

MINUTES of the meeting of Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at : The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Tuesday, 22nd January, 2008 at 2.30 p.m.

Present:	Councillor	SJ Robertson (Chairman)
	Councillor	WU Attfield (Vice Chairman)
	Councillors	DW Greenow, G Lucas, JE Pemberton, RV Stockton, JK Swinburne, AM Toon, WJ Walling, PJ Watts and JD Woodward
	Church Members	J.D. Griffin
	Parent Governor Members	Mr R Stevenson and Mr A Wood
	Teacher Representatives	Mr C Lewandowski (Teacher Representative)
	Headteacher Representatives	Mrs D Strutt (Secondary Schools)
	Community Representatives	Ms K Berry (Connexions), Ms D Scott (The Alliance) and Mrs H Tyler (Foster Care representative)

In attendance: Councillors: GFM Dawe, PJ Edwards, JP French, AE Gray, JA Hyde (Cabinet Member - Children's Services), TM James, MD Lloyd-Hayes, RI Matthews, AT Oliver, RJ Phillips and A Seldon

31. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors: ME Cooper and Brig P Jones CBE.

32. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor PJ Watts substituted for Councillor ME Cooper and Councillor DW Greenow for Councillor Brig P Jones CBE.

33. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declaration were made:

Councillor W U Attfield	Personal items 9 & 11	High School Governor
Councillor SJ Robertson	Personal items 9 & 11	Primary School Governor
Councillor AM Toon	Personal items 9 & 11	Primary School Governor
Councillor JD Woodward	Personal items 9 & 11	Primary School Governor
Councillor RV Stockton	Personal items	Primary School Governor

	9 & 11	
Councillor JK Swinburne	Personal items 9 & 11	Primary School Governor
Councillor JE Pemberton	Personal items 9 & 11	Primary School Governor
Mr RI Stevenson	Personal items 9 & 11	Primary School Governor
Mr A Wood	Personal items 9 & 11	Special School Governor
Mr C Lewandowski	Personal items 9 & 11	High School Teacher and Governor
Mrs D Strutt	Personal items 9 & 11	High School Head and Governor
Councillor RJ Phillips	Personal items 9 & 11	High School Governor

34. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That

- a) subject to the inclusion at minute No. 19 an additional part to the resolution that c) a report on the Business case for the Academy be considered by the Committee, the minutes of the meeting held on 25th September, 2007, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.
- b) the minutes of the meetings held on 5th October, 2007, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman

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

No suggestions were made by Members of the public.

36. LEADING ASPECT AWARD

The Committee noted that the Council had received a Leading Aspect Award in recognition of the county-wide impact that the Council's work had had on its schools across all phases.

The Committee appreciated the work done by schools, the communities and officers in achieving this award.

37. PRESENTATION BY CABINET MEMBER - CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The Committee received a presentation by the Cabinet Member – Children's Services, informing of the policy issues affecting this programme area and main priorities.

The Cabinet Member – Children's Services gave a presentation to the Committee. Some of the principle points from the presentation were:

- The Services would continue progress with the five outcome areas identified in the Every Child Matters agenda but also: to make further progress in applying the 'Team Around the Child'; progressing the Common Assessment Framework; make changes to working practices (information sharing/ICT and workforce reform); ensure the further involvement of children and young

people in strategic issues and improve targeted youth support and addressing changes to funding streams.

- Address any outstanding issues identified from the Joint Area Review 2005 (JAR) and the Annual Performance Assessment (APA), referred to in a later agenda item.
- Key issues identified for the coming year were: greater partnership working through the Children's Trust and PST; the development of a new Local Children's Plan by April 2008; reorganisation of the Children's Services Directorate to provide services 'around the child'; provide improved service delivery and outcomes; tackle budget pressures and address staff retention, recruitment and development. The review of school places would need to be progressed and was the subject of a later agenda item.
- Financial – consideration would need to be given to schools delegated budgets; the Directorate's budgets; Children's Trust commissioning arrangements; financial arrangements under the Local Area Agreement and budget pressures due to the number and cost of out of County placements.

Questioned on the retention and training of staff the Committee were informed that, where appropriate, efforts were being made to develop existing staff, otherwise recruitment was sought from various sources.

