CHILDREN'S SERVICES REVIEW COMMITTEE

ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME AND POLICY REVIEW
2008-2009

REPORT OF THE CITY SOLICITOR   **12 JUNE 2008**

1.   Purpose of Report

1.1   For Members to determine the Annual Work Programme for the Review Committee during 2008-09, including the main theme for a detailed policy review.

2.   Background

2.1   The Review Committee is responsible for setting its own work programme within the remit of

> Schools, Special Education Support, School Governors, Special Units, Youth Services, Children & Young People's Citizenship, Youth Parliament, Derwent Hill, Children's Social Care, Youth Offending, Sure Start and progress against future actions from inspections of Children's Services.

2.2   A report approved by Cabinet on 28 May 2008 (set out elsewhere on this agenda) revised the terms of reference for the committees to align the subject focus to the relevant priorities of the Sunderland Strategy. The intention is for the committee to focus on the priority areas and targets in the Sunderland Strategy and Local Area Agreement and that the work of all six Review Committees consistently addresses those areas of performance requiring detailed examination.

2.3   This approach linked to strategic and LAA priorities is proposed to allow a clear themed focus on the outcomes for the people of Sunderland, and allow for cross-cutting examination of issues, with potential for linking areas of knowledge and expertise that would not ordinarily be brought together, so increasing the likelihood of the committees identifying novel approaches and solutions to the issues they consider.

2.4   The Sunderland Strategy priority on which it is proposed the committee bases its work programme is as follows:

> Learning City: Creating a city with a thriving learning culture that supports personal fulfilment by ensuring that everyone can access their learning in a cohesive, inclusive city committed to social justice, equality and prosperity, and ensuring learning in Sunderland supports the city's economic prosperity and enabling individuals to thrive in the global economy.

2.5   All committees will take a role in the scrutiny of partnership and area issues
        and have a role in engaging with partners, external scrutiny, community and
        public engagement, engaging with media and area scrutiny.

3.   Operation of the Committee

3.1   For the previous two municipal years the committee has operated within
        certain arrangements to allow it to manage a large amount of business in the
        most productive way. The arrangements are as follows.

3.2   The annual work programme divided into those reports which are for scrutiny
        and a separate 'information' category for items that are less of a priority at that
        time.

3.3   The latter, while requiring no discussion, will still enable any Member of the
        Committee to request that the item be rescheduled as a scrutiny topic at a
        future meeting.   This information category provides the opportunity for the
        Committee to receive a diversity of reports to ensure a good general
        knowledge of Children's Services issues while focusing on a limited amount of
        detailed scrutiny.

3.4   The Committee also agreed that items for scrutiny will be limited as far as
        possible to three per meeting although flexibility will be necessary as the
        Committee will need to respond to new issues arising in addition to scheduled
        work programme items.

3.5   The Committee has previously managed all policy review evidence gathering
        through special evidence gathering meetings, site visits, commissioning of
        consultants and desk-based research. To further enhance and develop this
        Member-led approach the Committee may wish to consider smaller working
        groups involving members in pursuing issues in the work programme enabling
        discussion, development of ideas and preparation for the questioning of
        witnesses outside of Committee.

4.   Suggested Topics and Methods of Enquiry

4.1   Topics for inclusion in the work programme may be single items for scrutiny,
        short term reviews over 2-3 months or a major policy review.

4.2   The following sections include all topics suggested by Members and the
        proposed method of enquiry, including from the discussions held at the
        Scrutiny Conference on 20 May 2008 and the Children's Services breakout
        session.

