

MINUTES of the meeting of Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Friday 11 March 2011 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor WLS Bowen (Chairman)

Councillors: AW Johnson, JJD Lavender, G Lucas, JE Pemberton, SJ Robertson, RV Stockton, AM Toon,

Co-opted Members Mr PF Burbidge, Mrs S Catlow-Hawkins, Mr M Harrisson, Mr P Hayden and Mrs E Lowenstein

In attendance: Councillors: PJ Edwards, JA Hyde (Cabiner Member - Children's Services), MD Lloyd-Hayes and PD Price (Cabinet Member – ICT, Education and Achievement)

49. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors ME Cooper (Vice-Chairman), Councillor Brig. P Jones CBE; Councillor WJ Walling, Mrs OR Evans, and Mr P Sell.

50. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no named substitutes.

51. 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 G Lucas	Personal	Governor – Brampton Abbotts 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
Mr PF Burbidge	Personal	Governor – St Mary's RC High School.
Councillor PD Price – Cabinet Member (ICT Education and Achievement)	Personal	Governor Fairfield High School

52. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

Nursery Education Funding (NEF)

Councillor AM Toon suggested that, following changes to the method of funding, Nursery Education Funding be reviewed.

Future of Peripatetic Music Teaching

A 74 signature petition was handed to the Chairman stating:

‘We understand that the Council is reviewing the future operating model of the Herefordshire Music Service (HMS). As concerned parents, we would ask that the Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee:

- Review the way in which the future options have been developed;
- Consider whether the options developed are the best ones for all Stakeholders;
- Review the consultation process to-date and check the degree of involvement of all stakeholders;
- Investigate the constitutional principle of devolving decisions with county-wide impact to other forums.

We strongly value the inspirational teaching and continuity of the relationship which develop between our children and their HMS teachers.

We are keen to receive assurance that any improvement made by the Council to the way in which the HMS operate do not have a detrimental impact on our teachers, our children or our schools’.

The Chairman thanked the two members of the public for the petition and commented that no decision on the future of the service had been made by the Executive.

The Interim Director of Children’s Services confirmed that no decision had been made. The Music Service had run at a deficit for a number of years and as part of the changes and reductions to the Dedicated Schools Grant a number of options for the Service had been explored through the Herefordshire Schools Forum.

RESOLVED: That Nursery Education Funding (NEF) and the Future of Peripatetic Music Teaching be logged in the work programme as suggested areas that the new Council (post May elections) may wish to consider.

54. INITIAL REPORT BY THE INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN’S SERVICES

The Chairman welcomed Ms Jo Davidson, the new Interim Director of Children’s Services who had recently joined the Authority and he invited her to briefly outline her initial thoughts on the performance and direction of Herefordshire’s Children’s Service.

The Interim Director of Children’s Services (IDCS) thanked the Chairman for the welcome. She commented that the County had many strengths and opportunities and must invest in the future of its young people. She also emphasised that there were difficult times and decisions ahead. Gone were the days of operating as single organisations - the Service and all education providers will need to work even closer through partnership working if the County is to achieve what was expected.

There were many good elements of learning in the County. However, to ensure that future cohorts achieved their full potential, greater efforts were needed in the Early Years settings and primary schools. Herefordshire had to ensure that it did the 'basics' well and ensure that everyone contributed to the 'learning community'. Outcomes for young people in the County were good but not as good as they could be.

With the budget cuts there will be difficult times ahead and the Service, and the Council, will need to ensure that it clearly communicates with parents, schools and citizens to ensure that messages were properly conveyed.

While the Council clearly doesn't have the budgets it had, not just for schools but as a whole, there were still multi-million pound budgets to be invested and it was important that the budgets be used to best effect.

Early Years settings, schools and colleges will need to give serious consideration to how they can make best use of reduced resources e.g. by Federating.

She commented that outcomes from the Education Bill 2011 (taking forward the legislative proposals in the Schools White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching*) were still awaited. However, legislation set out the role of the Council: being an advocate for young people; being a strategic commissioner of services; being a custodian of excellence (including knowing the performance of academies, and being the champion for vulnerable children, particularly as Corporate Parent for children in care).

Following changes to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) she expected a revised Strategic Investment Plan to be available in the next few months and she thanked the Schools Forum for its contribution to this work.

Following change to the Connexions Service from a National to a local level, on which there were still a number of local concerns, the IDCS commented that it would take a little while for the Service to fully re-establish its self.

In relation to Sure Start there was still a commitment for universal Children's Centres with a duty to ensure provision. However, due to the change in grant funding there was a need to review their economics and efficiency and to ensure a particular focus on the most vulnerable.

