

MINUTES of the meeting of Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Friday 19 March 2010 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor WLS Bowen (Chairman)
Councillor ME Cooper (Vice Chairman)

Councillors: BA Durkin, Brig P Jones CBE, G Lucas, JE Pemberton, SJ Robertson, RV Stockton, AM Toon,

Co-opted Members: Mr PF Burbidge, Mrs S Catlow-Hawkins, Mrs D Coates, Mrs OR Evans, Mr M Harrisson and Ms H Tank

In attendance: Councillors: PJ Edwards and JA Hyde (Cabinet Member – Children's Service)

40. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor WU Attfield; Mr C Mutton; Mr T Plumer. The Cabinet Member (ICT, Education and Achievement) had also submitted his apology.

41. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Mrs D Coates substituted for Mr C Mutton.

42. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following interests were declared:

Name	Interest	Reason
Councillor WLS Bowen	Personal	Governor – Kingsland CE Primary and Luston Primary schools.
Councillor M Cooper	Personal	Governor - John Masefield High School
Councillor B Durkin	Personal	Governor - Kings Caple Primary School
Councillor Brig. P Jones CBE	Personal	Governor – The Minster, Leominster
Councillor G Lucas	Personal	Governor – Brampton Abbots CE Primary School
Councillor JE Pemberton	Personal	Governor – Hampton Dene Primary School.
Councillor SJ Robertson	Personal	Governor - Burghill Community Primary School
Councillor RV Stockton	Personal	Governor - Colwall CE Primary School
Councillor AM Toon	Personal	Governor - Whitecross High School and Trinity Primary School.
Mr PF Burbidge	Personal	Governor – St Mary's RC High School

43. DR S MENGHINI, DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The Chairman announced that Dr Sharon Menghini, Director of Children's Services since April 2007 had accepted a similar appointment with Stoke-On-Trent City Council and would

be leaving at the end of April. The Chairman commented that the Service had made strong improvements under her leadership which was now rated as 'performing well' by the regulators Ofsted. On behalf of the Committee he wished her the very best with her new appointment and thanked her for her services to Herefordshire.

On behalf of herself and the Cabinet Member (ICT, Education and Achievement) the Cabinet Member (Children's Services) commented that she would be sorry to lose Dr Menghini. Through the leadership of the Director the Directorate had established a sound foundation for continued improvement.

44. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 December 2009 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

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

46. YOUTH SERVICE PROVISION

The Committee were updated on the remit of the Youth Service and the range of provision across the county.

The Community Youth Service Manager reported that within the Every Child Matters (ECM) outcome framework the Youth Service work contributed primarily to the Positive Contribution Outcome area, within which the Youth Service key areas were: positive activities for personal and social development (youth work activities, not leisure based provision), and the participation of children and young people in decision making. The Service is charged with working directly with young people to achieve a range of key targets in a number of strategies namely: Targeted Youth Support (TYS), Positive Activities, the early identification of vulnerable young people through Youth Involvement, and increasing the opportunities for young people to volunteer. The activity of the Service in achieving these targets and strategies was described in the agenda report. Appended to the report was the Community Youth Service Team Plan 2009-10 which set out how the services would be delivered.

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

- Under a nationally funded initiative a number of local young people were appointed as Youth Inspectors. Subject to the limitations of the initiative the Youth Inspectors could decide what local services they wished to inspect – from a young persons point of view. This was also subject to the agreement of the relevant organisation. So far two inspections had been undertaken with the resultant findings being written up by the Youth Inspectors and presented to the organisations. On questioning the availability of the report, as the Committee wished to ensure that the views were being heard, the Committee were informed that while under the initiative the report had a limited circulation this could be escalated if the circumstances required.
- Responding to questions on how the Service communicated with young people the Committee were informed that this was principally by word of mouth, however, there was a web site with a wide variety of information on it and occasionally flyers were issued. It was acknowledged that more could be done and the Children's Trust had recently agreed that a strategy be developed to look at other means of communication.

- Historically, Herefordshire had encountered recruitment problems in the Youth Service due to a variety of reasons, however, this was not now the case with only 3 or 4 posts vacant due to the freeze on the staffing budget.
- Due to resource constraints there were pressures on the range of services that could be offered, however, greater targeted work would be undertaken through the Locality Teams, partners and schools.
- Noting the result of the questionnaires and questioning how young people not currently engaged in activities were to be reached, the Committee noted the work to be undertaken in supporting vulnerable people and through the Connexions Service.
- Youth activities were usually free or at very low cost. Charges may be imposed if young people agreed to fund additional benefits.
- Noting an increased level of activities during the summer months a point was made that a good level of interesting indoor activities was required for the winter months to ensure that young people's interests were sustained.
- Herefordshire had inherited a range of youth service properties in a poor condition and while there were exceptions e.g. at Kington and the Y-Zone, there was no specific capital programme to undertake improvements and therefore a creative look at other funding had been undertaken.
- The Committee requested that more information be provided specifically about the Youth Involvement work e.g. Youth Council and Shadow Children's Trust and agreed that a member briefing note be provided.
- No national comparative data for the Service as a whole was available, however, in relation to Positive Activities, Herefordshire was thought to be average for the West Midlands.

