

CHILDRENS SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE CHILDRENS SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 8 JUNE 2010 AT COUNCIL CHAMBERS, COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE.

Present:

Cllr Paul Darby, Cllr Andrew Davis, Cllr Peter Davis, Mrs J Finney, Cllr Peter Fuller, Cllr Mark Griffiths, Cllr Russell Hawker, Mr J Hawkins, Mrs A Kemp, Mr Chris King, Cllr Helen Osborn, Mr Neil Owen, Mrs R Ryan, Cllr Carole Soden (Chairman) and Dr M Thompson

Also Present:

Cllr L Grundy OBE, Cllr Richard Gamble and Cllr Richard Clewer

69. **Election of Chairman**

Cllr Carole Soden was elected as Chairman of the Committee for 2010/11.

70. **Election of Vice-Chairman**

Cllr Jon Hubbard was elected as Vice-Chairman of the Committee for 2010/11.

71. **Membership**

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Peter Davis who was appointed to this Committee by Full Council on 18 May, replacing Cllr Peter Hutton.

72. **Apologies and substitutions**

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs Di Dale, Cllr Mary Douglas, Cllr Jacqui Lay, Cllr Bill Moss and Cllr Pip Ridout.

73. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 18 March 2010 were approved and signed as a correct record.

74. **Declarations of Interests**

No declarations of interest were received.

75. Chairman's Announcements

1. **Special Educational Needs (SEN) seminar**

Following a request from Cllr Osborn, a seminar would be provided by officers on Special Education Needs (SEN) provision prior to the Committee's next meeting on 22 July 2010. This would provide some context to the SEN Review post-consultation report due for consideration at that meeting. The seminar would begin at 9.30am and it was requested that all councillors be notified of the seminar.

The Vice-Chairman requested that two Rapid Scrutiny Exercises be arranged: The first to look at the SEN Review consultation process. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman felt there has been weaknesses in the way the Review's rationale had been communicated. The second was to consider the SEN Review consultation results in order to add value to the recommendations to be submitted to Cabinet. The findings of both exercises would be reported to the full Committee's next meeting and considered alongside the post-consultation report.

Cllr Darby, Cllr Hubbard, Mrs Kemp, Cllr Osborn and Cllr Soden expressed interest in taking part in the exercise.

Resolved:

To undertake Rapid Scrutiny Exercises into the SEN Review consultation process and consultation results prior to the next Committee meeting on 22 July 2010.

2. **Letter regarding the proposed closure of the Special Learning Centre, Longleaze Primary School**

A letter from Mrs Ceri Seal and sent to Jon Hubbard was circulated. The letter outlined Mrs Seal's protest over the proposed closure of the Specialist Learning Centre at Longleaze School in Wootton Bassett. An officer response was also included for noting.

3. **Laverstock schools visit**

The visit to the St Edmunds, St Josephs and Wyvern College schools in Laverstock requested at the previous meeting would no longer take place on 29 June 2010. The Senior Scrutiny Officer would contact councillors to arrange an alternative date.

4. New Corporate Plan

The new Corporate Plan was approved by Full Council on 18 May. The Plan outlined the Council's priorities and where resources would be allocated to ensure the Council's goals and vision were realised.

The Plan's focus, in relation to children's services, was on improving Wiltshire's primary schools, pupil performance at Key Stage 2, and the reduction of attainment gaps between all children with Special Educational Needs, Looked After Children, children receiving Free School Meals and their peers.

A Delivery Plan would be produced by the Department of Children and Education (DCE) which would provide details on how these targets would be achieved, which was expected to be ready for consideration by the Committee in September.

5. Downlands School funding

At the Committee's previous meeting, Neil Owen, Secondary Parent Governor representative, expressed concern over the Schools Forum decision in January regarding Downlands School.

The decision related to the School being over-funded in previous years due to a mismatch between their census form and the formula used to calculate the appropriate funding. With this in mind, the Schools Forum agreed to implement a transition period whereby the school's funding would be reduced to the correct level over a period of four years.

