

**MINUTES of the meeting of Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday 28 September 2009 at 10.00 am**

**Present:** Councillor WLS Bowen (Chairman)  
Councillor ME Cooper (Vice Chairman)

**Councillors:** BA Durkin, Brig P Jones CBE, MD Lloyd-Hayes, G Lucas, JE Pemberton, SJ Robertson, RV Stockton, AM Toon, WJ Walling,

**Co-opted Members:** Mr PF Burbidge, Mr M Harrisson and Ms H Tank

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

**16. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor WU Atfield; Mr T Leach; Mr N Parker; Mr T Plumer; Mr A Wood; Ms K Berry; Mrs OR Evans; Mr C Mutton and Mrs D Strutt.

The Committee noted that Mr Wood had resigned from the Committee on personal grounds and that following a change in the Chairmanship of HASH, Mrs Strutt would be replaced on the Committee by Mrs Catlow-Hawkins.

**17. NAMED SUBSTITUTES**

Councillor MD Lloyd-Hayes substituted for Councillor WU Atfield.

**18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following interests were declared:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Interest</b>	<b>Reason</b>
Councillor WLS Bowen	Personal	Governor – Kingsland CE Primary and Luston Primary schools.
Councillor M Cooper	Personal	Governor - John Masefield High School
Councillor B Durkin	Personal	Governor - Kings Caple Primary School
Councillor Bri P Jones CBE	Personal	Governor – The Minster, Leominster
Councillor G Lucas	Personal	Governor – Brampton Abbots CE Primary School
Councillor JE Pemberton	Personal	Governor – Hampton Dene Primary School
Councillor SJ Robertson	Personal	Governor - Burghill Community Primary School
Councillor RV Stockton	Personal	Governor - Colwall CE Primary School
Councillor AM Toon	Personal	Governor - Whitecross High School and Trinity Primary School.
Mr PF Burbidge	Personal	Governor – St Mary's RC High School

## 19. MINUTES

In the resolution for Minute 4 the word clarifying be substituted by clarification and in the second paragraph of Minute 7 reference to Career Policy be changed to read Care Policy.

**RESOLVED: That subject to the above amendments the minutes of the meeting held on 6 June 2009 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.**

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

No suggestions for scrutiny were made.

## 21. SCHOOL TASK GROUP PAPER

The Committee were invited to note and comment on the progress made by the Schools Task Group (STG) and the proposals for the consultation process for the STG paper.

The Director of Children's Services reported that the Schools Task Group, lead by an independent chair, had met with the purpose of drafting a paper outlining the next steps in the planning of educational provision in the County. The STG paper had been reported to Cabinet on 24 September and copies of the STG paper had been issued to Committee members prior to the meeting. Cabinet on 24 September approved the process and timescale for consultation on Schools Task Group paper, noted the process followed and progress made by the Schools Task Group in preparing the paper for consultation; and agreed that a further report be presented to Cabinet in November 2009.

The Director further reported that in a relatively short time period the STG had considered the major challenges facing the County being: the priority to continually improve the quality of educational outcomes; the impacts of falling rolls, surplus capacity and parental preference; financial realities and changes in school workforce.

The Cabinet Member (ICT Education and Achievement) commented that this was not just about closing schools but working to engage the public in the challenges that schools must face. The Cabinet Member (Children's Services) commented that representation concerning the low funding to Herefordshire would continue to be made at the f40 Group which represented a group of the poorest funded education authorities in England. On this point the Director agreed that while greater financial equality with other authorities should be sought, the County still needed to tackle the problem of falling pupil numbers.

Having attended a recent seminar for Council Members on the content of the consultation paper, a member complemented the Task Group on their work and the consultation paper produced. Other members agreed that the issue needed to be tackled in a realistic manner.

Questioned on whether account would be taken of the new homes proposed for Herefordshire the Committee were informed that regular meetings were held with colleagues in the Planning Service to ensure that the latest position could be included in considerations.

A point was made that accurate estimates of future pupil numbers was essential as once a school had been closed or mothballed it would be very difficult to reopen. The Director of Children's Services reported that the current indications were that for the foreseeable future pupil numbers were unlikely to return to the high levels of recent years.

