

MINUTES of the meeting of Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday 30 March 2009 at 10.00 am

Present:	Councillor	SJ Robertson (Chairman)
	Councillor	WU Attfield (Vice Chairman)
	Councillors	ME Cooper, PGH Cutter, BA Durkin, G Lucas, JE Pemberton, RV Stockton, AM Toon and JD Woodward
	Church Members	none
	Parent Governor Members	Mr A Wood (Special School Governors)
	Teacher Representatives	Mr M Harrison (Teacher Representative)
	Headteacher Representatives	Mrs D Coates (Primary Headteachers), Mrs OR Evans (Special Schools) and Mrs D Strutt (Secondary School Headteachers)
	Community Representatives	Ms K Berry (Connexions) and Ms H Tank (The Alliance)

In attendance: Councillors PJ Edwards, JA Hyde (Cabinet Member Children's Services), TM James and PD Price (Cabinet Member ICT, Education and Achievement)

42. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from: Councillor Brig P Jones CBE, Mr T Leach, Mr C Mutton, Mr N Parker, Councillor W J Walling.

It was noted that Mr Griffin (Roman Catholic Church member) had moved out of county and had resigned and that Mr R Stevenson (primary school governor) had resigned.

43. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor P Cutter substituted for Councillor Brig P Jones CBE and Mrs D Coates substituted for Mr C Mutton.

44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor A Toon declared a personal interest in agenda item 9 – Capital Budget Report – as a governor of Trinity School.

While not an interest Ms H Tank briefly informed the Committee of her role on the Alliance as it related to this Committee.

45. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2008 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

No suggestions were received from Members of the public.

47. OFSTED APA OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES 2008

The Committee received an update on the outcome of the 2008 Annual Performance Assessment (APA) of services for children and young people in Herefordshire Council.

The Director of Children's Services presented her report on the APA letter from Ofsted, a copy of which had been appended to the agenda report. She commented that continuing progress was being made with most outcomes having improved since the last APA, with specific improvements being made in grades awarded for 'capacity to improve', including the management of services for Children and Young People (CYP) and Achieving Economic Well Being. She highlighted that with increased public awareness following the 'Haringey Baby P' case, the greatest risk was the area of safeguarding. A recent external review of safeguarding had been commissioned and was the subject of a later agenda report. The Director reported that she was leading the Local Safeguarding Board for Children to ensure it was appropriately focussed on developing good practice and quality assurance across agencies.

During the course of scrutinising the report the following principal points were noted:

- The Committee acknowledged that, overall, good progress was being made in the service, however, concern was raised regarding banded/statemented funding. The Director of Children's Services reported that work in this area was ongoing with schools being consulted later in the year and she accepted that the funding for children with special needs needed to be closely monitored.
- Referring to the 'Making a positive Contribution' weakness 'dissatisfaction amongst young people with the range of local activities...' it was reported that the new City Skateboard Park was already attracting young people from around the region. The Cabinet Member (Children's Services) reported that while still in its early stages improved levels of youth work was on-going in Aylestone Ward.
- The Director of Children's Services acknowledged that, when compared to the wide range of services provided by the Directorate, some specific comments reported within the Performance Assessment may seem to conflict. Concerning a question on the number of children in the looked after sector she responded there were currently 139, being a slight increase on previously reported figures.
- Questioned on the number of children's social work staff in the directorate, the Committee were informed there were 57 (full time and agency) undertaking a range of work.
- In response to a question concerning the number of 'out of County placements' both Herefordshire children placed out of County and children placed into the County, officers undertook to provide the Committee with the information.
- Referring to 'Achieving economic well-being' weakness 'people who progress

to work based learning...' concern was raised over the reliability of data collection, particularly around those young people who go on to college and then drop out. The Committee were informed that in such instances concerning Herefordshire students, colleges notify Connexions, who then follow up the matter with the student.

- Referring to 'Being Healthy' '...rising number of hospital admissions for alcohol misuse' comment was made that there seemed to be an increase in alcoholic drink cans/bottles in places where youths congregate. It was further commented that, through the Regulatory Committee, a firm line was being taken against premises that contravened the sale of alcohol laws.

RESOLVED: That

- a) **the Committee noted the content of the report and commended the staff and partners on the progress made this year; and**
- b) **The Committee noted the areas for improvement for the coming year – particularly safeguarding – in preparation for the forth coming anticipated CAA inspection in 2009.**

48. SAFEGUARDING ACTION PLAN

The Committee noted the actions taken by the Director of Children's Services and Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Board (HSCB) in regard to improving the effectiveness of safeguarding children arrangements in the County.

The Director of Children's Services reported that following the APA Inspection in October 2008 (see previous Minute) she had commissioned a review to examine the Directorate's safeguarding arrangements and interdependencies with the HSCB. The review had been carried out by an independent consultant. The consultant had found that there were some specific areas that required improvement and these were within the directorate at levels of casework; management; ICT and performance management and in the role of the Children's Trust and Safeguarding Board. She further reported that all the recommendation made by the consultant had been gathered into a full and detailed action plan which had been attached to the agenda report at appendix 1. The action plan had been approved by the HSCB and would continue to be closely monitored by the HSCB and the directorate leadership team.

