

MINUTES of the meeting of Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Friday 1 October 2010 at 10.00 am

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

Councillors: PJ Edwards, AW Johnson, Brig P Jones CBE, G Lucas, JE Pemberton, SJ Robertson, AM Toon, WJ Walling, JD Woodward,

Co-opted Members Mr PF Burbidge, Mr P Sell, Mrs S Catlow-Hawkins, Mrs OR Evans, Mr P Hayden and Mr M Harrisson

In attendance: Councillors JA Hyde (Cabinet Member - Children's Services) and PD Price (Cabinet Member ICT, Education and Achievement)

13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apology received from Councillor RV Stockton.

The Chairman welcomed Mr Philip Sell, Director of Education, Church of England Diocese, (voting co-opted Member) who had replaced Mr T Leach on his retirement. He welcomed Mr Paul Haydon as the representative from The Alliance, (Non-voting co-opted Member) who replaced Helen Tank. He also reported that Mr N Parker, Secondary School Governor (voting co-opted Member) had resigned as he was no longer eligible to be a governor and thanked him for his services to the Committee.

14. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor PJ Edwards substituted for Councillor RV Stockton.

15. 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 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 AM Toon	Personal	Governor - Whitecross High School
Councillor JD Woodward	Personal	Governor – Lord Scudamore Primary and Whitecross High Schools.
Mr PF Burbidge	Personal	Governor – St Mary's RC High School

16. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2010 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

No suggestions for scrutiny were received.

18. ISSUES RAISED FROM ECONOMIC WELLBEING SEMINAR ON 5 JULY 2010

The Committee noted the content of the seminar held 5 June to consider the activity to support and enable children and young people's economic well being in Herefordshire.

On 5 June 2010 a seminar had been held for all Members of the Council to hear about and discuss the work of the Council and its partners in addressing some of the issues concerning the economic well being of children and young people in the County. The agenda report set out an overview of the seminar and Member's views of the event. At the seminar Members had been interested in the progress made in relation to housing for vulnerable young people/adults. Members had also commented that the subject covered a wide agenda and overall the seminar had been very useful in terms of raising general awareness and highlighting the range of multi agency provision.

While Members had a number of questions it was agreed these would be better dealt with under later agenda items.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

19. PROGRESS MADE SINCE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE HEREFORDSHIRE TRAVELLER ACHIEVEMENT SERVICE IN SEPTEMBER 2009

The Committee considered the good progress towards the establishment of effective, integrated Children and Young People's Service provision for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) children and families.

The agenda report outlined: the rationale for withdrawing from the West Midlands Consortium Service for Travelling Children (Sept 2009) and the formation of a new, in-house, Traveller Achievement Service; the traveller population in the County; the pupil population in schools, and a number of achievements since the formation of the new Service.

The Committee noted the rationale for having changed the service delivery and acknowledged the good work of the Traveller Achievement Service under the leadership of the Advisory Teacher – Traveller Achievement Service. The Committee sought and received clarification on a number of aspects in the report and requested that a further report be made to a future meeting.

Members responsibilities towards Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) children and families was raised and it was suggested that Cabinet Member(s) remind Members of their responsibilities.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- a) recognises the good progress of the Traveller Achievement Service;**

b) through a further report, to a future meeting, continues to monitor the sustained year-on-year impact of the Children and Young Peoples' Plan in relation to:

(i) Benchmarking existing outcomes for GRT children;

(ii) Setting targets that narrow achievement gaps for GRT children; and

(iii) The targeting of resources towards improving outcomes for GRT Children

c) Requests that the Cabinet Member(s) bring to the attention of all Members of the Council their responsibility towards GRT Children.

20. GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES IN CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The Committee were provided with an overview of government initiatives that affect Children's Services.

The Assistant Director – Planning, Performance and Development reported that the coalition government had introduced a range of measures to address the economic situation as well as a number of policy initiatives that would have an effect on services received by children and young people in the County. His report covered the areas of: schools; 11-19 Agenda; 14-19 Team; Connexions; Youth Service; Early Years and Extended Services; Social Care: Vulnerable children and young people; Playbuilder and Children's Trust.

The Committee considered the report and appreciated that further information was being issued by government sources on a weekly or in some cases daily basis. In view of the major changes indicated by government, particularly in schools and children's services, the Committee wished to ensure that the Council's Executive, through the Cabinet Members for Children's Services and ICT, Education and Achievement, provided an attractive service to schools thereby ensuring that schools continued to purchase services from the authority.

While discussing the many Government initiatives the Committee noted the cuts to the Playbuilder scheme. They endorsed the valuable work done at community level to compile and submit schemes and appreciated that communities were disappointed that schemes, particularly those ready to proceed, had been stopped. The Committee questioned, through the Cabinet Members, whether the Youth Service through the range of work it undertook in the community, could give any support to schemes so that they could proceed in some form.

The Committee also debated the effect Academy status could have on both schools with and without the status.

In view of the confusing times with cuts or changes to various funding or learning programmes, e.g. in the area of 16-19 learning, the Committee wished to ensure that the authority gave clear information and assistance to young adults during their transition to adult life.

The Committee considered that when the Director of Children's Services collates a corporate response to Government Ministers concerning the initiatives he should liaise with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman for this Committee's input.

In view of the number and range of initiatives the Committee requested that it be regularly updated.

