

MINUTES of the meeting of Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Friday, 16th December, 2005 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:	Councillor	B.F. Ashton (Chairman)
	Councillor	J.P. Thomas (Vice Chairman)
	Councillors	G. Lucas, Mrs. S.J. Robertson, D.C. Taylor, Ms. A.M. Toon and W.J. Walling
	Church Members	Mr P. Eyles (Church of England) and J.D. Griffin (Roman Catholic Church)
	Teacher Representatives	C. Lewandowski (Secondary School teachers)

In attendance: Councillors T.M. James, D.W. Rule MBE (Cabinet Member Children's Services) and J. Stone

13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Mr M. Carter, Cllr R. M. Manning, Miss S. Peate Cllr Mrs J. E. Pemberton, Revd. I. Terry and Mrs C. Woolley.

14. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Mr P. Eyles substituted for Revd. I. Terry.

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

16. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 3rd October, 2005 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

No suggestions for areas of scrutiny were received from the public.

18. CABINET MEMBER'S BRIEFING

The Committee was advised by the Cabinet Member (Children's Services), of issues within the Children's Services portfolio.

The Cabinet Member (Children's Services), elaborated upon points made in the briefing report contained in the agenda and reported that priorities for the Children and Young People's Plan in Herefordshire, indicated in his report, were currently

being shaped and would be subject to consultation before being submitted to the Children's & Young People's Partnership Board in February 2006 for confirmation. These priorities had been based on needs analysis and anticipated the outcomes from the Joint Area Review (JAR) inspection.

He highlighted that a current challenge for the Service was a potential over-commitment of £382,000 (as at September 2005), which the Service was actively working to reduce to a minimum. This was largely due to out of area placements; secure orders and payments for bed and breakfast for homeless young people leaving care. Out of area placements for specialist education resources were also high costs. There was a projected overspend of £427,000 with further placements required before the year-end. This would result in greater budget pressures for future years. The inclusion policy in the school sector was supported by a banding policy for additional needs resources in schools. This was an important policy to support but the funding was stretched. Currently the budget was predicted to overspend by £20,000 for primary schools. However, this was likely to be offset by a similar under-spend for banding by high schools.

The Cabinet Member also reported that since publication of the agenda the Joint Area Review (JAR) report for Herefordshire Children's Services Authority Area had been made publicly available. The JAR report was disappointing in that it concluded that not all those youngsters at greatest risk got consistent help and that the Council's systems needed improvement. The overall contribution of services to keeping children and young people safe was regarded as inadequate, although the inspectors found some good support to prevent family breakdown, abuse and neglect and good support for looked after children. He reported that actions were already being taken on the key outcomes and an overall action plan to address the recommendations in the report would be produced as soon as possible.

The Director of Children's Services emphasised that the JAR inspection report was not all bad news and highlighted a number of areas receiving a good assessment namely: good quality early education and childcare provision; good overall support for young people in the local authority's care and good partnership working.

She commented upon the areas identified as 'of concern' in the JAR. She also highlighted an example that whilst the County had 59 children on the 'at risk' register, national statistics indicated that the County "should" have nearer 70. This had been of concern to the inspection team and was a contributory factor to the overall inspection outcome. However, the inspection team had provided no evidence of bad practice or that the Service was not identifying any children in this category. She emphasised that this, and the other concerns raised in the report were already being investigated or reviewed and that while maintaining the high quality of work being carried out, the Service would strive to improve those areas identified in the report. It was necessary to focus on the improvement needed.

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

- Additional resources to improve the areas identified in the JAR would need to be investigated. The Director of Children's Services reported that all partner agencies were already heavily prioritising their resources. Assuming no new investment the Children & Young People's Partnership Board would need to consider possible areas for decommissioning or reprioritisation. The Sure Start Grant would need to be used to the best effect.
- Public perception of the JAR outcomes may be confusing as a number of issues related to processes rather than the frontline service.
- In relation to staff morale the Director of Children's Services reported that she had already met with the managers, social workers and the duty team to discuss the JAR report.

