businesses seeking support from the Authority. Members are to receive further details of the new structure early in the next Council year and, if appropriate, will invite comment from the business community to ensure where possible that NCC are targeting their resources in the most effective manner.

1.6.3 **Welfare Reform** – The Committee have received regular updates on the Governments proposals under the Welfare Reform Act from 1 April 2013, including:

- changes to the Local Housing Allowance (LHA): increase in age threshold for the shared room rate in housing benefit to 35, and changes in occupation levels in a property;
- a new Universal Credit to be introduced for working aged people to replace a number of existing benefits and allowances. Claims will be administered through DWP mainly via the internet or telephone and it may be that the Council will be required to provide a front office facility. It is expected that direct monthly payments will be made to the claimant, which could have major implications for landlords, and
- the present council tax benefit will be replaced with a localised rebate scheme.

1.6.4 Further guidance is still awaited from Government and members will be briefed in due course as the changes will affect all residents.

1.6.6 **Tourism** – Tourism Conference was arranged to consider how to manage tourism in Northumberland following the withdrawal of OneNE funding. Tourism is critical to Northumberland, contributing approximately £652 million to the economy each year. Supporting jobs, attractions and businesses, the

industry spans a range of direct and secondary sectors from 'Bed and Breakfasts' to retail. Continuing work by the committee has brought about a new approach with tourism providers at the centre. The Committee recently received a comprehensive report on the Council's readiness for the Spring/Summer holiday season, which included a number of forthcoming attractions and events.

1.6.7 **Procurement** – Recommendations of the Procurement Working Group for improvements to our procurement processes were accepted. There is continuing scope for improvement in this area, with special emphasis on making council contracts more accessible to local businesses.

1.6.8 **Street Trading Policy** – The Committee recommended major changes to contentious draft proposals which have all been accepted by the Executive, including removal of CRB checks, withdrawal of geographical constraints and substantial reductions in charges.

1.6.9 **Pavement Café Policy** – This report received considerable attention by the Committee and the Executive agreed to revise the proposals, particularly in regard to charging levels and bureaucracy.

1.6.10 **Winter Services** – The report by the Winter Services Working Group was accepted in the main by the Executive and further examination by the Committee assisted officers with future planning and identified departmental shortcomings in procurement, which have now been addressed.

1.7 In addition, the Committee have considered a number of reports and strategy documents prior to determination by the Executive and have made recommendations and suggested amendments on the following:

- The Northumberland Economic Strategy Delivery Framework
- Northumberland Parking Strategy
- County-wide Shoppers Permit
- Budget 2012/13
- Northumberland County Council Public Transport Strategy 2011-2016

1.8 The Committee continued to monitoring issues across its remit, including:

- Regional Growth Fund
- North Eastern Local Enterprise Partnership
- Roads Maintenance Programme
- Debt Recovery
- Sickness Management
- ICT Infrastructure/Security
- Treasury Management
- Market Strategy
- Revenue Outturn

- Senior Management Structure
- Highways and Neighbourhood Services - Winter Services
- Transformation Programme
- Performance Overview

2. COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



**Councillor Glen Sanderson
Chairman**

2.1 In the Committee's third year we have been following the Executive Forward Plan as far as practicable and have been relevant, but challenging when necessary. We have offered the Executive a number of suggestions and recommendations to help ensure that Council services are delivered effectively, in particular when communicating with residents. We have held two public meetings, on planning and culture themes, and have conducted two important pre-scrutiny exercises on Homes for Northumberland and the Internal Review of Policy and Practice for Outdoor Advertisements, the value of the Committee's work being clear.

- 2.2 Adopting a central theme for each meeting has the benefit of focussing the Committee's attention on key issues while also limiting the use of Officer time as the need to make resource savings increases. As the Localism agenda takes effect, the shift from central to local government controls is bringing about a renewed involvement of the public in the provision of services from local authorities. Our Committee continues to engage with members of the community by continuing to hold meetings at public venues around the County or by inviting representatives of interest groups to take part in meetings.
- 2.3 Whenever the business of the meeting dictates, the Committee submits recommendations, comments and suggestions to the Executive, 18 in 2011/2012. Again this year, the vast majority of the Committee's recommendations have been supported by the Executive. Actions following agreement by the Executive are monitored and reported to the Committee six monthly until completed.
- 2.4 **Planning** - two meetings were devoted to planning matters, where progress with producing the County's Local Development Framework was reported. The Committee passed on to the Executive a public request at the 21 June Meeting that parish councils receive written acknowledgement of their consultation responses to planning



applications. The February 2012 Meeting looked at the Report for the Internal Review of Policy and Practice Relating to Outdoor Advertisements and suggestions to the Executive about maintaining a balance between enforcement action and support for local business were accepted.

