



Buckinghamshire County Council

Minutes *OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR ADULT SERVICES*

AGENDA ITEM: 3

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR ADULT SERVICES HELD ON WEDNESDAY 12 OCTOBER 2005, COMMENCING AT 9.45 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 12.15 PM IN MEZZANINE ROOM 1, COUNTY HALL, AYLESBURY

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr B G Allen (Chairman), Mrs B H Jennings, Mr S Kennell, Mr A Oxley, Mr P Roberts, Mrs D Summers, Mr F Sweatman, Julia Wassell and Mr H G W Wilson

OFFICERS PRESENT

Mrs P Buck	Acting Head of Adult Learning
Mrs C Capjon	Policy Officer
Mr R Edwards	Lead Officer for Scrutiny
Mr B Strong	Head of Libraries and Heritage
Mrs C Gray	Senior Democratic Services Officer

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

Apologies were received from Mr J Cartwright, Mrs E Lay, Mr B Lidgate, Mr C F Robinson OBE and Mr D J Rowlands. Members noted that Mr A Oxley was substituting for Mrs F D Roberts MBE for the duration of the meeting.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

1 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Adult Services held on 14 September 2005, copies of which had been circulated previously, were confirmed.

2 SERVICES, PRIORITIES AND CHALLENGES; THE CULTURE AND LEARNING SERVICE

Paula Buck, Acting Head of Adult Learning and Bob Strong, Head of Libraries and Heritage attended the meeting to update Members with an overview of current services and outlined the developments, priorities and challenges facing their services for the future. The vision was to create and implement a new service by merging the Adult Learning and Libraries and Heritage Services and to manage both the cultural and operational transition from the two services into one.

The Acting Head of Adult Learning and Head of Libraries and Heritage outlined the following points:-

- Work commenced on this Project in February/March of this year for implementation hopefully in April 2006.
- The structure options should be finalised by December 2005 and focus groups would be held in January 2006 using groups of staff around the County.
- There were budget pressures on the library service and external pressures from the Learning and Skills Council funding.
- Since the merger became a reality working relationships between the two services had improved significantly particularly through the use of coffee mornings.

During discussion the following points were made:-

- There was some concern regarding the terminology used by consultants. However, Members were reassured that the consultants were facilitating meetings between staff to develop their working relationships. A regular monthly update was sent to staff in plain English outlining developments.
- There were examples of Joint Working; the Reference Library was being used for the People's Network and Learn Direct Services. The aim was that all computer machines should be able to offer each service. A pilot was being run in Burnham Library, which was a small library, but it could be also used as a learning centre, bringing facilities together. This library had been used because it had a large amount of space and the capacity to offer these services.
- There would be a structure for staff training and development and for new qualifications to be obtained.
- Reference was made to the proposal to close 8 community libraries. The Head of Libraries and Heritage reported that some specific libraries did not have the capacity to provide the service required. This was linked to the merger and to other strategies of the Council such as Customer First so that libraries provided a wider range of community based facilities, for example, a One Stop Shop, an Adult Learning suite, a Customer reception which would include information on other partner organisations such as the Health Service.
- Members expressed disappointment that they did not have the opportunity to feed into the discussion on the Library Review and the proposal to consult on the impact of closure and alternative options.

- In answer to a question from a Member on how these ideas were working in other authorities, the Head of Libraries and Heritage reported that Tower Hamlets had been operating this scheme for some time having computer suites in libraries offering Learn Direct and business information services.
- The Skills White Paper was mentioned in connection with the Learning and Skills Council. Members noted that in a rural County such as Buckinghamshire, not everyone had close access to a College or a provider of Further Education and also some people found large College buildings intimidating. Therefore, it was important to be able to deliver Basic Skills Training in a relaxed environment that was easy to access but to maintain a link with Colleges and progression opportunities.
- The Acting Head of Adult Learning reported that the aim was to have a single approach to IT system to bring together as many services as possible. The Service was also looking at developing mobile facilities to provide library and IT facilities. This had been piloted in Liverpool and had been very successful.
- A new Head of Service would be appointed for the merged service and it was important for this person to put forward his or her own management structure to support the service. The new Head of Service would have a cultural remit, as at present the Acting Head of Adult Learning and the Head of Libraries and Heritage did not have responsibility for Arts; although both services were involved in this area.
- A Member asked about the link with schools and children. In response it was noted that there was an emphasis on family learning and families learning together such as literacy and numeracy and how parents can help understand the system of learning used by schools currently.
- This merger would not affect the School Library Service.
- There was currently a national consultation on the administration of student support for higher education including disability support and whether this should be locally or nationally delivered. There would be a couple of pilots the following year on a national call centre and the use of online applications.

The Committee thanked Paula Buck and Bob Strong for attending the Meeting and asked that the monthly newsletter to staff be sent to all Committee Members for information.

3 COMPLAINTS TO SERVICES: FINDINGS OF THE COMPLAINTS WORKING GROUP

The Policy Officer reported that during September, Members of the Working Group had met with Complaints Officers and other people responsible for handling complaints to services. The Group was set up to consider how complaints were handled in the various services, to identify any trends to complaints and establish any areas which the Group believed could be further investigated by the Committee. A paper was tabled on Complaints to Services from the Working Group.

The following points were noted:-

**Bob
Strong/
Paula
Buck**

ACTION

- A Member expressed surprise about how few complaints there were and that some responses were more detailed than required. Complaints were dealt with adequately and sensibly.
- Reference was made to the fact that some services had achieved the Chartermark in this area and whether this standard needed to be applied to all services, particularly as the overall level of complaints was extremely low.
- A Member expressed concern about the introduction of Customer First and how well complaints would be addressed under a centralised keyboard and whether the standard high quality response would be there. It was important for a service department to take responsibility for each complaint as it came through. A Member then referred to a visit to the Roald Dahl Museum where concern had also been expressed about the Customer First initiative and how well it would work for them.
- In relation to complaints made about Adult Social Care contracted out services, it was important that all complaints were monitored by the County Council and that these figures should be included in the overall picture in future reports.
- Concern was raised about the number of ethnic minority complaints and the need to ensure that they had the confidence to challenge local authority systems, particularly as English may be their second language. A Member referred to the issue that signposting was difficult for the Asian Community. The right to complain should be accessible and safe. A suggestion was made that it may be helpful to visit the local mosque to obtain feedback on the current complaints system. It was agreed that a scoping paper should be submitted to the next meeting on this issue.
- A discussion was held about whether the Standards Committee should consider social care complaints for children. Members agreed that the content of social care reports was important for both Overview and Scrutiny Committees with social care remits and that they would like to, in the future, see complaints reports included as part of both Committees monitoring of service performance.

Clare
Capjon

Clare
Capjon

Clare
Capjon

The Committee agreed that further work should be undertaken looking at Customer First and the low number of complaints from the Asian Community.

4 FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered and agreed the 2005/6 Work Programme for the Committee including scrutiny reviews into complaints about social care services from the Asian Community. The need to conduct a review into Customer First Contact Centres would be considered following a presentation by the Customer First team at the Committee's meeting in November.

5 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 9 November 2005 at 9.45am in Mezzanine Room 1, County Hall

CHAIRMAN