

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a MEETING held at COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE, on THURSDAY 29 JANUARY 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, Mrs E Leonard, Ms R MacDonald, Ms J Miller, Mr W Moss, Mrs P Rugg, and Mrs C Soden (Chairman)

OTHERS PRESENT:

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

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Winchcombe, Mrs Finney, Mr MacMahon, Mr Oldrieve, Mr Thompson and Mrs White.

2. **Chairman's Announcements**

- (a) members were asked to hold a minutes silence at the beginning of the meeting in respect of the late William Snow, former co-opted member of the committee
- (b) Maurice Emberson, Interim Service Director for Children & Families was welcomed to the committee, as a recently appointed member of staff
- (c) members were reminded of the Joint Overview & Scrutiny Transition Board meeting which would be held on the 17th February to scrutinize the 2009/10 budget recommendation
- (d) members were also reminded to feedback their comments to the scrutiny office regarding the consultation paper recently published on proposals for revised scrutiny arrangements in the new council
- (e) a School Food Task Group meeting would be held at 1.30pm, immediately following the committee meeting

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

Resolved:

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

4. **Members' Interests**

Mr Hawkins declared a personal interest in agenda item 12, as a governor of St Joseph's School.

5. **Public Participation**

None.

6. **Member Requests**

None.

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

Mr Hawkins provided members with a brief update (see page 12) on the Schools Forum's recent meetings when the issue of the primary behaviour support strategy had been discussed.

During the ensuing discussion on this update, further points were made including:

- (a) schools were being consulted on a proposal to use a 'top slice' of the increase to be received for the 'named pupil allowance' budget 09/10 to help fund the strategy
- (b) early intervention in regard to behaviour must begin from the earliest age possible, and therefore it was important that the county's children's centres were actively engaged in early intervention and appropriately for this purpose.

The committee reiterated its support for the primary behaviour support strategy and repeated its request that it be adequately funded.

8. **Joint Area Review of Children's Services 2008**

Members received a presentation from the Director of the Department for Children & Education, which further illustrated the findings of the 2008 Ofsted Joint Area Review (JAR) of children's services in Wiltshire (slides attached).

In discussing the report and the points made in this presentation, a number of key issues were explored, including:

Safeguarding

- (a) since the JAR, performance in regard to the use of and confidence in the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) had significantly improved

- (b) management and support for social care teams was being reinforced as a consequence of the JAR finding that there were some inconsistencies in performance in regard to the completion of initial and core assessments and in the commissioning of core assessments

Looked After Children & Young People (LACYP)

- (c) recruitment and retention of foster care staff was already a key focus of the department prior to the JAR
- (d) a strong adoption service and kinship care policy were key to achieving improved outcomes for looked after children and young people and value for money
- (e) whilst performance in adoption approval rates had improved since the JAR, more adopters were needed
- (f) some improvement in the speed of adoption court proceedings had been achieved, but further work and discussions with partners would continue to ensure further and continuous improvement in this matter
- (g) there were now only 15 (as opposed to 50) care leavers without a designated social worker
- (h) significant improvement in the timeliness of reviews for looked after children and young people, and the percentage of children and young people communicating their views had been achieved since the JAR
- (i) school attendance for looked after children and young people had significantly improved since the JAR

Learning Difficulties & Disabilities (LDD)

- (j) communication with the parents of children and young people with a learning difficulty or disability was improving, according to ASK (the independent parent partnership service for Wiltshire), and with 87% of parents recording their satisfaction in the service to date. Also a 'parents forum' had been established to provide parents with further opportunity to express their views

Teenage Pregnancy

- (k) the JAR had found good progress on tackling teenage pregnancy, however the subsequent Annual Performance Assessment in 2008 had highlighted that the council and its partners needed to do more to reduce conception rates under 18yrs
- (l) with binge drinking being a factor which contributed to teenage pregnancy, it was important that all partners were engaged in tackling this matter, including when licences needed to be revoked.

