

MINUTES of the meeting of Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at : The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Friday, 15th December, 2006 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:	Councillor	B.F. Ashton (Chairman)
	Councillor	J.P. Thomas (Vice Chairman)
	Councillors	Mrs. S.P.A. Daniels, G. Lucas, R.M. Manning, Mrs. S.J. Robertson, D.C. Taylor, Ms. A.M. Toon and W.J. Walling
	Church Members	J.D. Griffin (Roman Catholic Church)
	Teacher Representatives	C. Lewandowski (Secondary School teachers)
	Headteacher Representatives	Mrs. D. Strutt (Secondary Schools)

In attendance: Councillors Mrs. J.A. Hyde, T.M. James, D.W. Rule MBE (Children and Young People) and R.M. Wilson

27. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor N.J.J. Davies; Mr A. Geach; Councillor Mrs J.E. Pemberton and Mrs C. Woolley.

28. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no named substitutes.

29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

30. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 6th October, 2006 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

There were no suggestions from members of the public.

Members of the Committee raised issues concerning the Connexions Service; Extended Schools; City Academies and the monitoring of budgets containing in-year grants for specific projects. The Director of Children's Services reported that Member briefing papers on issues can be issued at any time. The subject of Extended Schools would be dealt with under agenda item 6.

32. CHANGE FOR CHILDREN IN HEREFORDSHIRE

The Committee was advised on the Change for Children progress overall, including extended schools and the recent Education and Inspection Act 2006 as applied to transport.

The Director of Children's Services reported that the national change programme – Every Child Matters – was now into the delivery stage. She further reported in relation to the Young People's Partnership Board; the Local Safeguarding Children's Board; the proposed establishment of a Public Service Trust; the delivery of key priorities under the Families Strategy and the Children's Centres and Extended Schools programmes, the details of which were set out in the agenda report.

The Committee noted that good progress was being made with 'Support for Families' issues; that the Extended Schools programme now combined with the role undertaken on the 'Play Strategy'; that the planning and delivery of the Common assessment framework was on track and that in November 2006 Advantage West Midlands (AWM) had been satisfied with the programme in place.

On questioning the criteria for locating Children Centres the Committee were informed that this was based on deprivation areas, that schools had been consulted and, where possible, school premises were the preferred location. The Cabinet Member (Children & Young People) warned that resources were very limited to enable the completion of the programme of Children Centres.

Funding under the Extended Schools programme was held by the relevant secondary school for allocation to schools in their partnership area.

The Director of Children's Services and the Admissions and Transport Manager reported that the implementation of the denominational Transport policy had not demonstrated any particular concerns. Details were issued to the Committee entitled: 'Appendix 1 Denominational Admissions & Transport provision – Secondary Schools' which set out yearly admission figures to Bishop of Hereford and St Mary's secondary schools and provided an 'Acorn' analysis for current year 7, 8 and 9 pupils in each high school.

The Admissions and Transport Manager further reported in relation to changes under the Act to travel arrangements provided for pupils from low-income families. He anticipated that, due in the main to the large distance between Herefordshire schools, there would be little or no impact on this aspect of its introduction.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted

33. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2006/07

The Committee scrutinised the report on the monitoring of the revenue budget, for the period to the end of October, for the Children & Young People's Directorate.

The Director of Children's Services reported that the trend towards an overspend continued and the monitoring of expenditure to October 31st now projected an overspend of £214,000 at year-end, as indicated in the figures set out in Appendix 1 to the report. The overspend was largely due to increasing external agency placements in the Safeguarding and Assessment Budget. Placements had risen from 24 at the beginning of the year to 29 now. The number of children in foster care had also risen from 111 at the beginning of the year to 121 now. Additionally extra spend on filling social work vacancies and agency staff had been incurred in order to

improve services in line with the Joint Area Review.

The Directorate Finance Manager reported that income under the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), which the Council had to pay to schools in March but didn't receive final notification of from government until June, had been less than expected.