- 2.5 **Localism** - the 20 July Meeting looked at a range of community related service areas, including the future provision of local services by parish and town councils, the Berwick Project, Morpeth Flood Alleviation Scheme and the Localism Bill (neighbourhood planning and the Allendale Project). The Committee also received the Report of its Road Safety Working Group and submitted recommendations to the Executive regarding continued financial support of the Northumbria Safer Roads initiative and democratic input to its governance.
- 2.6 **Housing** - in September the Committee was invited to comment upon the Homes for Northumberland Value for Money Review and endorsed officer recommendations to the Executive, adding a recommendation concerning keeping tenants informed about that process. The Committee also received updates on working with private landlords, WarmZone, empty homes and income from Council Tax on caravans/holiday chalets occupied as main residences. On this last issue, the Executive accepted a recommendation that all means to collect such tax be explored.
- 2.7 In March 2012, ISOS Housing gave an update on their operations since the Group's amalgamation with Castle Morpeth Housing and Milecastle Housing. As housing, and in particular the provision of affordable housing, remains the single most highly prioritised issue for this Committee, interaction with housing providers and tenant groups in the County will continue to feature on our Work Programme.
- 2.8 This year the Committee was also invited to provide input to the Council's:
- Common Allocation Policy Review, for which a Working Group was set up with the participation of Housing and Care Services Working Group Members
 - response to the Department for Communities and Local Government Consultation on Guidance for Local Housing Authorities in England.
- 2.9 **Community Safety** - in October, updates on the Public Protection Service Plan, the Safer Northumberland Partnership, CCTV in Northumberland and Underage Sales

were received. Northumbria Police Authority provided an update on the Police and Crime Commissioner's Bill, and Northumbria Police gave an update on their service reviews and current crime statistics. A recommendation that the possibility of using a dedicated phone number (or other appropriate mechanism) be investigated to facilitate reporting of underage sales offences to the Council was agreed by the Executive.

- 2.10 Council subsequently asked that the Committee receive regular updates on the Northumbria Police Authority and, for the first update in December, the Authority presented the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, and reports were received on police air support/response times and the 2012 Olympics/Northumberland. The Committee receives ongoing updates on the Police Authority.
- 2.11 **Waste Management** - in November, charities and textiles recycling, the Berwick in-house project, and performance information, were discussed. The Committee asked the Executive to consider providing householders with labels communicating guidance on which materials to recycle and which to include in residual waste bins. This was agreed.
- 2.12 **Culture** - this January we visited the Woodhorn Museum and received updates on the Council's Heritage and Archives Services and the Library Service.
- 2.13 **Communications** - the Council's communications practice and complaints handling were discussed at our February Meeting, along with an update on the Council's engagement with local residents, with a further update expected in April.



Meeting Remploy staff in Ashington should the closure go ahead.

- 2.14 **Remploy** - following the recommendations of the Sayce Report that Remploy factories were to close, scrutiny was asked to establish a cross party task and finish group to undertake an investigation of the implications for the 28 workers at the Remploy factory in Ashington and for Northumberland as a whole.
- 2.15 We visited the factory and held discussions with employees, management and a wide range of stakeholders and agencies to ascertain their views and concerns. All of these agencies willingly committed to proactively supporting the workers

- 2.16 The Group were generally in favour with the Sayce Report proposals which recommend diverting funding to assist disabled into mainstream employment but agreed that the current Remploy Enterprise Business model at Ashington was not sustainable or fit for purpose. However, the Ashington factory has provided positive and meaningful work experience for students at a local school. It was envisaged that this could be expanded in the future to provide training which could be added to a CV and help find supported employment in the open workplace.

