

MINUTES of the meeting of Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at: The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday, 19th March, 2007 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:	Councillor	B.F. Ashton (Chairman)
	Councillor	J.P. Thomas (Vice Chairman)
	Councillors	P Jones CBE, G Lucas, JE Pemberton, SJ Robertson and DC Taylor
	Church Members	Mr. A. Geach (Church of England)
	Parent Governor Members	(none)
	Teacher Representatives	C. Lewandowski (Secondary School teachers)
	Headteacher Representatives	Mrs. D. Strutt (Secondary Schools)
	Community Representatives	Ms D Scott (The Alliance)

In attendance: Councillors: JA Hyde, TM James and D.W. Rule MBE (Cabinet Member - (Children and Young People).

37. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr SPA Daniels; Cllr NJJ Davies; Mrs K Fitch; Mr JD Griffin; Cllr JP Thomas; Cllr WJ Walling.

38. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor Brig. P Jones CBE substituted for Councillor NJJ Davies.

39. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

40. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 15th December 2006 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

There were no suggestions from members of the public.

42. URGENT ITEM - CAPITAL FUNDING FOR RIVERSIDE PRIMARY SCHOOL AND SUTTON COUNTY PRIMARY SCHOOL

The Chairman permitted discussion on this item on the grounds that: notice had been received of a forthcoming Cabinet Members key decision; further information was needed prior to any potential call-in, and any delay could cause further costs to be incurred to the contracts.

To consider the capital funding for the Riverside Primary School and Sutton County Primary School projects.

The Chairman reported that he had received notice that the Cabinet Members for Children and Young People; Corporate Strategy and Finance, and Resources proposed to make a key decision, not included in the Forward Plan, on the capital funding for Riverside and Sutton Primary Schools. Copies of a letter dated 14th March to the Chairman with attached report concerning the proposed decision were circulated to Members at the meeting.

The Chairman considered there were two primary issues to consider namely: how the funding gap of £2.3m had arisen and why the issue had not been brought to the Scrutiny Committee's attention earlier. He invited the Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) and Director of Children's Services to comment.

The Head of Commissioning and Improvement briefly outlined the history to both the projects indicating in turn how the financial position had changed over time and how the specifications for both schemes had been reduced or realigned in an effort to manage the cost position. He did however, highlight that in addition to inflation, at Riverside the purchase of mobile classrooms and the clearance of contaminated land had contributed to additional costs. Likewise at Sutton additional costs had been incurred due to the more complex site works necessary as part of the land purchase agreement, and increased thermal insulation requirements for the scheme.

The Committee were still concerned about the position and requested that an urgent informal meeting be arranged with officers to hear further clarification of the reasons for the funding gap.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the Committee urgently meet informally to seek further clarification of the reasons for the funding gap.

43. CURRENT SCHOOL ISSUES

The Committee was advised of recent developments on some key issues for schools.

The Committee considered a report on the themes of 'Healthy Schools'; School Performance' and School Meals'.

The Head of Integrated Services and Inclusion reported that 54% of Herefordshire schools were already fully accredited for National Healthy School Status (NHSS) a position which had been achieved well ahead of schedule. A further 34% of schools were anticipated to have achieved the status by the target date of June 2007.

The Committee congratulated the schools on achieving the National Healthy Schools Status.

The Head of Commissioning and Improvement reported that overall, school

performance based on examinations results and inspections, continued to improve. Details of both primary and secondary school performance were set out in the agenda report. However, he warned that while 'aspirational' performance targets had been set locally the government were advocating the setting of more 'challenging' targets.

The Committee suggested that recognition of the achievement be communicated to pupils.

The Head of Commissioning and Improvement further reported that responding to government initiatives to improve the quality of school meals and offer county-wide hot meal provision by September 2008, a number of steps had been taken locally to meet the target and these were detailed in the agenda report.

The Committee noted that at some schools a number of practical problems still existed and these were mainly concerned with the transportation and quality of meal provision.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

44. PROGRESS ON IMPROVEMENT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES

To consider progress on improvement in outcomes and performance in the Children and Young People's Directorate.

The Director of Children's Services reported that the new approach to the action plan, resulting from the JAR inspection, had been endorsed by Government Office West Midlands (GOWM), and the updated plan had been attached to the report at appendix 1. The GOWM Improvement Board for Herefordshire had endorsed the achievements for 2006. These had been attached at appendix 2 and had informed the second report to the Minister along with the positive but separate outcomes for 2005-06. The third and currently final report to the Minister would be produced after the March Improvement Board. It remained the ambition to ensure sufficient progress against the agreed success criteria to satisfy GOWM and DfES so that routine performance assessment and improvement activity could be re-established.

She highlighted that on the key indicator 'Education qualifications of children looked after' Herefordshire was top nationally and second under 'Stability of placements of children looked after'. On several other targets Herefordshire was in the top group.

On scrutinising the report the Committee appreciated the open and effective way in which actions against the JAR outcomes had been managed. The Committee noted that an Interim Performance & Improvement Manager had been appointed.

The Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) praised the efforts made in tackling the performance issues without detracting from the important every day work of the Directorate.

RESOLVED: That progress to February 2007 as set out in the report be noted.

45. 14 - 19 STRATEGY

The Committee received an update on the revised 14 – 19 Strategy and were briefed on progress of the initiative in Herefordshire.

The Director of Children's Services reminded the Committee of the national objectives in the 14-19 Strategy and commented that this was a fast moving area of work.