Responding to questions on the production of a business case for the Wyebridge Sports College Academy project and whether an 'academy' was the right choice the Committee were informed that the business case was still being compiled, however, the academy option offered £20m of capital investment to the area.

The Committee noted that the Children's Trust Board comprised of representatives of key partners concerned with the delivery of services to children. The Director of Children's Services reported that The Children's Trust Board worked collaboratively to steer and monitor the commissioning of services for children. The link between the Children's Trust Board and Council was through the Director of Children's Services.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member – Children's Service, for her presentation and the Committee noted the position.

38. REVIEW OF PROVISION OF SCHOOL PLACES: PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee received a report on the Review of School Places.

The Director of Children's Services reported that since publication of the agenda the proposals for the future provision of school places had been withdrawn for reconsideration. She reported that consultation at a strategic level, rather than at individual school level, had been ongoing for some time with school headteachers, and this strategic level information had been shared with Members of the Executive. The paper that had been published, which named individual schools, had been a professional paper putting forward informal proposals for consultation.

The Committee heard that the proposals had been withdrawn to allow more time for consultation; detailed research and for independent verification to be undertaken before re-drafted proposals could be put to Cabinet for consideration in September 2008.

The Leader of the Council highlighted the difficult position the Council was in due to the falling number of pupils on roll and resultant funding pressures which would have to be addressed. The proposals as published had been politically unacceptable and had been withdrawn for reassessment.

The Chief Executive spoke of the need to ensure that the concerns of schools and communities were heard during the early stages in the consultation and therefore more time had been given for views to be put forward.

The Committee debated a range of issues including: when the Executive had received the published proposals; the timing of the member briefing to hear about the proposals; that school Heads had requested a set of proposals for debate; whether the statistics used were up to date and included accurate birth rate and immigration figures; how the process used so far compared with government guidance on schools reviews; the status of the proposals – were they a fait accompli?, and whether the proposals should have indicated the financial implications.

The Chairman reported that a number of written public questions had been received on this item, however, as events had changed written responses would be made.

Responding to a public question on how the proposals promoted the need to ensure that pupils, and the money that followed them, stayed in the county rather than be attracted to out of county schools, the Director of Children's Services acknowledged that there would be cross-border issues, however, reciprocal notification and discussion arrangements on any proposals were in place with neighbouring authorities.

The Committee noted the current position and requested that an update including a revised timetable for the review be brought to its next meeting.

The Committee also expressed its wish to scrutinise the revised draft proposals prior to the Executive issuing them for public consultation. The Committee also highlighted the need for all elected members to be kept informed throughout the review process.

RESOLVED: That

- a) an update, including a revised timetable for the review be brought to the next meeting;**
- b) the Executives proposals be scrutinised prior to being released for public consultation; and**
- c) all Members of the Council be kept informed through out the review process**
- d) the written public questions be acknowledged.**

The Committee adjourned for 13 minutes and reconvened at 4.30 pm.

39. ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT (APA) - UPDATE

The Committee were informed of the outcome of the Annual Performance Assessment (APA) process in Children's Services and the new priorities.

The Director of Children's Services reminded the Committee that following the Joint Area Review (JAR) inspection in 2005 the Authority had been in formal intervention with GOWM. A summary of the strengths and areas for development, by outcome, together with the overall recommendations from the APA inspection were set out in the report. She reported that learning from the inspection process and resultant judgements the Children's Services Directorate would be working with key partners to ensure the new Children and Young People's Plan effectively met the priorities. Consultation on the draft plan had begun and involved discussion with other partners together with children and young people.

She further reported that as a result of the 2007 APA inspection, GOWM had formally confirmed that Children's Services were no longer in formal intervention and this recommendation had been confirmed by the government Minister. The Ofsted letter of 26 November 2007 was appended to the agenda report. The overall recommendations from the APA were set out in the agenda report but she highlighted that further work was needed with partners to deliver the revised strategy for a coherent area-wide 14-19 curriculum that provided access to a wider range of vocational courses.

The Committee noted that while the local referral rate of children in need had significantly risen it was still below that of national and comparable Council averages. The Director of Children's Services reported that independently of the APA outcome the implications of the referral system were being looked at and a report would be made to Cabinet.

