



Item 3

Wiltshire
COUNTY COUNCIL

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CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a MEETING held at COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE, on
WEDNESDAY 13 SEPTEMBER 2007.

PRESENT: Mr P Coleman (Vice Chairman), Mr J Colquhoun, Mr A Davis,
Mrs M Groom, Mrs E Hannaford-Dobson, Mr J Hawkins, Ms R MacDonald,
Ms J Miller, Mr W Moss, Mrs P Rugg, Mr W Snow, Mrs C Soden (Chairman),
Mrs M White, Mrs C Williamson and Mr C Winchcombe

51. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Deane, Mrs Hill, Mr King,
Mr Oldrieve and Dr Thompson.

52. Chairman's Announcements The Chairman gave the following
announcements:

(a) to welcome Mr Colquhoun (Headteacher of St Laurence School,
Bradford on Avon) as the new non-elected non-voting member
of the committee, representing secondary school headteachers
and replacing Mrs Goodall;

(b) to thank all who had attended the committee's Development Day
on the 10th September, especially the committee's new children
and young people's representative Mr Chris King

53. Minutes of Previous Meeting RESOLVED to confirm and sign the
minutes of the meeting held on 25th July 2007.

In confirming this set of minutes, a comment was made about minute
44(c) which recorded part of the Academy Task Group Chairman's
presentation on the considerations of this task group so far. The
comment acknowledged and re-emphasised the need for the new
academy to be built in appropriate materials and to a suitable design.
The member putting this comment expressed a desire for the academy
to be built to a red-brick traditional design. The members of the task
group present were asked to take back these comments to their next
meeting.

Clarification was also given that interviews for a project manager for the
academy, required to work on behalf of Wiltshire County Council, would
take place on the 19th September 2007.

54. **Members' Interests** Mr Winchcombe declared a personal interest in agenda item 10 (Post-16 Mainstream School / College Transport: Proposals for Changes from September 2006) as his son received an Educational Maintenance Allowance.
55. **Public Participation** There were no members of the public present or previously submitted contributions from members of the public.
56. **Member Requests** There were no Member Requests.
57. **Update on Implementation of Recommendations (2.2a and 3.1) of the Contracted Out Placements for Children & Young People Task Group**

The Assistant Director (Children & Families) presented a report from the Director of the Department for Children & Education (DCE) which provided an update on the implementation of recommendations 2.2a and 3.1 of the Contracted Out Placements for Children & Young People Task Group.

With regard to recommendation 2.2a which had asked the department to review its staffing structure in the Family Placement Service to ensure that there were sufficient staff to provide support services to foster carers and sufficient recruitment and training officers, the committee was asked to note the work that had taken place to strengthen this Service. In highlighting this work, the Assistant Director also referred to the challenges which faced the service, but pointed out that there had been a net increase in foster care recruitment in 2006/07. Nevertheless a significant number of carers had left the service mainly through retirement or through foster carers becoming adopters.

In terms of service user satisfaction, the committee was asked to note that in the latest annual round of consultation meetings with foster carers, feedback about the service had been very positive.

With regard to recommendation 3.1, which asked the department to strengthen its placement commissioning arrangements, the Assistant Director explained the changes that had taken place in response to this recommendation and confirmed that externalisation of the children's homes would be in operation from the 17th September 2007. In detailing the placement commissioning arrangements, the Assistant Director also emphasised the ongoing risks to the service, especially with regard to the demand for high cost secure or intensively supervised residential placements.

During the ensuing discussion, the committee acknowledged the difficult decisions which this service had to make, its financial constraints, and the progress it had made in implementing the Contracted Out Placements Task Group's recommendations.

The key issues raised in this discussion included:

- a. the need to ensure that restricted budgets did not detrimentally impact upon the chances of a child being placed in the most suitable placement;
- b. the development of a revised Child & Adolescent Mental Health Strategy to ensure looked after children and young people's improved access to mental health services;
- c. the improvements that had been made to avoid emergency placement situations arising;
- d. the implications of the new National Minimum Fostering Standards on the service, its current staffing and budgets;
- e. the reasons for the current predicted placement budget overspend for 2008/09, which included unexpected demand for high cost secure placements, the delay in opening the externalised children's home service, underperformance in the Sedgemoor Solo Care contract, and a general increase in placement demand;
- f. the possible development of a new in-house solo foster care scheme; and
- g. the department's focus on working with schools to improve the educational attainment of looked after children and young people, which had helped to secure a result whereby all such children taking SATs had achieved Key Stage 2 targets in 2006/07.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) to note and thank the department for the report;**
 - (2) to inform cabinet of the committee's concern regarding the placement budget's predicted overspend for 2008/09, not least because of the task group's previous work and recommendations, and the additional money invested in the placements service; and**
 - (3) to inform cabinet of the committee's intention to work in partnership with the Budget Scrutiny Task Group in closely monitoring the ongoing financial position of the Children & Families' placement budget.**

58. Update on Implementation of Recommendations from the School Catering Task Group Report

The School Meals Strategy Co-ordinator presented a report from the Director, DCE which provided a progress update on the implementation of the School Catering Task Group's recommendations.