The Secondary School Improvement Manager reported upon the implementation of the Strategy in Herefordshire and highlighted the progress to date, details of which were set out in the agenda report. He reported that, in common with the majority of other authorities, expressions of interest for the five Diploma lines had been submitted. The decision by the DfES on the pilot authorities was now anticipated during late March 2007. He commented that whether Herefordshire was included as a pilot or not should not greatly affect this authority as it was already committed to working with 6th Forms and Colleges to develop vocational courses at different qualification levels in the County. High schools were approaching the question of provision by working in partnership with each other while attempting to keep the travelling time of students to a minimum. Pending further guidance from the DfES the Directorate would continue to work with schools to ensure the best possible provision.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

46. BEHAVIOUR AND DISCIPLINE MANAGEMENT IN HEREFORDSHIRE SCHOOLS REVIEW

The Committee considered the findings of the scrutiny review into Behaviour and Discipline Management in Herefordshire Schools.

The Chairman of the Review Group, Councillor B.F. Ashton, presented the findings of the review, a copy of which had been included in the agenda, and commented that while the scope of the review had been limited by the governance arrangements for schools, the Group hoped the findings would assist the Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) in this area of work.

The Manager of Social Inclusion, who acted as Lead Officer for the review, took the Committee through the report and highlighted: that the impetus for the review had primarily come about from the national focus, however a degree of local concern had also been registered; the scope of the review, and the range of evidence gathered through the questionnaire to selected school staff and face to face focus groups.

The Committee welcomed the report and the findings. During debate concern was expressed over the general degree of low level disruption in schools, particularly indicated in the questionnaire by female secondary teachers, and questions were raised regarding how the Council undertook its duty of care to its employees in the education sector.

The Committee noted recommendation 7.5 relating to the further provision of Learning Support Units and appreciated the high level of resources needed to provide this type of facility.

The Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) also welcomed the report and expressed a degree of optimism for the future through the development of both the Sure Start and Family Centre programmes.

**RESOLVED:
THAT;**

- a) **Subject to the inclusion of a recommendation drawing the Cabinet Member's (Children and Young People) attention to the**

Council's duty of care to its employees, the findings of the Behaviour and Discipline Management in Herefordshire Schools Review Group be approved for submission to the Cabinet Member (Children and Young People);

- b) The Executive's response to the review including an action plan be reported to the first available meeting of the Committee after the Executive has approved its response; and**
- c) A further report on progress in respect of the Review then be made after six months with consideration then being given to the need for any further reports to be made.**

47. JOINT SCRUTINY REVIEW: TRANSITION FROM LEAVING CARE TO ADULT LIFE

The Committee considered progress of the Joint Scrutiny Review on the Transition from Leaving Care to Adult Life.

The Chair of the Review Group, Councillor Mrs J.E. Pemberton, reported that at the first meeting of the review group the terms of reference and desired outcomes had been considered. The Group considered that the issues involved were complex and worthy of detailed consideration and a number of further key themes were identified and these were set out in the agenda report. It was decided that it was not possible to complete this piece of work to a satisfactory standard in sufficient time to report to both Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee and this Committee as originally anticipated. The Review Group therefore recommended that the work be taken forward to the 2007/08 work programmes of both the Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee and the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.

The Director of Children's Services agreed that this was a prudent course of action and highlighted that information and outcomes arising from a recent workshop on Corporate Parenting could be utilised by the Review Group when it was re-established following the elections.

**RESOLVED:
THAT:**

- (a) the report be noted and the Joint Scrutiny Review on the Transition from Leaving Care to Adult Life be taken forward in the 2007/08 work programme for Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing and Children's Services Scrutiny Committees;**
- (b) this Review remains a Joint Review between the two Scrutiny Committees under the wider leadership of Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee; and**
- (c) following the establishment of Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee for 2007/08, a new Review Group be established comprising membership from both Scrutiny Committees.**

48. SUMMARY OF ACTION IN RESPONSE TO SCRUTINY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee were invited to note progress against recommendations made by the Committee.

The Democratic Services Officer reported that in preparing for the current round of meetings some scrutiny Chairmen had requested a round up of all the recommendations made in addition to those made as part of scrutiny reviews. A list which attempted to give effect to this, together with an indication of resultant actions or outcomes, had been included in the agenda.

The Committee agreed that it would be useful if such information appeared as part of the appendix to the Committee work programme.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and future reports appear as part of the appendix to the Committee work programme.

49. CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME.

The Committee considered its work programme.

RESOLVED: That subject to the inclusion of the Review of Transition from Leaving Care to Adult Life identified at Minutes No. 47 into the programme for June and noting the expected Executive's response to the Behaviour and Discipline in Herefordshire Schools Review identified at minute No. 46 , the work programme be approved and reported to Strategic Monitoring Committee.

50. URGENT ITEM - SUE FIENNES, DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The Chairman and Committee paid tribute to Sue Fiennes, Director of Children's Services.

The Chairman reported that Sue Fiennes would be retiring at the end of the month after 5 years, formerly as Director of Social Care and latterly as Director Children's Services for Herefordshire. He commented that Ms Fiennes had been a driving force behind many of the positive achievements in Herefordshire schools. The Committee wished her a long and happy retirement.

51. URGENT ITEM - COUNCILLOR D. W. RULE M.B.E

The Chairman and Committee paid tribute to Councillor D.W. Rule MBE, Cabinet Member (Children and Young People).

The Chairman reported that Councillor D.W. Rule would not be seeking re-election in the May elections. The Chairman thanked Councillor Rule for his extremely hard work as Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) and formerly Cabinet Member (Education). The Committee wished him a long and happy retirement.

The meeting ended at 11.25 a.m.

CHAIRMAN