

MINUTES of the meeting of Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Friday 22 October 2010 at 9.30 am

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

Councillors: AW Johnson, Brig P Jones CBE, G Lucas, JE Pemberton, SJ Robertson, WJ Walling,

Co-opted Members Mr PF Burbidge and Mr P Hayden

In attendance: Councillors: PL Bettington, PJ Edwards, JA Hyde (Cabinet Member Children's Services), AT Oliver and PD Price (Cabinet Member ICT, Education and Achievement)

25. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from: Mrs Catlow-Hawkins; Mrs OR Evans; Mr M Harrison; Mr P Sell, and Councillor AM Toon.

26. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no substitutions.

27. 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 – Earl Mortimer College, 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
Mr PF Burbidge	Personal	Governor – St Mary's RC High School

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

No suggestions for scrutiny were received.

29. SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL PROVISION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

The Committee received an update report.

The Assistant Director, Planning, Performance and Development, presented the agenda report which briefly set out: the decline in overall pupil numbers in the county, Cabinet's consideration of the effect of this, and the work of the Herefordshire Schools Task Group to consider the future educational provision. Cabinet invited every Herefordshire school cluster to consider sustainable education for the 21st Century and to report back to Cabinet with ideas and proposals for achieving this. To date submissions had been received from 6 school clusters and one special school. Although no submission had been received from some clusters, officers were aware of, and were working with, other clusters and individual schools and it was therefore not appropriate at this stage to seek the views of the Scrutiny Committee on such a partial picture.

Comment was made by the Cabinet Members (Children's Services and ICT, Education and Achievement) that it was up to schools to ensure that they engaged in submitting their comments and it was disappointing that a number had so far not responded.

Questioned on whether the number of pupils was still falling the Assistant Director, Planning, Performance and Development reported that while some schools or particular year groups were fully subscribed the county as a whole was still seeing a decline in pupil numbers.

The Director commented that the issue would need vary careful future consideration.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the Committee suggests to the Cabinet Member that school clusters that had not yet responded be reminded of the importance of their comments and urge a prompt reply.

30. PERFORMANCE DIGEST - QUARTER 1 2010-2011

The Committee consider the Performance Digest for Children's Services for Quarter 1 of 2010-2011.

The Head of Quality and Improvement 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 and she highlighted a number of key issues. The report also provided an overview of the unvalidated examination results indicating that compared to the national and statistical neighbours, overall Herefordshire continued to perform well, however there were some areas that required specific attention.

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

- questioned on the statement of special needs process the Committee were informed that there were a number of assessment stages before a formal SEN was reached and in view of the available resources, it was thought good results were being achieved. Further information could be supplied if required.
- overall the rate of improvement in schools was thought to be good with the performance in secondary school GCSE results being particularly noted.
- data for the youth offending indicators would be circulated to Members.
- achievement continued to improve, however, achievement in the Early Years Foundation stage and in the Primary Phase was reported in a later agenda item.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the Secondary schools that had improved their record in GCSE results be commended for their achievement.

31. STANDARDS IN THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

The Committee were provided with an overview of the standards in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in Herefordshire in 2010.

The General Inspector for Early Years presented the agenda report which briefly described: the EYFS framework; the assessment process under the framework; the moderation process applied to assessment findings, and that anomalies had been found in the data and how these were being addressed.

The General Inspector for Early Years highlighted that: in Herefordshire 96.3% of 3-5 year olds attend pre-school education; the quality of Herefordshire EYFS provision had improved in 2010; 100% of network childminders had been judged as outstanding by Ofsted, 83% of private, voluntary and independent settings had been judged by Ofsted as providing good/outstanding provision; there were no inadequate early years settings in Herefordshire; 75% of the early years provision in primary schools had been judged as good/outstanding, and there was no inadequate early years provision in Primary Schools in Herefordshire.

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

- Responding to whether the sparsity of some communities in the county had an effect of a child's learning the General Inspector for Early Years reported that in some cases a child's speech or language skills could be impaired due to the lack of social contact and this needed to be addressed by pre-school settings.
- While there was an excellent range of early years provision in the County the Director of Children's Services emphasised that standards must further improve to ensure that children's learning skills are better developed before entering primary school. Parenting skills varied and the Council and its partners were working through Family Learning Centres to ensure that young people achieved their full potential.
- Questioned whether Herefordshire was behind in introducing E-Profile, the General Inspector for Early Years reported that this was an optional tool for schools, however, the Council was now in a position to support its introduction.
- The priorities for the Early Years Quality Improvement Team in 2010/11 set out at paragraph 19 of the report were noted and an update on how the Team were achieving those priorities be reported to a future meeting.
- Concern was expressed over the wide variation in children attaining a 'good' standard in early years – referred to at report paragraph 16. The General Inspector for Early Years responded that in part the wide variation depended on the number in the cohort and their social background. The Council were working with the relevant headteachers to address the issue.

RESOLVED: that

- a) the report be noted, particularly the actions to drive further improvements set out at paragraph 19 of the report; and**
- b) an update report be presented in approximately 6 months with a fuller report being made in 12 months.**

32. STANDARDS IN THE PRIMARY PHASE.

The Committee were provided with an overview of the standards in the Primary school phase in Herefordshire in 2010.

