

**REPORT OF THE EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY
SUB-COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS**

Purpose of Report

1. To advise the new Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on the activities of this Sub-Committee from June 2000 to November 2001.

Terms of Reference

2. The Sub-Committee acted within the following terms of reference, which were agreed by the County Council and the two parent committees: -

To consider and enquire into the policies and practices of the committees scrutinised.

To monitor service delivery.

To consider the budget plans, service plans, and any other major planning or strategic statements of the committees scrutinised.

To review aspects of the committees' best value performance plans.

To comment on the performance of the committees scrutinised using indicators such as:

- Best Value Targets
- Data generated by the District Auditor and the Audit Commission and other external agencies concerned with economy, efficiency and effectiveness of local authorities.
- Whether anticipated costs and benefits of earlier actions materialise in the way the commissioning committees hoped.

To explore the general quality and effect of the decisions of the committees scrutinised.

To study the impact of the work of the committees on other agencies and vice versa.

Proceedings

3. The first meeting of the Sub-Committee took place on 1st June, 2000 and there have been twelve meetings in total.
4. Significant items considered have included: -
 - (a) Best Value Reviews
 - Direct Payments
 - Growing up in Warminster and Corsham
 - Disabled Children and their Families
 - Residential Centres
 - Adult Learning
 - Disabilities
 - Family Support
 - Community Safety
 - Emergency Duty Team
 - Library Services
 - (b) Other Issues
 - Recruitment of Head Teachers
 - Complaints Procedure
 - ICT Teaching
 - Grants Procedure
 - Budget Overspends
 - School and Social Services Transport
 - Pupil Progress Tracking
 - Schools in difficulty
 - Health Scrutiny
 - Social Services and Education Merger
5. The issues below remain following consideration by the Sub-Committee and will be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee: -
 - (a) Best Value Reviews
 - (1) Library Services - To recommend the establishment of a task group at the appropriate time under the new arrangements to consider the issue of central costs and corporate use of library facilities to supplement the work of the best value review
 - (2) Provider Services for Disabled Children and their Families - The review has been completed but due to the uncertainty of the future provision for this service, to seek an update on implementation of the action plan to a future meeting.

(b) Other Issues

- (1) Recruitment of Head Teachers - members have received progress reports on this issue since taking an interest in the high vacancy rate and difficulties in recruiting to head teacher posts in the county. The Sub-Committee explored some of the underlying causes such as salary and stress-related illnesses. This is an on-going matter and may be worthy of continued monitoring.
- (2) ICT Teaching - weakness in this area of provision had been identified in the Education Development Plan. The Sub-Committee was keen to see how this would be addressed and whether the proposed action would result in the expected degree of improvement.
- (3) Grants Procedure - the Sub-Committee recommended that the Council should operate a common grant aid applications process with a supporting code. The officer from Social Services that was to work on developing such an approach is no longer with the Council and therefore this matter remains outstanding.
- (4) Health Scrutiny - local authorities will be responsible for this new function from April next year. The Sub-Committee, and more recently the Council, have considered how best to take this forward with our partners in health and the districts. A project has been established and is reported elsewhere on this agenda. It is raised here because of the increasing amount of time that has been devoted to gathering information from various sources prior to consultation.
- (5) Integration of Social Services and Education - this will be a major challenge for the new Executive and we have taken an interest so as to ensure that the reorganisation does not have a detrimental affect on the recipients of the service and adequate protection is afforded to staff. The management committee may wish to monitor the situation as details of the merger project unfolds.

Conclusions

5. The Sub-Committee has, in the main, worked successfully and has considered matters referred to it in as much depth as was possible, given the resources available.
6. The Sub-Committee was particularly pleased with the good work achieved in respect of Social Services transport costs where the lack of local accountability over spot purchasing and the resulting overspend had been identified. Last year's overspends for Education and Social Services had also been questioned with evidence being provided by the relevant executive chairman and chief officers. This was a challenging but rewarding experience!

7. In their review of the Council's scrutiny arrangements, INLOGOV acknowledged that there was a need for additional resources to be made available for the scrutiny process and, in particular, for member and officer training. The Sub-Committee fully endorses these recommendations, which have also been supported by the Scrutiny Members' Steering Group. The Steering Group will be reporting on this and other issues to the new Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee.
8. During this period members have started to develop an expertise in the scrutiny process and have worked well together in a non-partisan way. It is to be hoped that this expertise will not be lost in the new governance arrangements that are being introduced.

Recommendations

9. To recommend: -
 - (1) that this report be forwarded to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee for information.
 - (2) that a report on the revised Best Value procedure be presented to an early meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Managing Board.
 - (3) that the outstanding issues identified in the report be recommended for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee.

K. Wren
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Scrutiny Sub-Committee

Unpublished documents relied upon in the production of this report: None

Environmental impact of the recommendations contained in this report: None