

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a MEETING held at COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE, on THURSDAY 13 NOVEMBER 2008.

PRESENT:

Mr E Clark, Mr P Coleman (Vice Chairman), Mr a Davis, Mr T Deane, Dr J English, Mrs J Finney, Mr P Fuller, Mrs M Groom, Mr J Hawkins, Mr C King, Mrs E Leonard, Ms R MacDonald, 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)
Mrs B Wayman (Cabinet Member for Children & Families)

74. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Mr MacMahon, Ms Miller and Mr Snow.

75. **Chairman's Announcements**

- (a) members were reminded to stay for a presentation immediately following the meeting on Domestic Violence
- (b) the new School Food Task Group had been formed and would meet for the first time on the 20th November. The chairman wished the task group well in its work

76. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

Resolved:

To confirm and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 11th September 2008.

77. **Members' Interests**

None.

78. **Public Participation**

None.

79. **Member Requests**

None.

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

None.

81. **Primary Behaviour Service - Strategy**

The chairman explained to members that their agreed work programme priority in relation to preventing / reducing exclusions for 7, 8 and 9 year olds, had prompted the submission of this report to the committee.

The Head of Area Services and the Strategic Manager – Primary Behaviour Support Service were then invited to present this report. In doing so, they highlighted that this service had been the subject of an independent review in 2007, the findings and recommendations of which had subsequently been taken forward by a working group, comprising primary head teachers from across the county. As a consequence of this work, a revised service model and strategic direction of primary behaviour support had been devised, driven by the key objective of early intervention. The officers explained that this new service model, and its associated budgetary implications had been discussed by the schools forum in September, when a decision had been made to defer agreeing to the full funding required until more was known about the 09/10 dedicated schools grant.

In considering this matter, the co-opted member who had taken a lead in pursuing this work programme priority for the committee, expressed thanks for the report and for those who had been involved in compiling it, and reminded members of the key reasons why this strategy needed to be effective and appropriately funded. In doing so, he referred to the:

- (a) local authority's relatively high rates of exclusion, recognising that the county's overall rate of permanent exclusions was beginning to decrease
- (b) the negative effect of exclusions on all concerned, and the very complex issues involved in such cases, which officers had confirmed were increasing
- (c) the success of the Specialist Emotional Literacy Centre (SpEL) model and the need for this sort of model to be operating across the whole of the county – which the revised service was attempting to do
- (d) the government's recognition of the importance of early intervention
- (e) the various research findings which reinforced the need for effective early intervention strategies, including a report by a Worcestershire County Council's scrutiny committee
- (f) the relevance of the Joint Area Review findings
- (g) the need to ensure that the new service/strategy suited the requirements of schools, families and pupils.

During the ensuing discussion, further matters clarified included the level of staffing required to implement the new service, the good likelihood that other sources of government funding could be available for this service, the methodology behind the data showing 'total need below national average' (which would be confirmed in writing), and the rationale behind the hub models detailed in the report. Members were also assured of the continued commitment of the cabinet and schools forum in pursuing improved models of early intervention/prevention as a priority.

The improvements already made in primary behaviour support were acknowledged, but the need to ensure that the new service was fully equipped to provide help when needed, and to minimise the delay in response which was currently being experienced in some cases, was highlighted. Also, members acknowledged the high number of service priorities but limited funding available to the schools forum, and queried whether the new council might consider providing some budgetary support to this service in the future.

Additionally, the committee reiterated the need to strengthen service provision in the south of the county. Members stressed the important role of parents in this matter – which was being assisted by new strategies and the children's centre model, and suggested to the department that it consult with its local military colleagues for possible funding assistance.

Members appreciated that much attention had already been given to refining this new service model, and that all concerned were agreed that it was the best way forward. Mindful of this, the committee welcomed the news that the schools forum, its finance sub group and other associated groups, would continue to assess (during the current budget setting process) how best to fund this service / strategy from September 2009.

Resolved:

- (1) To thank the department and other officers who had been involved in compiling this report.**
- (2) To recommend that the local authority continues to pursue the most effective ways in which support is focused on identifying and tackling behavioural problems at the earliest age possible, including a focus on more formalised outreach work at Foundation stage, Key Stage 1 and 2, with the aim of avoiding more serious problems at a later date.**
- (3) To support the strategic direction of the development of the primary behaviour service, and to welcome the progress made towards implementing the new service model.**

- (4) To inform the schools forum, and its relevant finance sub group, of the committee's support for this new service model.
- (5) To note that the schools forum has given high priority to early intervention services, and that it will be giving due consideration to the request for £303,000 to implement this new service from September 2009.
- (6) To continue to monitor the development of this new service and its impact on the outcomes for children and young people in Wiltshire.
- (7) With the organisation of the council being restructured for unitary purposes from 2009, to ask the director of the department to investigate whether or not previous advice given against using local authority budgets to supplement the dedicated schools grant could be revised.
- (8) To ask the director to explore with local military personnel colleagues the possibility of funding support for early intervention / behaviour support strategies being made available from the army/MOD, mindful of the large military population in Wiltshire.

82. **Anti-bullying in Schools – Update on Anti-bullying strategies and their impact**

Members considered a report on the progress made to implement anti-bullying strategies in a consistent and effective way across the county. In doing so, members noted that considerable progress was being made and that targets continued to be strengthened and resources directed towards tackling bullying.

The young peoples' representative on the committee commented on his understanding of the issue of bullying in schools, and referred positively to one of the three conferences which had been arranged to disseminate good practice across the county in November. He highlighted how he would like to see greater clarity and the communication of the actual processes and procedures followed when children and young people were found to be bullies or to be bullied.

