

## CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



**Wiltshire**  
COUNTY COUNCIL

website: [www.wiltshire.gov.uk](http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk)

MINUTES of a MEETING held at COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE, on  
THURSDAY 8 NOVEMBER 2007.

### PRESENT:

Mr P Coleman (Vice Chairman), Mr J Colquhoun, Mr A Davis, Mr T Deane, Dr J English, Mrs M Groom, Mr J Hawkins, Ms R MacDonald, Ms J Miller, Mr W Moss, Mr S Oldrieve, Mrs P Rugg, Mr W Snow, Mrs C Soden (Chairman), Dr M Thompson, Mrs C Williamson, and Mr C Winchcombe.

### OTHERS PRESENT:

Mrs N Bryant (Cabinet Member for Education & Youth Development)  
Mrs B Wayman (Cabinet Member for Children & Families)

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### 63. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs Hannaford-Dobson, Mrs Hill and Mrs White.

### 64. Chairman's Announcements

The chairman made the following announcements:

- (a) councillors from Leicestershire County Council would be attending the committee, and meeting with officers and members to discuss how scrutiny was undertaken in Wiltshire
- (b) Mrs Dixon would take the seat of permanent substitute for Mrs Hill on this committee for the foreseeable future
- (c) Joy Tubbs, previously the Head of School Support, had left the council for a job at Capita to work on national learning strategies for the primary school sector
- (d) the committee would adjourn for 5 minutes between items 10 and 11 in order for members to take a "comfort break", before resuming for consideration of the Academy Task Group's final report.

65. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

**Resolved:**

To confirm and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2007.

66. **Members' Interests**

No interests were declared

67. **Public Participation**

None.

68. **Member Requests**

Members noted a 'member request' form had been submitted by Mr Snow asking the committee to scrutinise:

*"The processes by which the local authority, in collaboration with the diocese when relevant, supports and nurtures flexible and innovative structures to meet the needs of small schools experiencing periods of difficulty."*

69. **Response to Member Request Regarding Support for Small Schools Experiencing Periods of Difficulty**

The chairman introduced this item to clarify why the full detail of the 'member request', and the initial response note that had been provided by the Department for Children & Education (DCE), had not been included with the committee's agenda.

In doing so, the chairman explained that the full detail of the request and the initial response were very specific to the circumstances relating to the difficulties recently faced by Corsley School. Consequently, the chairman explained that she and the vice chairman had taken the decision that it would be inappropriate for the committee to carry out an investigation into these specific matters, but that this should be done so by the DCE with Mr Snow.

Instead, the chairman explained that it would be for the committee to decide in due course whether or not this 'member request' had rightly prompted a review of the council's small school strategy.

Mr Snow explained his reasons for submitting the 'member request' and insisted that he had not foreseen that the committee would focus upon the specifics of the difficulties experienced by Corsley School. He highlighted that there were a number of other small schools facing similar difficulties in the county, and that it was therefore important for members to secure confirmation that the small school strategy was sufficiently robust. Mr Snow agreed to meet with the DCE to discuss

the more specific aspects of his 'member request', and asked that one other governor from the school also be included in these discussions.

During the ensuing discussion, members commented on the difficulties facing a number of other small schools in the county, the impact closures had on small rural communities, and on the need to ensure that governing bodies were given sufficient training and support to be able to identify potential risks to the future viability of their school. Comments were also made about the effect of Ofsted on small schools, and how the inspection regime had removed some of the local authority's ability to prevent unplanned closures.

**Resolved:**

- (1) To note that Mr Snow has submitted a 'member request' form that related to the council's small school strategy, but which also raised specific issues regarding Corsley School.**
- (2) To note the actions taken by the chairman and vice chairman in seeking to assist Mr Snow in resolving his concerns about Corsley School with the DCE.**
- (3) To request a report for the committee's 13<sup>th</sup> March 2008 meeting, intended to assist members in carrying out a review of the council's small school strategy.**

**70. Key Findings from Wiltshire Schools' Ofsted Inspection Reports 2006/07**

The Assistant Director (Schools), presented a report from the Director, DCE, which provided an update on findings from school inspections carried out in 2006/07. In highlighting key aspects of the report, the Assistant Director referred to:

