

MINUTES of the meeting of Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday, 19th June, 2006 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:	Councillor	B.F. Ashton (Chairman)
	Councillors	N.J.J. Davies, G. Lucas, Mrs. J.E. Pemberton, Mrs. S.J. Robertson, D.C. Taylor, Mrs E.A. Taylor, Ms. A.M. Toon and W.J. Walling
	Church Members	Mr. A. Geach (Church of England) and J.D. Griffin (Roman Catholic Church)
	Teacher Representatives	C. Lewandowski (Secondary School teachers)
	Headteacher Representatives	Miss S. Peate (Primary Sector Headteachers)

In attendance: Councillors: Mrs. A.E. Gray, D.W. Rule MBE (Cabinet Member - Children and Young People) and R.M. Wilson

9. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor J.P. Thomas.

10. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no substitutes.

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

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

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

13. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 31st May 2006 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

14. PRESENTATION BY CABINET MEMBER (CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE)

The Committee received a presentation by the Cabinet Member (Children and Young People).

A report had been prepared by the Cabinet Member (Children and Young People)

outlining the issues affecting the programme area and highlighting some of the specific challenges for 2006/07.

In presenting his report the Cabinet Member highlighted in particular:

- The need to demonstrate that improvements had been made following the Joint Area Review. This would include showing there was a strong determination to ensure that the improvements already made on safeguarding were being sustained and that progress had been made on filling social work vacancies.
- That Herefordshire's priorities have been agreed by the Partnership Board and these had been mapped against the Herefordshire Plan ambitions and Herefordshire Council's objectives. A map of the priorities was included at Appendix 1 to the report. While the Children & Young People's Plan had been published it would need to be a flexible document as further strategies and regulation may arise from the education green paper at the end of the year.
- Overall the school accumulated balances had reduced following reports that government may enable a proportion of unspent budgets to be recouped.
- The Annual Performance Assessment (APA) of the Council's Children's Services, attached to the report at appendix 2, will give the Services a benchmark for demonstrating the improvements in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) scores.

The Committee noted the report by the Cabinet Member. The following is an outline of the responses or comments made during the ensuing questioning of the Cabinet Member.

- Arising from concerns over the effect on surrounding primary schools and one high school, the Leader of the Council had requested a meeting with the Secretary of State concerning the proposal for a Steiner Academy. An area of concern was the use of capital funding. While it was acknowledged that funding would be from different capital streams, it was considered that funding could be better put to clearing some of the backlog of maintenance in County schools. A further concern was that a Steiner Academy would not be obliged to meet the many national achievement targets.
- Responding to questions on improving dental health of children (JAR – being healthy) the Director of Children's Services reported that improvements were being driven by the Primary Care Trust through school engagement; better access to clinics and an increased number of dentists signing up to the NHS contract. The possibility of water fluoridation had been considered by the Health Scrutiny Committee. It was suggested that the Director of Public Health be invited to a future meeting to discuss child and young people's health care issues.
- The Director of Children's Services confirmed that the realigning and confirming of thresholds within the Child Concern Model for social work involvement had taken place. While the number of referrals was likely to increase the system would be monitored to identify any trends.
- Efforts were being made to address both the number of vacancies in various areas e.g. social workers and occupational therapists, and the balance between agency and full time employees.
- Responding to questions on the JAR priority "increase the percentage of babies who are breast fed..." the Committee noted that this work would have been undertaken through Children Centres, however, currently work was being targeted at certain areas.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for his report and response to the Committee's questioning.

15. JOINT AREA REVIEW IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Committee were advised on the latest progress with the Joint Area Review (JAR) Improvement Plan.

The Director of Children's Services reported that the revised Joint Area Review (JAR) Improvement Plan, appended to the report at appendix 1, had been accepted by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). She highlighted a significant statement in the report that "the response to the JAR has been positive and services have improved as a result". She further reported that discussions were on going with the DfES about the proposals to ensure sustained improvement at the right pace. A meeting was planned with the Minister for Children & Families 11th July following which a further report would be made to Committee.

She further reported that since the agenda had been issued JAR Recommendations: 5 - 1) "Build on existing CCM" had been completed. 5 - 2) "Establish interagency common processes..." had been completed; 6 - 1) "Training for new CAF..." was on track and due to be completed in September 2006; 15 - 1) "Ensure effective co-ordination of all consultations..." had been completed and 15 - 2) "Produce and develop a framework..." was on track for completion. Work was on-going to address the remaining key issues.

RESOLVED: That progress against the JAR Improvement Plan as set out in the report and reported above be noted and further monitoring reports be presented to future meetings.

16. THE EFFECT OF HOMELESSNESS OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN HEREFORDSHIRE

The Committee was advised of the work-in-progress to improve the experience of young people and families requiring suitable housing.

The agenda report indicated the current housing situation and highlighted that the lack of affordable housing and associated homelessness was an important issue for young people in Herefordshire. However, a great deal was being done to improve the housing opportunities of vulnerable young people, including Care Leavers, much of which was reflected in the JAR Performance Improvement Action Plan.

The Director of Children's Services reported that management of the Homelessness and Housing Advice Services had returned to the Council and an associated shift in focus towards homelessness prevention had lead to a reduction in homelessness applications.

During the course of discussion the Committee noted that while the Leaving Care Team supported and planned the transition of young people, unfortunately, despite assistance by the Team, a small number were in unsuitable accommodation. This concern had been identified by the Corporate Parent Working Group.

The Committee further noted that the Mediation Service had been developed to help tackle the issue of parental evictions leading to young homelessness. The Service also offered support to schools to raise awareness and assist in tackling problems.

Additional funding had been secured from the Supporting People programme to expand and deliver 'floating support services' to Care Leavers and other vulnerable young people.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

17. MR. H. LEWIS, HEAD OF SOCIAL CARE (CHILDREN)

The Chairman reported that Mr H Lewis, Head of Social Care (Children), would be leaving the authority at the end of July after serving this authority since its inception in 1998 and having previously served for many years with the former Herefordshire and Worcestershire County Council. The Chairman and Committee thanked Mr Lewis for his commitment to social care in the County and wished him well for the future.

18. MISS S.M. PEATE

The Chairman reported that this had been Miss S.M. Peate's last meeting, as she would be leaving the authority. The Chairman thanked Miss Peate for her contribution to the work of the Committee as Headteacher representative for the Primary Schools and for her work as Head of Little Dewchurch CE Primary School. The Committee wished her well for the future.

The meeting ended at 11.20 a.m.

CHAIRMAN