

EDUCATION & SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a MEETING held at COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE, on THURSDAY, 25th JANUARY 2001.

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

63. Election of Vice-Chairman

Resolved: To defer election of a vice-chairman in the absence of any opposition members.

64. Apologies Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Mrs. M. Boulton, Mr. R.T. Rogers and Mr. I.C. West.

65. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Resolved: To confirm and sign the minutes of the Sub-Committee meeting held on 30th November 2000, subject to replacing the name of Mr. K.C. Wren with Mr. I.C. West in Minute No. 49.

66. Pupil Progress Tracking (Min. 42/00) The Chief Education Officer reported on this new initiative and tabled a paper on the pupil tracking database showing progress to date and the further development work needed. Members were supportive of the initiative and commented that investment in the appropriate IT system was vital to its success. Members accepted that it would take 12 months to see meaningful results but were keen to remain involved in the development of this initiative.

This item arose from the Sub-Committee's consideration of the performance indicators for the Education Department at its meeting last October.

Resolved: To consider progress on the implementation of the initiative at the Sub-Committee's meeting on 21st June, 2001.

67. Overspend: Education and Social Services Revenue Budgets 2000-01 (Min. No. 55/00)

Education

The Chief Education Officer reported that the overspend was projected to be £469K with the fluctuation in pupil numbers having the potential to impact further on this figure. In responding to questions from members regarding contingency provisions,

the Chief Education Officer commented on other demands of the budget proving difficult to predict, including outcome of special needs tribunals and early retirement of teachers, maternity cover, etc.

Social Services

The Assistant Director of Social Services reported that the latest position was showing a projected overspend of £1.3m (down from 1.5m in October). She commented on the impact of the decisions on service delivery and increased waiting lists. Members questioned the Council's position regarding its statutory obligations and complaints received as a consequence of the decisions taken.

In a general discussion between members and officers the issues of risk, challenge, capping demand to match resources and the budget monitoring systems used by the Council were debated. At the conclusion, the Chairman moved a motion which had been discussed in principle at the pre-agenda meeting and subsequently had been the subject of input by the Chief Executive and County Treasurer.

Resolved:

- (1) *To note the comments made to the sub-committee over the last three meetings by the Director of Social Services and the Chief Education officer in respect of the overspend in the revenue budget for their services in the current year.*
- (2) *To note the comments of County Treasurer and other officers present.*
- (3) *To note other relevant reports, including the report (to come) by the County Treasurer to the Council, the District Auditor's Management Letter and the current Financial Regulations.*
- (4) *To note the impact of prospective changes in executive arrangements which will be made early in the new Council with implications for budget responsibilities.*
- (5) *To request the Chief Education Officer, Director of Social Services, Chief Executive and County Treasurer, along with the Chairman of the Education and Social Services Committees, to attend the next meeting to advise the Sub-Committee on these matters and the lessons learned from addressing the overspend in the current year.*
- (6) *To reschedule the next meeting of the sub-committee from Tuesday, 27th March to Friday, 6th April at 10.30 a.m.*
(NB. The chairman's pre-agenda meeting will now be held on 27th March at 9.30 a.m.)
- (7) *To invite the Officers and Chairmen to circulate beforehand any material which may be helpful to the sub-committee.*
- (8) *To issue a similar invitation to the District Auditor (or representative).*

- (9) *To resolve to report the Sub-Committee's views after the next meeting to the Policy & Resources Committee for possible advice to the incoming County Council.*

68. **Best Value Review of Adult Learning Disabilities Services** The Sub-Committee considered a report by the Director of Social Services covering stages 1 and 2 (of the 7 stage Best Value process) and asking the Sub-Committee to pass a judgement on the initial scope of the review.

The Assistant Director of Social Services recommended that the review should be extended to a full service review to be jointly conducted with Wiltshire Health Authority. She explained the range of services currently being provided for this client group by a number of agencies and that the review would be expected to find substantial efficiency savings.

The Sub-Committee noted that two members of the Social Services Committee would be invited to join the Project Board and discussion took place on how best to involve scrutiny members in progressing the review.

Resolved:

- (1) *To agree that the review be extended to a full service review conducted with Wiltshire Health Authority.*
- (2) *To suggest in principle that two members of the Sub-Committee should be involved in the review but concentrating on the elements specifically relevant to scrutiny.*

69. **Best Value Review of Social Services Provider Services for Disabled Children and their Families** A report by the Director of Social Services was circulated. The report covered stage 4 (of the 7 stage Best Value process) and the Sub-Committee was asked to agree the revised purpose, service specification and proposals for action to determine service delivery options. It was noted that Mrs. Bryant and Mr. Spiers have been briefed between meetings on progress with the review.

Bridget Goddard for Social Services highlighted the main elements of the report including an increased emphasis on working in partnership with agencies some opportunities for development through Government specific grants.

Members were keen to see some detailed examples of typical provision and a full range of creative options for the future, including stimulating the "market place" if necessary.

Resolved:

- (1) *To note the assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the current service and the market and the actions proposed to determine service delivery options.*
- (2) *To approve the new purpose and outline service specification, and to agree that the Review proceeds to Stage 5, the identification of future service delivery and the development of a draft Action Plan.*

70. **Social Services Transport** (Min. 53/00) The Sub-Committee received an oral update on the progress with specific actions taken to address the budget control problems for Social Services transport as requested at the last meeting.

The Chairman indicated that this would be the last time for this topic to feature on the agenda now that the Sub-Committee were satisfied that adequate safeguards were now in place.

Resolved: To thank the officers for their reports over previous meetings, and to recognise that this formed part of the overspend for Social Services in the current year and would continue to be monitored in this way.

71. **Corporate Complaints Procedure** (Min. 60/00) The Sub-Committee were 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 working alongside the Solicitor to the Council. The Sub-Committee was updated on progress at the last meeting.

Resolved:

- (1) *To note that it had been hoped to submit the new procedure to this meeting of the Sub-Committee but chief officers had suggested further revisions to the draft and therefore it will not be available for consideration until the next meeting.*
- (2) *To request that a list of major complaints currently being responded to by the County Council be supplied to members.*

72. **Support for Scrutiny** (Min. 61(4)/00) At its last meeting, the Sub-Committee resolved to note the decision of the Policy & Resources Committee... *'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'.*

It was hoped to be in a position to circulate the consultants' report along with the comments of the Director of Corporate Services with the agenda. Unfortunately, the report was unlikely to be available before the meeting. Members discussed options for the best way forward.

Resolved: To hold a joint seminar with the other Scrutiny Sub-Committee on Friday, 9th February to hear a presentation from the consultant on their findings and recommendations for final consideration by the Policy & Resources Committee.

73. **Work Plan** A copy of the latest work plan was circulated.

Resolved: To note the items for the next meeting on 6th April 2001, already identified along with the matters agreed for inclusion at this meeting.

(Duration of meeting : 10.30 a.m. – 12.30 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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