

MINUTES of the meeting of Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Tuesday, 18th November, 2008 at 2.00 p.m.

Present:	Councillor	SJ Robertson (Chairman)
	Councillor	WU Attfield (Vice Chairman)
	Councillors	ME Cooper, G Lucas, JE Pemberton, WJ Walling and JD Woodward
	Church Members	Mr T Leach (Church of England)
	Parent Governor Members	Mr R Stevenson (Primary School Governors) and Mr A Wood (Special School Governors)
	Headteacher Representatives	Mrs D Strutt (Secondary School Headteachers) Mrs O R Evans (Special Schools)
	Community Representatives	Ms H Tank (The Alliance)

In attendance: Councillors WLS Bowen, JA Hyde (Cabinet Member - Children's Services) and PD Price (Cabinet Member – ICT, Education and Achievement)

22. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from: Ms K Berry; Councillor BA Durkin; Mr JD Griffin Councillor Brig P Jones CBE; Mr N Parker.

23. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no named substitutes.

24. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

25. MINUTES

RESOLVED: Subject to recording apologies from Councillor JA Hyde (Cabinet Member Children's Services) the minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2008 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

No suggestions were received from members of the public.

27. EXTENDED SCHOOLS IN HEREFORDSHIRE

The Committee considered progress towards the implementation of extended services in and around schools in Herefordshire.

The Early Years and Extended Services Manager presented her report setting out the financial position; background to the provision of the extended service and set out its context in supporting the Every Child Matters agenda. The expectation by the DCSF was that by 2010 every school will offer under a 'core offer': high quality childcare; a varied menu of activities; parenting support; swift, easy and effective referral to a wide range of support services and wider community access to ICT sports and arts facilities. The report also described how the Council was working with its partners to deliver the service and set out that under the new Ofsted inspection framework the effectiveness of extended schools services and educational and support programmes would be evaluated and reported on by Ofsted.

She further reported that by September 2008 the DCSF expected 50% of primary and 33% of secondary schools to be delivering the full core offer. Herefordshire had achieved this target with 64% of primary and 100% secondary schools offering the full core offer. She updated the figures in the report at paragraph 14 by commenting that the actual number of primary schools delivering the core offer was now 67 and that the Steiner Academy, Hereford, would need to be included in the overall figures.

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

- The Committee acknowledged that a lot of hard work had gone on to ensure that the delivery programme was on track. However, a member questioned whether schools were actually delivering it on the ground as a number of concerns had been raised. The Cabinet Member (Children's Services) invited the Member to discuss the concerns with her.
- Information was requested concerning which schools were delivering and which were not so that Members could make further enquiries. The Director agreed that it may help Members to undertake an informal visit to schools to see the delivery first hand.
- The Committee noted that due to limited resources, particularly in rural areas, some schools were working to provide services from within their cluster rather than try to provide the full core offer from every school.
- Referring to a chart entitled 'extended schools cluster report' handed out at the meeting, it was clarified that 'full' or 'sustainable' referred to whether the provision at the schools was provided (full) or whether that provision was considered 'sustainable' to 2010 and beyond.
- Responding to whether there was any underlying pattern to those school (19) currently not involved in providing services, the Committee were informed that, no pattern had been detected other than they were mainly rural schools where difficulties had occurred in appointing Extended Schools Co-ordinators to progress the work at a local level.
- The Chairman and Cabinet Member (Children's Services) reported on their recent attendance at a conference when they had established that in comparison with other Local Authorities Herefordshire was going well in its Extended School provision, however, they acknowledged that more needed to be achieved.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the Director of Children's Services arrange for Members of the Committee to undertake an informal visit to see the provision of Extended School Services.

28. EARLY YEARS IN HEREFORDSHIRE

The Committee received an overview of Early Years provision with a focus on Children's Centres, number of childcare settings and funding linked to both of these themes and considered progress against objectives.

The Early Years and Extended Services Manager reported that all Sure Start, Early Years and Childcare Grant (SSEYCG) funding should support the delivery of the Government's Ten Year Strategy for Childcare, Choice for parents. The strategy sets out the Government's vision to ensure that every child gets the best possible start in life and to give parents more choice about how to balance work and family life. This was a large area of work and her report set out the headlines in relation to the capital and revenue funding available; the requirements placed on the local authorities and their partners in health services and Job Centre Plus; the key priorities and challenges, and set out some of the implications for Herefordshire. She further reported that the government allocation for Children's Centres now covered phase three and was intended to support refurbishment rather than new build. The number of Childcare setting was adequate for the County, however, the settings would be closely monitored to ensure that they were in the right locations and could, if necessary, provide cover for each other. All childcare settings had covered the basic training course and an audit would now be undertaken to ensure that the training was making a positive difference to the level of provision. Increased funding levels were anticipated in 2009 to ensure the transformation of the disabled children's short break service. Children's Centres in phases 1 and 2 were on target and phase 3 included proposals for a centre in the north of the County to meet an identified need in the Wigmore area.