A new Alcohol Strategy, co-ordinated and led by the Director for Public Health in partnership with the council was intended to help with this

- (m) research into the causes of teenage pregnancy indicated that education was not necessarily the key to prevention, but that other support to influence and improve young people's self esteem could also have a positive impact

Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

- (n) whilst the JAR had noted a good reduction in the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs), the number had since increased - this was emerging as a national problem, linked to the credit crunch
- (o) increase in the provision of apprenticeships and other vocational courses for young people was a local and national priority

Overall

- (p) the JAR Action Plan documented how the department, with its partners, would respond to the recommendations for improvement
- (q) a number of the improvements requested had already been achieved, however issues relating to services providing value for money, e.g. placements, were matters which could not be resolved in the short term
- (r) the JAR had recommended that improvements be made to the department's strategic management capacity. Consequently the council would be asked to approve a growth bid in the 09/10 budget of £100,000 approx for the appointment of a fourth service director with responsibility for commissioning and performance. It was proposed that this would be a joint post with NHS Wiltshire
- (s) inspectors were inevitably going to measure the performance of services with stricter criteria year on year, and the JAR 2008 was no exception. Nevertheless, the department considered the inspection outcome to have been fair overall.

Resolved:

- (1) To schedule consideration of a report on the restructure of the Department for Children & Education to the March meeting.**
- (2) To seek reports on the following issues to form part of the committee's revised work programme from June 2009:**
 - (a) improvements made to the range of post 16 vocational provision (including for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities)**

(b) revised provision and plans for the future needs of young people from KS4 – post 16

(c) SEN Strategy

(d) Children & Young People's Trust Board's exercise to map costs for services for children and young people.

9. Wiltshire Youth Development Service Inspection 2008

The committee considered the report written on the 2008 Ofsted inspection of the Wiltshire Youth Development Service and asked questions of the Head of the Service and of three young people who had been trained and appointed to carry out assessments of this service.

The Head of the Service highlighted key elements of the inspection report and explained that there was an action in place to take forward the improvement areas recommended. He also asked members to note that the 2007/08 Youth Agency Audit for Wiltshire had rated this service as low cost but effective, particularly in regard to making contact with young people.

During the ensuing discussion members commented positively on the service's performance and raised the following further issues:

- (a) it was important to ensure that youth engagement in the new unitary council's community governance model was adequately representative of all young people
- (b) it was also important to make area board meetings appealing for young people to attend
- (c) a key priority for young people was to have somewhere to go and something to do, particularly for teenagers and especially on Friday and Saturday evenings and during the holidays. This priority was reflected in the Children & Young People's Plan and work was ongoing with partners, including the voluntary sector and schools, to improve facilities for young people
- (d) initiatives such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award were being effectively used in Wiltshire to improve young people's outcomes and in preventing them from making the wrong decisions in life
- (e) the council should give the youth service adequate funding to help it continue its good work.

Resolved:

- (1) To thank the department for the report.**
- (2) To note the outcome of the inspection.**

10. **Annual Performance Assessment 2008**

The committee considered the Ofsted Annual Performance Assessment (APA) Letter for 2008 and discussed the key issues listed in this letter.

Members noted that in regard to the outcome 'enjoy and achieve' Ofsted had used 2007 exam results, and consequently the letter did not reflect the improved results achieved in 2008.

Also members were asked to note that inspectors were especially focusing in recent inspections on services for vulnerable children and young people including those from black and minority ethnic communities, and that this was an area in need of continued improvement in Wiltshire.

The committee was informed that the action plan drafted in response to this letter would be incorporated into the JAR action plan.

Resolved:

- (1) To use the APA Letter 2008, and its corresponding action plan, to inform the committee's future work programme, particularly in relation to the following items:**
 - (a) Children & Adolescent Mental Health Strategy**
 - (b) Transitions**
 - (c) 14 – 19 strategy**
 - (d) CAF**
 - (e) Teenage Pregnancy Strategy**
 - (f) Outcomes for children and young people from the black and minority ethnic communities in Wiltshire**
- (2) To invite the Virtual School Head Teacher (for looked after children and young people) to a future meeting to explain how she was helping with the actions to improve the performance of looked after children at key stage 4**
- (3) Ask the Corporate Parenting Group to seek further reassurance and information concerning:**
 - (a) adoption rates for looked after children**
 - (b) the Kinship Care Policy and its effectiveness in promoting the fostering of children and young people by family and friends.**

11. **Summary of Haringey Council's Joint Area Review and Outline Implications for Wiltshire**

The chairman explained that she had asked for this report to come to the committee, to seek reassurance that child protection arrangements were sufficiently robust, as measured against government guidance for reviewing the council's services against learning from the Haringey Council 'Baby P' case.

In discussing this report, members were asked to note that, whilst the JAR had rated the work of the Wiltshire Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) to be 'good', the overall rating received for safeguarding had been 'adequate', due to the need to improve use of the CAF and to improve consistency in initial and core assessments.

