



CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a MEETING held at COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE, on THURSDAY 12 MARCH 2009.

PRESENT:

Mr E Clark, Mr P Coleman (Vice Chairman), Mr a Davis, Mr T Deane, Dr J English, Mr P Fuller, Mrs M Groom, Mr J Hawkins, Mr C King, Ms R Macdonald, Ms J Miller, Mr W Moss, Mr S Oldrieve, Mrs P Rugg, Mrs C Soden (Chairman), Dr M Thompson, and Mrs M White

OTHERS PRESENT:

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

18. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs Finney.

19. Chairman's Announcements

- (a) members were asked to note that the Department for Children & Education (DCE) had still not received the government's 'statement of intent' concerning the proposed Laverstock Academy. In the meantime the department was continuing to offer support to schools on the Laverstock site and to pursue the government for the 'statement of intent'
- (b) members were asked to note that the design and construction programme for The Wellington Academy was still on track, with the planning application timetabled to be submitted on the 23rd March and to be approved at the end of June. In doing so, members also noted that the main issues arising from the consultation phase on the design and construction of the academy related to the use of timber cladding and to the design of the on and off site highways
- (c) with the current term of office of the three parent governor representatives on the committee timetabled to expire on the 30th April 2009, the chairman recorded the committee's thanks to these representatives for the time and commitment they had given to the committee
- (d) members were reminded of the date of the last Children's Services Scrutiny Committee meeting of the current council – as the 7th May.

20. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

Resolved:

To confirm and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 29th January 2009.

21. **Members' Interests**

There were no declarations of interests.

22. **Public Participation**

None.

23. **Member Requests**

None.

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

None.

25. **Restructure of the Department for Children & Education**

The Director of the DCE provided members with an update regarding the department's planned restructure, the preferred model of which would be confirmed at the beginning of April. Members noted that two of the main reasons for a revised structure was so that children and education services could support and work with the new council's community governance arrangements, and to optimise joint working and commissioning with NHS Wiltshire.

In discussing this update, one of the issues raised by members was the need to ensure strong management, supervision and a counselling service for social workers.

Resolved:

To note the plans for the restructure of the Department for Children & Education and to await a further update at the May 2009 meeting.

26. **The Wiltshire Strategy for 13-19 Education & Training**

The committee considered a report updating members on the progress in delivering the Wiltshire Strategy for 13-19 Education & Training. This report also provided details on the achievements to date, results from recent assessments and inspections, and on areas of future challenge, including the transfer of responsibilities for the commissioning of provision for 16-19 year olds from the Learning & Skills Council (LSC) to the local authority from 2010.

During the ensuing discussion, the following key issues were raised by members

- (a) the strategy included a number of actions to minimise the challenges which arise from Wiltshire being a large rural county in regard to student access to the 13-19 curriculum, including development of the three local areas (North Wiltshire federation, West Wiltshire Federation and the Wessex Partnership in the south of the county)
- (b) whilst appreciating the intention to develop a sub regional partnership with Swindon Borough Council in taking forward the local authority's new responsibilities for 16-19 education and training, relations and collaborative working with other neighbouring authorities must also continue and be further strengthened
- (c) investment in IT and mobile technology solutions to support the 13-19 curriculum must overcome the challenges which a number of students continue to face in those areas of the county without adequate broadband connections
- (d) clarification was needed on whether the transfer of responsibilities from the LSC would lead to the local authority inheriting a substantial capital investment programme
- (e) the aims and objectives of the 13-19 strategy and the associated issues listed in the report provided much material for the committee to scrutinise. Members should be given the opportunity to further consider these matters, including the sub regional partnership, the three local area federations/partnerships, Wiltshire's 6th form and further education infrastructure, the diploma programme, apprenticeships, links with employers, NEETs, etc.