The Committee noted that an increasing number of schools were experiencing financial problems and were receiving support, which was to the detriment of other schools. The current intention to continue the Small Schools Policy was noted.

**RESOLVED: That the Committee**

- (a) agreed with the process and timescale for consultation on the Schools Task Group paper;**
- (b) agreed with the process followed and progress made by the Schools Task Group in preparing the paper for consultation;**
- (c) be kept informed of progress.**

**22. 14-19: MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT, : CHANGES TO CONNEXIONS, LSC TRANSFER**

The Committee received an update on the current position relating to: Machinery of Government changes / Learning & Skills Council (LSC) transfer and Connexions transfer.

The Director of Children's Services and the Assistant Director Improvement and Inclusion highlighted the key issues contained in the agenda report and supplementary papers, previously issued to members.

The Committee noted that the changes had been initiated by government and locally officers were working with both services concerned to ensure a smooth change over and that the resultant service reflected local need.

Questioned on whether the authority would regain control over the 6th form and colleges the Committee were informed that the authority would have the potential to influence the commissioning of provision; would be helping young people with career choices and would be seeking to re-engage with students that may have dropped out of further education or training.

The Committee noted the current legal issues concerning the intended transfer of the Connexions office in Hereford and requested to be kept informed. The Assistant Director Improvement and Inclusion reported that should the transfer not take place a fall back position was being explored.

A Member criticised the fact that in the Connexions Consultation Summary document, issued as a supplement to the agenda, the Summary Feedback from Young People appeared to have been buried at the back of the document and thought the intention of the consultation should have been more forward facing

The agenda report touched on the need to ensure that young people experienced a smooth hand over of service and the need to improve the level of data and performance management which the Committee concurred with and sought assurances that urgent consideration was being given to the speedy integration and continuity of data on the transfer of the services.

The Committee noted the staff transfer issues outlined in the report.

**RESOLVED: That**

- (a) The Committee noted the process established for transferring the Learning and Skills Council staff;**

- (b) The Committee noted the delivery arrangements following the consultation process for the transference of the Connexions Service from Herefordshire and Worcestershire Connexions Company into Herefordshire Council;**
- (c) the need for urgency be brought to the attention of the Cabinet Member (ICT, Education and Achievement) concerning the need to ensure the speedy integration and continuity of data on the transfer of the services; and**
- (d) The Chairman consider whether a progress report on the ICT/Data issue be included in the Committee work programme.**

## **23. CAPITAL BUDGET REPORT 2009/2010**

The Committee considered the capital budget position for 2009/10 for the Children and Young People's Directorate.

The Schools Planning & Access Manager presented the agenda report and highlighted that approval to the final business case for the Hereford Academy was expected which would release the funding. The formal process to amalgamate the Leominster Infant and Junior schools had commenced and a report to the Executive was expected to be made in December 2009. The report to the next meeting would include greater detail of the grants under the Quality & access for early years provision and under the Extended Schools Grants.

During debate the following principal points were noted:

- Questioned on The Minster, Leominster, the Committee noted that Amey had provided the Architectural consultancy work and that the sustainability of the school had been an important part of the design brief. A suggestion was made that any spare capacity at the site could be used for a career advice centre.
- It was confirmed that the government was providing the funding for the Hereford Academy, however, the authority acted as the delivery agent and therefore drew down the funding from government.
- Greater detail would be provided in future reports on the capital maintenance programme.
- Questioned whether it was the Council's responsibility to fund the Holmer Flood Alleviation works, the assertion being that this lay with the Environment Agency, the Schools Planning & Access Manager undertook to make further investigations and inform members.
- Responding to a suggestion that greater benefit could have been gained from investing the Primary Capital Programme funding in a range of schools the Schools Planning & Access Manager reported that it was the Governments intention that the funding be concentrated on larger schemes.
- Criticism was expressed concerning the schemes being proposed under the Playbuilder grant funding, particularly those in Ledbury and Kington, and the Director undertook to make further investigations and provide a briefing note on the terms for the funding and the proposed schemes.

### **RESOLVED: That**

- (a) the Committee noted the content of the Capital Monitoring report and approved the format of the information.**
- (b) The Committee be informed by briefing note of the terms and intended location of schemes under the Playbuilder grant.**

## 24. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2009/2010

The Committee considered the Children's Services revenue budget for 2009/10 and comparisons to the 2008/9 budget outturn. The report was presented in a revised format to meet the expectations of the Committee.