RESOLVED that:

- 1. the report be noted and the Committee requests that the Assistant Director Improvement and Inclusion discuss with the Cabinet Member ways of improving the means of communicating with young people.**
- 2. a Member Briefing note be provided specifically setting out the range of work undertaken and costs involved in the Youth Involvement work e.g. Youth Council and Shadow Children's Trust.**

47. SAFEGUARDING ARRANGEMENTS FOR CHILDREN IN HEREFORDSHIRE - TOP TEN QUESTIONS FROM IDEA/CFPS

The Committee were informed of Safeguarding arrangements for children within Herefordshire using the I&DeA/CfPS top ten questions to ask.

The I&DeA/CfPS had produced a guide for Councillors to assist in scrutinising safeguarding arrangements for children which contained ten key questions to ask. Following a recent Members seminar on the subject and responding to a request at the last meeting the Committee considered a report setting out the answers to those key questions.

The Assistant Director Safeguarding and Vulnerable Children, presented the report together with: Appendix A - indicating the Herefordshire Safeguarding Board Arrangements, and Appendix B - detailing the services offered to children and families when relationships are at breaking point. She highlighted that the membership of the Children's Trust Board were moving to include the Cabinet Member (Children's Services).

Questioned on where this Committee stood in obtaining information on other agencies and scrutinising their actions e.g. the Children's Trust, the Committee were informed that

the minutes of the Trust were available via the website and further information could be provided as necessary.

Noting that the answers to questions 7 and 8 (early intervention and services for vulnerable groups) referred to a range of services, the Committee requested further information on these services.

Continuing with services for the most vulnerable groups, the Committee debated issues around the stay safe outcome and, while noting that schools had teachers specifically designated to oversee Child protection issues, requested further information on the number of pupil transfers that had been requested due to bullying.

The Committee appreciated the complexity of Safeguarding issues and suggested that all Councillors be reminded of their duties as Corporate Parents.

The Assistant Director Safeguarding and Vulnerable Children further reported that Safeguarding was inspected by Ofsted and other agencies and Herefordshire had received positive feedback on its operations. How Herefordshire undertook Serious Case Reviews had been rated as good. The Committee were assured that the Government Office West Midlands (GOWM) provided a healthy challenge at review meetings. The IdEA were undertaking a safeguarding peer review with the Council and its partners.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and

- 1. in view of the range of services covered in questions 7 and 8 a Member briefing note be provided expanding on the various elements covered and, following consideration of the briefing note, the Chairman consider placing an item on the work programme for future discussion;**
- 2. The Committee recommends that a seminar be arranged in the near future to remind all members of their duties as Corporate Parents; and**
- 3. A Member briefing note be provided setting out the number of pupil transfers requested due to bullying.**

At this point the Committee adjourned for 5 minutes and resumed at 11.40am

48. CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2009/10

The Committee considered the capital budget position for 2009/10 for the Children and Young People's Directorate.

The Head of Access & Capital Commissioning presented the agenda report and highlighted that the overall capital programme was broadly being delivered on time and to budget. The agenda report provided an update on all major funding streams and capital developments.

On scrutinising the report the following principal points were noted:

- The Committee wished to be informed when the outcome of the Performance Bond negotiations arising from the Riverside Primary School contract had been settled.
- Continuing with the Riverside Primary School (report paragraph 4.9), clarification was sought concerning the funding position, particularly in respect of the funding shortfall, the land disposal which it was alleged was to be used for Key Housing, and the disposal of the portacabins.
- The Committee noted that negotiations had been held concerning purchasing the former Connexions building for use as the site for City (North) co-located services. Due to complications from joint use with Worcestershire, the

repayment of grant funding from the DCSF and the costs of upgrading the ICT infrastructure, it was considered that the valuation had been too high. Further negotiations were ongoing concerning a possible lease arrangement. Criticism was expressed by Members over the repayment of publicly funded grant when the potential purchase involved public funds.

- Noting that a report on the options for the use of the 14 – 19 and Special Educational Need Grant (report paragraph 4.6) would be made to Cabinet, the Committee requested that an update be included in the July Capital monitoring report.