Resolved:

- (1) To thank the department for the report.**
- (2) To recommend that early in the new council, the committee give full consideration to the aims and objectives of the 13-19 strategy for education and training and all the associated issues.**
- (3) To recommend that in carrying out further scrutiny of this strategy and its associated issues, the vice principle of the Wiltshire College with responsibility to engage with employers, employers, students and parents be invited to give their views.**

27. Final Report of the School Food Task Group

The committee considered the final report and recommendations of the School Food Task Group which were presented by the task group's chairman.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Youth Development and the Cabinet Member for ICT, Procurement & Partnership expressed general support for the task group's recommendations and agreed to

provide a formal response to the committee in due course. The Service Director (Resources, Improvement & Young People) recorded his thanks to the members and officers who had contributed to this task group, and commented positively on the report and its recommendations, despite the challenges they posed for the department.

In discussing the main findings and recommendations, members asked for insertion of the words “where practicable” after the word “organic” in recommendation 9(b), and agreed an additional recommendation:

“That the Cabinet Member for Education & Youth Development write to the School Food Trust to convey the concerns of some schools in Wiltshire, especially small rural schools, regarding the challenges that they are facing in implementing the nutrient based standards, and the potential impact this can have on the continuing viability of locally arranged small school catering contracts in particular.”

The committee discussed how lack of financial resources was often the key challenge for schools in providing a sustainable school meals’ service which complied with the requirements to feed children with healthy food. Also members discussed how the decision made in April 2001 to delegate to schools the responsibilities for the provision of school meals and for the maintenance of school kitchens had impacted upon the overall school meals’ service infrastructure and contractual arrangements in Wiltshire since that time.

Resolved:

- (1) To support the findings and conclusions of the School Food Task Group and to adopt its recommendations, as amended.**
- (2) To thank the members and officers who had supported and provided evidence to the task group for their work.**
- (3) To request that Rebecca Macdonald (if not appointed as a parent governor representative to the committee after the 30th April 2009) be invited to remain on the committee as a co-opted member with the specific purpose of representing the committee on the procurement project board for the re-tendering of the school catering contract.**

28. School Meals’ Contract – Progress Update

The committee was provided with the opportunity to consider the same report which had formed part of the School Food Task Group’s evidence gathering, concerning work being progressed towards replacement arrangements for school meals’ services currently being provided under contract by Sodexo.

In discussing the report, members noted the key issues which both schools and providers would want to see carefully considered in the development of the replacement arrangements. Also, members noted

that, despite the challenges, schools were open to the possibility of buying into new framework contract arrangements for school meals, subject to these being suitably flexible to cater for individual requirements.

Members were informed that, on this basis, one of the options being explored for the new arrangements was a countywide framework agreement. This would involve the development of an overarching contract for all schools and children's centres, offering a minimum standard of service, i.e. the national food and nutrient based standards, but with a number of options to enhance local service and improve choice, i.e. menu choice, local sourcing options and flexibility over the length of the contract.

All agreed that how the new arrangements were shaped and marketed to schools would be critical in securing the buy-in needed to make the future school catering contract viable.

Also, members discussed the importance of ongoing maintenance, upkeep and renewal of school kitchens, and how this would influence the success or otherwise of future school catering contract arrangements. Members requested a report to help them understand better the rules governing the delegation of responsibilities to schools for the provision of school meals and for the maintenance of school kitchens.

Resolved:

- (1) To note the report and the progress to date.**
- (2) To endorse the plans for further discussions with the Schools Forum and individual schools.**
- (3) To request a report explaining the rules governing the delegation of responsibilities to schools for the provision of school meals and for the maintenance of school kitchens.**

29. **Brief Verbal Update from the Department on the Primary Behaviour Support Strategy**

The Service Director (Resources, Improvement & Young People) updated members that following consultation on a proposal to provide funding for the new Primary Behaviour Support Strategy from a 'topslice' of the Named Pupil Allowance, recommendations concerning this matter would be discussed by the Schools Forum on the 19th March 2009.

Resolved:

To note this update.

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

Resolved:

To note the item listed in the Cabinet's / Implementation Executive's latest rolling forward plan for March 2009 relevant to this committee.

31. **Urgent Items**

None.

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 am – 1.30 pm)

The officer who produced these minutes is Karen Linaker, Democratic & Members' Services, direct line (01225) 713056 or email karenlinaker@wiltshire.gov.uk

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