

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a MEETING held at COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE, on THURSDAY, 30th NOVEMBER, 2000.

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

Also present: Mrs. J. Seager, Chairman of Social Services Committee
Ms. F. Taylor, INLOGOV.

46. **Membership** It was reported that the Education and Social Services Committees had appointed the following members to serve on the Sub-Committee:

<u>Conservative (3+1)</u>	<u>Labour (1)</u>	<u>Liberal/Democrat (2)</u>
Mrs. N.S. Bryant	Mr. R.T. Rogers	Mrs. M. Boulton
Mr. G.J.M. Downes		Mr. I.C. West
Mr. W.A. Spiers		
Mr. K.C. Wren		

47. **Election of Chairman**

Resolved: *To elect Mr. K.C. Wren as Chairman of the Sub-Committee.*

Mr. K.C. Wren in the Chair

48. **Election of Vice-Chairman**

Resolved: *To defer the election of Vice-Chairman to the next meeting.*

49. **Apologies** Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Mr. R.T. Rogers and Mr. K.C. Wren.

50. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Resolved: *To confirm and sign the minutes of the Sub-Committee meeting held on 26th October, 2000.*

51. **Chairman's Announcements** The Chairman welcomed Francis Taylor, Consultant from INLOGOV, and Mrs. Seager, Chairman of the Social Services Committee to the meeting.

52. **Best Value Review of Social Services Provider Services for Disabled Children and their Families** A report by the Director of Social Services was circulated which was deferred from the previous meeting. It covered stages 1 and 2 of the Best Value review process.

Annie Hudson, Assistant Director of Social Services, introduced the paper recognising that Health and Education also had a significant role in commissioning and providing services for disabled children. Mrs. Bryant and Mr. Spiers had been involved in the build-up to the Sub-Committee's consideration of the report and particularly commented on the unsuitability of Canons House.

Members raised questions about current costs, future developments and the time and cost of undertaking Police checks as part of the recruitment process of staff. Members also highlighted the impact of the introduction of Primary Care Groups and the involvement of leisure centres.

Resolved:

- (1) *To approve the initial scope of the review under stages 1 and 2 and that the review proceeds to the next stage.*
- (2) *To write to the Police Authority regarding the costs and time taken to respond to requests from the Council and other agencies for checks on potential staff/volunteers.*

53. **Social Services Transport** At the last meeting on 26th October members asked for a future report on the outcome of the actions being taken (Mn.39(2)/00). At the pre-agenda meeting, the Chairman felt it was important for members to receive an oral update.

The Director of Social Services reminded members of how the overspend on transport occurred. He was pleased to report that it was now falling from £145k to £107k in respect of adult care through tighter monitoring, reducing the demand by requiring more information on urgent journeys and those costing over £25, and a system of approval involving the Area Managers. Requests for service have now dropped from 3,000 in August to 1,100 in November.

He went on to explain the high contract prices being experienced recently with increases in the range of 16.5%-63% and the implications of managing these within limited resources. A report going to the Social Services Committee would give details of how to potentially combat this situation.

Resolved: *To seek a verbal update at the next meeting in January and, in the meantime, to be circulated with a copy of the report going to the next meeting of the Social Services Committee on 14th December on this subject.*

54. **Grants to Voluntary Organisations** A report by the Director of Social Services was circulated. This was requested at the 6th September meeting following consideration of an overview report. (Min.34/00)

Hazel Watson introduced the paper highlighting the independent involvement of Audit in reviewing the grant aid process. The conclusion reached was that it would be difficult to establish a central point for all grants but that a corporate code of practice would develop a more consistent and fairer approach.

Discussion took place in respect of small grants not subject to formal agreement and the process around the payment of village hall grants.

Resolved: To request a report back on progress with the adoption of a common code of practice at the 27th March, 2001 meeting.

55. **Overspend: Education and Social Services Revenue Budgets 2000-01** (Min.43/00)
The Chief Education Officer had hoped to report a continuing improvement in the position but he explained about two potentially significant demands on the budget associated with rates revaluation on school premises and fluctuations relating to military personnel movements. More information was being gathered on these additional demands, and their consequences for report to the Education Committee on 15th December.

Members reflected on the fact that revaluation could potentially generate additional revenue for the District Councils and that any end of year overspend would be the first call on next year's budget. Concern was also expressed about any reduction to special education needs.

The Director of Social Services reported that the overspend position was still running at £1.5m and that staff were currently working to full capacity to try and bridge the £7m gap between the financial plan and the additional demands on next year's budget.

Members discussed the blocked hospital beds situation, the waiting list for residential care placements and the need to make the most effective use of joint resources between Social Services and Health.

Resolved: To note the recent developments and seek further oral update reports at the next meeting.

56. **Best Value Review – Growing Up in Warminster and Corsham** (Min.26/00) A report by the Chief Executive was circulated. This followed an initial report considered on 24th July and covered stages 1 and 2 of the Best Value review process.