Neil Owen and the Chairman of the Committee had arranged to meet with Carolyn Godfrey, Corporate Director DCE on 14 June to discuss the matter. A full update would be provided to the Committee in July.

6. National Review of Children's Cardiac Surgery Services

At its meeting in May, the Health and Adult Social Care Select Committee was informed of plans for a national review of specialised children's cardiac surgery. The results of the review would eventually determine where centres for children's cardiac surgery would be located around the country.

Recommendations would be developed in 2010 and shared with local commissioners and stakeholders, including the Health and Adult Social Care Select Committee, who were leading on this process for the Council. The Children's Services Select Committee would receive regular updates and given the opportunity to provide input.

7. Coalition Government - Plans for Children's Services

An outline of the new Government's proposals for children's services and education was circulated. Members of the Committee were requested to consider the content of the paper outside of the meeting and provide the Chairman, Vice Chairman or Senior Scrutiny Officer with comments on proposed priorities by 1 July. It was also agreed that a standing item be included on each agenda for officers to update the Committee on the latest developments.

The Corporate Director for Children's Services reported that funding to Children's Services could be reduced by approximately £1m per year, every year.

Resolved:

A standing item to be included on each agenda for officers to update the Committee on implications of the new Government's proposals for children's services and education.

76. Public Participation

None.

77. Primary School Strategy: Securing Primary School Improvement through the World Class Primary Plan

Members considered a report from the Corporate Director for Children and Education, providing an update on recent developments within primary school improvement, including the World Class Primary Plan for Wiltshire and the programmes of support currently provided by the local authority to primary schools. Julie Cathcart, Head of School Improvement, and David Ross, Head of School Support, presented.

Ensuing discussion included:

- (a) The Council had been asked by the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to produce a World Class Primary Plan for Wiltshire by end of April 2010. The future status of these plans was now unclear following election of the new coalition Government. Much of the Plan was built on existing strategies and activities and provided details on how the authority supported schools that were currently below the performance target, methods of maximising progression, how to encourage consistent performance and how to transform schools from good to great.

- (b) The report highlighted key features of Plan, to include the role of the School Improvement Partner (SIP). In March 2010, Wiltshire Council was asked to take part in a project to develop the role of the SIP and look at how they could take an increased role in brokerage.
- (c) Under the coalition's new Academies Bill, it was proposed that schools judged as 'outstanding' by Ofsted could be fast-tracked to academy status by the autumn. 1,114 schools nationally had registered to become an academy, though it was still unclear how many schools in Wiltshire would do so.
- (d) The nature of academy status would change the way in which local authorities provided support to those schools, which could result in a change to the Plan. The local authority would have no responsibility for academies as they are independently run, but they were likely to retain some funding passing through the local authority such as for Special Educational Needs (SEN). Admission requirements were clearly set out prior to the announcement on academy status and it was hoped that academies would remain in the same situation as schools with Foundation Status. Funding arrangements were anticipated to be included within the documentation supplied for academy status.
- (e) Wiltshire Council had been contacted by the new Department of Children and Families to provide advice on the work of 'schools supporting schools' as the authority was considered to have expertise and experience in this area.
- (f) Links between the local authority and diocese schools were strong and work was underway to ensure that in future, diocese and council were heard as once voice.

Resolved:

- 1. To thank the department for the report and note its contents.**
- 2. To request that changes to the primary school policy framework and related resources implications were reported to the Committee when known.**

78. School Performance

Stephanie Denovan, Service Director for Schools and Learning, presented a report on why a high proportion of Wiltshire's primary schools were judged by Ofsted to be no better than satisfactory, with a small number inadequate, in the 2009 assessment of children's services in Wiltshire. The assessment also commented that the gap between the majority of children and young people and those in vulnerable circumstances was closing in some areas but that the

picture was inconsistent for different groups. The report explained the factors influencing these results and the work being done to improve primary school performance and narrow the attainment gaps.