The IDCS appreciated that there were tensions around the future operation of the Peripatetic Music Teaching Service, referred to earlier in the meeting. The Music Service had run at a deficit for a number of years and as part of the changes and reductions to the Dedicated Schools Grant a number of options for the Service had been explored through the Herefordshire Schools Forum. It was in the best interest of young people that any future service was provided on a sustainable footing. She again confirmed that no decision had been made about the future of the Music Service.

The IDCS warned that the new Council (post May elections) would face some challenging times and would need to be clear about its intentions.

The Chairman thanked the Interim Director of Children's Services for her comments on the future of Children's Services and young people in the County.

RESOLVED: That the position outlined by the Interim Director of Children's Services be noted.

55. REPORT ON THE RESULTS ON THE CONSULTATION ON PRIORITIES FOR THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLAN 2011 - 2014

The Committee were provided with an update on the Consultation feedback and the next steps in relation to the Children and Young People's Plan 2011-2014.

The Head of Children's Services Development reported that since the report in December 2010 the draft Children and Young People's Plan, covering the period 2011-2014, had been consulted on and comments received would be used to inform the final plan to be published in April 2011. The main points coming out from the consultation included: that the priorities were generally the right ones; the number of priorities needed to be reduced and be more focused; the plan needed to address whole family approaches, support for parents and early intervention, and certain vulnerable groups needed support e.g. young carers and Gypsy Roma Traveller, although the Shadow Board had voiced concern that children and young people shouldn't be labelled and that all deserved to have the same aspirations and opportunities. Individual actions in the plan should consider how vulnerable groups of children could be supported better.

The Partners to the Plan were now in discussion regarding the development of the final plan and how to take forward the partnership arrangements as part of the overall approach to partnership working.

It was noted that early years and early intervention would be key areas to focus on and this would be addressed through the Locality Teams.

RESOLVED: That the position set out in the report be noted and a further update report be logged for consideration as part of the Committee work programme.

56. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2010/11

The Committee considered the monitoring report of the Children's Services revenue budget for 2010/11 at the end of quarter three and assessed comparisons to 2009/10 budget and outturn.

The Assistant Director, Planning, Performance and Development, reported that the overall forecast showed a net over spend of £647k and this represented a reduction in the projected overspend of £434k since the last report to scrutiny in December 2010. The overspend was almost entirely due to the pressures on external placements for looked after children and young people and placements for children with complex needs. The agenda report outlined the service pressures and the measures being put in place to address those pressures.

During the course of scrutinising the report the following principal points were noted:

- While initial projections suggested that 50% of schools would face a deficit within two years, action would be taken by schools to address this. A deficit budget position was not something that schools should plan to be in.
- The Committee noted that the new Early Intervention Grant (EIG) provided reduced levels of grant (£2,000k) when compared to previous grants. While savings had been anticipated – as set out at paragraph 29 in the report – the Director of Children's Services reported that a number of programmes had stopped and only a smaller core of activities could be provided. A further restructure of the Directorate would also be necessary.
- Responding to whether further economies could be made through school transport without prolonging the journey time for young children the Committee were informed that the Service worked closely with the Sustainable Communities

- Directorate to ensure that, where possible, economies were made between school transport and public transport.
- Questioning the pressures on the Safeguarding staffing budget due to a reliance on agency social workers covering vacant posts (16.5 vacant posts on 1 January 2011) the Committee noted that recruitment to this sector was a national issue and the Council was represented both regionally and nationally to try to address the shortage. Meanwhile the Council had a programme of training its own social workers and were working with Human Resources to reduce the costs. The Committee requested comparative information on the administrative and financial advantages or disadvantages between employing agency Social Workers and recruiting them to the full time staff.
 - The Interim Director of Children's Services reported that in reviewing its Youth Service the Council will need to consider how much to provide or commission. Nationally there were a number of models that could be considered.
 - The budget had been top sliced based on an assumed figure for the impact of academies, however, the government had actually based the grant on a predicted number of academies which had impacted on the budget in some local authorities to a greater extent.
 - Special Educational Needs funding surrounding statementing and some specialist services was not being transferred to academies. Further guidance was anticipated in the government green paper in the autumn.
 - While funding for the Choice Advisor had been cut, the function remained a statutory duty and therefore alternative ways of covering the duty were being explored.
 - The government were undertaking a review of the School Admission Code, the implications from which would be awaited.
 - Responding to various questions concerning the overspend on Looked After Children (£1245k) the Committee noted that while the needs of the child were paramount, the Service was exploring various alternative activities to prevent children requiring care and were working with the Council's Procurement Section to ensure value for money was obtained from service providers.
 - The Service were looking to develop an Emergency Adult and Children Duty Team, which was currently provided by Worcestershire.