- 2.17 A number of positive recommendations were subsequently endorsed, intended not only to protect the current workforce but also to provide a valuable opportunity for all disabled in our County to receive the support and training necessary to allow them to enter and sustain mainstream employment.
- 2.18 Remploy were advised to work proactively with the Government, County Council and partners and the many organisations willing to support their workforce and meet their corporate responsibilities. The situation is being monitored.

3. CARE AND WELLBEING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Councillor Margaret Richards
Chairman

3.1 **Health and Social Care Act** - After a year of debate and dispute, the Health and Social Bill finally gained Royal Assent. The Committee have received regular briefings on the proposals and implications of the huge structural reform and recognise their increased involvement as further guidance is received regarding HealthWatch, Health and Wellbeing Boards (currently operating in shadow form) and the implications for scrutiny.

3.2 The next big development is the Adult Social Care White Paper, expected later this spring and the Committee will remain fully involved in developments.

3.3 **Public Health Transition Plan** - The Committee welcome

the return of public health leadership to the Council. We believe we have the democratic mandate and local knowledge to improve the health and wellbeing of our population by working with our key partners to address the key determinants of health.

3.4 We are concerned, however, about the current low level of NHS funding for public health services within Northumberland. Northumberland has the lowest per capita spend on these services with the North East region and is in the lowest quartile of public health spend within the country as a whole. We have therefore written to the Secretary of State for Health and local MPs expressing this concern and emphasising that the public health needs of this region overall are much greater than those of most other parts of England, and that this is reflected in the distribution of funding for public health.

3.5 **Regional Review of the Health Needs of the Ex-Service Community** - Last year, the Joint Regional Health Scrutiny Committee carried out a review of the health needs of veterans and their families. The work was recognised nationally and received two “Good Scrutiny Awards” last June.

3.6 Recommendations from the review are aimed at achieving a ‘joined up’ approach across the North East to serve the need of the Ex-Services Community. Among the recommendations there is a clear drive for the Armed Forces to work more closely with local authorities to provide information on the numbers of people leaving the forces and their likely demand for such things as employment and skills, housing and social care.

3.7 The Council will sign an Armed Forces Community Covenant at the Annual Meeting in May, which confirms its commitment to improving services to the Armed Forces and their families.

3.8 Progress of the recommendations are monitored regularly by an Armed Forces Forum and the Regional Scrutiny Committee.

- 3.9 **North East Ambulance NHS Foundation Trust: Proposed Service Review** - The Committee held a very well attended meeting in Berwick in February to discuss the North East Ambulance Service Review and in particular, the implications for Berwick. There was a full and probing debate on the proposals and opposition to the proposals was clear, particularly the proposed redeployment of one of the two double crewed ambulances currently stationed at Berwick.
- 3.10 Whilst understanding the logic behind the proposed review – that it will free up A and E drivers to attend to life threatening 999 cases - members felt that there needed to be comprehensive engagement of key groups in those areas affected, particularly Berwick and the West.
- 3.11 A briefing was subsequently held for all members to discuss the implications across Northumberland and again, opposition to the proposals was clear.
- 3.12 Following discussions with Commissioners, the Trust have now announced that services in Berwick and Haltwhistle, will remain untouched and additional funding will be provided to improve ambulance response times in Northumberland and County Durham.
- 3.13 The Committee welcome this increased funding and are grateful that the Trust has listened to the views expressed. We hope to see real progress in response times for 999 calls in Northumberland over the next year and beyond.
- 3.14 **Implementation of NHS 111 across Northumberland, Newcastle and North Tyneside** - The NHS 111 telephone number is simple and easy to remember in cases where medical assistance is needed but are not 999 emergencies. Calls are free, even from mobile phones and available 24 hours, seven days a week, 365 days a year.
- 3.15 The number is currently being piloted in County Durham and Darlington and will be implemented north of Tyne by April 2013.
- 3.16 Members welcome the service as a means of directing the public to the most appropriate service first time and reducing health inequalities by improving access
- 3.17 **Palliative Care Funding – West Northumberland** - At the invitation of the Chairman, Peter Wood, chairman of the Charlotte Straker Project in Corbridge, a dual registered residential and nursing home, addressed the committee regarding the decision of the Clinical Commissioning Group not to continue to fund the provision of three palliative care beds at the Charlotte Straker Nursing Home in Corbridge once the time limited pilot ended on 31 March.
- 3.18 The Commissioners were asked to reconsider this decision and provide a long term solution to provide stability in the system and for patients
- 3.19 The CCG has now decided that funding will continue to allow the GPs to provide

the enhanced service to help care for more patients at home and will be rolled out over the whole of Northumberland in 2012/13. Whilst deciding not to continue with the three palliative care beds which formed the second part of the pilot, patients who need inpatient palliative care will be able to receive this from Hexham General Hospital where their care will be supported by a specialist community palliative care consultant.