The General Inspector presented the agenda report which briefly described: the assessment of pupils work and the moderation process for those assessments; that target setting for key stage 1 had been introduced alongside statutory key stage 2 target setting and this would continue in 2010/11; a number of schools had boycotted the KS2 SAT assessment in 2010; due to falling rolls and financial pressures heads at some schools were considering carefully the organisation of classes at their school. The Report also set out that key stage one results continued to be a concern and, while there had been welcome improvements in writing and some improvement in children achieving level 2B+ in reading and level 2C+ in maths, results were still not matching national averages. Pupil achievement was set out in greater detail in the report.

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

- While the intention was to improve all academic areas, support to schools would be focused through the 'category' and the 'intervention' programmes and work was already underway through the Early Years Team, School Improvement Partners and school governors. Further work was being undertaken with governors to support governance and leadership arrangements.
- A number of areas in the Early Years curriculum conflicted with the curriculum for the Primary phase and a number of teachers were being supported in addressing this issue.
- Pupils entered primary phase at differing attainment levels and therefore teachers at KS1 had to balance the classes abilities in an attempt to bring them up to the same level. A child's birth date could also be a factor.
- Some schools had not administered the KS2 SATS tests this year and therefore the national results may be overstated. Locally 8 schools had boycotted the tests.
- The results of Ofsted inspections indicated that more schools in Herefordshire were moving away from the negative inspection outcome.
- Questioned on Science (report Table D) the Committee noted that attainment was now assessed by 'teacher assessment'.
- Questioned why in some cases English and Maths statistics were combined, the Committee were informed that pupils that achieve well in both subjects usually had greater life chances in later life.
- Noting the difference in attainment in reading (report Table B) it was questioned whether Libraries were being proactive in providing interesting literature, particularly for boys. In response it was reported that Libraries were running a project to encourage under 5s to read and further publicity for this would be considered.

The Committee noted that in view of the 2010 data the priorities for 2010/11 at both key stage 1 and 2 for the School Improvement Team had been identified, as set out at paragraphs 13 and 15 of the report. The Committee requested further reports on how the Team were achieving those priorities.

RESOLVED: that

- a) **the report be noted, particularly the actions to drive further improvements set out at paragraphs 13 and 15 of the report; and**
- b) **an update report be presented in approximately 6 months with a fuller report being made in 12 months.**

33. OFSTED INSPECTION OF SAFEGUARDING AND LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN SERVICES

The Chairman decided to allow this extra agenda item on the grounds that the Ofsted report following the inspection of Safeguarding and looked after children services in Herefordshire had only been released by Ofsted on the morning of the meeting.

Committee members were provided with copies of the report published 22 October 2010 (available in due course from the Ofsted web site).

The Director of Children's Services reported that an announced and an unannounced inspection had taken place in recent months and he proposed that one report on the outcome of all the inspections, including a consolidated action plan on actions being taken by the Executive to address any concerns highlighted be reported to the December meeting of the Committee.

Appreciating that Committee Members had not had time to read the report he briefly commented on some of the main findings listed at pages 30 (Safeguarding service) and 31 (Services for looked after children) of the report. The overall effectiveness of Safeguarding had been judged to be 'adequate'. The overall effectiveness of Services for looked after children had been judged as 'good'.

He also drew the Committees attention to paragraph 64 of the report relating to areas for improvement in 'services for looked after children'. He emphasised that any complaint was usually actioned immediately without waiting to be formally recorded.

Questioned on the effectiveness of the Frameworki data management system the Director responded that there had been a number of issues. These centred around the importing of data; staff training; the lack of historic data and the management of performance data produced.

The Cabinet Member (ICT, Education and Achievement) commented that Herefordshire was behind other authorities in the implementation of the Frameworki system and needed to catch up.

RESOLVED: that the oral report by the Director of Children's Services be noted and a full report together with a consolidated action plan be reported to the December meeting.

34. DIRECTORATE REORGANISATION - UPDATE

The Committee received an update on the reorganisation of the Children and Young People's Directorate.

The Director of Children's Services reported that the directorate reorganisation had entered the third phase. A consultation document on a proposed structure had been issued to staff and comments had been received and considered. Changes to Safeguarding would be implemented within the next 4 weeks with other sections being implemented very soon thereafter. He also reported that staff had been offered the opportunity to consider a voluntary reduction in working hours. The structure around the Locality Teams would be looked at in more detail and he anticipated this would be completed early in 2011. Looking to the future he warned that the directorate structure would need to be further reviewed in light of the outcome of the government spending review.

Responding to a request for clarification concerning the activities and responsibilities within the directorate following the reorganisation the Director undertook to ensure that this aspect was included in the update report to March 2011 meeting.

RESOLVED: that the oral report by the Director of Children's Services be noted and a further update, particularly giving greater detail on the various services in the Directorate, be presented to a future meeting.

35. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme.

The Director of Children's Services reported that as indicated earlier, a full report on the recent inspections, with a consolidated action plan, would be brought to the December meeting.

RESOLVED: that subject to the inclusion of any issues identified earlier in the meeting the Committee work programme be approved and reported to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

The meeting ended at 11.25 am

CHAIRMAN