On scrutinising the report the following principal points were noted:

- The Director was commended for the clarity of the Action Plan.
- The Committee requested that regular reports on actions to achieve the Safeguarding Action Plan be scheduled into the Committee work programme.
- Questioned on progress with Ref 3.1 concerning CRB checks, the Director of Children's Services reported that a CRB Team had been set up within Human Resources (HR). The Directorate were working with HR to ensure that all necessary staff, including school personnel, had up to date CRBs. Headteachers had also been briefed and strong action was being taken to ensure personnel complied. The Committee requested a briefing note on the number of CRB checks undertaken in the connection with the directorate.
- The Committee further noted that a CRB check had to be undertaken for each individual setting the person went into and therefore one CRB was not transferable.

RESOLVED: That

- a) **The Committee noted the report and contents of the Safeguarding Action Plan;**

- b) Regular update reports on actions to achieve the Safeguarding Action Plan be scheduled into the Committee Work Plan; and
- c) A committee briefing note be produced on the number of CRB checks undertaken in connection with the Directorate.

49. COMPREHENSIVE AREA ASSESSMENT AND PERFORMANCE DIGEST - OCTOBER- DECEMBER 2008/2009

The Committee received a summary of the proposals for assessing Children's Services under the Comprehensive Area Assessment and considered the Performance Digest for Children's Services for the third quarter, October to December 2008.

The Performance Improvement Manager reported that from 1st April 2009, the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) will replace the current Comprehensive Performance Assessment. The CAA will assess those outcomes delivered by councils working alone or in partnership. The starting point will be the locally agreed priorities in the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and the Herefordshire Sustainable Community Strategy. The CAA will assess the prospects for the future achievement of these priorities by the Council and its partners. The area of children and young people will be a key focus within the CAA and will have a rigorous inspection regime, summarised in the agenda report.

She also reported that Ofsted had now published its proposals for assessing Children's Services under the CAA and these were set out in the report. She further reported that there are six children related indicators in the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and the agenda report indicated the current position regarding those indicators. She highlighted concerns about meeting the target NI 117 for the reasons set out in the report.

During the course of scrutinising the report the following principal comments were noted

- Questioned on NI 117 (% of 16-18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET)) the Committee were informed that some post 16 provision was now on stream, however, pre 16 provision was still to be developed.
- Referring to Digest HCS28 the Committee noted that the survey, which had arisen from the Committee's scrutiny review of Behaviour and Discipline, had been undertaken with the resultant data now being analysed. The results were expected towards the end of April.
- Questioned on the recruitment and retention of social workers the Director of Children's Services reported that following the 'Haringey Baby P' case, nationally there had been a down turn in social care recruitment. In Herefordshire a number of approaches had been taken to recruitment and efforts would continue to attract suitable staff at all levels. She was pleased to announce that a new Head of Safeguarding and Vulnerable had been appointed. While it was reported that there were 55 social workers in post, the Committee requested a briefing note on the exact number and type (full time, part time or agency) of employment of Social Workers in the Directorate.
- Referring to Digest NI 117 – Substance misuse – it was questioned whether there was any correlation between alcohol and drug misuse and whether the statistics for each, when available, could be disaggregated. The Committee noted that in a number of cases alcohol had led to drug misuse. The Performance Improvement Manager undertook to look into how these statistics could be best presented.

- Commenting that 18 weeks was along time to wait for a referral (Digest BH02) the Committee noted that a lot of work had been done by the CAMHS team and there were currently no children on the waiting list. A grant bid had been made and, if successful, further work would be done through a number of high schools to target children earlier.
- The Director of Children's Services confirmed that exit interviews were offered to staff (Digest HR04).
- While noting that 'the number of families occupying bed and breakfast accommodation had achieved the target of zero for quarter 3', the Committee questioned where the families were being housed if, as had also been stated, 'this is despite the increase in the number of families accepted as homeless?'. The Director of Children's Services responded that more permanent accommodation had been found, however, she undertook to provide further information.
- Responding to whether a briefing note had been provided on children's dental waiting lists, as requested at a previous meeting, the Democratic Services Officer undertook to investigate.
- Referring to Digest indicator 6014SC, the Performance Improvement Manager reported that difficulties had arisen in recruiting foster carers. Questioned further the Committee were informed that this had related to attracting foster carers for all ages but particularly caring for young people. The Cabinet Member (Children's Services) reported that part of the problem had been the level of remuneration to the foster carer, however, following review Herefordshire was now inline with its neighbouring counties in this respect.