3.20 In addition, the CCG has increased the core funding for the Tynedale Hospice at Home by £30,000, which also provides support in the community for patients who wish die at home. It is hoped that this will partly off-set a decision by the CCG to discontinue additional funding of £70,000, which had been made available, again as a pilot, to increase capacity at Tynedale Hospice at Home.

3.21 **Health Inequalities Working Group**

3.21.1 During 2011/12 members undertook a review to scrutinise the approaches within Northumberland for tackling the main determinants of health inequalities in the context of the Marmot Review and the proposed changes to the public health system in England announced in the public health white paper Health Lives, Healthy People

3.21.2 This work focussed on the Policy Objective A of the Marmot Report - ***Give every child the best start in life.***

3.21.3 Over the period from September 2011 - March 2012, the working group heard evidence from a range of professionals about preventive and health improving activities aimed at improving pregnancy outcomes and early year's provision including attachment, childcare and parenting.

3.21.4 Having considered this evidence, the working group have made a number of recommendations to the Executive which we feel will result in achievable outcomes, including requesting that partners work collaboratively across organisational boundaries to improve services and outcomes together. This approach should be apparent within the forthcoming Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy.

3.21.5 The detailed report can be made available on request. Implementation of the recommendations will be monitored by the Committee.

3.22 **End of Life Care Working Group**

3.22.1 End of Life Care in Northumberland was identified as an area in need of development and improvement. This, allied with the higher national profile afforded to End of Life by the publication of the first national strategy, led to the establishment of the Working Group.

3.22.2 End of life care is an emotive and sensitive topic to consider. Death and how society cares for the dying remains, to some extent, a taboo topic that people do not wish to speak about.

3.22.3 However, we live in a time when around 60% of deaths could be considered to be predictable or expected, following illness or frailty. We also live in a time when the proportion of older people in the population is increasing and, death becomes more likely the older one becomes.

3.22.4 The Working Group gathered a vast amount of evidence and advice from a range of different sources on the topic of End of Life Care in Northumberland and sought to investigate all services provided such as housing; keeping people integrated within society, recognising the added problems of rurality; the role of religious and other groups; encouraging IT for older people in Northumberland and rolling out current practices such as the integration of loss and bereavement into school curriculums and work experience opportunities.

3.22.5 An information event was held in County Hall for staff and members to raise awareness of the services available.

3.22.6 Local Authorities are uniquely placed to play a major role in the practical implementation of a *Good Death* charter and the Working Group considered a number of practical ways in which such a Charter could



Sir Alan Beith MP attends the information event
be adopted and implemented across Northumberland. They looked at how the Council could influence these key areas across a spectrum of services and help change how society deals with dying and death.

3.22.7 A number of recommendations have been submitted to the Executive for approval and a copy of the full report can be made available. The implementation of the recommendations will be monitored by the Committee.

3.23 **Emergency Care Project** - Extensive work has been carried out over the past few years with Newcastle and North Tyneside Overview and Scrutiny Committees to scrutinise in detail Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust's proposals to:

- build a new specialist emergency hospital close to the North Tyneside and Northumberland Border;
- improve facilities at Wansbeck and North Tyneside General Hospitals, and
- rebuild community hospitals in Berwick, Haltwhistle and Morpeth.

3.23.1 Now that the planning application has been submitted, discussions are ongoing with the Trust regarding possible services to be provided at the new hospitals.

3.23.2 For example, a vigorous question and answer session was held at Berwick regarding Berwick redevelopment. The discussion involved Councillors, the Member of Parliament for Berwick-upon-Tweed and approximately 85 members of the public, including Town Councillors and a range of professionals. Concerns were expressed about the proposed replacement of the current hospital, the loss of some services provided in the past, perceptions about the rationale for and possible impacts of the proposals. The Trust have agreed to continue discussions with local people when proposing any further changes to hospital services.

