

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Wiltshire
COUNTY COUNCIL

website: www.wiltshire.gov.uk

MINUTES of a MEETING held at COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE, on
THURSDAY 11 SEPTEMBER 2008.

PRESENT:

Mr E Clark, Mr P Coleman (Vice Chairman), Mr a Davis, Mr T Deane, Mrs J Finney, Mr P Fuller, Mrs M Groom, Mr J Hawkins, Mrs E Leonard, Ms R MacDonald, Ms J Miller, Mr S Oldrieve, Mrs P Rugg, Mr W Snow, Mrs C Soden (Chairman), Dr M Thompson and Mr C Winchcombe.

OTHERS PRESENT:

Mrs N Bryant (Cabinet Member for Education & Youth Development)
Mr J Noeken (Cabinet Member for ICT, Procurement & Partnerships)
Mr J Thomson (Cabinet Member for Community Services)

61. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Dr English, Mr Moss and Mrs White.

62. Chairman's Announcements

The chairman welcomed committee members back from their summer recess, and in particular, welcomed Judith Finney (Headteacher of Dilton Marsh Primary School), as the committee's new Primary School Headteacher representative. The chairman also recorded members' welcome to Gerard Macmahon (although not present), as the committee's new Secondary School Headteacher representative.

63. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Resolved:

To confirm and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 24th July 2008.

64. **Members' Interests**

None.

65. **Public Participation**

None.

66. **Member Requests**

None.

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

Mr Coleman provided feedback from his involvement on the Children's Trust Board. In doing so, he referred members to the latest Children & Young People's Plan, and highlighted the strong commitment shown by the members of the board to the Trust, and to its agreed objectives. In describing the governance structure of the Trust, Mr Coleman also referred to a number of the key issues it would be focussing on in the coming months, e.g. anti-bullying strategies and childhood obesity. Mr Coleman concluded by saying that the board was both well aware and appreciative of the scrutiny committee's work.

68. **North Wiltshire Schools PPP/PFI Project: White Horse Education Partnership – Annual Report**

The chairman welcomed Mr Bolden, General Manager of the White Horse Education Partnership (WHEP) to the meeting, and invited him and the Head of Procurement & Contract Management to present the report.

In doing so, they highlighted that the project had now reached "steady state", with services being provided in accordance with an operating specification and service level agreement, agreed between the council, WHEP and the schools.

In considering this report, members noted that the majority of the concerns and issues they had raised about the project, having visited the three schools in 2007, had either been resolved or were in the process of been resolved. In particular, the committee was informed of:

- (a) a stronger commitment from the schools and WHEP to begin the process of generating good community use of the three school sites
- (b) the introduction (to be online in spring 2009) of an improved Help Desk facility
- (c) the trialling of a cashless payment system at Wootton Bassett school
- (d) completion of the 6th form extensions at Abbeyfield school and Wootton Bassett school (despite considerable difficulties), on time and on budget

- (e) improvements (although still causing concern) to the drainage problems associated with the playing fields at Abbeyfield school
- (f) improvements (although still an ongoing problem requiring further work) to the roof leaks at Malmesbury School
- (g) the important matter of the “whole project completion certificates” being signed off - nearing resolution, which would facilitate suitable re-financing of the project.

Mr Noeken, as the responsible cabinet member for the project, recorded his thanks to WHEP, the relevant council officers and the three schools for their hard work in helping to resolve some of the earlier problems associated with the project.

During the ensuing discussion, further key points relating to the “sinking fund financial monitoring report 2007/8”, the significance of Malmesbury school and Wootton Bassett school applying for foundation status, and the ongoing problem of litter and chewing gum on carpets at the three schools, were commented on.

Resolved:

- (1) **To note the content of the White Horse Education Partnership Annual Report 2007.**
- (2) **To note the progress towards resolving the issues raised in considerations of the Annual Report for 2006.**
- (3) **To forward the above record to the Cabinet Member for ICT, Procurement & Partnerships to inform his consideration of the project’s performance and 2007 Annual Report.**

69. **Update on Implementation of Strategic Objectives of the School Food Strategy**

The School Meals Strategy Co-ordinator presented a report which provided members with an annual update on the implementation of the school food strategy. In highlighting key points in the report, the co-ordinator also clarified that continued funding for her role had been secured from the Wiltshire PCT for the following 12 months. As a consequence, members were informed that the school food strategy would remain a high priority in the county for the foreseeable future, facilitated by stronger partnership links with the PCT, and its new obesity strategy. Also, members were informed that the co-ordinator would be starting to work more closely with early years’ settings, including children’s centres.

