

MINUTES of the meeting of Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday, 25th June, 2007 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:	Councillor	SJ Robertson (Chairman)
	Councillor	WU Attfield (Vice Chairman)
	Councillors	ME Cooper, P Jones CBE, G Lucas, R Mills, K Swinburne, AM Toon, WJ Walling and JD Woodward
	Church Members	Rev. I. Terry (Church of England)
	Parent Governor Members	Mr R Stevenson (Primary School Governors) and Mr A Wood (Special School Governors)
	Community Representatives	Ms D Scott (The Alliance)

In attendance: Councillors JA Hyde (Cabinet Member)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor JE Pemberton, Councillor RV Stockton, Mr JD Griffin.

2. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor R Mills substituted for Councillor RV Stockton.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Ms D Scott declared a personal interest in agenda Item 12 – Review and consideration of committee representative arrangements.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 19th March 2007 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Chairman took this opportunity to thank the previous Chairman (Mr BF Ashton) and Vice-Chairman (Mr JP Thomas) for leading the Committee during the previous Council and particularly through the period of transition from Education to Children's Services.

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

No suggestions were made by members of the public.

6. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLAN ANNUAL REVIEW 2006/07 AND ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

The Committee considered the annual review of the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) 2006/07 and the self-assessment of Council's Children's Services for the Annual Performance Assessment (APA) 2007.

The Herefordshire Children and Young People's Plan Review of the First Year 2006/07 and Priorities for 2007/08 document had been sent to Committee Members with the agenda. The APA 2007 Self-evaluation had been attached at Appendix 1 to the agenda report.

The Director of Children's Services reported that a review of progress in delivering the Plan had been undertaken through the Children and Young People's Partnership. The review included consultation with the Shadow Children and Young People's Partnership Board. The self-assessment grades had been discussed with partners, with the Directorate Management Team taking a final decision as the grading was an assessment of the Council's Children's services. She reported that while a significant amount of work had been done to address the issues raised in the JAR inspection further work was needed and targets would have to be prioritised to make best use of limited resources.

On questioning the grade of 2 contained in the self-assessment (Appendix 1 "Capacity to improve") the Director of Children's services report that, while erring on the side of caution, this score had been based on the criteria set by OfSTED.

The Committee noted that the traffic light system had been used to indicate progress against outcome requirements and also that in many cases work had progressed since the time of the assessment. However, the self-assessment had had to be based on a particular timeframe.

RESOLVED: That the Children and Young People's Plan review 2006/07 and self-assessment of the Council's Children's Services be noted,

7. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S DIRECTORATE PLAN 2007-2010

The Committee were informed of the Directorate Plan for 2007-2010 and arrangements regarding the subsequent review and update of the three year Children and Young People's Directorate Plan.

The Director of Children's Services reported that the Children and Young People's Directorate Plan 2007-2010 was a strategic overarching plan, which aligned with the Herefordshire Community Strategy and the Council's Corporate Plan. She would use the Directorate Plan, together with the three directorate services Plans, to manage service delivery and to monitor the overall performance of the directorate.

Following the review of the Children and Young People's Partnership Delivery Action Plan 06/07, the confirmation of 06/07 performance data, and the Annual Performance Assessment (APA) the Directorate Plan was being updated i.e. it is a 'live' document.

The Committee noted that while based on the 2002 census data, as more up to date statistical evidence became available e.g. teenage pregnancy statistics from the Primary Care Trust, the Plan would be updated. The Committee were cautioned that when a minor change occurred to a small cohort figure a large statistical change may be produced which need not necessarily indicate an area for concern.

In relation to “staying safe – provision for children experiencing domestic violence is unsatisfactory” the Committee noted that since last years APA further work had been undertaken to ensure better co-ordination between the various agencies to make sure the wider issues were addressed e.g. if a child was in a violent home then its learning and behaviour may be affected.

The Committee noted that the statutory move to a Children's Trust involving all agencies would necessitate the various agencies planning and commissioning services differently.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

8. CAPITAL BUDGET OUTTURN REPORT 2006/07

The Committee considered the capital budget for 2006/07 for the Children & Young People's Directorate.

The Head of Commissioning and Improvement reported that the Capital outturn summary had been set out in the report with the full details of all expenditure on all projects set out at Appendix 1 to the report. He gave a brief commentary on major capital projects at Sutton County Primary and Riverside Primary Schools; Kington Children's Centre and Weobley High School sports hall. He highlighted that most capital projects span two or more years and that a large percentage of the capital resources available were project specific.