Issues identified around CRB checks were multi-agency issues, however, the Council had tightened up its procedures.

Responding to questions concerning the APA recommendation 'improve dental health of children and young people' the Director of Children's Services reported that the dental health of children needed addressing, particularly for those under 5 years of age, and while fluoridation of the water could be seen as the quickest means to tackle the problem there were financial, regional and public choice issues to be taken into consideration.

Responding to a question concerning possible funding cuts to the voluntary sector and whether social workers would continue the work currently being undertaken, the Director of Children's Services responded that this commissioning issue was being looked at by the Children's Trust Board and she undertook to provide members with further information.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

40. YOUTH SERVICE UPDATE: TARGETED YOUTH SUPPORT AND POSITIVE ACTIVITIES

The Committee received an update on the performance of the Youth Service within the context of Every Child Matters (ECM) framework and informed of national changes in youth work particularly the increased emphasis on Targeted Youth Support for vulnerable young people and new legislation on the provision of Positive Activities.

The Community Youth Service Manager reported upon: the contribution made by the Service to the Positive Contribution Outcome area within the Every Child Matters (ECM) Outcome framework; the four key performance indicators set by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and additional indicators set by Ofsted; partnership working; work undertaken in the six geographical areas; budgets, including staff and building costs, and the effect of staff vacancies on the service. Details of these issues were set out in the agenda report.

He also reported that the government, as part of the ECM agenda for teenagers, had announced two new policy initiatives: **Targeted Youth Support (TYS)** (detailed further in appendix 1 to the report) and **Positive Activities – Aiming High** a ten year strategy, that directly affected the work of youth services as well as other service providers. These initiatives were part of the wider integration agenda for all

children's services which is more broadly termed **Integrated Youth Support Services (IYSS)** and aimed to increase the co-ordination of all youth support activities to enable agencies to work together better, reduce duplication and avoid gaps in provision. Details of these initiatives were also set out in the report.

The Committee noted the need to move away from the 'leisure provider for young people' towards the governments target driven service.

Questioned on staff vacancy rates the Committee were informed that performance had been effected by the high turnover rate of staff leaving the Services together with resultant budget expenditure for advertising vacancies. Action to address this was contained in the Services Plan 2007-8, (appended to the agenda report) however, it was reported that pay rates in the Service were low compared to other authorities.

The Director of Children's Services reported that there was no new money to support the changes in the Service and therefore a refocusing of the Service was needed. She acknowledged that some elements of funding were available via Extended Schools funding, which had been delegated to schools. While a co-ordinator had been appointed to advise schools in the effective use of the funding this had met with varying degrees of success. The Schools Forum are to consider clawing back the funding to use centrally.

The Committee noted comments that a lack of resources in Youth Services may only move problems into other areas e.g. youth crime and vandalism.

RESOLVED That

- a) **the report be noted and in view of the additional pressures on the Service the Executive be requested as a matter of urgency to review the level of funding to the Youth Service; and**
- b) **a further report be brought to a future Committee updating on how the Youth Service planed to respond to the changes and government initiatives.**

41. ARRANGEMENTS FOR SCHOOL MEALS PROVISION

The Committee were informed of the arrangements for School Meals provision and notified of the take-up of school meals in the County.

Arising from discussion at the meeting on 5th October 2007 (Minute No.26 - Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2007/08) the Property Services Manager presented a report setting out: the Council's School Meals Policy; the percentage of school meal take-up; the Healthy School Meals draft policy Framework; details of contractors and financial details (exempt appendix to the report); initiatives and work done to improve the standard of meals in schools.

The Committee noted that from September 2008 any child in a County school would be able to request a hot school meal. In recognition of this the Council had started to invest in kitchens in high schools in order to increase their capacity to provide meals for the primary schools within their catchment area. The strategic framework for the investment was set out in the policy statement 'Health School Meals for Herefordshire draft policy Framework' at appendix 4 to the agenda report. Accordingly works had been undertaken at John Masefield High, John Kyrle High and Aylestone High Schools. Work to three further High Schools would be considered in 2008.

