

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee
22nd May 2008

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
WORK PROGRAMME 2008/09

Purpose of the Report

1. To present a revised work programme for the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee to pursue in 2008/09 (Appendix 1).

Action Required of the Committee

2. To agree a revised work programme for 2008/09.

Background

3. Members will recall that at their last development day in September 2007, they were invited to reflect on the value the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee has added over the past 12 – 18 months to services, policies, decisions and strategies in place to improve children's outcomes in Wiltshire.
4. This revealed encouraging findings, with the majority of recommendations made by the committee, particularly as the result of task group reviews, being accepted and taken forward by the executive, but it also highlighted that the committee often tries to do too much.
5. Analysis of previous work programme activity revealed that the committee's workload can be categorised under three main headings:
 - (a) agreed priorities
 - (b) performance monitoring
 - (c) ad hoc issues (demonstrating that the work programme is suitably flexible to respond to key issues as and when they arise)
6. Members also commented on how the committee might experiment with new techniques in the future, such as encouraging community engagement, and conducting rapid response task group exercises. These new techniques would supplement current practices such as time-limited task group exercises, site visits, best practice sharing sessions and member training.
7. The Director of the Department for Children & Education contributed to the development day by highlighting a number of key aspects from the national context, the current strategic direction in Wiltshire and local priorities - see Appendix 2. These key aspects will continue to be taken into account in the committee's work, and will assist members in agreeing the scope of each priority identified for scrutiny in 2008/09.

Key Work Programme Priorities for 2008/09

8. As referred to in paragraph 5 above, the committee's annual work programme has capacity for members to pursue agreed / specific priorities, maintain a focus on standard performance reports, and retain flexibility to respond to what might be classed as urgent topics for consideration during the year.
9. The key work programme priorities for 2008/09 which were identified at the Development Day are:
 - (a) Early Intervention

To evaluate the council's policy for early intervention and to assess whether or not this policy is being effectively implemented by the council and all partners. In particular, to focus on what positive steps can be taken to reduce the incidence of children with challenging behaviour from being excluded from school at an early age (8 – 10 year olds).
 - (b) Extended Schools

To assess the extent of take up in primary and secondary schools of the extended schools agenda, and to evaluate the impact extra-curricular activities have on improving children's outcomes, especially 'enjoy and achieve'. In particular, to focus on the role of enrichment activities, i.e. the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, Ten Tours, other after school clubs and activities, in influencing pupil development both as an individual and as a team player.
 - (c) Silent Majority

To gain a better appreciation of, and seek reassurance, concerning the extent to which resources and attention are applied to pupils who are not categorised as having special needs or as 'the gifted and talented'. To consider this in a context of improving Wiltshire's overall Ofsted "adequate" rating for the outcome "enjoy and achieve" (2007 Annual Performance Assessment).
 - (d) School Bullying

Building on the committee's previous consideration of this topic, evaluate how well anti-bullying policies are being implemented, and the effectiveness of the council's approach in working with schools to reduce incidents of bullying.
 - (e) School Food

This has been an ongoing priority for the committee since 2005. Building on previous discussions, continue focussing on the efficacy of the School Food Strategy, in particular its actions and progress relating to the school catering contract, and on the arrangements in place to ensure pupils are given sufficient time, healthy choices and value for money at lunch-time.
10. Attached at Appendix 3 is a suggested initial scope for each of the key priorities. The scope incorporates the main reasons put forward by those members of the committee who volunteered to take a lead in explaining

further the justification for the key priority at the development day. This scope will be refined as part of the process involved in bringing forward these priorities for committee consideration. This process will also identify how each priority should be scrutinised, i.e. single committee report, task group exercise, site visit, community/stakeholder engagement etc.

Adding Value within the overall context of children's services in Wiltshire

11. In seeking to add value through pursuing the committee's revised work programme for 2008/09, it is important to bear in mind a number of significant contextual issues for children's services in Wiltshire in the coming year:

- (a) the National Children's Plan and the Wiltshire Children & Young People's Plan 2008-2011
- (b) the work and priorities of the Children's Trust Board and the Schools' Forum
- (c) the 2007 Ofsted Annual Performance Assessment, and the forthcoming Joint Area Review in June / July 2008
- (d) the new LAA and corresponding performance framework: National Indicator Set, and the additional statutory targets for children and young people
- (e) the National Primary review and plans to distribute Building Schools for the Future funding from 2009/10 to primary schools (as reported to members at the March 2008 meeting)
- (f) the Wiltshire PCT's renewed focus on children's health and wellbeing, in particular obesity, mental health and misuse of alcohol
- (g) the new statutory requirement that councils and PCTs carry out Joint Strategic Needs Assessments every 3 – 5 years to identify current and future health and wellbeing needs to inform future service planning
- (h) how children's services are developed, commissioned and delivered in the new council, through increased public, partner and stakeholder involvement.

12. Appendix 2 provides further commentary from the high level context outlined in paragraph 11 for Wiltshire. This detail will be used to assist the committee in its overview and scrutiny of the priorities and other items featuring on its work programme for 2008/09.

Conclusion

13. The committee is requested to agree its work programme for 2008/09, as attached at Appendix 1, the monitoring and management of which will be carried out by the chairman and vice chairman during the year.

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