

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a MEETING held at COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE on WEDNESDAY, 26th OCTOBER, 2000.

PRESENT: Mr. K.C. Wren (Chairman), Mrs. M. Boulton, Mrs. N.S. Bryant, Mr. G.J.M. Downes, Mr. W.A. Spiers.

36. **Apologies** Apologies for absence were received from Mr. R.T. Rogers and Mr. I.C. West.

37. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Resolved: To confirm and sign the minutes of the Sub-Committee meeting held on 6th September, 2000 subject to:-

(1) *adding the name of Mr. I.C. West to the list of those present; and*

(2) *amending the date in minute 35(3) to read "March 2001".*

38. **Chairman's Announcements**

(1) The Chairman welcomed Stephanie Snape, one of the consultants currently reviewing the Scrutiny Process in Wiltshire, to the meeting.

(2) The Chairman reminded everyone about the need to work in a relaxed and open way during the meeting.

39. **School and Social Services Transport** The Sub-Committee received a comprehensive joint report by the Director of Environmental Services, the Director of Social Services and the Chief Education Officer. The following officers were present to introduce the paper and respond to questions:

Mr. George Batten	}	
Mr. Eric Egar	}	Environmental Services
Mr. Chris Pettifer	}	
Ms. Hazel Watson		Social Services
Mr. Chris Dale		Education

The background to the delivery of the current service was explained to members, including the difference between the procurement and budget arrangements with Education and Social Services. Members were concerned about the increasing costs facing the service including fuel prices and the lack of appropriate control over the demand for journeys being requested by Social Services staff. Members heard from Ray Jones, Director of Social Services, about the action taken within the Department to manage-down the number of requests being made and the line of responsibility to the individual budget holders. It was recognised that this increased discipline would lead to a reduction in service to clients.

With regard to Education transport, members were pleased to hear that there was no trend between non-transport entitlement and non-attendance of pupils. On the subject of rising costs, members were interested to hear about more proactive consultation with schools and the potential for staggering hours. Mrs. Boulton took the opportunity to give the example of Preshute School where provision was arranged but which did not meet the needs of the local community. Members expressed general concern about the lack of recognition by Government over the high costs of delivering transport in a rural county, and the implications of continuing pressure to delegate resources to schools.

Resolved:

- (1) *To accept the following conclusions from the evidence in the report and discussion in the meeting:*
 - (i) *the anticipated benefits of co-ordinating transport functions in the Passenger Transport Unit have in most cases been realised;*
 - (ii) *significant problems remain with Social Services transport in relation to the rapid growth in demand for one-off bookings, but these were now being addressed;*
 - (iii) *the proposed actions resulting from the recent Management Review of PTU should, when implemented, address the service delivery issues identified by stakeholders and provide a sound foundation for continuing improvement.*
- (2) *To ask for a future report on the outcome of the specific actions taken to address the budget control problems for Social Services transport.*

40. Fundamental Best Value Review of Social Services Provider Services for Disabled Children and their Families

Resolved: *On the basis that Appendix 2 had not been circulated with the papers, to defer consideration of this item to the next meeting.*

41. Joint SSI/Audit Commission Review of Social Services The Director of Social Services gave a short presentation to the Sub-Committee. This followed the seminar for all members and consideration of the review report by the Social Services Committee on 12th October.

Members noted that Wiltshire had the lowest spend on central management costs and had one of the lowest spend per head of population of the authorities reviewed so far. Members were impressed with the conclusions reached by the joint inspection team and its comments that Wiltshire was serving most people well and had excellent prospects for improvement.

Resolved: To note the outcome of the joint inspection and that the Social Services Committee would be monitoring progress with implementing the findings.

42. **Best Value Performance Plan – Scrutiny of Performance Indicators for Education and Social Services** The Sub-Committee received a report by the Chief Executive, along with a covering report by the Director of Corporate Services.

John Feane introduced the report explaining its purpose and content. Chris Dale responded to questions by members on the Education performances and targets set out in Appendix 1. He explained the “light touch” role of the LEA in respect of school targets and the impact of the Government’s drive towards improving literacy and numeracy. Members were interested to hear more about the pupil progress tracking (related to starting ability) and were very concerned about the poor educational attainment of children in local authority care.

Resolved:

- (1) *To note the information in the report.*
- (2) *To agree the proposal that information be provided each July and January.*
- (3) *To invite an Education Officer (John Croft/Melanie Oliver) to the January 2001 meeting to talk about pupil progress tracking.*

43. **Overspend: Education and Social Services Revenue Budgets 2000-01** At the request of the Chairman, the Sub-Committee received the latest budget monitoring reports submitted to the service committees.

- (1) **Social Services** The Director of Social Services commented on the initial projected overspend of £1.5m, the reasons and action to improve the position, being set out in the September budget monitoring report. He reported on the original danger of the overspend reaching £2.2m, but through the application of tighter budget control and “turning off” demand, it was now projected at £1.3m.

Members asked about the implications of curbing demand including bed-blocking, tightening eligibility criteria and the management of delegated budgets.

Resolved: To be kept informed of the position through oral update at future meetings.

- (2) **Education** Chris Dale reported on the overspend of £0.94m and action taken to control expenditure. This has resulted in a projected overspend now of £0.54m which would be reported to the Education Committee at its next meeting. It was hoped that libraries would manage out its £50k overspend by

year end. An example of the one of the dilemmas of reducing expenditure was that to defer £150k of IT spend could potentially lose £140k of Government grant under the National Grid for Learning. Members were also concerned about achieving best value from our procurement of equipment.

Resolved: To be kept informed of the position through oral update at future meetings.

44. **Support for Scrutiny** On report that Policy & Resources Committee would be considering the Sub-Committee's previous recommendation on 31st October,

Resolved:

- (1) To receive a report back at the next meeting.*
- (2) To welcome the appointment of a new Research Assistant (80 days of the person's time would be devoted to scrutiny).*
- (3) To note the comments made by the Chief Executive during the briefing meeting in respect of resources and the current independent review.*

45. **Work Plan** Members discussed the expectation placed on them in respect of the current terms of reference for scrutiny, including the amount of retrospective major strategic/planning work being identified and the Best Value process. Members were keen to reach a position where they were "driving" the agenda and had reports and minutes with a stronger scrutiny emphasis.

Resolved:

- (1) To seek to move away from the "budget plans, service plans and other major planning or strategic statements by the main committees" and concentrate more on Best Value reviews, committee decisions and topics chosen by members.*
 - (2) To note that the items on schools with serious weaknesses and corporate complaint procedure had been deferred to the next meeting on 30th November.*
 - (3) To amend the work plan to reflect the decisions taken during the meeting.*
 - (4) To adopt a more project plan based approach to developing topics for scrutiny*
- (nb. During the post-meeting discussion, it was agreed that all members could attend the Chairman's pre-agenda meetings in future.)*

(Duration of meeting : 10.30 a.m. - 12.50 p.m.)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Paul Kelly, of the Committee Services Unit, direct line 713049.

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