

MINUTES of the meeting of Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at : The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Friday, 5th October, 2007 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:	Councillor	SJ Robertson (Chairman)
	Councillor	WU Atfield (Vice Chairman)
	Councillors	P Jones CBE, G Lucas, RV Stockton, JK Swinburne, AM Toon and JD Woodward
	Church Members	Rev. I. Terry (Church of England)
	Parent Governor Members	Mr R Stevenson and Mr A Wood
	Foster Care Representative	Mrs H. Tyler
	Headteacher Representatives	Mrs. D. Strutt (Secondary Schools)
	Community Representatives	Ms D Scott (The Alliance)

20. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor ME Cooper; Mr JD Griffin; Councillor JE Pemberton Councillor WJ Walling and Councillor J Hyde – Cabinet Member (Children's Services).

21. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no substitutions.

22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Brig. P Jones CBE declared a personal interest as a governor of Minster College, Leominster.

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

No suggestions were made by Members of the public.

24. ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT (APA)

The Committee received a report on the recent Annual Performance Assessment (APA).

The Director of Children's Services reported that on 27th September inspectors had undertaken the Annual Performance Assessment of the Service. This inspection

was similar to a school Ofsted Inspection with the Cabinet Member (Children's Services), key officers and partners being involved. As part of the assessment a pre inspection self- assessment had been completed and the Director briefly outlined her personal assessment of how the Service had performed against the 2006 APA scores. She also reported that the pre inspection meetings with the Chairman of the Committee and Council partners had been particularly useful. The result of the inspection was likely to be released in 5 or 6 weeks following which further reports would be made.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and a further report on the outcome of the 2007 APA be presented to a future meeting.

25. PRINCIPLES ON FUTURE PROVISION OF SCHOOL PLACES

The Committee considered the draft principles on the future school provision and provided comment to shape the final document.

The Director of Children's Services reported that a draft paper entitled "Principles to Guide the Provision of Education in Herefordshire in the 21st Century" was currently with key partners for consultation (copies having been issued to the Committee prior to the meeting). The provision of school places and school organisation were major determinants in how resources were allocated and expended. The aim of the paper was to seek agreement on the principles by which the Council would want to base educational provision. In developing the Statement of Principles account had been taken of the vision, ambitions and local priorities set out in various key Council plans. Following the consultation period a final report would be taken to Cabinet.

The agenda report, and appended report to Cabinet dated 16 March 2006, set out the background and context against which the 'principles paper' had been produced. The Head of Commissioning and Improvement reported that while a number of comments had been received, Secondary schools had so far broadly welcomed the document. Discussions with the primary schools were still to be held.

During consideration of the report the following principal comments were noted:

- The level of SEN or banded funding would not be affected.
- While national statistics indicated an increase in birth rates, Herefordshire birth rate figures were falling, however, the situation would be closely monitored.
- The effect of changes to the way pupils were educated e.g. public, private or at home, were expected to be minimal.
- The Director commented that statistics were not an accurate science and therefore further work would be undertaken e.g. the effect of people migration and discussion with planners on expected new build housing, to try to ensure the best picture was obtained. Specific discussion would be held in due course with school Heads in relation to the data used.
- A degree of concern was expressed regarding reference in the paper to a pupil travel time of no more than 45 minutes to school. While understandable for a rural county the Committee were apprehensive about this length of travelling time for primary pupils. Concern was also expressed about the length of travel time pupils attending special school were currently experiencing.
- Continuing the transport theme the Committee requested that school transport e.g. use of the Yellow Bus Scheme, be considered in the Committee Work Programme item.
- Concern was also expressed in relation to the level of provision for 6th Form

or post 16 education particularly in view of any increase due to changes at The Minster, Leominster, and Wyebridge Sports College, Hereford.

- A view was expressed that current Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) were full and that PRU provision would need to be included in the review when considering future pupil provision.
- In view of the unsettling nature of the review on schools the Committee expressed concern that sufficient staff and resources be devoted to undertaking the review to ensure that it was completed to timetable.

RESOLVED: That

- a) the Committee's concerns relating to pupil travel times; 6th Form and post 16 education provision levels, and ensuring the review was completed to timetable be noted for consideration by the Executive in finalising the Statement of Principles; and**
- b) further reports on the review of provision of school places and school transport issues e.g. use of the Yellow Bus Scheme, be considered as items for the Committee Work Programme item later in the agenda.**

26. CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2007/08

The Committee considered the capital budget for 2007/08 for the Children and Young People's Directorate.

The Head of Financial Services reported that the Directorate budget summary, as reported to Cabinet on 20th September, was set out in the report and full details of expenditure on all Children's & Young People's projects were listed at appendix 1 to the agenda report. The revised capital figure of just under £12m was fully resourced from a combination of Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) grant; borrowing approvals supported by Council funding; capital receipts and Section 106 monies. Slippage to the capital programme continued to be a problem and this would be the subject of a report to Strategic Monitoring Committee.

Questioned on the slippage to Sutton Primary School replacement scheme he clarified that the budget had slipped from 2006/7 to 2007/8 necessitating a re-profiling of the budget, however, there had been no change in the gross expenditure.

The Head of Commissioning and Improvement reported that while the Sutton Primary School replacement contract was well underway unfortunately it was 4 weeks behind due to bad weather. He anticipated no major cost increases. Questioned on any payment of late penalties under the contract he responded that only legitimate increases would be considered.