RESOLVED: That

- a) **The performance achieved for the third quarter of 2008/09 be noted;**
- b) **Clarification be provided on the exact number and employment type of Social Workers in the directorate;**
- c) **A Committee briefing note be produced outlining the range and type of provision offered to homelessness families; and**
- d) **The provision of a briefing note on Children's dental waiting lists be investigated.**

50. CAPITAL BUDGET REPORT 2008/9

The Committee considered the Capital budget position for 2008/09 for the Children & Young People's Directorate and were provided with detailed information on variances between planned expenditure and the forecast outturn at 31 March 2009.

The Schools Access and Planning Manager presented the agenda report. Details of expenditure on capital projects were set out in the appendix. He reported that while the planned spend for 2008/9 had been £17.6m the actual forecast spend was £14.6m. The bulk of the variances of £3.0m was accounted for by a small number of schemes, the balances for which would be carried forward to 2009/10. He highlighted that as a result of the contractor for the Riverside school rebuild scheme going into administration, resulting in several months delay to the build programme, the budget spend for the project had been re-profiled.

The Committee noted that the Harnessing Technology Grant, referred to at paragraph 8.10, was entirely capital based.

Questioned whether the Bradbury Lines Section 106 funding (£182,443) would be lost, it was claimed that Central Planning Committee had ring-fenced the sum to improve the LEA pool, the Schools Access and Planning Manager reported that the sum was for education facilities and a number of possible beneficiaries in the area

had been identified. Continuing the LEA Pool theme the Committee requested a briefing note on Key Stage 2 pupil attainment in swimming.

Responding to whether local Members had been consulted concerning 'The Coughton' (see report para 8.7.5) the Director of Children's Services commented that ward Members would have been consulted, however, the priorities for the allocation of funding were set out in the Schools Asset Management Plan.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and:

- a) **A report setting out the Key Stage 2 pupil achievement in swimming be presented to the July Committee; and**
- b) **A copy of the Schools Asset Management Plan be placed in the Members Room Library.**

51. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2008/9

The Committee considered a report on the monitoring of the revenue budget for 2008/09 for the Children & Young People's Directorate.

The Finance Manager reported that based on expenditure to 28 February 2009 a revenue budget underspend of £567,000 was forecast arising mainly from savings in transport and active budget management by the Directorate. His report, which had been issued with the agenda, set out the areas of budget variation with commentary and provided a detailed budget analysis at appendix 1.

The Director of Children's Services reported that a bid would be made in accordance with the year end procedure to use any carry forward to facilitate the move to locality teams and restructure the Directorate.

The Committee noted that following a significant reduction in fuel prices since the summer, an underspend was now anticipated within the transport budget. However, the current uncertainty regarding the 14 – 19 provision may adversely impact future transport budgets.

Generally the levels of school balances in Herefordshire were reducing although nationally balances were increasing and future government action to impose a national claw back scheme remained a real possibility.

Questioned on Special Needs funding, and specifically the policy for supporting children with Autism, the Committee were informed that there was a wide continuum of disability within the term Autism and therefore assessments were made through statementing. Many such pupils could, and did, attend either main stream school or the Brookfield special school, however, in a very small number of cases pupils needed to be placed out of County for their education. The Committee requested further information on the number of Autistic children in the County and the policy for their education.

The Committee noted that, as the music service was self financing, the Council provided no financial support and hence a zero net budget. The £247,000 expenditure figure, stated in appendix 1, related to expenditure which was paid for by income received direct from schools and parents.

Responding to whether funding was available for 'gifted and talented' pupils the Committee were informed that the Standards Fund contained a small provision to schools as did the Specialist Schools Grant.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and a report setting out the number of Autistic children in the County and the policy for their education be presented to the July Committee meeting.

52. ESTABLISHING LINK ROLES FOR SCRUTINY MEMBERS TO SUPPORT EVERY CHILD MATTERS

The Committee considered the establishment of Scrutiny Link Members in support of Every Child Matters (ECM).

At a previous meeting the Chairman had suggested that there was a need to ensure that Committee members had a fuller understanding of the complex and diverse services the Children's Services directorate delivered across the County. It had been suggested that members of the Committee volunteer to align themselves to one of the five outcome areas of Every Child Matters. It was emphasised that these 'ECM Link Members' would only shadow or observe appropriate meetings when invited by officers. A suggested terms of reference for ECM Link Members was appended to the agenda report.

RESOLVED: That the Committee adopt the recommended format for the role and title of Link and Vice Link Member for ECM and the roles be established with immediate effect and the ECM Link Member role be reviewed in one year.

53. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme.

RESOLVED That subject to the inclusion of reports on the issues identified earlier the work programme be approved and reported to Strategic Monitoring Committee.

For July 2009:

- the Safeguarding Action Plan (referred to at Minute 48);
- Key Stage 2 achievement in swimming (referred to at Minute 50)
- the number of Autistic children in the County and the policy for their education (referred to in Minute 51)

For March 2010:

- Review of the ECM Link Member Role (referred to in Minute 52).

The meeting ended at 12.15 pm

CHAIRMAN

