

MINUTES of the meeting of Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday, 13th March, 2006 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:	Councillor	J.P. Thomas (Vice Chairman)
	Councillors	G. Lucas, R.M. Manning, Mrs. S.J. Robertson, D.C. Taylor, Mrs E.A. Taylor, Ms. A.M. Toon and W.J. Walling
	Teacher Representatives	M. Carter (Special Education Sector Teachers) and C. Lewandowski (Secondary School teachers)
	Headteacher Representatives	A Marson (Secondary Headteachers) and Miss S. Peate (Primary Sector Headteachers)

In attendance: Councillors: T.M. James, Mrs. M.D. Lloyd-Hayes, R.J. Phillips, D.W. Rule MBE (Cabinet Member Children and Young People), W.J.S. Thomas and R.M. Wilson

The Vice-Chairman, Councillor J. P. Thomas in the Chair.

22. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor B.F. Ashton (Chairman), Councillor N.J.J. Davies, Mr J.D. Griffin.

23. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no named substitutes.

The Committee noted that Mr Alan Geach was in attendance and that he would be representing the Church of England at future meetings in lieu of Rev Ian Terry who would be retiring from this Committee following this meeting.

24. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

25. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 16th December, 2005, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

26. SUGGESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON ISSUES FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY

No suggestions for areas of scrutiny were received from the public.

27. JOINT AREA REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES IN HEREFORDSHIRE

The Committee were advised of the recommendations for improvement following the

Joint Area Review (JAR) and informed of progress to date.

Copies of the Joint Area Review – Herefordshire Children's Services Authority Area inspection report had been previously issued to Members of the Committee.

The Director of Children's Services reported that as a result of the JAR inspection report a JAR Improvement Plan had been sent to the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and the Department of Education and Skills (DfES). The outcome of their assessment of the Service's capacity to improve as a result of the Improvement Plan was still awaited.

She reported that the first four recommendations in the JAR report were the most critical for improving on Staying Safe, and these were set out in the agenda report. The judgement that Staying Safe was in adequate, identified in the JAR inspection report, was a serious concern for the Council and its partners. This had led, alongside the Adult Social Care assessment, to a position of "0" star for Herefordshire for Social Care. She emphasised that the necessary improvement must deliver confidence in the County that children were properly referred and assessed against revised criteria.

The JAR inspection report identified a number of recommendations which had been graded 'for immediate action'; 'action over the next six months' and 'action in the longer term'. In relation to the 'immediate' recommendations the Director reported that recommendations 1 and 2 had been developed for implementation in March 2006. Recommendation 3 was progressing to the agreed timetable and recommendation 4 had already been acted on.

She further reported that as a follow on from the JAR inspection, there would be a routine Annual Performance Assessment (APA) for Children's Services in Herefordshire. This would be an opportunity for the Service to demonstrate and evidence the improvements made.

The Committee noted that the Strategic Monitoring Committee had indicated that they were keen to be engaged in the future monitoring of the Improvement Plan and therefore it would be important for both Chairs of Strategic Monitoring and this Committee to be properly briefed about the Plan as soon as the endorsement was forthcoming.

During the course of debate the following principal points were noted:

- That, in hindsight, the evidence used in compiling the JAR self-assessment may not have been sufficiently robust, however, it had been considered sound at the time. The APA would demonstrate whether the Service had moved forward.
- The turnover of staff was not necessarily an indicator of staff morale. On the whole Social Workers had done well from Job Evaluation. However, the Service had 80% of its complement and recruitment was a common national problem. At the time of the inspection the Service had lost a number of key officers due to death, retirement and relocation. The 3rd 'immediate action' recommendation (effective workforce strategy) would also be looked at during Staff Review & Development process.
- The criteria for referral at level 1 set out in the Child Concern Model (CCM) was being revised through consultation with partners and cross-agency meetings. A handout was issued indicating the current proposal. The Model attempted to define the appropriate range and level of response to the child's individual situation and to plan for any associated risk. The Committee expressed concern that the CCM had been found lacking and questioned

whether common criteria were used to assess the various agencies involved in the CCM. The Committee noted that the number of children in each level varied according current need. The Director intended to include information on the Child Concern Model 'criteria' in a forthcoming Member's seminar on the Family Support Service.