The report explained what the LSCB was doing to review child protection arrangements in light of the Baby P case, and what actions were needed to further strengthen these arrangements.

Other points raised during this discussion included:

- (a) there was a very fine balance to be met in taking a child into care and working with families to support them through difficulties
- (b) there was a need to ensure that the executive and non executive members of all partners involved in the LSCB were actively engaged in discharging their responsibilities in child protection. A high level meeting had been called to discuss this by the Leader of the Council. It had been agreed that it was crucial for executive and non executive members to have an oversight of quality assurance arrangements
- (c) early intervention strategies were crucial in preventing child protection cases and in tackling the root causes of abuse
- (d) a White Paper was about to be issued to clarify for all schools and children's centres what early intervention meant and how it should be applied
- (e) the CAF, children centres, parenting classes and antenatal classes were all helpful ways in which the local authority, with its partners, were promoting early intervention and preventative strategies.

Resolved:

- (1) To note the report and further work that would be carried out concerning the implications for Wiltshire from the Haringey Council JAR and Baby P Serious Case Review.**
- (2) To recommend that, as part of members' induction to the new authority, firm advice and encouragement be issued to ensure the fullest possible attendance at training events and courses on safeguarding.**
- (3) To request a report in due course describing how early intervention strategies, e.g. CAF and parenting classes were being applied in all children's settings in Wiltshire, including children's centres.**

12. **The Academies' Programme**

The Assistant Director (Schools) presented a report which provided an update on The Wellington Academy project and outlined the plans to develop two further academy projects in Salisbury.

In discussing The Wellington Academy first, members were updated that the senior leadership team from Castledown School was now a part of the 'education group', responsible for taking forward the education vision for the new academy.

Drawings from the recently confirmed preferred bidder for the design and construction of the academy were displayed and members were referred to agenda item 18 which explained in detail the processes involved in evaluating and selecting the preferred bidder.

Members noted that, with the appointment of the preferred bidder (Kier Construction), the 'Final Business Case' stage of the project could begin. Members were also asked to note that this appointment was made without financial commitment to the bidder until a number of conditions set by the project steering group had been met.

Officers explained that a report would be presented to cabinet prior to the submission of the 'Final Business Case' to summarise the risks to the council at that point in time, and to request authority to award the contract.

In considering the reports at agenda item 12 and item 18 in relation to The Wellington Academy project, members raised the following key points:

- (a) it was important to have the boarding accommodation completed at (or close to) the same time as all other buildings on the site, to ensure the ethos of the new academy was maintained from its inception
- (b) in addition, it was important that the design of the boarding facility did not detract from the ethos of the new academy, and that the intention to construct one unit with two wings did not create a 'barrack-type' feel. Members were given reassurance that the sponsor was strongly influencing the design of the boarding facility
- (c) the preferred bidder had been requested by the 'project steering group' to use cedar as the wood materials for the new academy's buildings, rather than the originally proposed black stained timber cladding
- (d) the academy would include provision for children and young people with special educational needs, and the principle designate, who had expertise in SEN was actively involved in the design and construction of the new academy

- (e) a member of the former academy task group reiterated his earlier request that the offer of a visit to Stanbridge Earls Special School be followed up, mindful of the technical advice this school could offer to the project steering group
- (f) a model of The Wellington Academy would be displayed in the members' room, and this would clearly indicate the different design features, e.g. the SEN facilities
- (g) 'Partnership for Schools (PFS)' committed the design and build contractors of academies to deliver within a funding envelope - consequently, most of the risks related to cost overruns on this project would rest with the contractor. The report to cabinet at the Final Business Case stage would report on the residual risks to the council
- (h) the ability of Kier Construction to deliver academy projects would have been tested by PfS as part of the development of the contract framework arrangements. In addition, the evaluation team has been satisfied as to the specific experience of the proposed team members on education projects
- (i) Kier Construction had a good track record in the design and construction of academy buildings and it would be using a well built existing academy as a benchmark to help devise a set of design quality standards for The Wellington Academy
- (j) a large boiler fuelled by regenerated wood would help to heat the academy and, at the request of the chairman of the task group, Kier had been asked to explore whether or not it could use fuel from the new Westbury MBT facility
- (k) a member from the former task group expressed concern that the design would only achieve a 60% reduction in carbon emissions and questioned why the Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Mechanism (BREEAM) had been used to rate the design. Members noted that for the design to achieve 100% reduction in carbon emissions, additional funding would be required.

