

**Children's Services Scrutiny Committee  
25 JULY 2007**

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**RESPONSE TO MEMBER QUESTION REGARDING THE  
FUNDING OF SERVICES TO CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

**Purpose of Report**

1. To provide an initial response to the question raised by Councillor Oldrieve as recorded at paragraph 3 below.

**Action Required of the Scrutiny Committee**

2. To consider the Department for Children & Education's initial response to the question submitted and to discuss whether or not this issue should be incorporated as a priority for the Committee's work programme.

**Background**

3. Earlier in the year Councillor Oldrieve submitted a question: "Are we under funding services which should be supporting children and families within our schools, focusing on those children with challenging behaviours?"
4. In order to clarify the issues which Councillor Oldrieve was seeking to address a planned discussion took place on 28 June last. This attempted to consider the wider children's services context and highlighted a number of related issues.
5. The Children & Families Service Budget for 2007/2008 amounts to £52.1m of which £15.8m is Delegated Schools Grant. There are restrictions on the use of Dedicated Schools Grant which provides for a range of education support services and Special Educational Needs. The remaining £36.3m covers social care services including safeguarding, looked after children, disability and a range of 'support' services.
6. The service has faced significant financial constraints between 2003 and 2006. Placement costs for looked after children were a significant factor in contributing to this and the impact of the Primary Care Trust financial crisis also impacted. However, tighter financial management, more effective placement commissioning / procurement contributed to a position where the budget was not in deficit at the end of 2006/2007.
7. As part of the financial recovery plan a number of service re-configurations were set in train. In part to achieve potential efficiencies, but also because it was judged to be appropriate in the interests of the services concerned.

8. In July 2006 the Area Services Social Care Teams were re-grouped to provide seven rather than ten teams across the county. Three family support teams became two with the aim of achieving a clearer remit and focus. This re-configuration achieved savings of some 250K. This configuration is also linked to our aspiration to develop co-location and multi-disciplinary working across the county.
9. A review of the area business support (administration) was commenced in 2006 and new arrangements put in place from June 2007. Whilst cashable savings amounted to some £25k, this review has made it possible to achieve a standard structure across the county and allows for the development of posts which would otherwise have not been possible. For example, the new role of Information Sharing Coordinator: a post which will support the Council's implementation of part of the Every Child Matters agenda.
10. The Disability Service for children has also been the subject of a review and as of June 2007 has been brought within the scope of Area Services. Two fieldwork teams and a family Support team have been re-grouped to achieve one fieldwork team within each of the three county areas. The aim will be to strengthen the service to children with a disability and their families over the next few years. The Council has provided £250k on a one off basis in the current year and this will allow some opportunity to strengthen Occupational Therapy provision, provide for specialist placement need and enhance family support in the short term. However, it will be necessary to identify ways of achieving sustainable service development also.
11. Work is currently underway to develop a framework to support collaborative working with schools. It is envisaged that this can be achieved through a number of pilot initiatives with school cluster groups. For example, the Strong Children Project within a group of Chippenham Primary Schools. This is designed to strengthen 'working together' to avoid children falling through the net. In addition, it seeks to find innovative ways of achieving supportive links with families to maintain children who may be experiencing behavioural problems within the school setting. The role of family link and family support workers are being considered in this regard. A sum of £50k has been made available from the Council's Development Fund to trial a 'family support' initiative.

### **Service Implications**

12. It is suggested that in the light of the initiatives referred to above and the need to allow some time to evaluate the benefits or otherwise, that it may be premature to move to a definitive answer to Councillor Oldrieve's question at this stage.
13. Having managed to operate services within the allocated budget in 2006/2007 and to have funds to support developments in 2007/2008 is a somewhat unique position and one that it is hoped can be maintained.

14. In addition to the above, the Department for Children & Education will be subject to the Annual Performance Appraisal in September. This will be undertaken by Government Office for the South West and will be based on our performance data set for the past year. Later in the year we will receive our assessment and this will help to identify areas where we wish to re-direct resources. The Medium Term Financial Planning process will create the opportunity to identify potential funding areas which the Department might prioritise for additional funding.
15. The Government has just published Care Matters: Time for Change. This is a White Paper concerned with improving the life chances of children in care. The document highlights a number of themes which Local Authorities will need to address. These include Corporate Parenting; Family & Parenting Support; Placement Experience; Education and Health and Transition to Adulthood. It will be necessary to understand the implications of these recommendations and proposals in terms of our overall budget and spend over the next year or two.

### **Conclusion**

16. The Scrutiny Committee is requested to note the position as outlined, and to discuss whether or not this issue should be incorporated as a priority for the Committee's work programme.

**Carolyn Godfrey**  
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