



# Buckinghamshire County Council

## Minutes

### *OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES*

#### **AGENDA ITEM: 3**

**MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES HELD ON THURSDAY 26 MAY 2005, IN MEZZANINE ROOM 1, COUNTY HALL, AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT 10.05AM AND CONCLUDING AT 12.00PM.**

#### **MEMBERS PRESENT**

Mrs M Baldwin, Mr D Carroll, Mr C Ditta, Mr N Hussain, Mrs B Jennings (Chairman), Mr D Polhill, Mr P Rogerson (Vice-Chairman), Mr P Smith, Mr D Watson and Mrs C Willetts.

#### **CO-OPTED MEMBERS PRESENT**

Mr D Ashburner, Mrs A Howe, Mr P Monk and Mr M Moore.

#### **OFFICERS PRESENT**

Mr R Edwards, Mrs J Fisk, Mrs R Lally, Mr S Powell and Mrs C Street.

#### **MEMBERS PRESENT**

Lin Hazell - Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

#### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP**

Apologies were received from Mr D Anson MBE, Mrs L Clarke, Mr P Hardy and Mr F Sweatman.

#### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Mr P Rogerson declared a personal interest as he has a grandson with special needs in receipt of services provided by the Council. Mr P Monk declared a personal interest as he had a child with special needs at Carrington School.

#### **3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**

The minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Lifelong Learning held on 14 April 2005, and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services held on 19 May 2005, were agreed as a correct record.

The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting. It was noted that Mrs A Howe was attending as Parent Governor representative for Secondary Schools, and Mr P Monk was attending as Parent Governor representative for Primary Schools. The Chairman commented on the valuable work that had been carried out by co-opted

members during the life of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) on Lifelong Learning.

The Chairman introduced Paul Rogerson, Vice-Chairman of the OSC, Jackie Fisk, Policy Officer for Children's Services OSC, Roger Edwards, Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny, and Claire Street, Democratic Services Officer, to members.

The Chairman commented on the wide remit of the OSC, explaining that the first few meetings would be focused on providing members with background information in the area of children's services. It was likely that working groups would be formed to cope with the large area of work. Members were issued with a pack to assist them in their work, and with questionnaires to ascertain their particular areas of knowledge.

#### **4. INTRODUCTION TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

Members received a presentation from Roger Edwards, Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny, on the functions of OSC in Buckinghamshire County Council. He explained recent changes to the Constitution and the key role that non-executive members and co-opted members on OSCs could play. A copy of the presentation is attached for information at Appendix 1.

In response to a query from a member regarding the process for calling in key decisions, the officer advised that any member could ask for a key decision to be called in; the OSC would then meet to decide how to proceed.

The Chairman advised that meetings of the OSC were informal and respectfully asked members to ensure that their questioning of contributors was concise and to the point. During late summer, members would be asked if they required training in matters relating to their scrutiny work. It was noted that contributors sat at the table with members of the OSC.

A member asked how the OSC could ensure that policies approved had enough resources to be realistic, referring to the recent demise of the Corporate Performance OSC. The Lead Officer for Scrutiny advised members of the existence of the newly established Corporate Task Force panel, which would examine the medium term planning process, and assess if aims and objectives were being achieved against the budget. The OSC for Children's Services could also monitor budget areas and targets that related to its remit. The Lead Officer for Scrutiny informed the Committee that the Corporate Task Force would be made up of members, but the specific membership had not yet been determined.

The Lead Officer for Scrutiny was thanked for his informative presentation.

#### **5. WORK PROGRAMME 2005/06**

The OSC Policy Officer circulated members with a copy of the Work Programme for the Committee.

It was noted that some of the items on the Work Programme were there as a legacy from the former OSCs. Although the Constitution required that OSCs present their Work Programmes to full Council, it was up to members to determine the priorities.

The Policy Officer would bring a scoping paper on two pieces of work to the next meeting of the Committee for consideration. Although the Constitution stated that OSCs should normally meet bi-monthly, members agreed to keep the monthly

meetings that had been diarised for the time being. The Policy Officer advised of the need to be very specific when scoping a review, to ensure the work remained focused.

At the suggestion of a member, it was agreed that the Work Programme should be included on the agenda for the September / October meeting of the Committee so that members could review the content once they had absorbed some of the issues. It was further agreed that items in the Work Programme should reflect the five outcomes contained in the Every Child Matters document. During discussion of the Work Programme, a member referred to recent concerns expressed by Buckinghamshire residents about the lack of achievement in Aylesbury schools compared to the rest of the County.

## **6. CHILDREN'S SERVICES SELF-ASSESSMENT**

The Chairman welcomed Stuart Powell, Head of School Improvement, to the meeting. Members were informed that there would be an Annual Performance Assessment (APA) of children's services, and as part of this a self-assessment would need to be completed by the end of May. Members were issued with a copy of the guidance on completing the self-assessment. The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and Ofsted would visit the Authority on 6 July to consider the self-assessment, alongside a wealth of other evidence. The Authority would be given a grading ranging from 1 (poor) to 4 (very good). Members were informed that previously the social care and education aspects of children's services had been rated separately. A rating of '1' would mean that the Council could not be graded as effective.

Members noted that the Annual Assessment had been requested very early on in the development of the Service. In answer to a question from a member regarding member input to the Annual Assessment, the Head of School Improvement stated that there had been little time from notification to the production of the report and so member input had been restricted. He also agreed that in future reports such as these should be passed to Overview and Scrutiny prior to issue, whenever possible.

The Strategic Director for Children and Young People advised that the education aspect of the assessment was likely to be successful. Investment had taken place in the social care area and much progress had been made, but further work was needed and the officer did not want to overestimate what could be achieved within short amount of time. The Strategic Director was hopeful that a two star rating could be reached in time but matters had been complicated by the introduction of new monitoring systems. She referred to the fact that the Council had made improvements in the children's services area, which had resulted in the Authority being assessed as serving some children well with promising prospects. Problems with recruitment and retention of social workers, particularly in the south of the county, meant that it was sometimes difficult to allocate children who were on the child protection register. The Authority had put in place a number of strategies to try and overcome this but it was an ongoing problem. Members noted that there were no cases currently unallocated.

A member asked what had improved in children's services. The Strategic Director advised that resources had been put into capacity building to help run the business. Staff salaries had been increased and money had been put into recruitment strategies, such as overseas recruitment. A scheme had been developed to fund social workers through university and resources had been put into support for foster

carers. Also some key services involving respite care were being built and that would improve services to children and families.

A member asked how the Authority consulted young people regarding the development of its services. The Strategic Director advised that they were consulted through the Youth Parliament, and through the Corporate Parenting Panel, which included two looked after children as part of its membership. She added that more work was needed in this area, particularly regarding assessing options available for looked after children.

The Vice-Chairman asked when members would be informed of medium term plan objectives for children's services. The Strategic Director replied that the MTP was three-year strategy, and that as far as children's services were concerned, the objectives were to continue to build capacity and where appropriate reconfigure services. She advised that children's services was beginning to get a firmer grip on resources adding that this had been a weakness in the past.

The officers were thanked for their contribution to the meeting. It was agreed that the OSC should review the next self-assessment.

## **7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Thursday 23 June, 10.00am, Mezzanine Room 1, County Hall, Aylesbury.

**CHAIRMAN**