- (a) the revised inspection regime, which gave shorter notice for inspections, but which took less time, relied more on the school's self evaluation and the headteacher's and chair of governor's portrayal of the school
- (b) the majority of schools had been graded "satisfactory", especially primary schools, which did not rank well against the local authority's statistical neighbours
- (c) schools had done well in the inspection judgement relating to "personal development and well-being", but not so well in "leadership and management", which inevitably impacted upon grades for "achievement and standards"
- (d) fewer schools in 2006/07 had been placed in "special measures" or given a "notice to improve" than in previous years

- (e) the Schools Forum was evaluating how the council might increase its delegation of funding from the Dedicated Schools Grant (allocation for deprivation) to schools in high areas of need, as currently only 46% was distributed - lower in comparison with other local authorities
- (f) the top 10 key issues identified for school improvement in 2006/07 was assessment, writing, provision for higher attainers, quality of teaching, role of subject co-ordinators, maths, curriculum, pupils taking responsibility for their own learning, knowledge of living in a multi-cultural society, leadership and management
- (g) 9 shorter Section 5 subject inspections had been carried out – resulting in mainly “good” grades, one “outstanding” grade and one “satisfactory” grade

As a further verbal update to this report, the Assistant Director also confirmed that the results of 13 inspections so far carried out in 07/08 had recorded mainly “outstanding” and “good” performance - with only 2 out of the 13 classed as “satisfactory”.

During the ensuing discussion, reference was made to the correlation between schools in areas of high need and poor inspection findings, the correlation between schools providing healthy food and good inspection findings, the positive impact new children centres were beginning to have on pupil attainment, and the impact an improved school building environment can have on performance. In addition members asked for caution in revising the formula to increase the level of DSG (deprivation funding allocation) distributed to areas of high need, to ensure that this suited the individual needs of the school.

### **Resolved:**

- (1) To thank the DCE for the report.**
- (2) To use this report as background material when carrying out scoping exercises for the committee’s 2008/09 work programme priorities.**

## **71. Pupil Performance in Public Tests and Examinations**

The Assistant Director (Schools), DCE presented a report from the Director of DCE which provided the public test and examination results of Wiltshire schools in 2007, and details on how these compared with national expectations.

In doing so, she highlighted the following:

- (a) children’s centres were impacting positively upon areas of high deprivation, with a 7.6% improvement in achievement at foundation stage recorded in 2007

- (b) overall there had been promising improvements in attainment at all key stages, particularly in english. However, the DCE was not complacent and was focusing on areas in need of improvement, in particular KS3 maths
- (c) the letter of congratulations from Lord Adonis had been issued to commend the rate of improvement at KS2 from 2004 to 2007 in english and maths. However, the DCE accepted that, whilst the rate of improvement was good, improvements were still required if Wiltshire was to rank higher against comparator authorities' performance than was currently the case
- (d) in particular, Wiltshire needed to improve attainment of pupils from the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) community and looked after children (LAC).

During the ensuing discussion, the committee commented on the improvements made and the work still to do on raising attainment for BME pupils and LAC. In particular, members noted that a new headteacher post had recently been created to improve the educational attainment of LAC, and that, despite the low numbers of LAC attaining 5 A\* - C GCSEs, none of the existing cohort were classed as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).

Concern was also raised about the significant number of pupils from unclassified ethnic backgrounds performing more than 5 percentage points below Wiltshire's average pupil attainment. Reassurance was given that schools were working to improve this, and to instil in parents the confidence to fully complete forms relating to their child's ethnicity.

The effectiveness of teaching methods to ensure the emotional intelligence, health and wellbeing of pupils was also discussed and members requested a future report on the "Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning" programme as it was applied in Wiltshire.

Similarly, with respect to the health and wellbeing of teachers and headteachers, the committee noted that there were support processes in place, but that the relatively new wellbeing programme for teaching staff should be given a higher profile and continued funding, to ensure all teachers could benefit.