- It was suggested that a seminar be arranged for Members on the organisation and management of the Family Support Services.
- Responding to an allegation that in some instances a heavy-handed approach was adopted to the investigation of cases for the Child Protection Register, the Head of Social Care (Children) commented that any issue of concern was taken into account. A balanced but robust risk assessment was needed.
- The Cabinet Member (Children's Services) commented that levels of services were good in areas covered by children's centres. However, due to the rural nature of the County and financial constraints, the most rural areas were less well provided for.
- Multi-agency meetings were already being held to look rigorously at the implementation process for the '3 levels' under the Child Concern Model. Members were issued with a copy of the Herefordshire Child Concern Model for information.
- In response to a question on the availability of baseline data to facilitate the measurement of any improvement to areas identified in the JAR report the Director of Children's Services reported that the Service already collected performance data and 'Needs Analysis' data.
- Questioned on the rigour with which contracts and fees were negotiated for 'out of area placements', the Head of Children's and Student's Services reported that providers were robustly challenged on service level and fees. However, the Service had to deal sympathetically and appropriately with the most challenging and complex young people. When appropriate the Service considered 'spend to save' measures to reduce the long-term cost of individual care, which may be between £50,000 and £400,000 per annum per placement.

It was noted that a report on the actions taken to address the shortcomings identified in the JAR inspection report would be presented to the March 2006 meeting.

RESOLVED:

THAT

- a) the report of the Cabinet Member- Children's Services be noted and a report on the actions to address the shortcomings identified in the JAR inspection report be presented to the March 2006 meeting; and**
- b) a seminar be arranged for Members on the organisation and management of the Family Support Service in the County.**

19. INTEGRATING SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN HEREFORDSHIRE

The Committee was invited to comment on the proposed framework entitled "Integrating Services for Children and Young People in Herefordshire", outlined in the paper attached to the agenda report at appendix 1.

The Director of Children's Services reported that the consultation paper set out some of the key arguments and reasons for change and provided some ideas for how this could be achieved in Herefordshire. At the heart of the debate about integrating services to children and facilities, was the recognition that better outcomes in education attainment and health and safety, required the combined action of a number of agencies. The focus of Every Child Matters (ECM) was on vulnerable children and young people, especially those who were in danger of social exclusion. However, the Director explained that this was not simply about children with the most complex needs but about focusing on the needs of all children and recognising that outcomes were linked.

The Director of Children's Services highlighted that the provisional conclusions indicated in the consultation paper were that the concept of developing "service hubs" – the reconfiguration of services around the child and family in one place, for example, children's centre, extended schools and the bringing together of professionals in multi-disciplinary teams – and their location in areas of relative deprivation was already developed and comparatively straightforward in Herefordshire. She reported that while a clear view of the long-term destination was apparent, and indicated in the consultation paper, what was not so clear was the route to this destination, however, the report set out a number of pointers and signposts for the journey.

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

- Further information on the concept of Extended Schools was requested.
- Acknowledging that the development of Children's Centres was at an early stage in the County and that the area of the City south of the River Wye was identified as an area of deprivation, a view was expressed that areas of the City to the north of the river were also in need of these facilities. The Committee were informed that this was already the subject of a feasibility study.
- Accepting that the provision of after school transport would be extremely expensive, the Committee reminded the Cabinet Member (Children's Services), that while the City and Market Towns lacked adequate off-peak public transport provision, many rural areas had no transport infrastructure that would permit children to participate in after school activities, thereby adding to their sense of rural isolation.
- The Committee noted that a pilot project was being worked on with Sure Start (and the DfES), which would provide valuable information concerning provision and cost that would inform the rest of the integration programme.
- While schools already work together in the pyramid system further collaboration may be possible through School Trusts.
- The Committee questioned why a child who attended one school, but lived near another school, could not make use of that other school's after school facilities.
- The Cabinet Member – Children's Services emphasised that the development of children's Centres and Extended Schools was necessary and possible.