In discussing this report, and noting that the strategy would be reviewed in 08/09, to include new objectives relating to communications, partnership working, environmental sustainability, and

the future sustainability of the continued drive to improve school food, the following key points were made:

- (a) the co-ordinator would be carrying out an audit during September 2008 to further assess the progress made in improving school food in Wiltshire
- (b) the role of parents was also key in ensuring children had a positive attitude towards healthy eating, and members welcomed the news that the co-ordinator would be working more closely with early years' settings during the coming year
- (c) two secondary schools in the county will shortly be introducing cashless payment systems to improve the arrangements for school meals, and the committee was keen to monitor the impact of this on school meal take-up
- (d) as a consequence of targeting schools with funding for school meals in areas of high social deprivation, take up of meals had been improved in those areas
- (e) the School Food Trust has begun to implement measures to improve the recording of the take up of school meals, which currently was unreliable in many areas. The take up of school meals will have to be reported annually from April 2009
- (f) the National year of Food & Farming Campaign, along with input from the WCC publication "Wiltshire Schools Food & Farming Directory", was assisting schools in highlighting the need for children to understand where food comes from, and in encouraging schools to grow fruit and vegetables
- (g) Sodexo had a strong policy of sourcing food locally, and was beginning to focus now on reducing its carbon foot-print with regard to the number of food miles it travelled as a consequence of its supplier chain network
- (h) whilst the introduction of the government's new food based standards had proved to be broadly successful, the target to introduce nutrient based standards was proving more challenging. Schools outside of the council's main school catering contract, in particular, were finding it difficult to devise methods to ensure compliance of their menus. Consequently, there was a risk that schools would opt not to offer a school meals service at all
- (i) with regret, due to the tight timescales and strict criteria associated with the government's recent offer of capital funding for school kitchens, the council had been unsuccessful in securing sufficient interest from schools to apply for a percentage of this funding. However, there would be further opportunity to submit bids, and the co-ordinator would be working with the School Buildings & Places Team to facilitate this

- (j) from September 2008, all young people from the ages of 11-18 now have an entitlement to learn to cook through the government's 'License to Cook' programme, and by 2011 all secondary schools will have their own, or have access to others' up to date food technology facilities and equipment

In conclusion, whilst acknowledging the good progress made against the strategy, members nonetheless felt that there were a number of issues they would like to explore further. Consequently the committee agreed that to commission a task group to give further attention to the major aspects of the school food strategy, such as:

- (a) the government's nutrient based standards, and the challenges they posed
- (b) how many secondary schools in Wiltshire would need to make plans to build or share modern food technology facilities and equipment, and the general impact of making learning to cook and understand the principles of diet and nutrition, an entitlement for 11-18 year olds
- (c) the principles underlying the new school catering contract, particularly to see how best to secure buy-in from schools
- (d) the role of the Schools Forum in promoting the school food strategy.

Resolved:

- (1) To thank the School Meals Strategy Co-ordinator for the report.**
- (2) To commission a task group to give further consideration to the major aspects of the school food strategy, as outlined in (a) to (d) above.**

70. **Report on Improvements in Social Care & Educational Provision**

The Interim SEN Manager presented a report which responded to members' request made in May 2008, for a detailed explanation of the steps taken to make the improvements recommended by the ombudsman in a recent finding against the department of maladministration.

In considering this report, the committee invited Mr Thomson, as ward member of the family involved in the ombudsman complaint, to give his view on whether or not the improvements detailed, responded adequately to his understanding of the issues associated with the case.

In doing so, whilst Mr Thomson was satisfied that the steps detailed in the report would help to prevent such a case arising in the future, he also suggested that there were a number of wider issues which would need further attention if children and families were to receive an

enhanced service from the local authority. These wider issues included:

- (a) improvements in services for young people and their families making the transition from children to adult social care, which often involved complex arrangements and the co-ordination of numerous agencies
- (b) the need for a protocol, particularly for the new unitary councillor, which clarified the role of members in such cases, to ensure that, on the one hand families understood what influence a councillor may be able to exercise for them, and on the other, that schools, local authority officers, and other professionals respect and give due regard for the members' role.

During the ensuing discussion, in respect of (a) above, the committee was reminded that it would be receiving a paper in due course on the department's progress in this, following members' consideration of a report from the County Council Network in July 2008.