The Committee appreciated that while some overspends were unforeseen e.g. due to the rise in steel prices, they hoped that greater emphasis was being placed on ensuring that foreseeable liabilities were accounted for from the outset. The Director of Children's Services reported that improvements to the financial planning of capital projects had been discussed with the Director of Resources. Regular reports on capital projects would be made to future meetings.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

9. REVENUE BUDGET OUTTURN REPORT 2006/07

The Committee considered a report on the final outturn on the revenue budget for 2006/07 for the Children & Young People's Directorate.

The Finance Manager reported that while the report in October 2006 predicted an overspend of £214,000 the final outturn, being an overspend of £140,000 had been better than predicted. This had been largely due to a £235,000 carry forward from 2005/06 provisionally allocated to the Joint Agency Management budget and not now required and a range of small underspends elsewhere in the budget.

The report gave a brief overview of the position in Safeguarding and Assessment which had resulted in an overspend of £554,000 due to increased external agency placements; an increased number of in year redundancy commitments resulting in an overspend of £285,000 and further efficiencies in School Transport delivering an underspend of £373,000. The level of School balances had reduced with a transfer of funding from revenue to capital to avoid the newly implemented balance claw back scheme, which applied to revenue balances only.

On scrutinising the report the Committee noted the following principal points:

- The needs of the child were given very careful attention when considering the

placement of a child. When internal arrangements were inappropriate (fostering) then external agency placements were used. Some children had very complex needs and therefore required high levels of care, which in turn made the placement more costly. The Committee requested that it be provided with examples of the care/costs involved.

- The rise in number of external agency placements followed the national trend and signs were that the children involved had increasingly complex issues to deal with.
- While the average cost per agency placement was £150,000 pa efforts were made to ensure that the placement was cost effective. Providers were monitored by OfSTED and regional arrangements were in place to monitor quality and cost.
- Questioned on the level of support for the families of children with complex needs the Committee were informed that where possible the family setting was preferable, as provided by the 'Support for Family Strategy', however this was not always possible.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted

10. PERFORMANCE REPORTING ON CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES 2006/07 OUTTURN

The Committee were informed of the performance levels against key indicators as at March 31st 2007.

The Head of Commissioning & Improvement – School Services reported that a large amount of information was collected by the Directorate and agencies which needed to be collated and presented thereby enabling the Executive to manage the function and scrutiny to assess the effectiveness of those services. To address this weakness identified in the JAR inspection the first edition of The Quarterly Digest had been produced, copies of which were issued at the meeting. The agenda report provided a commentary on each key outcome area.

The Committee noted that the style and content of the Quarterly Digest would be improved as it became more established and it was suggested that it should include the 'process flow' of activities to show the robustness of actions taken.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

11. JOINT SCRUTINY REVIEW: TRANSITION FROM LEAVING CARE TO ADULT LIFE

The Committee considered participating in a joint scrutiny review into the Transition from Leaving Care to Adult Life and considered its appointments to the Review Group.

The Head of Safeguarding and Assessment reported the background to the joint Scrutiny Review, which was being lead by the Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee, and the work so far undertaken as set out in the appendix to the report.

RESOLVED:

- That (a) the Committee noted the work undertaken so far and agreed that the Scrutiny Review of Transition from Leaving Care to Adult Life continue under the leadership of the Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee; and**
- (b) the representatives on the review from this Committee be Mrs D.**

Strutt (Headteacher) Councillor G Lucas and Councillor Mrs J E Pemberton (nominated to Chair the Review).

12. REVIEW AND CONSIDERATION OF COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

The Committee noted the statutory co-opted membership on the Committee and considered whether to co-opt a wider representation.

The Committee heard about the wide range of work that The Alliance undertook and the appreciated that they could make a valuable contribution to the work of the Committee.

The Committee debated the scope of its remit and the various organisations that could assist in its work e.g. Foster Carers, Probation Service; Police; Primary Care Trust; Connexions; Youth Council and those from the education sector.

RESOLVED:

- That**
- (a) the arrangements for the co-option of statutory members (Diocesan and Parent Governors) be noted;**
 - (b) one member be co-opted from The Alliance (representing the voluntary and community sector) and one representative from the Foster Care sector;**
 - (c) the Head of Legal and Democratic Services in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman determine the co-option of representatives from other sectors.**

13. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme.

The Committee debated a range of possible issues for future consideration e.g. the lack of activities/facilities for teenagers; the lack of Youth Services provision in the North of the City/County, and the effect of falling pupil numbers with possible school closures. It was also suggested that future work be more closely linked to the key themes in 'Every Child Matters'.

When appropriate the Chairman wished to occasionally hold meetings at facilities in the community.

RESOLVED: That following consultation with the Director of Children's Services the Chairman and Vice-Chairman determine the draft work programme.

The meeting ended at 11.52 a.m.

CHAIRMAN