Members were informed that the task group's recommendations had helped to form the basis of the new School Food Strategy which had been issued to all schools and relevant partners. The key progress so far made included positive engagement with new Children Centres in promoting healthy lifestyles, universal delivery of fresh chilled water in schools, a rapid rise in schools working towards Health School status, increased training for school caterers and improved links with local food suppliers. Key actions to be further developed included the carrying out of a more formal study into the impact of healthy eating on pupil behaviour and educational performance, a greater focus on promoting healthy eating in areas of high social deprivation, further development of Food Learning Partnerships, and progress in confirming future school catering arrangements.

During the ensuing discussion, the committee commented on a number of specific examples where schools were exploring how to contract with local food suppliers, including pubs, and negotiating how best to maintain a healthy food service at an affordable cost to parents. Other issues discussed included the national decline in demand for school meals following the Jamie Oliver campaign and the introduction of new National Minimum Standards, the need to convince parents of the merits of healthy eating, and the likelihood that government funding would continue for the next three years.

The committee was informed that with regard to future school catering contract arrangements, the current contract with Sodexo was scheduled to end in March 2008, but that due to plans to develop the new Unitary Council, negotiations were currently taking place to see if the contract could be extended to 2009 / 2010.

The committee was also informed of the government's intention to provide new funding to improve school kitchens in 2008. Members noted that there were approximately 40 schools in Wiltshire without kitchens and many more with out-dated kitchen equipment.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) to thank the department for the report;**
 - (2) to request an update for the 31st January 2008 committee meeting on the School Food Strategy (traffic light model) and on progress to negotiate the current school catering contract extension, including details on the**

number of schools remaining within the contract and those choosing to opt out;

- (3) to request that the School Food Strategy be issued to all school governors and contract caterers; and**
- (4) to request a further update on the implementation of the School Catering Task Group's recommendations at the September 2008 committee meeting.**

59. Wiltshire Local Safeguarding Children's Board Annual Business Plan 2007-08

The Head of Safeguarding (Children & Families) presented a report of the Director, DCE which provided the committee with an update on the work of the Wiltshire Local Safeguarding Children's Board Annual Business Plan 2007/08.

In discussing this report members commented on a number of safeguarding issues including:

- a. the need for improved promotion of the council's service in processing Criminal Record Bureau checks for volunteers and organisation in Wiltshire;
- b. the system for managing child abuse allegations against education and other professionals in the county – the Head of Safeguarding summarised the council's compliance with government guidance in every case for a multi-agency response and reporting to Local Authority Designated Officers (Area Service Managers), and reported a low, 0-1% rate, of malicious outcomes; and
- c. the increase in 2006/07 of the county's re-registration rate of child protection cases, and in particular where this was linked to the release of dangerous adults from prison.

RESOLVED: (1) to thank the department for the report; and

(2) to request the next update report on the Annual Business Plan following the outcome of the Joint Area Review in 2008 to include:

- (a) two or three anonymised case studies to illustrate typical safeguarding case work**
- (b) reference to relevant aspects of the current Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements report**

(c) details of the findings and actions being taken as a consequence of the Quality Assurance Sub Group's audit of police response to child abuse cases and how the police work with other agencies.

60. Post-16 Mainstream School/College Transport: Proposals for Changes from September 2008

A report from the Director of Environmental Services was presented by the Education Transport Policy & Development Manager which detailed a revised pricing structure for the Post-16 Mainstream School/College Transport Scheme.

Members were informed of the reasons for the revised pricing structure which included the requirement to make £100,000 worth of savings as part of the council's current Medium Term Financial Strategy. Members noted how this particular transport scheme worked and how the revised pricing structure took into account the government's Educational Maintenance Allowance.

During the ensuing discussion, members sought further clarification regarding the proposed appeal process for the scheme, the potential environmental impact of the revised pricing structure of increased car usage, the potential risk in the increase of young people 'Not in Education, Employment or Training', and the consultation feedback received.

In conclusion, mindful of the reasonable length of time given both in consulting on the revised pricing structure and in introducing the revised charges in September 2008, and mindful that the scheme was already significantly subsidised by the council, the committee agreed to support the proposal.

RESOLVED: (1) to support the revised pricing structure for the Post-16 Mainstream School/College Transport Scheme, mindful of the reasonable length of time given to consult and to implement the revision, and mindful that the council would continue to subsidise this scheme; and

(2) to request that the public relations in announcing the revised pricing structure be carefully managed and clearly explain the full costs of the scheme and how it would continue to be subsidised by the council.

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

RESOLVED to note the items listed in the cabinet's latest rolling Forward Plan for September 2007 to December 2007 relevant to this committee.

62. **Urgent Items** There were no urgent items for consideration

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 am – 1.05 pm)

The officer who produced these minutes is Karen Linaker, Corporate Services, direct line: 01225 713056.