- While Children's Centres and Sure Start facilities were providing a valuable service, the Children's Partnership Board would need to look at the level of provision, particularly in relation to preventative work. The facilities needed to be open and a safe place to get advice.
- While debating Children's Centres and Sure Start it was suggested that these services concentrated on the pre-high school age range and that there appeared to be a gap in provision for the older age range. In response the Committee noted that while Family Services had an integrated approach this would be further developed.
- The Committee noted the restrictive funding available for further Children's Centres.
- The Director highlighted that high transport costs and physical access to Children's Centres or Extended Schools, particularly out-side school hours, were factors that would make expanding or developing their provision an extremely challenging target.
- A revised Early Intervention Strategy was being developed for implementation in May/June 2006.
- Responding to questions on performance monitoring procedures (JAR para 82) and in particular the wider range of issues affecting a child's well-being (illustrated at JAR para 72 – affordable housing) the Director of Children's Services reported that key targets for the Directorate would in future be reported to the Committee for monitoring. She acknowledged that links to other aspects, e.g. affordable housing, also needed to be made. However, housing was primarily scrutinised by the Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee and scrutinising the planning, provision and operation of health services was in the remit of the Health Scrutiny Committee. While acknowledging the individual remit of the Committee, the Committee highlighted the need for the close liaison between the Committees to ensure a co-ordinated approach to children's/young persons well-being.
- Continuing the theme of performance monitoring, and in particular against 'statistical family' and national Performance Indicators (PIs), the Director reported that the Looked After Service was performing at a level above the national average. However, the position regarding 'referrals' was not satisfactory.
- The Head of School Improvement reported that where possible comparable data would be used. However, as illustrated by JAR paragraph 13 – in relation to 'gaining qualification at 16', the data used in the JAR had had to be the 2004 statistics. Had the 2005 data been used, which at the time had been awaiting auditing, a much more favourable position would have been indicated.
- The early provision of holistic mediation was very important as various causes of stress in the family, which could lead to homelessness etc, impinge on the welfare of children or young persons.
- The Director reported that the accuracy of recording of contacts (JAR immediate action recommendation 4) had been examined and the procedure employed by the Duty Team had been revised. The JAR inspectors checked the decision-making procedures and no concerns were found.
- Responding to JAR para 43 – 'Initial referrals are assessed by unqualified workers....' The Director reported that this was not the case as qualified workers made the decisions and the team manager monitored the situation.
- The Committee noted that issues reported in JAR paras 39 and 42 relating to

the Child Concern Model and staff training and highlighted at the first bullet point in the 'six month' recommendations, had been picked up in the draft Improvement Plan and would be reported upon at a future meeting when the agreed Improvement Plan would be considered.

- A survey of neighbouring authorities had been undertaken to establish staff levels in Social Services and, in view of the potential for an increase in workload following the revised CCM criteria, 2 additional Social Workers had been commissioned.
- During discussion on the development and retention of staff and the reason for staff leaving, which may be identified by exit interviews, the Director reported that this was one ingredient involved in addressing the third bullet point in the 'immediate' recommendations, in relation to an effective workforce strategy.

The Committee expressed a wish to undertake a series of fact-finding visits to observe the various services within the Directorate so that they could better appreciate the work undertaken.

**RESOLVED:
THAT**

- a) the report on the Joint Area Review be noted;**
- b) the Improvement Plan resulting from the JAR inspection and any implications arising there from be reported to the next meeting;**
- c) a performance monitoring report on performance against the JAR Improvement Plan, Performance Indicators etc be included in the work programme for future meetings; and**
- d) the Director of Children's Services arrange for the Committee to undertake a series of fact-finding visits to the various services within the Directorate.**

28. HEALTH OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN HEREFORDSHIRE

The Committee was briefed on the work undertaken by Children's Services and its partners to improve and maintain the health of children and young people in Herefordshire.

The report outlined various aspects of work undertaken in the area of children and young peoples health including:

- National Healthy Schools Status (HHSS) – being a new holistic approach to the education of children and young people, fully in keeping with the five outcomes of Every Child Matters. The report detailed the five themes in the HHSS.
- Drug Education – as previously reported to the Committee.
- Sex and Relationship Education – including Herefordshire and the West Midlands teenage pregnancy rates and the work undertaken by the Herefordshire Healthy Schools Partnership (HHSP) to reduce the upward trend.
- Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) – including the work with schools, new teachers and via the Marches Consortium.
- Healthy Eating – including progressing schools towards the 'Food in Schools Toolkit'
- Physical Activity – outlined the move away from Physical Education (PE) and team games to a broader provision of physical activity.

The Committee also received a short presentation on the work undertaken by the Herefordshire Healthy Schools Partnership highlighting:

- The National Healthy Schools Status.
- Inclusion and the encouragement of whole school and community working for long-term impact.
- The wider health issues – emphasising increases in: childhood obesity; diabetes; sexually transmitted infections and binge drinking.
- Healthy Eating and the new Schools Meals Policy.
- PSHE and the partners involved.
- The promotion of physical activity and the Emotional Health and Well-being of children.
- Current national initiatives.

During the course of debate the following principal points were noted:

- While all high schools have drop in-clinics, currently only 6 can dispense contraceptives. The clinics are required to abide by a strategic protocol.
- Unfortunately the statistics for teenage pregnancy (based on full-term and legal abortions) took some time to become available. Data held by schools is restricted by the Human Rights Act.
- Pregnant teenage schoolgirls were given the option at 18 weeks to attend a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) until it was appropriate to integrate back into school life. However, many preferred to stay in school with their peers. The HHSP were aware that pregnancy hot spots were in the South Wye/Belmont area and work was ongoing to address this.
- Problems with a child's or young person's well-being could affect their self-esteem and develop into problems with bullying; smoking; drinking; drugs or sexual health problems. It was therefore important to tackle these at an early stage and a number of procedures or protocols were in place to address these issues. Prevention rather than cure was the intention.
- The Committee noted that Westfield School, Leominster, had already achieved Healthy School status.

RESOLVED: That the position set out in the report on the Health of Children and Young People in Herefordshire and subsequent comment during debate be noted.

29. MR TED ST. GEORGE, HEAD OF SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS

The Vice-Chairman and Committee paid tribute to Mr Ted St. George, Head of School Effectiveness.

The Vice-Chairman reported that Mr St. George would be retiring at the end of the month after serving this authority since its inception in 1998 and having previously served for many years with the former Herefordshire and Worcestershire County Council. The Committee appreciated Mr St. George's commitment to education and the way he had lead his team to attain the many achievements for education in the County.

The meeting ended at 12.26 p.m.

CHAIRMAN