Also, members reflected on some of the improvement areas which the department was already working on to prevent cases such as this occurring again, in particular, ensuring that social care, health and education services were working as one integrated service provider – facilitated by appropriate ICT systems and fully staffed teams.

Finally, members enquired about the work ongoing to improve respite services for families, which had been a particular feature of this case. In response, the Interim SEN Manager highlighted key points relating to this, which are fully detailed in the attachment to these minutes on pages 8 and 9.

Resolved:

- (1) To thank the department for the report, and Mr Thomson for his contribution.**
- (2) To await a further report on the issue of young people requiring local authority social care / educational assistance, transferring from children's to adult services.**
- (3) To request the director of the department to draft a protocol ready for the new council, which clarified the role of councillors in representing their constituents in such cases as had been highlighted by this ombudsman finding. This is to ensure that both members of the public and the professionals involved in such cases fully understand and give due regard to the councillor's role.**

71. **Wiltshire Local Safeguarding Children Board Annual Business Plan Report**

The Head of Safeguarding presented the 2008/09 business plan of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), clarifying the role of the board and the role of councillors in calling it to account for its work.

In considering the report, the committee sought further clarification about the arrangements in place to safeguard children from harm, commented on the significance of domestic violence and alcohol misuse as two key factors in child protection cases, and received assurance that the JAR was likely to file a positive inspection finding on the LSCB.

Other matters discussed, included the role of parents in child protection conferences – whether they received advocacy support and the chance to feedback on their experience, and the meaning / rate of child protection cases that are re-registered in anyone year.

Resolved: **To note the report.**

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

Resolved:

To note the items listed in the Cabinet's latest rolling forward plan for October 2008 to January 2009 relevant to this committee, and to request a brief update on the architectural/building design aspects of The Wellington Academy project, including how this was being managed within the required funding envelope.

73. **Urgent Items**

None.

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 am – 1.15 pm)

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Short Breaks for Disabled Children

Is the Department taking appropriate steps to ensure respite services are meeting the needs of service users?

- 1 Aiming High for Disabled Children introduces a requirement for a radical transformation of short breaks services for disabled children and their families. Short breaks is given a wide definition, meaning all, including those of a few hours through sitting services and play schemes as well as involving overnight stays.
- 2 The Government has recently issued very detailed guidance for local authorities and PCTs to implement the transformation of a short breaks service, and will be making a substantial amount of funding available for the provision of a comprehensive service.
- 3 In the year 2008-9 a smaller amount has been made available for local authorities/PCTs to prepare for the short breaks step change – this involves implementing the detailed guidance by -
 - consulting with young people and their families about their needs and taking those into account.
 - auditing the provision of short breaks including residential care, family based overnight respite, play schemes, sitting service, use of direct payments, youth clubs.
 - conducting a gap analysis to identify short fall in provision
 - “developing the market” ie engaging with a range of providers to ensure provision meets the needs of disabled children, young people and their families.
- 4 In October 2007, the Children’s Trust Board Sub-group for Disabled Children commissioned a small working party to begin the work on gap analysis well in advance of the implementation guidance being distributed.
- 5 The PCT has identified a newly appointed Commissioning Manager for Children’s Services to lead on the audit and gap analysis and she is working closely with officers in Children & Families to complete this work.
- 6 The services that are currently being provided are
 - residential care at Canons House and Hilcote (for 70 families)
 - family based overnight/daytime short breaks via Family Link Scheme (20 approved carers)
 - Saturday Club
 - Bridging Project (a Youth Service provision)
 - childminding
 - sitting services
 - direct payments
 - holiday schemes

- 7 It is recognised that the need for short breaks of all descriptions outstrips provision and we have taken some albeit small steps to increase provision this year.
- 8 New developments have included
- funding for training for childminders interested in providing a specialist service
funding for summer picnics at Hilcote
 - appointment of a third “Family Links” Family Placement Officer based in Chippenham to increase capacity to develop our Family Links Scheme.
 - increased direct payments funding by 20k.
- 9 The funding for next year is considerable and available once we have demonstrated our “readiness” by completing the consultation, audit and gap analysis. It will be a considerable amount and will enable us to extend short breaks both as a service to which all disabled children and their families are entitled, and inclusive of those young people who have been excluded in the past because of their complex needs and challenging behaviour.

Shannon Clarke
Head of LACYP
Placement & Support Services