Ensuing discussion included:

- (a) Nationally, Wiltshire is in the top quartile at Foundation Stage profile and Key Stage 4 but over the last four years progress at Key Stage 2 has been broadly in line with the national average. This is disappointing given the county's socio-economic position and the department will continue to strive to achieve the ambitious targets set out in the new Corporate Plan.
- (b) There are various factors correlating with poor primary school performance. Other local authorities producing similar results to those found in Wiltshire tend to have a similarly high proportion of small, rural schools. In Wiltshire, this has been addressed with closures, amalgamations, federations and collaborative re-starts involving Wiltshire's National Award Schools and National Leaders of Education. Attainment levels for paired infant and junior schools were also generally lower than those of primary schools, and this has also been addressed through amalgamation where appropriate.
- (c) Schools with a high proportion of children from a services background tended to show average or below average pupil performance. Wiltshire also has one of the highest proportions of voluntary-aided or voluntary-controlled schools in the country. Further partnership working with the Dioceses about our combined support and challenge work is underway.
- (d) It was unclear whether the Accredited Provider Programme would continue under the new government, but the principals would continue to be taken forward, with stronger supporting struggling schools to improve.
- (e) Some of the early intervention programmes that have shown significant success are under threat of removal of government funding. For example, the newly formed Department of Education (formerly the Department for Children, Schools and Families) is to be cut by £670 million, including £311 million from council spending on schools. In addition to this there is an announced £47 million nationally less for one-to-one tuition and £40 million less for Every Child schemes such as Every Child a Reader.
- (f) The three areas with the widest attainment gaps were Free School Meals (FSM), Children Looked After (CLA) and Special Educational Needs (SEN). The greatest attainment gap was in the SEN area, and the root and branch review of SEN services underway is intended to address this.

Resolved:

- 1. To thank the Department for the report and to note its contents.**
- 2. To request a breakdown of Wiltshire's schools by governance arrangements against Ofsted grading.**
- 3. To request that changes to the primary school policy framework and any resource implications are reported to the Chairman and Vice-Chair once known.**

79. SEN Transport

Trevor Daniels, Head of Special Educational Needs (SEN), and Jason Salter, Principal Officer – PTU, presented a report on joint working between officers from DCE and the Passenger Transport Unit (PTU) to reduce the cost of providing transport for children and young people with SEN. The report was requested following a DCE Fact-finding meeting that highlighted various issues relating to this historic area of overspend for the authority.

Ensuing discussion included:

- (a) Responsibility for procuring and managing transport arrangements and for managing the Passenger Assistants sits with the PTU. Responsibility for determining entitlement to transport, ownership of the budget, and responsibility for budget management, lies with DCE.
- (b) In recent years the SEN Transport budget had overspent while the mainstream transport budget had experienced significant under-spends. DCE had previously expressed concern that the savings achieved on the SEN Transport budget by applying eligibility criteria and implementing other measures had not been reflected in a proportionate reduction in the overspend.
- (c) The PTU would now be making every effort to achieve good value for money with its SEN Transport contracts and would be providing timely and comprehensive management information to allow more accurate forecasting and budget setting by officers in DCE.
- (d) It was acknowledged by members that the SEN Transport budget was extremely difficult to manage due to the fluidity of the requirements of children with widely varying needs.
- (e) Passenger Assistant salary costs had increased by £350,000 per annum over the last three years. The Council employs Passenger Assistants directly rather than contracts them through an agency, which is unusual amongst local authorities and carries its own associated costs. A

preliminary review has already been undertaken, and further work is being commissioned as a matter of urgency to progress this further. A report outlining the recommendations from this work is expected in October 2010. It was requested that the Chairman and Vice-Chair be informed of the outcome of this review.

- (f) There was member concern that the Constitution does not make provision for scrutiny of 'internal contracts', such as the arrangement between DCE and the Passenger Transport Unit. It was agreed that a request would be submitted to Cabinet and the Focus Group on the Constitution to add such a provision.

Resolved:

- 1. To thank the Department for the report and to note its contents.**
- 2. To request that, once plans regarding the future provision of Passenger Assistants are known, the Chairman and Vice-Chair are kept informed so an update can be provided to the Committee.**
- 3. To recommend to Cabinet and the Focus Group on the Constitution that a provision be included within the Constitution allowing members to scrutinise internal contracts.**

80. **Food Technology**

The Final Report of the School Food Task Group, which made twelve wide-ranging recommendations on school food provision, was endorsed by Committee in March 2009. This update report included executive responses to Recommendations 5 & 6 of the report, plus updates on the implementation of the Task Group's other recommendations.