RESOLVED: That

- a) the position set out in the Revenue Budget report be noted; and**
- b) a Member Briefing note be issued setting out the administrative and financial advantages or disadvantages between employing agency Social Workers and recruiting them to the full time staff.**

57. PERFORMANCE DIGEST QUARTER 3 2010/11

The Committee considered the Performance Digest for Children's Services for Quarter 3 of 2010/11.

The Head of Quality and Improvement presented the report and Digest which drew Members attention to a number of key areas for consideration based on the Every Child Matters outcome areas. The report and action plan (Appendix 2) also provided an update to the position reported to the December 2010 meeting in relation to the inspections of Safeguarding and Looked After Children following the Ofsted inspections.

The Head of Service (Fieldwork) reported that the Referral and Assessment Team had been redesigned to speed up and tackle the quality of referrals. The quality of information from a number of agencies had been below standard and had initially been returned, however, following training on what was required, improvements had been made and more robust systems were in place and could be audited.

In relation to the 'Composite Outcomes and Action Plan for Improving Services to Children and Young People' the Committee noted that the action plan included the recommendations from the inspection report and also picked up on a number of issues identified that hadn't warranted a formal recommendation. All the issues were indicated as either amber or green showing that they were on track and progress was moving forward. A number of actions were the responsibility of partner organisations.

The Cabinet Member, Children's Services, reported that she was heartened about progress with the action plan.

A Committee Member commented that in relation to action plan Ref 11.3 service evaluation needed to be 'bottom up' rather than 'officer down' to ensure that young people's views were reflected. The Assistant Director, Planning, Performance and Development, stated that this would be the case.

It was suggested that the report and the Digest should be used in training sessions for the new Council as examples of good performance reporting.

RESOLVED: That

- a) **the performance indicated in the report and Performance Digest be noted and future reports to include progress against the 'Action Plan' for improving services to Children and Young People.**
- b) **It is suggested that the report and the Digest be used in training sessions for the new Council as examples of good performance reporting.**

At this point the Committee adjourned for 6 minutes and resumed at 11.48am

58. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE DIRECTORATE REORGANISATION

The Committee received an update on the progress of the Children and Young People's Directorate reorganisation, the development of locality team arrangements, and feedback on issues raised at the Members seminar on 7 February 2011 on localities development.

The Assistant Director, Community Operations, reported that the directorate had been re-designed and now comprised four divisions covering all statutory and essential business. This had resulted in a reduction of 35.4 full time equivalent staff. Due to the significant impact grant cuts and reductions in 2011/12 will have, further redesign work will be required to ensure a sustainable structure as part of the redesign of the Council. There was a growing body of evidence that the locality services were making a positive impact.

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

- The Chairman complemented the officers concerned on the well researched and well presented Member seminar which had been appreciated by the Members in attendance.
- Questioned on the progress of Frameworki and Agresso computer systems the Head of Service (Fieldwork) responded that Frameworki was progressing but still had a little way to go. Regular meetings were being held with the system provider to modify the standard forms to ensure that they were simple to complete but captured the required information. Overall the project was on schedule but would continue to closely monitored.
- The development of locality working should lead to more effective targeting and less duplication of resources, so providing better outcomes for children and families. Professionals will be able to hot desk at the Locality Centres thereby reducing travel time to their office and increased the time spent with families. Having briefly received clarification on the number of Locality areas when

compared to the number of locality teams and service provision areas a Member Briefing note would be issued with copies being sent to Parish Councils for information.

- It was noted that Appendix B to the report only provided a summary of the actions to monitor the impact of introducing locality teams. Further work was ongoing that would contribute to other performance measures.

RESOLVED: That

- a) the report be noted and a further report be logged in the work programme so that progress with the Framework and Agresso Systems can be reported;**
- b) A Member Briefing note be issued clarifying how the Locality areas and teams interrelate.**

59. STANDARDS IN THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE AND STANDARDS IN THE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY STAGES - FURTHER UPDATE

The Committee considered an update on progress in standards in the Early Years Foundation Stage and standards in the Primary and Secondary Stages.

In response to the Committee's earlier request (22 October and 10 December 2010) the Head of Improvement, presented an update on standards in the three stages. The report set out the proposed actions reported to the previous meeting and an interim evaluation of the actions taken (to February 2011). The report also summarised pupil attendance/absence standards.

The Senior Secondary School Improvement Advisor and the General Inspector for Early Years briefly outlined the performance in the respective school stages.