The Chief Executive explained the multi-agency approach to this review and the various ways in which the views of the young people of these towns were being sought. Members were pleased to hear about these ideas and hope that they would be extended to other parts of the County.

Resolved: To approve the initial scope of the review under stages 1 and 2 and that the review proceeds to the next stage.

57. **Best Value Review of Education Residential Centres** A report by the Chief Education Officer was circulated. The report covered stages 1 and 2 of the Best Value process.

Gordon Evans introduced the paper commenting on the level and type of provision at each of the centres. He was aware that the current service was valued by members and users but the review would ask fundamental questions about the most effective way to deliver these in the future.

Resolved: To approve the initial scope of the review under stages 1 and 2 and that the review proceeds to the next stage.

(NB. Mrs. M. Boulton and Mrs. N.S. Bryant declared non-pecuniary interests as members of the Management Committee of Braeside and remained in the meeting during debate and resolution on this item.)

58. **Schools in Difficulty: Current Trend** (Min.35(2)/00) A report by the Chief Education Officer was circulated in response to the Sub-Committee's request at its 6th September meeting.

The Chief Education Officer reported that the number of schools in difficulty in Wiltshire were below the national average although the increase in those with special measures was cause for concern. He went on to explain the impact of the change in the Ofsted inspection framework and the imbalance in the schools inspected.

Members discussed the "light touch" approach to monitoring and advice adopted in Wiltshire and the relationship this had to resources and the degree of prevention work that could be achieved. The Sub-Committee considered the quality of teaching to be the most effective way of preventing an increase in the number of schools in difficulty.

Resolved: To note the position and seek a further report to the June 2001 meeting.

59. **Recruitment of Head Teachers** (Min.27/00) The Sub-Committee was due to receive a report reviewing the situation next summer. However, at the pre-agenda meeting, the Chairman felt it would be helpful to have an oral report on the current position.

The Chief Education Officer reported that there had been 13 primary school vacancies advertised this term, 9 appointments made (7 from within the County), 2 pending appointment and 2 which did not attract any candidates. A report on this matter was being submitted to the Education Committee on 15th December, 2000.

Resolved: To note the position, receive a copy of the Education Committee report, and seek an update next summer.

60. **Corporate Complaints Procedure** The Sub-Committee was keen to be involved in the development of proposals for a corporate complaints procedure following consideration of the existing arrangements for Social Services and Education at its meeting on 29th June (Min.19/00).

Mrs. Boulton and Mr. Spiers agreed to take a lead in the preparation and implementation of proposals. They have met with Stephen Gerrard, Solicitor to the

County Council, and Nina Wilton, who have conducted a study of the Council's existing procedures and, as a result, drafted a new corporate complaints procedure.

The Sub-Committee would shortly receive a report based on the proposals and the outcome of further discussions. This will give members an opportunity to be actively involved in the way the policy is defined and operated, prior to implementation next April.

Resolved: To note the position, that Ms. Boulton and Mr. Spiers would be visiting a "beacon council" and that a report would be submitted to the next meeting on 25th January, 2001.

61. **Support for Scrutiny** (Min.36(4)/00) At its meeting on 6th September, the Sub-Committee resolved to recommend the Policy & Resources Committee to give early consideration to the need for adequate resources to enable the scrutiny function to be more effective. The other Scrutiny Sub-Committee supported the recommendation at its meeting on 20th September and highlighted the need for scrutiny to be independent. It also suggested a seminar to further develop the skills of members and officers involved before Christmas.

The Policy & Resources Committee considered the recommendation at its meeting on 31st October and resolved as follows:

‘To agree in principle the recommendations of the Sub-Committee in connection with resources for Scrutiny but to defer final consideration until the receipt of the INLOGOV report into the County Council's scrutiny arrangements.’

Resolved:

- (1) To note the position and that the report by the consultants would be available by the end of the year.*
- (2) To note that a Researcher would be appointed in January/February in part to support the scrutiny process and suggest that members of the sub-committee(s) have some involvement in the recruitment process for this post.*

62. **Work Plan** On receipt of a copy of the latest work plan,

Resolved: To amend the plan to include:

- (i) Social Services Transport – verbal update report to 25th January, 2001 meeting.*
- (ii) Grants to Voluntary Organisations – report on adoption of common code of practice to 27th March, 2001 meeting.*
- (iii) Overspend – verbal update report to 25th January, 2001 meeting.*
- (iv) Schools in Difficulty – further report to 21st June, 2001 meeting.*

- (v) *Recruitment of Head Teachers – further report to a meeting next summer.*
- (vi) *Corporate Complaints – report on proposed new procedure to 25th January, 2001 meeting.*
- (vii) *Review of Scrutiny – report of consultants to 25th January, 2001 meeting.*

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 a.m. – 12.55 p.m.)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Paul Kelly, of the Committee Services Unit, Corporate Services Department, direct line (01225) 713049.
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