Mrs Rebecca MacDonald, Chairman of the Task Group and a co-opted member of the previous Committee, attended the meeting.

Carolyn Godfrey, Corporate Director for Children and Education, provided the following further information:

- (a) The latest statistics on obesity levels in Wiltshire indicated that Wiltshire was bucking the trend against national and regional levels of obesity. Weighing and measuring programmes were now taking place in Reception year and Year 6.
- (b) The Sodexo corporate school catering contract was due to expire last April but was extended on a 3-month rolling basis. An extensive consultation had taken place with schools, with Sodexo agreeing to provide a range of different options for schools to buy into. At the time of

the original report, 120 schools were part of the corporate school catering contract but only around 30 schools now remain.

- (c) Concern was expressed that cuts in local authority funding could impact upon cooking and nutrition within schools.

Resolved:

- 1. To note the executive's responses to recommendations 5 and 6 of the final report of the School Food Task Group.**
- 2. To note the progress made with respect to implementation of the School Food Task Group's recommendations.**

81. Annual Report for Major Contracts Task Group 2009-10

A report was presented to the Committee providing a round-up of the reviews undertaken by the Major Contracts Task Group. Since July 2009, the Task Group had considered the Council's contracts with:

- the White Horse Education Partnership (who are responsible for the accommodation at 3 North Wiltshire Schools)
- Sodexo, who supply school meals
- Wiltshire's children's centres, and
- Quarriers, who provide residential placements for young people with complex needs.

As well as noting the report, the Committee was asked to re-appoint the membership of the Task Group for 2010-11.

Resolved:

- 1. To note the work of the Task Group in reviewing Major Contracts over the previous year.**
- 2. To endorse the membership of the Task Group to continue over the coming year and report back to the Committee in 12 months time.**

82. Task Group Update

An update on the work of the Major Contracts Task Group was included in the previous item.

A written update on the Placements for Looked After Children Task Group's first meeting was provided with the Agenda. Further information had been requested for the next meeting, scheduled to take place in August.

Resolved:

To note the updates.

83. **Holding the Executive to Public Account**

Items from the Cabinet, Corporate Parenting and Schools Forum work programmes relevant to children's services were listed on the agenda for consideration by the Committee.

Ensuing discussion included how Youth Provision in Corsham had disappeared from the programme. The Portfolio Holder for Youth Services confirmed that he would investigate this outside of the meeting.

Resolved:

To note the items in the Cabinet, Corporate Parenting Panel and Schools Forum forward work programmes listed in the Agenda.

84. **Forward Work Programme**

Aftercare Provision for Young People leaving care

A recommendation was received from the Major Contracts Task Group requesting that a report on aftercare provision and the work towards independent living for young people leaving care be added to the Select Committee's work programme. This followed comments from Quarriers, one of the external residential foster placement providers, that this was lacking at present.

It was agreed that the remit of the Placements for Looked After Children (LAC) Task Group would include looking at aftercare, and so an item to Select Committee was unnecessary.

Basic Skills

Following the comment in the Common Area Assessment that Basic Skills was one of nine key areas requiring focus in Wiltshire, members requested that an initial report be brought to the Committee's next meeting.

Role of Schools Forum

Due to the Chairman of Schools Forum being unable to attend the Committee's July meeting, this item was slipped to September.

Resolved:

1. **To request that a report on the issue of Basic Skills be brought to the Committee's July meeting, including an outline of the partnership arrangements, what initiatives are in place and plans for the future.**
2. **To note the Forward Work Programme, with the amendments agreed.**

85. **Date of Next Meeting**

10.30am, Thursday 22 July, at County Hall, Trowbridge.

86. **Urgent Items**

None.

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 am - 1.00 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Sharon Smith, of Democratic & Members' Services, direct line (01225) 718378, e-mail sharonl.smith@wiltshire.gov.uk

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