

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



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MINUTES of a MEETING held at COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE, on
THURSDAY 22 MAY 2008.

PRESENT:

Mr E Clark, Mr P Coleman (Vice Chairman), Mr A Davis, Dr J English, Mr P Fuller, Mrs M Groom, Mr J Hawkins, Mrs E Leonard, Ms R MacDonald, Ms J Miller, Mr W Moss, Mr S Oldrieve, Mrs C Soden (Chairman), Mr W Snow, Dr M Thompson, Mrs M White, and Mrs C Williamson.

OTHERS PRESENT:

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

27. Membership

To note the membership of the committee for 2008/09, as agreed by County Council on the 13th May.

28. Election of Chairman

Mrs Soden was elected as the Committee's Chairman for 2008/09.

29. Election of Vice-Chairman

Mr Coleman was elected as the Committee's Vice-Chairman for 2008/09.

30. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Colquhoun, Mrs Rugg, and Mr Winchcombe.

31. **Chairman's Announcements**

The chairman made the following announcements:

- (a) to thank the committee for its well wishes and support during her recent spell of ill-health, and in particular to thank the Vice-Chairman for standing in at the last two meetings
- (b) to welcome Mr Fuller as a new member of the committee, and to reiterate a welcome to Mr Clark having been appointed to the committee towards the end of the last municipal year
- (c) to highlight the full agenda to be considered at the meeting that day and to restrict consideration of item 11 to initial comments only, with a view to more full discussion being timetabled later in the year.

32. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Resolved:

To confirm and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 13th March 2008.

33. **Members' Interests**

Mr Coleman declared a personal interest in item 14.

34. **Public Participation**

None.

35. **Member Requests**

None.

36. **Committee Representation on other Groups – Member Feedback**

The Chairman explained that this would feature as a standard item on future Children's Services Scrutiny Committee agendas, for the following reasons:

- (a) to make the most of committee member nominations to other groups
- (b) (on the basis that member feedback is brief), to keep up to date on as much of the activity concerning children's services as possible
- (c) to help identify whether projects/issues require a full update from officers

Members received a brief update from Mrs Leonard (Parent Governor Representative – Special Needs, and member of the Extended Services in and around Schools/Children's Centres Strategic Board)

regarding the Children's Centres Project. Her update referred to the progress that had been made in phase 2 of the project and to the plans for phase 3. Also, members were informed of recent performance monitoring activities and of training arrangements for staff.

Members expressed thanks to Mrs Leonard for this update and requested that a fuller report regarding phase 3 be submitted to the committee in due course. In the meantime, the Director of the Department for Children & Education (DCE) was requested to explore the possibility that the plans for children's centres in Salisbury and Chippenham, link up with plans for PCT centres, to maximise opportunities for inter-agency working within these facilities.

37. **Initial Consideration of a Monitoring Officer's Report on a Finding of Maladministration Leading to Injustice**

The Chairman invited the committee to give initial consideration to this report, with a view to scheduling time for fuller discussion at a future meeting.

The Director, DCE then presented the report which had been compiled by the Monitoring Officer, and which related to an Ombudsman's finding of maladministration leading to injustice in respect of education and social care services provided to a family during a period from 2005 - 2007.

Members also received clarification from the Interim Head of Special Educational Needs regarding the actions that were being taken to ensure that this maladministration and injustice were not repeated. These included:

- (a) strengthening decision making processes, particularly to clarify roles and responsibilities, and to especially ensure that not just the child's needs, but also those of the family were carefully assessed before services were agreed
- (b) improved training on initial and core assessments, to ensure a consistent and standardised practice across the county
- (c) improved multi-agency working, joint protocols and collaboration to support care and education plans
- (d) improved training, coaching and support given to staff in understanding the complex and changing nature of legislation and statutory requirements
- (e) reduced administrative staff in the SEN team, to facilitate the recruitment of additional case workers
- (f) an action plan to ensure all improvement points were taken forward from this case, which had been devised in agreement with the PCT.

Members noted that this report had been considered by Cabinet on the 20th May and that the Leader and Cabinet Members for Education & Youth Development and for Children & Families would continue to monitor the work carried out in response to the Ombudsman finding.

During the ensuing discussion, members commented in particular on the need to improve SEN provision in schools, to improve professionals' awareness and response to the social and not just educational issues inherent in special needs cases, and on the many issues the ombudsman report raised which were damaging to the council's reputation.

In conclusion, suggestion was made that annual reports on ombudsman cases should be considered by the committee, and that a report explaining the key issues and improvement actions arising from this and other cases investigated should be brought to the committee for fuller debate.

Resolved:

- (1) To note the report.**
- (2) To request that the Cabinet Members for Education & Youth Development and for Children & Families submit and present a report explaining the key issues and improvement actions arising from this and other ombudsman cases involving the Department for DCE for the September committee meeting.**
- (3) To invite the local ward member for the case referred to in this ombudsman investigation to the September meeting.**
- (4) In considering this report in September, to also discuss whether or not the committee should be seeking annual reports on ombudsman findings.**

38. National Children's Plan

The committee received a presentation on the National Children's Plan, and an explanation of how the Wiltshire Children & Young People's Plan (CYPP) 2008-2011 contributed to that Plan.

In discussing the points highlighted in the presentation, members commented on the improved sense of coherence and output from the Children's Trust Board in terms of the CYPP, on some of the goals in the national plan and on the funding released to councils for its implementation locally. Members also sought the view of the Cabinet Members and Director regarding the national plan and its relevance to Wiltshire. This led to further discussion on key aspects such as parenting, mental health, wellbeing and resilience, disability services,

the involvement of the health and voluntary sectors, and on the importance of play. This discussion also referred to the fact that the local authority had been selected to bid for funding to enter into a 0-7 partnership with other agencies in Wiltshire, due to its good reputation in early years support and provision.