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

- Questioned on how the Discretionary Grant U4 (£459,390) was distributed the Committee were informed that a panel from the Early Years Forum made the allocation based on the pattern of spend over previous years.
- Responding to what services were provided and whether all Children's Centres would provide them, the Committee were referred to the Council publication 'Children's Centres in Herefordshire: what we have achieved so far...'. The Early Years and Extended Services Manager undertook to provide the details requested and include the reasons why some Centres would be unable to offer the full service.
- It was noted that the government had made local authorities responsible for ensuring 'hard to reach families' were contacted and informed about the service, which many authorities were finding difficult. The Committee noted that wherever appropriate service providers (agencies and voluntary organisations) also undertook home visits. Close links were established, particularly with health visitors, to ensure the early identification of any child/family issues.
- While initial services were being provided in the Golden Valley by a range of existing providers in Kingstone, a more permanent Children's Centre was being developed at Peterchurch.
- The Committee noted that performance benchmarking against other authorities was being investigated.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the Committee be provided with information on the range of services provided, and the limitations experienced, by each Children's Centre.

29. PERFORMANCE DIGEST - APRIL - SEPTEMBER 2008/2009

The Committee considered the Performance Digest for Children's Services for the

half year April to September 2008.

The Performance Improvement Manager presented her agenda report which drew the Committees attention to key areas in each of the outcome areas based on Every Child Matters together with Service Management.

In relation to Being Healthy she reported that many of the indicators for this outcome area relied on national or local survey information. The response national Telus3 survey had received such a low response that the results could not be used to measure the indicators. The Authority were looking at undertaking its own survey work.

Questions were raised regarding indicator Staying Safe 2054SC/DIS 1111 – percentage of looked after children fostered by relatives or friends, and in particular how many children were cared for by unofficial carers e.g. other than kinship carers or foster carers. The Director of Children's Services undertook to report to a future meeting.

On a similar theme reference was made to a concern identified in the Scrutiny Review of the Transition from Leaving Care to Adult Life regarding the uncertain number of young people who are resident in Herefordshire but in the care of other local authorities. The Cabinet Member (Children's Services) reported that repeated requests for information concerning this issue had been made to the DCSF.

The Chairman reported that reference had been made at Strategic Monitoring Committee to the appointment of Social Workers and the timeliness of assessments and percentage of referrals. The Committee noted that as a result of recruitment campaigns the authority was on target to increase the number of social workers on the establishment to 55 against the target of 57. The Service were mindful of the need to be vigilant and were currently reviewing CRBs and checking practices.

In relation to Enjoy and Achieve, the Committee noted that a number of indicators related to exam results and targets were set nationally.

The Performance Improvement Manager reported that the percentage of 16-18 year olds who were not in education, employment or training (NI117 and LAA indicator) had risen as at the end of Quarter 2 due to young people leaving school and colleges at the end of the academic year. A more accurate picture was expected at the end of Quarter 3.

Questioned on the strategy for securing suitable accommodation for young offenders (Achieve Economic Well-Being NI 46) the Performance Improvement Manager undertook to provide further information.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and an item be added to the work programme for future debate concerning the number of children cared for by unofficial carers.

30. APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS AS CHAMPION OR VICE-CHAMPION FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee considered appointing Councillors on the Committee as Champion or Vice-Champion for Children's Services Scrutiny Committee based on the five areas of Every Child Matters.

The Director of Children's Services welcomed the initiative as it would provide

Committee Members with further opportunities to learn about fast moving areas of work in the Service.

Following discussion about the intentions inferred by the title Champion and the need for clearer terms of reference it was suggested the issue be deferred until all Councillors on the Committee were in attendance.

Reference was made to the benefit governors at Whitecross High School derived from undertaking a similar shadowing role.

RESOLVED: that the title Champion be reconsidered and the terms of reference be reviewed and a further report be brought to Committee.

31. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme.

Concerns were raised regarding alleged inequities in the Statemented and Banded funding system, with examples given of schools in the Wigmore school cluster being adversely effected. The Church of England Diocese representative also relayed a number of issues highlighted to him and undertook to provide details. The Committee noted that a report on statemented and banded funding was scheduled for the December meeting.

The Chairman reported that following discussion with the Director of Children's Services the Director intends to provide a list of key issues for the Committee to consider including in its work programme. The issues will be based on the Every Child Matters outcomes and Council objectives.

The Head of Planning, Performance and Development requested that the school transport item, scheduled for the December 2008 meeting, be deferred until such time as the guidance expected from government had been received and a considered report could be made.

RESOLVED: That

- a) **Reports on 'Children cared for by unofficial carers' (referred to in minute No29) and Reconsideration of the appointment of Children's Services Scrutiny Champions (referred to in Minute No 30) be included in the Committee work programme.**
- b) **The report on School transport including reference to the Yellow Buss Scheme be deferred until the receipt of government guidance.**
- c) **Subject to be above amendments the work programme be noted and reported to Strategic Monitoring Committee.**

The meeting ended at 3.32 p.m.

CHAIRMAN