In considering the arrangements for school meal provision, including proposed capital expenditure on some school kitchens, the Committee identified the need for caution to be exercised, given the possible implications of the review of the provision of school places, discussed earlier at agenda item 9 (minute No.38).

The Committee noted that contracts undertaken by the former Herefordshire Jarvis Services (HJS) had not been taken up by Amey Wye Valley Limited (AWV) and that all contracts were currently with private companies. It was further noted that in some instances assistance with capital outlay had been given to small companies when starting up a contract.

The Committee noted that there were 36 breakfast clubs currently operating within schools and that the intention was to encourage more schools to participate through the Extended Schools agenda.

Responding to questions on the cost of a meal, snack or beverage the Committee noted that while there was a standard cost for items, it was the school Governors that actually set the item costs for their school. The Committee wished to examine the cost of items to the pupils and requested comparative details from around the County e.g. the cost to a pupil of a bottle of water.

RESOLVED That

- a) **the report be noted and, given the possible implications of the review of the provision of school places, the need for caution to be exercised be highlighted to the Executive when considering improvements to school kitchen facilities; and**
- b) **Committee Members be provided with comparative costs of meals, snacks or beverages across the County.**

42. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2007/08

The Committee received a report on the revenue budget's financial position for Children & Young People's Directorate as at the end of December 2007 and were provided with projections to the end of the financial year.

The Finance Manager reported that as of the end of December 2007 an overspend of £475k was projected. This compared with a projected overspend of £703k in the November Integrated Performance Report. Further detail of the change in the budget profiles, including an indication of budget pressures were set out in the agenda report and appendix.

The Committee noted that a typical external agency placement of a child with complex need on average cost £150,000 per annum, however, a severe complex need case could cost in the region of £300,000 per annum.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

43. CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2007/08

The Committee received a report on the capital budget financial position for Children and Young People's Directorate.

The Capital programme budget monitoring summary position was set out in the report and full details of expenditure on Children and Young People's projects were listed in appendix 1 to the report.

The Finance Manager reported that the revised figure of just over £12m was fully

resourced from a combination of DCSF grant; borrowing approvals supported as part of the Council's capital programme; capital receipts and Section 106 monies. Brief details of significant schemes (over £500k) were set out in the report together with a number of other budget changes.

In view of the review of school places (discussed earlier at minute No 38) a concern was raised regarding the advisability of entering into a tender for the replacement of The Minster College. The Committee noted that under the review, while the number on roll and catchment areas may change, the size and design was not anticipated to change.

Questioned on expenditure for 'Virtual Learning' the Committee noted that this was grant funded and managed by Community Services.

Referring to Appendix 1 to the report the Committee noted that the 'spend to date' for 'Ledbury Primary – extension' related to the cumulative expenditure to date. Also that expenditure against the item: 'site acquisition – Cradley', related to the Council's contribution to the school Governors for the playing field.

Responding to concerns regarding the management of projects the Director of Children's Services reported that projects were now managed through the Corporate Management Team.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

44. PERFORMANCE DIGEST - QUARTER 2 - 2007/2008

The Committee considered the Quarter 2 Performance Digest for Children's Services (July to September 2007) and key areas specifically highlighted arising from the performance for the second quarter.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

45. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme.

The Chairman reported that a number of concerns had been raised with her regarding the Wyebridge Sports College Academy Project. She proposed that Councillors: A M Toon; ME Cooper; JD Woodward, together with herself, meet with key officers to discuss matters of concern.

Responding to Members wishes to receive a range of background information on the service the Director of Children's Services reported that following discussion with the Chairman a series of information seminars would be held for Members and co-opted-members based on specific themes.

The Committee had earlier identified that it wished to receive reports on the review of school places (minute No 38) and the Youth Service (minute No 40).

RESOLVED: That

- a) **The Chairman, together with Councillor AM Toon; ME Cooper and JD Woodward meet with officers to discuss issues of concern regarding the Wyebridge Academy; and**
- b) **following consultation with the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Director of Children's Services, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services adjust the work programme accordingly**

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**and the programme be referred to Strategic Monitoring
Committee.**

The meeting ended at 6.07 p.m.

CHAIRMAN