In considering the outline plans for two further academies in Salisbury, members were referred to comments that had been submitted by the committee's co-opted member for secondary schools on behalf of the headteacher of St Edmund's School for Girls. Members noted that a meeting with and written response to the headteacher would be arranged. In discussing the submitted comments, members noted that the Statement of Intent letter from the DCSF in relation to the Laverstock Academy proposal was well overdue, and that officers continued to chase this statement.

A number of the points raised in this submission were echoed by a member of the committee, including in relation to paragraph 7 of

agenda item 12, who also challenged points made in paragraph 10 of this item.

In further discussing the two Salisbury academy proposals, members questioned whether there would be sufficient pupil demand for these two academies, and raised concerns about the highway/traffic problems associated with schools currently on the Laverstock site. Members also referred to the financial implications of the Salisbury academy projects, noting that a significant sum of capital funding would be required from the local authority's already oversubscribed capital programme.

Resolved:

- (1) To note the update on the academies' programme and to reassert the committee's request for termly updates on all projects within the programme.**
- (2) To note the appointment of Kier Construction as the preferred bidder for the design and construction of The Wellington Academy.**
- (3) To request Mr Deane, as the chairman of the former academy task group, to continue to work with the department on the committee's behalf, to carry out further overview of The Wellington Academy project, as it progressed.**
- (4) To ask the department to make contact with the headteacher of St Edmund's School for Girls to discuss her comments on the academies' programme update report, and to provide her and the committee with a written response.**

13. The Development of Sure Start Children's Centres in Wiltshire 2008 - 2010

Members considered an update report on the development of children's centres in Wiltshire, noting that a further 2 had since been opened, bringing the total to 24.

In discussing this item, members congratulated officers for the good progress made, but also questioned how well children's centres were being promoted throughout the county, particularly in the rural areas.

In response, officers clarified that a survey to assess the level of public understanding and awareness was currently being carried out, and that this was an area that the service needed to work on further. In regard to access to the centres for people in the rural areas, the JAR had commented positively on the outreach being carried out to ensure this accessibility.

Other matters discussed included making use of the centres not just for 0-5 year olds but also for teenagers, and the opportunity that would be

taken when contracts needed to be renewed for a preferred management model to be applied across the network of centres. This model would enable the council to reassert its role and vision for the centres, ensure a consistency of service and provide the opportunity to maximise economies of scale to make the centres as efficient and effective as possible.

Resolved:

To note the report.

14. **The Education & Inspections Act 2006 – Extended Provisions for Free School Transport for Lower Income Families: Update on the Impact Following Implementation**

Members discuss this update report, and in particular commented on the financial implications of the extended provision for free school transport to lower income families, both currently and as estimated for the future.

Resolved:

To note the report.

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

Resolved:

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

16. **Urgent Items**

None.

17. **The Wellington Academy – Evaluation of Bids Received and Selection of Preferred Bidder**

The committee's discussion of this report and resolutions are recorded at minute 12 above.

(Duration of meeting: 9.30 am – 1.45 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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Children's Services Scrutiny Committee 29th January 2009
Update on Primary Behaviour Support Strategy

Further to the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 13th November 2008, Members might like a brief update on the item, minuted at paragraph 81,

Primary Behaviour Support - Strategy

The Minutes state that it was Resolved, *inter alia*,

(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 stage 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 given 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.

Schools Forum has discussed this issue at some length at its full meetings on 4th December 2008 and 22nd January 2009 and at a number of its sub groups. Members were informed that, after the award of the Minimum Funding Guarantee of 2.1% was passed to all schools, there would be, virtually, no 'headroom' left over to fund the listed additionally proposed programmes and services. Schools Forum agreed that these proposals should be considered against an agreed set of criteria in order to prioritise. This was done using a statistical technique, and the Primary Behaviour Support Strategy was placed within the top three priorities.

The original Strategy proposal was costed at £303,000. In the light of budget constraints, a reduced service was proposed which was costed out at £173,000. The Assistant Director outlined a proposal for funding this from a top slice of the current Named Pupil Allowance Budgets. As a result of a number of discussions on the issue, it was agreed at the meeting on 22nd January that this proposal would be put out to Consultation with all schools in both the primary and secondary sectors. I understand that the matter will be discussed with PHF and with the Primary Heads Behaviour Support Group, in the near future.