3.24 In addition, the Committee have been consulted or informed about a range of other services and initiatives over the year and have provided valuable input into national and regional strategies and plans:

- Southern Cross Homes
- Welfare Rights and forthcoming developments
- A Partnership Enterprise for Learning Disability Day Services
- Preventative Services such as Rehabilitation, Telecare and Telemedicine
- Attendance Allowances
- Complaints and compliments
- Performance reports
- North of Tyne Planning Update
- NTW NHS Trust Annual Plan
- NEAS Annual Report
- Patient Transfer Service
- Older People's Partnership Board
- Haltwhistle Health and Social Care Scheme
- Any Qualified Provider

4. FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



**Councillor Richard Dodd
Chairman**

4.1 The Committee have had another busy year dealing with many diverse issues including the condition of school buildings; delivery of the music services; impact of new academies; young people not in education, employment or Training (NEET) and the Children and Young People's Plan. Members have also received a number of regular monitoring reports including summaries of rota visits to children's services establishments and audit reports arising from the Climbie Inquiry. Falling populations, particularly in rural areas, continues to cause a concern on the impact on school numbers and this is an area which the Committee will keep under review.

4.2 **Anti-bullying in Northumberland Schools** – bullying takes place in many forms, e.g. cyber bullying, at school and even at home. The Committee recognised that there is a

need to support and promote approaches to anti-bullying in Northumberland and to ensure that the authority's approach reflect best practice and is in tune with national policies and local ambitions. Northumberland has developed an Anti-bullying Accreditation for schools. To date, 33 mainstream schools have been accredited and more schools have expressed an interest in gaining accreditation. In addition, a special school and three care homes has also been accredited. Locality Inclusion Support Teams have been established and include a steering group of professional and support staff from each of the areas comprising Specialist Behaviour Support, Educational Psychology and Education Welfare. It is anticipated that an anti-bullying website will come on-line in the near future.

4.3 Teenage Pregnancy

4.3.1 The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy has been in place for around ten years, from a period when England had the highest teenage pregnancy rate in Europe. With the continued support of the Committee, a number of initiatives have been put in place resulting in Northumberland having the lowest teenage pregnancy rate in the north east of England. Throughout the ten year strategy there has been two key performance targets:

- 50% reduction in the teenage pregnancy conception rate, and
- 60% increase in teenage parents engaged in education, employment or training.

4.3.2 Teenage pregnancy remains a key priority for the local authority. Performance indicators are to be fixed locally and Northumberland's Teenage Pregnancy Partnership Board had recently set a 2% reduction target on the annual teenage conception rate for Northumberland. In order to achieve that target, support services such as the provision of Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) and improved access to Contraceptive and Sexual Health (CASH) services are key in continuing the reduction.

4.3.3 An SRE curriculum had been developed last year for schools in Northumberland and was launched in September 2011. The curriculum covered foundation stage right through to year 11. Sex education includes issues of self-esteem and self-worth and understanding what are positive/healthy relationships and allowing young people to develop skills in order to make informed choices for themselves in different situations and not just in relation to their sexual health. In addition, work is to be developed with Targeted Adolescent Services (TAS) to ensure SRE was offered within the programmes of work offered to young people.

4.3.4 In relation to support services for teenage parents, a great deal of work has been carried out with maternity services, which has resulted in targeted support meetings being established. These multi agency meetings have been set up county wide in partnership with Children's Centres, Health Visitors and support workers from the Teenage Pregnancy Team.

4.3.5 The Committee are pleased with the progress Children's Services has made in this area and will continue to support this work and receive regular monitoring reports in their coming work programmes.

4.4 Monitoring of Children's Services by OFSTED and DfE

4.4.1 In its annual rating of performance published on 8th November 2011, Ofsted confirmed that the Council's children's services continue to perform well, achieving a judgement of 3 out of a possible 4. The report notes that the large majority of services, settings and institutions for children and young people are good or better overall and the very large majority are good at helping children and young people to stay safe, enjoy their learning and achieve well. A number of strengths were identified in the letter and the areas that were identified for further improvement are mostly areas the local authority had already begun to plan and initiate improvements. However, some of these are long term issues such as the progress made between key stage 1 and key stage 2, and closing the gap between the education achievement of 16 year olds from low income backgrounds and their peers. The Committee will continue to monitor and offer support in the areas identified for improvement.