Resolved:

To thank the department for the presentation, and to use the National Children's Plan and Wiltshire Children & Young People's Plan 2008/11 to inform future scrutiny of topics listed on the committee's work programme.

39. **Exclusion of the Public**

Resolved:

To agree that in accordance with Section 100 A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the public from the meeting for the business specified in Minute No. 40, because it is likely that if members of the public were present, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information, as defined in paragraphs 3 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act, and the public interest in withholding the information outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

40. **The Wellington Academy Update Report**

Members considered an update report on The Wellington Academy project, and were introduced to the recently appointed project manager for academy developments in Wiltshire.

The main points discussed as part of that consideration related to the work involved and financial implications of the Outline Business Case, issues relating to the boarding element, confirmation of the funding agreement, the appointment of the principal, and the investment being made by the council to progress this project.

Members noted that the project was now in its implementation phase, and working towards a Final Business Case in 12 months time. Members also noted that a Transition Working Group had recently been set up to ensure that the continuing educational improvement at Castledown was effectively being managed alongside establishing the Academy.

The committee expressed continuing support for the project, but voiced concerns (many of which had been raised previously through the scrutiny task group) about the lack of funding for fire sprinklers, TUPE and other staffing matters, and the investment the council needed to

make. Further reassurance was also sought regarding the curriculum and education vision, and on the academy's impact on surrounding schools and colleges, the latter of which was to be further examined through the reinstatement of the Stakeholders Group.

Resolved:

- (1) To thank the department for the report.**
- (2) To request termly update reports on all academy developments in Wiltshire.**

41. **A Strategy for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)**

Members considered a report which explained the services involved and the strategy in place to improve the emotional well being and mental health of children and young people in Wiltshire, in order that their outcomes also improve.

The main comments made during this consideration related to:

- (a) how the impact of the strategy would be measured
- (b) the prevalence/underlying causes of poor mental health and wellbeing in Wiltshire
- (c) a query relating to the methodologies used
- (d) the priority to make service provision more equitable across the county, especially to reduce waiting lists
- (e) how the strategy would help to achieve the CYPP 08/11 goals.

Resolved:

- (1) To thank department for the report.**
- (2) To request annual updates on the strategy from the Emotional Wellbeing Sub Group of the Children's Trust Board.**
- (3) To request that these annual updates clearly indicate the impact the strategy was having on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in Wiltshire.**

42. **Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning**

Members considered a report detailing the approach the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) Steering Group was taken to embedding the SEAL programme in schools in Wiltshire. This report

detailed how schools were supported in providing SEAL, the monitoring and evaluation of the programme, how parents and carers were involved, and how SEAL was helping in the transition children had to make from primary to secondary schooling.

The committee noted that techniques to support and improve emotional intelligence in schools had been ongoing for a number of years, and that SEAL was building on the success of those techniques and proving to be a popular programme.

Members were encouraged to hear that SEAL benefited both staff and pupils, that it was being implemented alongside restorative justice, and non-verbal communication techniques, and that there were plans to link it with the new teacher wellbeing programme.

Resolved:

- (1) To thank department for the report.**
- (2) To ask the department following the meeting, what was the purpose of the review of the Behaviour Support Service, and why was it hindering the timetable of SEAL training for primary schools.**

43. Commissioning Strategy for Looked After Children in Wiltshire 2008-13

Members considered a report detailing a 5 year strategy for the commissioning of placements for Looked After Children in Wiltshire. In doing so, members noted that the Corporate Parenting Group took an active role in monitoring the progress of this strategy, which had gained renewed momentum since the publishing of the Care Matters White Paper in 2007.

The committee were informed of the progress made as a consequence of the previous strategy (2003-2007) to improve the quality, access and cost-effectiveness of placements, and to strengthen in-house arrangements, both in terms of adoption and fostering services.

The key points highlighted during this discussion was:

- (a) steady progress had been made to strengthen commissioning arrangements, and this related to a number of the recommendations made by the scrutiny task group in 2006
- (b) there was an investment plan for the development of an in-house solo foster care service
- (c) the recent unexpected growth in the number of looked after children entering the system, had impacted on the strategy

- (d) there was a need to ensure sustainable growth in the number of foster carers
- (e) there was a need for appropriate educational support for looked after children, including good special schools and complementary educational facilities for disaffected young people
- (f) there was joint working with the PCT to ensure appropriate therapeutic support was available for service users, carers and families
- (g) the multi-agency nature of the weekly placements' panel facilitated good joint working in terms of co-ordinating education, health and social care services for looked after children.

Resolved:

- (1) To thank department for the report.
- (2) To note that the progress of this strategy will be regularly monitored by the Corporate Parenting Group.

44. **Children's Services Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2008/09**

Members discussed the committee's work programme for 2008/09, recalling that its 'agreed priorities' had come about as a consequence of the development day in September 2007.

In doing so, the committee agreed that it should take on a more outward and inclusive approach to scrutinising children's services, i.e. by holding meetings out in local communities, by engaging more with stakeholders, and through the carrying out of site visits.

Particularly in respect of the priority regarding extended schools, members agreed that the preparation for this topic should include school visits, and an examination of the '8 intelligences/aptitudes' for learning. Also, for the priority regarding early years support and provision, a request was made for the scope to include consideration of why Homestart was not supported as a countywide third sector resource.

Resolved:

To agree the committee's work programme for 2008/09.

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

Resolved:

To note the items listed in the Cabinet's latest rolling forward plan for May 2008 to August 2008 relevant to this committee, and in particular that members would have an opportunity to comment on the Youth Justice Plan 08/09 prior to its submission to Cabinet in June.

46. **Urgent Items**

None.

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 am – 1.40 pm)

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