Scrutiny – single item (Items to be scheduled when dates known)	
Youth Service Commissioning Plan	
Equality and diversity – barriers to accessing services	
Reducing surplus school places	

School Attainment data	
Anti-Social Behaviour – Performance data	
Racism in schools	
Children's Centres / Extended Schools	
NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training)	Including specialised diplomas, modern apprenticeships
Parenting	
Partnership Reports – Children's Trust, Youth Offending Service, Safeguarding Board, Learning & Skills Council, Connexions	Are effective partnership arrangements in place to support the achievement of outcomes?
Task & Finish Group	
Young People and Alcohol	Links: 1. CYPP Priority 3 Reduce Substance Misuse amongst children and young people 2. Government Youth Alcohol Action Plan outlining action on five fronts.
Under 18 conception rates	Links: CYPP Priority 3 Improve Sexual Health and Reduce Teenage Pregnancy.
Obesity among children in Year 6	Links: 1. Priority 3 Increase number of children and young people participating in physical activity and choosing healthy diet and reduce the rate of increase in childhood obesity 2. Children's Plan – child health improved, with the proportion of obese and overweight children reduced to 2000 levels.
School Governors	To assess the support provided to existing governors.
School Health Services	The public health focus of the school nursing service has received renewed attention in the light of Government policies to improve health and reduce inequalities in health outcomes. The assessment will consider the future provision of school nursing services.
Learning – demand from private sector for skills gaps in Sunderland	Link: Children's Plan – Employers satisfied with young people's readiness for work.

4.3 In selecting from the long lists members are asked to consider the revised terms of reference for the committee as referred to in section 2 of this report.

5. Policy Review

5.1 Policy review is the process of maintaining an overview of council policies and will usually examine whether the council's intended policy outcomes have been achieved. The process will also explore issues such as the service user's perspective.

5.2 Policy reviews are project planned with appropriate methodology applied to investigate the chosen topic. This may include meetings, site visits, surveys, public meetings or analysis of comparative practice in other local authorities. For the review of looked after children evidence was gathered at 3 specially

convened evidence gathering sessions with a selection of witnesses at each session.

5.3   Other reviews carried out by this Committee have included school exclusion, boys' attainment, out of school hours learning, community use of school buildings and multi-agency approaches to youth disorder. All previous reviews are available at www.sunderland.gov.uk/Public/editable/Themes/CityCouncil/corporate/review/reviewcommittees

5.4   Following the selection of a topic for review, the Committee will receive a report setting out a possible approach to the review. This will include the terms of reference, definitions, links to corporate goals, partnerships, the national and local context, and proposals for gathering evidence.

5.5   The shortlist of Review Topics for 2008-09 is listed below. The Committee is recommended to select one topic from this shortlist for an in depth review.

Policy Review Proposals	
Emotional Health of Children & Young People	Review with possible focus on the following areas: • Universal services availability and appropriate response for children and young people • Access to specialist services • Transition arrangements for 16 and 17 year olds into adult mental health services Sunderland - Targeting Mental Health in Schools Project Pathfinder this year. Possible cross-cutting with health scrutiny Links: Priority 5 Promote mental health and emotional wellbeing across children and young people settings
Involving young people in decision making and democracy	Review of how young people are involved and what groups such as Youth Parliament are involved in and who is less likely to get involved in formal groups. What other examples of youth participation projects are being carried out in the Council and with partners. Is there a co-ordinated approach to participation across all Council services areas or clear method of evaluating the effectiveness of the projects undertaken? Links: CYPP Priority 1 Engage children and young people
Tackling Child Poverty in Sunderland	Review covering both strategic and service-based aspects of work in Sunderland and its partners in contributing towards the Government's goal of ending child poverty by

	2020.
	Links: The Children's Plan – child poverty halved by 2010 and eradicated by 2020.

6.   Work Programme

6.1   A draft work programme for 2008-09 with items already scheduled is <u>attached</u> as Appendix A. The items listed above, when reduced to a short list and when timings can be known, will be included in the programme.

6.2   The work programme can be amended during the year. Any Member of the Review Committee can add an item of business to a Review Committee agenda (See Protocol 1 Overview & Scrutiny Handbook).

7.   Conclusion & Recommendation

7.1   The Committee is asked to

(a) Consider the draft Annual Work Programme for 2008-09 and indicate any additions or amendments
(b) Consider the list of suggestions for policy review and determine one topic for review.

7.2   Subject to any amendment at this meeting, the work programme will be submitted to the Policy and Coordination Review Committee in its coordinating role.

8.   Background Papers
None

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