4.4.2 The Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted are challenging local authorities to improve the performance of those schools where performance is below the defined 'Floor Standards' at KS2 and KS4.

4.5 Troubled Families

4.5.1 The Government has recently announced additional resources totalling £448m over the next three years to support work with "troubled families". These are families who are experiencing multiple problems and disadvantages, such as worklessness, truancy, drug and alcohol addiction and also causing problems such as anti-social behaviour.

4.5.2 This funding is intended to supplement and support the recently launched European Social Fund (ESF) Programme for Families with Multiple Problems. Northumberland has been chosen as part of the ESF programme to be a subcontracted provider of services on behalf of the Wise Group and will deliver support to 519 families over the three year period. This work will supplement the Troubled Families initiative and will allow the development of a whole family approach towards children affected by parental difficulties.

4.5.3 The funding will provide additional resources to support front line staff in the targeting of work towards those families who cause significant difficulties within communities and where outcomes for children are poor.

4.5.4 The Committee are aware that Children's Services have been developing a model of early intervention and prevention based upon the Berwick Project and

works previously undertaken in the South East of the county. This initiative mirrors the intended outcomes and service user group identified in the Prime Ministers announcement, will provide an infrastructure to deliver a local programme and access the funding available from central government. The team will be based on a family recovery and early intervention model and will be drawn from a range of professionals to provide a whole family response to both worklessness and troubled family issues.

4.5.5 The Committee will continue to receive further updates on the development and implementation of prevention and early intervention services as the work progresses.

4.6 Parenting Support Strategy

4.6.1 The Committee have endorsed the Parenting Support Strategy which reflects Northumberland County Council's Children's Services multi-agency approach to supporting parents and carers and aligns with the emerging priorities of the Health and Wellbeing Board. In light of national Government's focus on the identification and support for those families with complex needs, it is envisaged that the strategy will provide partner agencies with an understanding of the high priority given to parenting support within Northumberland.

4.6.2 The strategy sets out Northumberland's vision for supporting parents, recognising that while parents ultimately have responsibility to parent their children, at any given point in time parents may benefit from additional support and that this may be required either by law or request. This vision is underpinned by the raft of principles set out in the strategy that focus on support interventions specifically aimed to help parents to improve outcomes for their children.

4.7 Prevention Strategy

4.7.1 The Committee have endorsed an updated Prevention Strategy for Northumberland, arising from a review of the previous version approved at FACT Board in October 2010. The new strategy reflects the needs analysis, outcomes and priorities of Northumberland's new Children and Young People's Plan 2011-14, how the Strategy will be resourced, including tools for the workforce and how performance management will support the shift towards prevention.

4.7.2 The central aim of the Prevention Strategy is to shift in the focus of resources from acute and reactive provision towards early identification and intervention in order to address problems for children and young people before they become more entrenched and problematic.

4.7.3 The Committee will receive regular progress reports.

4.8 Youth Service

4.8.1 Following on from the recommendations of the Committee's Youth Services Working Group referred to in last year's annual report, members have continued to monitor the good work of the service. We were pleased to hear that Maurice Bransfield has won the regional Youth Service Manager of the Year Award and that Silx teen bar also won an award at a ceremony recently held at Sunderland's Stadium of Light.

5. NATIONAL POLICY DEVELOPMENTS – IMPACT ON SCRUTINY

- 5.1 There have been significant national policy developments since the last Annual Report with the publication of the Localism Bill, the Education Act, the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill and the Public Health White Paper, "Healthy Lives, Healthy People" being published and most recently, the issuing of the Government's response to the public consultation on NHS reform, "Liberating the NHS – Legislative Framework and Next Steps".
- 5.2 The Overview and Scrutiny function will play an important role in subjecting the proposals to independent analysis and help the Executive and its Partners consider the long term implications of the decisions being taken. Scrutiny can also provide valuable assurance to the public and stakeholders that their views and concerns will be taken into account in the way the new measures are shaped and implemented.
- 5.3 To retain public confidence, it is important that all existing and new forms of service delivery are subject to robust and public accountability. Scrutiny can harness the challenging and investigative aspects of its work together with its positive role in contributing to policy development and the restructuring of local services.