RESOLVED: That the monitoring report be noted and;

- 1. the out come of the Riverside Primary School Performance Bond negotiations be communicated to Members; and**
- 2. A Member briefing note be provided clarifying the Riverside Primary School financing position, particularly in respect of financing the project, the land disposal and disposal of the portacabins**

49. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2009/10

The Committee considered the Children's Services revenue budget for 2009/10 for the period to the end of quarter three. The Committee were provided with comparisons to the 2008/9 budget and outturn and assessed and commented upon the budget management for Children's Services.

The Assistant Director Planning Performance and Development, reported that while several cost saving measures had been actioned the forecast overspend of £533k at December had risen to a forecast overspend of £772k as set out in the report. The key changes to the budget related to new children entering the care system off set in part by savings in transport (for example due to transport not being provided because of bad weather). Other budgetary changes were detailed in the agenda report and appendices.

On scrutinising the report and questioning the Music Service overspend the Committee were informed that for the first time in many years of operation the Music Service was within budget. The service had also reduced the current deficit and had plans in place that would further reduce this over the next financial year. Traditionally the practice had been to write off any overspend – usually £125k, but this was now considered inappropriate as, being a trading service, it needed to be self financing. Work had started on: restructuring the Service; reducing the surplus resources; increasing the hourly fee rate and modernising the delivery through groups rather than individual tuition. Responding to concerns about whether low income families could afford the tuition fees the Committee were informed that it should be school policy to provide support to such families. The Committee requested further detailed information concerning the take up of the Music Service with specific reference to how many pupils on free school meals received tuition.

Responding to concerns regarding the overspend in the School Improvement Service (report paragraph 14) the Committee were informed that tighter budget and trading controls were being put in place.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and a Member briefing note be provided indicating the take up of the Music Services and cross correlating the results with the take up of free schools meals.

50. PERFORMANCE DIGEST - QUARTER 3 2009/2010

The Committee considered the Performance Digest for Children's Services for the third quarter of 2009/10 (October – December 2009).

The Head of Performance presented her report which drew Members attention to a number of key areas for consideration based on each of the Every Child Matters outcome areas. She highlighted that the impact of the recession and general down turn in the economy continued to impact on the Achieve Economic Wellbeing outcome area. The percentage of young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) (NI 177) had risen to 5.8% which was well above target but in line with the 2008/2009 outturn. This increase would have implications for the Local Area Agreement (LAA). She also reported that the lack of some targets would be addressed from 1st April 2010.

Invited to comment on school examination performance the Head of Improvement acknowledged that there was a big job to do in improvement. The key message from Early Years was that the dip in overall performance was being reversed and monitoring showed that this should continue. There was a broad range of expertise in the Improvement Team to drive further improvement.

He reported that at secondary school level while there was a good amount to be proud of there were still improvements to be made. GCSE results were important but the picture needed to be seen in the round. The 14 -19 Agenda was helping pupils to achieve. Some schools still had work to do in narrowing the Free School Meal gap. The 2011 government targets, which were comparable with the Fisher Family Trust averages, would be challenging. Schools were being targeted with help to achieve further improvement.

At Primary School level a number of serious issues had been identified. Trends at KS1 were towards the bottom levels when compared with statistical neighbours. Where good practice was identified it was shared. Twelve schools were currently receiving intense support. He warned that the introduction of a more rigorous inspection regime could mean more schools would be 'vulnerable'. Increasing demands would place additional pressures on an already fully committed service.

The Committee thanked the Head of Improvement for his open and honest report.

Questioned on how the Improvement Service intended to improve the examination results, and the costs involved, the Assistant Director Improvement and Inclusion reported that the recent freeze on recruitment had impacted on the service, however, the directorate restructure should improve the situation. The Head of Improvement undertook to provide a bullet point Member briefing note on how examination results were to be improved.

The Committee briefly debated how limited resources and spare capacity related to a school's performance. While appreciating parental preference, from a school capacity point of view this caused problems when assessing Pupil Admission Numbers (PAN). The Committee requested a briefing note on Pupil Admission Number trends and surplus school capacity.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and

- 1. a Member briefing note be provided setting out how the Service was going to improve examination results and indicate the resources needed;**
- 2. a briefing note be provided on Pupil Admission Numbers / surplus school capacity once these have been confirmed for 2010/11.**

51. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme as set out at Appendix 1 to the report and noted the status of previous recommendations set out in Appendix 2.

It was suggested that members be shown the DVD 'Direction Burghill' which had been funded by the Youth Funding Council and had been made by a youth group from the village.

RESOLVED: That the Committee work programme be approved and it be recommended to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for approval.

The meeting ended at 12.58 pm

CHAIRMAN