RESOLVED: That

- a) the contents of the report and possible implications for the Children and young people of Herefordshire be noted;
- b) the Committee Recommends that the Cabinet Member(s) consider whether the Youth Service can provide any support towards those Playbuilder schemes ready to proceed so that the impetus at community level isn't lost.
- c) The Committee Recommends that the Cabinet Member(s) ensure that the services offered by Children's Services are attractive thereby ensuring that schools continue to purchase services from the authority
- d) The Committee Recommends that the Cabinet Member(s) ensure that there are clear, fully coordinated, joined up links in the 16-19 area to ensure that young people have clear information and assistance during their transition to adult life.
- e) That the Committee be regularly updated on government initiatives during this period of rapid change;
- f) The Director of Children's Services liaise with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman concerning the collating of strategic concerns to be considered as part of any corporate response to Government Ministers concerning the many initiatives.

At this point the Committee adjourned for 10 minutes and resumed at 11.20am

21. THE FINDINGS OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO PUPIL ACHIEVEMENT IN SWIMMING AT KEY STAGE 2

The Committee considered the findings of the Scrutiny Review into Pupil Achievement in Swimming at Key Stage 2.

At its meeting on 6 July 2009 the Committee set up a Scrutiny Review Group to review 'pupil achievement for swimming at Key Stage 2 to establish base line data against which any future trend can be compared'.

The Chairman of the Review Group, Councillor WLS Bowen, presented the findings of the review and commented that in undertaking the review the Review Group considered a range of information and issues, further set out in the agenda report, and made four recommendations. He clarified that 88% of pupils attaining the 25m swimming target be used as the local comparator and that the data collected should be compared with that collected by Halo.

RESOLVED: that

- a) the findings of the scrutiny review (as amended below) be agreed and the review be forwarded to the Cabinet Member (ICT, Education and Achievement) for consideration:
 - (i) that 88% of pupils attaining the 25m swimming distance target be used as a local comparator for future benchmarking and trend monitoring;

- (ii) that Officers be requested to investigate the least disruptive means for schools to submit swimming data on an annual basis and that data be compared to the data held by HALO;
- (iii) results from the data collected should be included in the performance Monitoring report to this Committee and any anomalies should then be investigated as the Committee considers appropriate;
- (iv) Officers should investigate whether the local partnerships between public, private and voluntary sectors were making the most efficient use of their swimming resources.

b) The Cabinet Member's response to the review be reported to the first available meeting after the Cabinet Member has approved their response.

22. CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2010/1011

The Committee scrutinised the capital budget position for 2010/11 for the Children & Young People's Directorate.

The Head of Access and Capital Commissioning presented the agenda report and highlighted that a reduction in some capital grants, following central government announcements of funding cuts, had resulted in capital schemes and grants being halted or reduced. Also that other than for urgent health and safety work the planned capital maintenance programme had been halted due to significant expenditure on urgent and essential work to clean up asbestos and also to replace pipe work to LPG tanks. 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 ward Member for Leominster North (Cllr Brig. P Jones) was pleased that the new Earl Mortimer College, Leominster had been completed on time and to budget.
- The Committee were extremely concerned about the high level of extra costs being incurred in relation to the Riverside Primary School. Appreciating that the contract went into liquidation the Committee were concerned that the 'bond' had been insufficient to cover the resultant expenses and that the level of expenses (additional professional fees etc £511,000) were extremely high. They were also concerned that funding now had to be found from other budgets to cover the shortfall. The Committee noted that a report on 'project design and development/financial control of capital schemes' would be considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- The Committee received an assurance that the capital scheme at Staunton-on-Wye school was proceeding to budget.
- The Director of Children's Services expressed his disappointment over the costs relating to the Riverside Primary School project and informed the Committee that he had already had discussions with the Director of Resources about both the management of capital projects and the possibility of renegotiating the additional fees in this case.
- Comment was made regarding whether the Committee and Cabinet were being provided with the full information on projects at an appropriate time as there had been no previous indication of this level of additional expenditure. The Committee were informed that concerns regarding capital schemes would normally be reported through the Capital Budget Monitoring Report.
- Questioned on the Asset Register (Asset Management Plan) the Director reported that this in effect was reported in the Capital monitoring report. The

Committee requested further information on the buildings condition surveys carried out by Asset Management & Property Services.

RESOLVED: that the position set out in the Capital Budget Monitoring report be noted.

23. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2010/11

The Committee considered a report on the Children's Services revenue budget for 2010/11 at the end of quarter one.

The Director of Planning, Performance and Development reported that the current projected outturn position predicted an over-spend of £590k. The agenda report outlined the service pressures and measures being put in place to address those pressures.

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

- That in paragraph 24 the 'other' figures for 2010/11 and 2009/10 had been transposed.
- Concern was expressed over the cost of external agency fostering and children looked after. In response the Assistant Director Safeguarding and Vulnerable, reported that it was a competitive market with a limited number of foster carers. The cost per child being looked after can be considerable. Work was ongoing through the commissioning strategy to ensure value for money.
- It was suggested that if there was more support for parents at an early stage then children may not get to the stage of being in need of the foster or looked after service. The Director of Children's Services responded that services were being restructured and integrated through locality working to give further support to families.

RESOLVED: that the Revenue Budget Monitoring report be noted.

24. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme.

The Director of Children's Services reported that following a number of recent inspections a report on the outcomes, together with the Executive's intended action plan to address any issues identified, would be submitted to Committee in December. The Chairman acknowledged the hard work of staff during the inspections.

RESOLVED: that subject to any inclusions or amendments made earlier in the meeting the Committee work programme be approved and reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The meeting ended at 12.03 pm

CHAIRMAN