**Resolved:**

- (1) To thank the DCE for the report.**
- (2) To request that all officers and schools involved in raising educational performance in 2006/07 be congratulated for their efforts.**
- (3) To request that the headteacher appointed to improve the educational attainment of LAC, review the approach to supporting looked after children's achievement, and**

**report to the corporate parenting group and the committee in March 2008.**

- (4) To request a report for the next appropriate meeting of the committee on the “Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning” programme and how it was applied in Wiltshire.**

**72. Internal Audit of Child Protection Arrangements**

A report previously written for the Final Accounts & Audit Committee’s 27<sup>th</sup> September 2007 meeting was presented by the Assistant Director (Children & Families), to inform members of the findings of a recent internal audit of child protection arrangements. Also appended to this report was a note from the DCE listing the actions taken in response to that audit.

In presenting this report, the Assistant Director highlighted that the DCE had responded positively to the audit, recognising the importance of its findings. He explained that, in essence, the audit had found that there was a lack of consistency in the way in which visits to children were recorded. In response, the Assistant Director explained that the DCE had re-established its own audit and check processes, restated and reissued guidance on child protection visits and how these should be recorded, and was providing re-training on and reaffirming the statutory guidance regarding child protection.

During the ensuing discussion, members commented on the problems which had been caused by a new electronic system introduced for the recording of child protection cases, their reviews etc. Members recalled that electronic recording on a new Integrated Children’s System had been recommended as a consequence of the Victoria Climbié Inquiry.

NB: The Assistant Director also took the opportunity during the meeting to update members on the recent liquidation of the contractor “Sedgemoor”, previously responsible for providing a Solo Foster Care service to the local authority. Members noted that this contract had never realised the benefits it had intended for the local authority and that, at the time of liquidation, it was only managing three placements for the local authority. The Assistant Director explained that the three placements had been re-provided, with some financial impact to the local authority.

**Resolved:**

- (1) To note the report and update on the actions carried out by the DCE in response to a recent internal audit report on child protection arrangements.**

- (2) **To request that the chairman and vice chairman of the committee monitor the findings of internal audit's follow up review of child protection arrangements in 2008.**

73. **Academy Task Group – Final Report & Recommendations**

The chairman of the Academy Task Group, presented the task group's final report and recommendations for the committee's endorsement.

In doing so he thanked the members of the task group and its support officer for their commitment and hard work, and reiterated the group's support for the academy project and for Wellington College as its sponsor. He also highlighted how the report's recommendations were intended to positively influence the feasibility phase of the project, in terms of the project management arrangements, the design and build of the academy, and its impact on surrounding schools and 6<sup>th</sup> forms and the local community. He added that the report also included recommendations relating to the need to plan for and suitably fund future school building projects in Wiltshire, and highlighted the need to ensure that:

- (a) the template approach being used by consultants to develop the project was suitably tailored to meet the specific requirements of this academy, particularly as it would not be replacing a failing or inner-city school
- (b) sufficient funding was made available not just to develop the new school building but also to resource the requirements of the academic ethos and vision.

During the ensuing discussion, the Cabinet Member for Education and Youth Development thanked the task group for its report, which she considered would be beneficial to this and future school building projects. She confirmed that discussions were ongoing as to how more resources could be put into this and other school building projects.

Other members commented on matters such as the:

- (a) academy's and other 6<sup>th</sup> form provision in Wiltshire
- (b) way in which academy projects like this helped to break down barriers between the public and private school sectors
- (c) potential for the local authority to act as co-sponsor of future academies in the Wiltshire

- (d) positive way in which the Department for Children, Schools and Families now regarded Wiltshire, due to its proactive response to progressing this academy project

**Resolved:**

- (1) To endorse the findings and recommendations contained within the Academy Task Group's final report.
- (2) To thank the task group members and its support officer for their work.
- (3) To note that a summary of the responses to the report's recommendations would be submitted to the committee's 31<sup>st</sup> January 2008 meeting.
- (4) To note that an update report on the academy project and the implementation of the task group's recommendations had been requested to come to the committee in March 2008 following the completion of the feasibility phase.
- (5) As part of members' consideration of that March 2008 update report, to agree how the committee should continue to monitor the progress of this academy project.

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

**Resolved:**

To note the items listed in the cabinet's latest rolling forward plan for November 2007 to February 2008 relevant to this committee.

75. **Urgent Items**

None.

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 am – 1.10 pm)

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