In response to questions concerning the cost of the summer flood damage at a number of schools the Committee noted that the current estimate stood at just short of £1m and that this had not been recoverable under the Government's Bellwyn Scheme. This was because the risk was viewed as insurable. The Committee noted that the Council had decided some years ago to self-insure and had set aside £250,000 to meet the risk. A government grant of £160,000 had been received. The short fall was being examined as part of the corporate risk management approach.

On questioning the need to refurbish the kitchen at John Masefield High School the Committee were informed that the authority was under a statutory duty to provide, where needed, a hot meal facility to schools. The Authority was therefore improving the kitchen facilities at High schools so that they could serve primary schools in their pyramid. Should a school let the school meal contract to external providers then the contractor would benefit from the refurbishment.

The Director reported that the funding of projects was getting even tighter and therefore the need to utilise all sources of funding was important. In this context she commented that the level of Delegated Funding to schools may need to be reviewed.

The Committee requested that future capital reports include an asset list indicating the properties owned or leased by the Directorate.

RESOLVED: That

- a) **the capital budget monitoring report be noted including that a report will be made to Strategic Monitoring Committee on the slippages overall to the Capital Programme;**
- b) **an asset list indicating the properties owned or leased by the Directorate be included with subsequent capital budget monitoring reports; and**
- c) **A report on school meal provision be considered for inclusion in the Committee work programme.**

27. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2007/08

The Committee considered a report on the revenue budget for 2007/08 for the Children and Young People's Directorate.

The Head of Financial Services reported that expenditure to 31st August indicated an overspend of £783,000 for the year before any claims on the corporate social care contingency. He highlighted projected overspends in Safeguarding and Assessment (£878,000) due to the increased number of placements and that school redundancy commitments were under similar pressure to those in 2006/7 when an overspend of £285,000 had occurred. He also highlighted that school transport anticipated savings of £166,000. His report indicated various movements to the Dedicated Schools Grant budget.

The Committee debated the issue of external agency placement of children with complex needs. The Committee noted that the number of placements had risen over last years figure but that this rise was now stable. Each placement typically cost £150,000 pa. While the preference was to place the child locally via foster carers this was not always possible due to the complex need of the child. The authority was unable to provide in-house provision due to the wide range of complex individual needs involved and therefore had to place the child via agencies. When ever possible a child would be brought back to the county but the needs of the child was paramount in this decision. The Committee further noted that an inappropriate placement with local foster careers not only affected the child but the foster care family.

The Committee noted that there was no special grant to schools for children assessed under the stated or banded assessment scheme.

In view of the varied and sensitive issues involved with the agency placement of children the Committee agreed that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman discuss the matter further with the Director of Children's Services.

RESOLVED: That the revenue budget monitoring report be noted and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman discuss the agency placement of children with the Director of Children's Services.

28. PERFORMANCE DIGEST - QUARTER 1 - 2007/2008

The Committee considered the Quarter 1 Performance Digest for Children's Services

(April – June 2007) and key areas specifically highlighted arising from the performance for the first quarter.

The Improvement Manager for the Directorate reported that the format of the Performance Digest, copies having been previously circulated to Members with the agenda, was evolving to ensure the clearest presentation of data.

On considering the performance set out in the Digest the Committee noted that further work was being undertaken to define the performance data for a number of specific targets e.g. at HCS22a.

In view of the complexity of the detail presented in the Digest the Chairman requested that a short informal meeting of the Committee be arranged to clarify the targets and statistics used.

The Committee commented on the high number of acronyms used.

RESOLVED: That the Quarter 1 Performance Digest for Children's Services be noted and an informal meeting to clarify the targets and statistics be arranged.

29. REVIEW OF BEHAVIOUR AND DISCIPLINE MANAGEMENT IN HEREFORDSHIRE SCHOOLS

The Committee was informed of the Cabinet Member (Children's Service) acceptance of the recommendations contained in the Review of Behaviour and Discipline Management in Herefordshire Schools Scrutiny report and the resultant action plan.

The Chairman, Councillor SJ Robertson, who had served on the Review Group, briefly outlined the background to the review and the range of work undertaken which had resulted in a report, with recommendations, that had been considered by this Committee on 19th March 2007 and subsequently forwarded to the Cabinet Member (Children's Services) for consideration.

The Manager of School Inclusion, who had acted as Lead Officer for the review, reported that the recommendations contained in the Scrutiny report had been accepted and an action plan, appendix 1 to the agenda report, to address the recommendations had been put in place.

On questioning whether parents were aware of the service that Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) provided the Committee were informed that letters would be sent to all schools to remind them that CAMHS was also part of the referral service. However, the Committee also heard that there was a waiting list for the CAMHS service.

The Committee noted the report and action plan and requested that a further report setting out the progress against the action plan be brought to Committee in 6 months time.

RESOLVED: That the action plan be accepted and progress against the action plan be reported in 6 months time.

30. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme.

The Committee briefly debated the current work programme, set out at appendix 1 to

the agenda report, and the issues identified during earlier debate namely: the outcome of the APA inspection; the review of the provision of school places; school transport issues with particular reference to the Yellow Bus scheme; provision of school meals and kitchen facilities and a 6 month update on implementing the Behaviour and Discipline action plan.

RESOLVED: That following consultation with the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Director of Children's Services the Head of Legal and Democratic Services adjust the work programme accordingly.

The meeting ended at 11.50 a.m.

CHAIRMAN