The Director of Children's Services reported that her management team had started looking at future service provision in the context of the government's current tighter budgetary intentions and the provision needed to support vulnerable groups.

The Assistant Director Planning Performance and Development, presented the agenda report and highlighted issues in relation to the Dedicated Schools Grant, general grant funding and the repayment of charitable rate relief.

It was clarified that while an underspend was anticipated on the school transport budget through route rationalisation and lower fuel prices, there was still an underlying pressure from inflation on fuel and staff costs.

Questioned on the budget to support the placement of out of county looked after children the Committee was informed that there was no separate contingency should the budget be over spent. Court cases were expensive and court fees had risen. The needs of the child were paramount and in such circumstances budgets would have to be reallocated. The Committee noted that higher payments were now paid to the County's foster carers and an improved training programme had been introduced which it was hoped would reduce the reliance on agency foster parents.

Subject to one or two minor changes the Committee approved the new format as a significant improvement on previous reports. Future revenue reports will be to the new format.

**RESOLVED: That the Revenue Budget Monitoring report be noted and subject to further minor improvements in the report formatting, the format be agreed.**

## 25. PERFORMANCE DIGEST - QUARTER 1 2009/2010

The Committee considered the performance Digest for Children's Services for the first quarter of 2009/10 (April-June) and any highlighted performance issues.

The Director of Children's Services reported that 56.9% of initial child assessments were completed in 7 working days (NI 59) which was an improvement on the year end position of 37.4%. The Head of Performance further reported that initial indications (to the end of Aug 09) were that this had risen further to 64.8%. It was clarified that not every referral ended up as an assessment.

Questioned on the current staffing level of social workers (target 57) the Director of Children's Services reported that following discussions with regional government it had been agreed that the current level of 54 was acceptable.

Referring to NI 112 in the Digest, indicating that no data was available, the Head of Performance explained that data was collected by the PCT but had to be verified, which delayed its release. The Committee questioned whether a local figure could be used pending the verified figure.

Questioned whether a referral to CAMHS within 18 weeks was appropriate or timely the Committee were informed that there were currently no children on the CAMHS referral

list. The Committee noted that the referral system had been widened to ensure more cases were captured. It was further noted that the voluntary sector were currently responding to consultation on this matter.

The Committee debated the effect of homelessness on families and the use of Bed and Breakfast facilities and questioned whether more empty properties could be brought into use rather than place families in expensive temporary bed and breakfast accommodation.

**RESOLVED: That**

- (a) the levels of performance achieved for the first quarter of 2009/2010 were noted and**
- (b) the Committee suggested that the Cabinet Member (Environment and Strategic Housing) give further consideration to reducing the number and period that residential properties become 'void' to ensure a speedy turnover in letting, the intention being to let the property rather than place homeless families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation.**

**26. SEN/BANDED FUNDING REVIEW WORKING GROUP REPORT**

The Committee considered the findings of the SEN/Banded Funding Working Group.

The Chairman of the Working Group, Councillor WLS Bowen, outlined the work of the Working Group and its findings which were set out at paragraphs 12-14 of the agenda report. He suggested that school cluster groups be included in paragraph 13 concerning future consultation on SEN by the Funding for Inclusion (FFI) Group.

**RESOLVED: That, subject to inclusion of reference to school cluster groups in the recommendation at paragraph 13, the report be noted and the findings of the Working Group set out in paragraphs 12 – 14 of the report be referred to the Herefordshire Schools Forum for consideration as part of their further review of SEN/Banded Funding**

**27. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered its work programme.

The Chairman of Strategic Monitoring Committee reported that arising from the external health check of the scrutiny function an informal meeting of Strategic Monitoring Committee had been held to further consider the work programmes of the Scrutiny Committees. The Committee noted that the theme of Safeguarding, identified during that informal meeting, was already due to be considered at the next meeting. The other theme identified had been youth issues.

The Chairman commented that he would be discussing with the Director of Children's Services possible future debates on Youth provision and the Museum Educational Service and would report further in due course.

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