During the course of scrutinising the standards report and digest the following principal points were noted:

- Ofsted now had a rigorous inspection framework in place. While there had been some excellent improvements in a number of school judgement grades (Table 3 in the report) there were still a number of schools of concern.
- Following concerns about the quality of data from a number of primary schools, a quality assurance process was now in place to ensure the accuracy of data and that any issues were identified.
- Concern was expressed regarding the future of Nursery Education Funding. In response the Head of Improvement reported that the Private Voluntary and Independent (PVI) settings were represented on the Herefordshire Schools Forum which considered the funding for nursery settings.
- The Herefordshire Schools Forum was complemented on their work in addressing the school budget situation and it was suggested that the Chairman write to the Forum to convey the complement.
- Further analysis was needed on School absence statistics to identify local issues.
- The Committee acknowledged the good work of the School Improvement Team in driving improvement activity in schools.
- The Association of Secondary Headteachers appreciated the openness and honesty and 'joined up thinking' when discussing performance issues with officers.
- The Senior Secondary School Improvement Advisor reported the improved outcomes from recent Ofsted Section 5 inspections at: Lady Hawkins High School; John Masefield High School, and Weobley High School. She highlighted that a few years ago Weobley High had been classed as in 'special measures' but had now been classed as 'outstanding' across the board. The Committee acknowledged the excellent outcomes.

- The Committee noted that in relation to the 11-19 Group a new network of 6th Form lead Headteachers/Principals had been formed to progress the collaborative working in this area of education. The 14-19 Strategic Partnership continued to offer pathways to learning.

RESOLVED: That

- a) the report be noted and the Committee acknowledged the good work of the School Improvement Team in driving the improvement activity in schools;**
- b) the Committee acknowledged the excellent outcomes at: Lady Hawkins High School, Kington; John Masefield High School, Ledbury, and Weobley High School arising from their recent Section 5 Ofsted inspections;**
- c) the Chairman write to the Herefordshire Schools Forum to complement them on their work in addressing the school budget situation.**

60. CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING UPDATE ON 2010/2011 AND FUNDING FOR 2011/2012

The Committee scrutinised the capital budget position for 2010/11 for the Children and Young People's Directorate (CYPD) and received information on indicative capital funding for 2011/12.

The Head of Access & Capital Commissioning reported that the 2010/11 capital programme for CYPD was on schedule. The indicative 2011/12 capital allocations for Herefordshire showed an 80% decrease in schools' devolved formula capital allocations. Although, in part, this was due to the Government allocating the bulk of capital maintenance grant to the Local Authority, rather than to schools, the overall capital allocation for 2011/12 was about £1.4 million below the 2010/11 allocation. The report set out the key areas of progress, achievement and challenge within the capital programme for 2010/11. It also set out the indicative capital funding grants 2011/12 from the national context and the indicative allocations 2011/12 for Herefordshire.

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

- That over the last few years Herefordshire had attracted a good level of school based capital investment and delivered some very valuable schemes including: Sutton St Nicholas, Earl Mortimer, Riverside, Hereford Academy and work starting at Leominster.
- Following the Government allocating the bulk of capital maintenance grant to the Local Authority, the Capital Strategy Consultation Group would be used to determine how the grant would be allocated to meet priorities. Noting that a scoring matrix was currently used as part of the consultative group's deliberations. Members requested a Member briefing note indication how capital projects were prioritised.
- Greater emphasis will need to be placed on how the capital stock is managed and the release of capital receipts. A member commented that issues concerning the clarity of the Council's capital dealings had been raised by the Audit Committee. Officers took on board the comments about how information on capital projects was presented.
- Questions were asked about how maintenance contracts were placed. The Committee hoped that by prioritising the work a number of maintenance projects could be grouped together, thereby ensuring that economies of scale were obtained.
- Questioned on the low spend to date of the TCF Standards and Diversity budget (£76,000), the Committee were informed that spend would be up to budget (£657,000) by the end of the year. It was also noted that further expenditure was expected in relation to the Primary Grant (currently at £358,000).

RESOLVED: That the position set out in the Capital Budget report be noted and a Member Briefing note be issued indicating how capital projects were prioritised, including the indicative 'scoring matrix' used.

61. EXECUTIVE RESPONSE TO SCRUTINY REVIEW OF PUPIL ACHIEVEMENT IN SWIMMING AT KEY STAGE 2

The Committee noted the Cabinet Member – ICT, Education and Achievement, response to the Scrutiny Review of Pupil Achievement in Swimming at Key Stage 2.

The Chairman reported that the findings from the Scrutiny Review of Pupil Achievement in Swimming at Key Stage 2 had been considered and approved by this Committee on 1 October 2010. Having considered the findings and recommendations the Cabinet Member - ICT, Education and Achievement had approved the recommendations and officers will now be investigating methods of collecting the swimming data and, once analysed, will be reporting the outcomes to Committee via the performance report.

The Head of Improvement reported that an initial analysis of the data collected indicated that Herefordshire's performance in swimming at KS2 was slightly above the national average.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the results of Key Stage 2 swimming performance be awaited.

62. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme.

RESOLVED: That issues identified earlier in the meeting be noted for future work programmes and the work programme be approved and reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The meeting ended at 1.10 pm

CHAIRMAN