RESOLVED: that, subject to the points noted above, the framework for integrating services for Children & Young People in Herefordshire, as outlined in Appendix 1 to the report, be noted.

20. REVIEW OF STATUTORY AND CO-OPTED MEMBERS ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - UPDATE

The Committee considered the principles under which a Foster Care representative and a Children's Social Care Social Worker representative were to serve on the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee and other arrangements.

In accordance with the resolution passed at the Committee's meeting held on 3rd October, 2005, the Director of Children's Services, following consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, put forward in a report an appointment mechanism and terms for a Foster Care non-voting co-opted representative and a Children's Social Care Social worker advisor to the Committee. The report also proposed that the term for non-voting co-opted teacher representatives expire at May 2007 and thereafter run concurrently with Council elections and that prior to Council elections

Headteacher Associations reconfirm or re-nominate their representative.

The Committee noted that, depending on the subject to be debated, suitable officer advice would be secured or an external representative e.g. in relation to Youth Services or the Child Protection Agency, would be invited to attend the meeting.

**RESOLVED:
THAT**

- a) **the Herefordshire Foster Care Forum be invited to nominate one representative to serve on the Committee under the terms proposed in the report;**
- b) **one Children's Social Care Social worker be nominated by the Director of Children's Services to act as advisor to the Committee;**
- c) **the term of office for the non-voting co-opted teacher representatives be set to expire at the May 2007 Council elections and thereafter the term for non-voting co-opted representatives run concurrently with the Council's Electoral cycle; and**
- d) **subject to the Associations confirming their nominations prior to Council elections the term of office for the Headteacher representatives be at the discretion of the appropriate Headteacher Association.**

21. CHILDREN'S SERVICES SRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2006/7

The Committee considered a new work programme for 2006/07.

Following consultation with the Vice-Chairman and the Director of Children's Services the Chairman proposed the Committee work programme, as set out at appendix 1 to the report, for the period May 2006 to March 2007.

The Chairman confirmed the current intention that the March 2006 meeting would debate issues concerning:

- the Every Child Matters agenda and the Change for Children Programme. The Committee would particularly focus on the outcome of the Joint Area Review (JAR) and the Cabinet Member's action plan to tackle the areas of concern identified from the review; and
- Young People's Health issues.

The Committee considered the programme and suggested the following issues for consideration:

- i) Pupil transition arrangements between primary and secondary school and between secondary school and sixth form or college. It was suggested that parental concerns about their child e.g. in relation to pupil dyslexia problems, were not being adequately communicated at the time of transition. The Director of Children's Services reported that the Joint Area Review (JAR) had identified that "planning overall for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) was a weakness" and this wider aspect may be an area to which scrutiny might give consideration.
- ii) Disruptive Behaviour in Schools – the Committee requested a workshop on this subject so that they could appraise of the level of disruption and the

methods of monitoring employed and be informed of what measures the Executive and schools were taking to control it.

- iii) Any potential implications arising from the feasibility of the Steiner School at Much Dewchurch becoming an Academy.
- iv) School Improvement Service (SIS) - formerly IASPS – Following clarification on what aspect of the services was to be the subject of a scrutiny report, the Committee requested comparative details on school performance, particularly in relation to the 2005 exam results, including vocational training.
- v) A report was requested concerning Weobley High School's achievement of coming out of 'special measures' within a year of being placed in that category by OfSTED. Following clarification of the matter to be scrutinised the Cabinet Member (Children's Services) responded that he was pleased to report that the school had come out of 'special measures' and that any good practice learned would be disseminated to other schools.

RESOLVED:

THAT

- a) **that the work programme as set out at appendix 1 to the report be approved and recommended to the Strategic Monitoring Committee;**
- b) **the suggested issues i, ii, iii and iv above be noted and taken into consideration as the work programme evolved during the year; and**
- c) **the response by the Cabinet Member (Children's Services) in relation to Weobley High School be noted.**

The meeting ended at 11.47 a.m.

CHAIRMAN