During the course of scrutinising the monitoring report the Committee noted the following points in response to questions raised:

- There needed to be clear lines of monitoring in relation to the use of in-year grants received under the Early Years Childcare Grant, which was used to offset some early years expenditure.
- The Council was seeking an increase in funding from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to support the Special Educational Need (SEN) cost of post-16 pupils.
- External agency placements were generally negotiated, however, costs were typically £150,000 for each place per annum provided by the private or voluntary sectors. On the face of it these costs were thought to be expensive and the Audit Commission were undertaking a national audit study into better management of expensive 'out county' placements. However, the agencies did provide a range of highly specialist services to children most in need.
- An audit of the child's need was always undertaken to ensure proper placement of the child.
- Herefordshire together with Worcestershire and Shropshire were awaiting the outcome of a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) funding request to the DfES to jointly commission a placement facility in Ludlow, which would provide for 12 placements, 2 of which would be for Herefordshire.
- The DfES had awarded greater than inflation rises (on a per pupil basis) to school budgets and although, in general, schools in Herefordshire had high balances funding was expected to reduce in line with falling pupil numbers and schools would have to reduce their staffing and expenditure in coming years.
- The Directorate worked with schools that had a deficit budget to assist them in balancing their funds. The Directorate anticipate that the number of schools to be in deficit may rise in coming years.
- While the Assessment and Family Support budget currently showed an underspend, new initiatives coming on line were expected to put a strain on this budget in the future.
- Grant money received usually had clear criteria governing its use.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

At this point the Committee adjourned for approximately five minutes and reconvened at 11.30 am.

34. IMPROVEMENT AND ANNUAL ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE

The Committee considered progress on improvement and performance of the Children & Young People's Directorate.

The Director of Children's Services reported that the improvements identified in the Joint Area Review (JAR) were on track and that the allocated budget for this had levered external advice and input to assist the Directorate in achieving the improvement required. She further reported that the success criteria for the improvement work programme (set out at Appendix 1) and reports to the Minister for Children and Families had been agreed.

The Joint Area Review (JAR) progress report as of 27th November was attached at Appendix 2 to the report and the Director of Children's Services drew the Committees attention to a number of highlights in the report. She also reported that the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) 2006 Annual Performance Assessment (APA) letter at Appendix 3 to the report confirmed the Council's self-assessment agreed by Cabinet in May 2006. That meant that with satisfactory scores of 2, the Council had secured a position where there were no inadequate assessments on "Staying Safe" or "Service Management". Outstanding matters under the JAR improvement Plan would transfer to a new reporting arrangement, which would also take account of the emerging priorities from the APA letter and GOWM priorities meeting.

During the course of debate the Committee noted that:

- Good efforts had been made to increase the current Social Worker establishment level, including where appropriate, by encouraging existing staff to progress their training and career in this area.
- With the fall in the number of Statutory Assessments, 100% of assessments had been undertaken within the target time.
- As a result of the good progress made in meeting the JAR Improvement Plan it was expected that the GOWM Children and Young People's Services Improvement Project Board for Herefordshire would be wound up in March 2007.
- The work undertaken by the Homelessness and Advice Team in significantly reducing the number of families housed in bed and breakfast accommodation, and consequent call on the budget, was appreciated and it was noted that the Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee monitored this BVPI. However, the Committee expressed some concern over the possible number of young people who may be 'sofa surfing' or living in difficult/overcrowded conditions with friends or in-laws.
- Reference in the CSCI letter to 'dental health is very poor' referred to the fact that the majority of Herefordshire's drinking water was not fluoridated.
- Good progress was being made in tackling the issues raised by the CSCI statement 'there is a lack of co-ordination between agencies for the assessment, planning and individual involvement of children with learning difficulties and /or disabilities'.
- The Service, together with its partners, were looking at ways of helping young people leaving care to access appropriate employment opportunities.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

35. PROGRESS OF THE BEHAVIOUR AND DISCIPLINE MANAGEMENT IN HEREFORDSHIRE SCHOOLS REVIEW

The Committee noted that the scrutiny review of Behaviour and Discipline Management in Herefordshire Schools was progressing and that a report on the findings was expected soon.

36. CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme.

While Members raised a number of suggested issues, following commentary by the Director of Children's Services no issues were added to the programme.

The Committee requested that when the issue of 'school performance' was

discussed in March 2007, that a full break down within the examination A*C range be supplied so that Members can see what had been achieved.

The Committee noted the draft scoping statement for the 'Scrutiny Review of Transition from Leaving Care to Adult Life', attached to the report at Appendix 1 and that an approach to undertaking the review had been previously agreed.

RESOLVED That the work programme be approved and reported to Strategic Monitoring Committee.

The meeting ended at 12.15 p.m.

CHAIRMAN