6. WORK PROGRAMMES

- 6.1 The work programmes will continue to be delivered through a number of mechanisms, for example:
- Revisiting previous reviews and issues considered, focusing on progress made with recommendations contained in the reports;
 - Light touch reviews on particular issues;
 - Task and Finish Working Groups to look at in depth investigations, and
 - Receiving information on policy/strategy areas as part of their overview function.
 - Cross cutting issues will be considered by joint meetings
- 6.2 It is envisaged that the scrutiny function will continue to contribute positively to policy development, community engagement and participation, performance monitoring and scrutiny of partners and improvements in services provided.

7. PARTNERSHIP WORKING

A particular strength in scrutiny is the ability to bring in external partners to offer evidence and professional advice on issues. For example, Stephen Spink from the **Highways Agency** attended a meeting of Economic Prosperity Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discuss Trunk Road Signing Policy and Strategy; Brown Tourist Signs; Winter Maintenance issues in Northumberland, and joint working opportunities, such as operational matters, accident issues, the Pinch Point Programme and engagement with local Councils (who have an enhanced importance in a unitary council like Northumberland). The Committee hope that representatives of the Highways Agency will continue to attend future meetings to continue to foster a better understanding for members of the work of the Agency.

- 7.2 The **NHS Trusts**, which provide health services to people in Northumberland, regularly attend the Care and Wellbeing meetings to discuss the key issues facing them, their priorities and budget pressures; health inequalities; potential change and performance. The Trusts and **NHS North of Tyne** have involved members in a number of service changes, and given regular feedback on their future plans. Also, Northumberland Local Involvement Network works closely with the Committee.

8. CALL-INS

- 8.1 There has only been one “call in” during 2011/12 – the Northumberland Parking Strategy which led to the Council setting up a Car Parking Strategy Working Group to consider any proposed amendments to the Northumberland Parking Strategy. All recommended changes are to be subject to pre-scrutiny by the Economic Prosperity and Strategic Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, prior to consideration by the Executive.

9. VISITS

- 9.1 Over the year, **Care and Wellbeing** Members have visited the North East Ambulance Service Control Room, the Joint Equipment Loan Service, St. Oswald’s Hospice and the Palliative Care Units at North Tyneside General Hospital and Wansbeck Hospital. They have also held well-attended public meetings at Hexham Hospital and Berwick.
- 9.2 **Communities and Place** have held meetings at the Corn Exchange in Morpeth, attended by Parish and Town Council representatives, and at Northumberland Museum and Archives (Woodhorn Trust), Ashington, and Members have also visited the Wansbeck General Hospital Laboratory.



Woodhorn Museum and Northumberland Archives

10. BRIEFING SESSIONS

- 10.1 Briefing sessions for members continue to be a useful way of providing information on a range of important issues. This year, presentations have included: Welfare Reform, North East Ambulance Service Review proposals, the Compassionate Community approach to end of life care services; benefits, the Local Council Charter, and implications of the Education Act.
- 10.2 As well as helping inform the Committee's work programme, the briefings are often extended to all members of the County Council in order to improve general knowledge and understanding of issues and how proposals will affect local communities.

11. CHALLENGES/AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

- 11.1 The key challenge for both members and officers this year is to make scrutiny more effective and outcome focused.
- 11.2 To maintain and build on the current levels of member engagement and attendance by focusing on priority issues of concern to members, providing concise information in appropriate formats and offering a range of training and development opportunities which meet member requirements.
- 11.3 To take on board the increased powers and responsibilities of the relevant legislation.
- 11.4 The Scrutiny committees will continue to monitor the status of their recommendations to Executive. The aim, as always, will be to achieve best practice standards and to make a positive contribution to partnership working and service improvement.

12. FURTHER INFORMATION

Feedback on scrutiny work or suggestions for possible issues to be included in the work programmes is always welcome. Members are invited to contact the Chairs, Vice-Chairs or any member of the Scrutiny Team.

13. SCRUTINY TEAM

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