During the ensuing discussion, members expressed thanks and support for the good progress made, and suggested that governors and members be involved in the anti-bullying steering group and the additional group being proposed.

Additionally, members noted attempts to ensure that good progress in some schools was being disseminated to all schools, and that teaching

assistants, mid-day supervisory assistants and the whole school community was engaged in effective anti-bullying strategies, including SEAL and restorative justice methods. In regard to monitoring the positive impact of anti-bullying measures, members were informed that one way would be to survey schools through the child protection audit, which received a very good response rate each year.

In conclusion, members agreed to support the continuing progress being made, noted that a definition of bullying had been agreed by all partners and requested information relating to the trends apparent from the various surveys carried out to monitor bullying.

Resolved:

- (1) To thank the officers for the full, informative and encouraging report.**
- (2) To note that information on trends apparent from various bullying surveys would be issued to members when available following the meeting.**
- (3) To request a report in the future on the progress against the 2008-11 action plan and targets, and on the guidance being issued to all schools on developing and writing an anti-bullying policy.**
- (4) To confirm support for the anti-bullying steering group's work.**
- (5) To endorse the report's recommendation for the setting up of an additional steering group to work alongside the anti-bullying steering group, with a remit to support and promote anti-bullying for all agencies working with children and young people (other than in educational settings and travelling to/from these settings).**
- (6) To request that officers, in consultation with the existing and new steering group, consider extending an invitation to a school governor and one or two councillors to work with one or both groups.**

83. Pupil Performance in Public Tests and Examinations

Members considered a report which compared up to date Wiltshire pupil performance in public tests and examinations against national expectations across all school phases.

In doing so, the committee welcomed the news that, overall results were very positive this year, which were reinforced by improved school inspection findings. The positive impact of the £14m investment in children's centres was considered to be one of the contributory factors

to the improved results, particularly in relation to the impact on communities based in areas of high socio-economic need.

Reference was made to the disruption caused by the failure nationally to mark Key Stage 3 exam papers, and to the need for the local authority to continue to focus efforts on closing the attainment gap at Key Stage 4 between mainstream and vulnerable children.

Members noted that the government may introduce a new “report card scheme” as currently used in the USA as a future improved way in which attainment and school performance would be assessed.

In analysing the data provided, the committee reflected upon the need for further work to improve performance against the local authority’s statistical neighbours, bearing in mind the county’s overall socio-economic make-up.

Resolved:

- (1) To thank the department for the report, and to congratulate all for the improved results received overall.**
- (2) To request that the arrangements for scrutinising children’s services in the future ensure that members have the opportunity to build on this committee’s attempts to scrutinise pupil test and examination data, with a focus on improving the local authority’s performance against its statistical neighbours.**

84. Shared Processes, Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and Lead Professionals in Wiltshire

The committee considered a report which provided an overview of the shared processes in Wiltshire, and a specific update on progress made in implementing CAF.

In considering the report, the committee was informed that CAF was an assessment tool designed to identify the additional needs of children from the earliest possible opportunity, and to ensure that all the relevant professionals were engaged in meeting those needs, and in preventing their escalation. Members noted that these shared processes were required to be implemented by the local authority from April 2008, and that the good progress so far made would be disseminated across all areas of the county.

Members were reassured that confidence in these new shared processes continued to strengthen, and that the new community area model and other actions as outlined in the report would assist officers in further embedding these processes throughout the county.

Finally, members commented on the resources and initiatives available to lead professionals, including access to sport, cultural and other enrichment activities, which often helped children to work through their additional needs.

Resolved:

- (1) To note the report and to thank officers for the clear explanation of shared process, CAF and lead professionals.**
- (2) To note and welcome the progress made in respect of implementing CAF and the actions to ensure that the CAF is firmly embedded across Wiltshire.**
- (3) To request a report in the future on progress made against the aspirations for shared processes, CAF and lead professionals, including an update against the implementation plan, and demonstrating how sport, art, music and other enrichment activities are used to help children work through their additional needs.**

85. Briefing Note for Information – The Wellington College Academy – Building Design Update

Members considered this briefing note which had been provided as an information update on the progress so far made to develop the design of the new academy's buildings.

In considering this note, members commented on the protracted negotiations which had led to a three month delay from the original timetable for the project, noting that these had been necessary to secure the additional £400,000+ funding required for the "abnormal costs" identified – costs which would otherwise have been liable to the council.

Members were informed that stage two of the design process was now almost complete with the two preferred bidders finalising their design proposals, the actual details of which should be ready for the committee's January 2009 meeting, and for public consultation during January – March 2009.

Members also noted that the majority of the existing school site would be demolished and replaced, with the exception of the sports hall and science block.

As indicated in earlier reports, members were reminded that the decision on the design of the academy would be by the design group of the academy trust, which included representatives from the local authority, Wellington College, the DCSF and Partnership for Schools.

Finally, members sought reassurance that the planning permission process would not present further delays or risk to the project, and were informed that the reason for the inclusion of the word “college” in the academy’s title was due to the trust’s ambition for the academy to develop a brand which could be marketed across the world, to assist it in its aspiration to develop links internationally.

Resolved:

To note the information update.

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

Resolved:

To note the items listed in the Cabinet’s / Implementation Executive’s latest rolling forward plan for November 2008 to February 2009 relevant to this committee, and to request that a rapid response exercise be carried out in respect of the item “The Education & Inspections Act 2006 – Impact on Passenger Transport”.

87. **Urgent Items**

None.

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 am – 1.20 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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