



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 23 JUNE 2005, IN MEZZANINE ROOM 1, COUNTY HALL, AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT 10.00AM AND CONCLUDING AT 11.55AM.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr N Hussain, Mrs B Jennings (Chairman), Mr D Polhill, Mr P Smith, Mr F Sweatman, 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 S Bagnall, Mrs C Corcoran, Mrs J Fisk, Mrs S Imbriano and Mrs K Sutherland.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Lin Hazell - Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
Marion Clayton – Cabinet Member for Schools

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

Apologies were received from Mr D Anson MBE, Mrs M Baldwin, Mr D Carroll, Mr C Ditta, Mrs L Clarke, Mr P Hardy and Mr P Rogerson.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mrs C Willetts declared that she was involved with the management of the Pupil Referral Units in Aylesbury. Mr M Moore declared that he was a member of the project team for both the Communication with Schools and the Services for Schools projects.

3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services held on 26 May 2005, were agreed as a correct record.

4. COMMUNICATION WITH SCHOOLS PROJECT

The Chairman welcomed Caroline Corcoran, Education Officer and Graham Norris, Headteacher, Bedgrove Junior School to the meeting. Caroline Corcoran presented a report on the Communication with Schools Project. The project began in September 2004 and the project team were now at the stage of planning the implementation of the five recommendations, from September 2005.

Following a rigorous analysis of the views of School staff, Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) staff and School Governors and research into good practice in other authorities, the recommendations were approved by the Project Management Board and received the support of stakeholders following an extensive consultation exercise. A Co-ordinated Communication System had been developed, incorporating the five recommendations. A key recommendation was that all communication with schools would be co-ordinated through a weekly schools newsletter and a monthly Governor Times newsletter. The project team were now raising awareness of the new system of communication which would be operating from September 2005 and supporting staff in schools and within BCC who would be most affected by the changes.

Graham Norris reported that from a Headteacher's perspective, he had found communication between the Local Education Authority (LEA) and schools to be poor. He wholeheartedly endorsed the project's recommendations as he felt the new system would be a great improvement and would benefit the partnership between the LEA and schools and other BCC departments. He added that the project and its recommendations had support from the very top level of the LEA and this was recognised as a key to success. He felt that this was the first time that schools had been really listened to by the LEA and their views taken into account in shaping the recommendations.

10.20am Mr P Smith joined the meeting.

Michael Moore, who was a member of the project team, commented that the project's recommendations had addressed points raised in the LEA's OFSTED report and schools and other stakeholders had been very supportive of the changes. It was recognised that all stakeholders would need to adopt a disciplined approach and adhere to the new procedures in order for them to be effective. Caroline Corcoran informed members that progress would be closely monitored and reports would be presented to the Extended Management Team (EMT). A formal review with all stakeholders was scheduled to take place in Spring 2006 to assess if benefits were being realised after a term of operating under the new systems. The project team would continue to undertake work during 2006 to ensure that the new communication systems would remain relevant in light of children's services changes.

A member asked how much work had been done on change management with BCC staff, as the effectiveness of the new communications system would rely heavily on their ability to adapt. Caroline Corcoran reported that the Strategic Solutions Group, a meeting of senior BCC managers, were to receive a presentation later that day, on how the system would work in practice and BCC staff had been consulted and involved in the project from the very beginning. BCC officers would also enjoy benefits from the changes and all stakeholders, not just BCC staff, would have customer service standards to uphold.

A member noted that significant cultural change was dependent on the co-operation of many individuals, which was very difficult to achieve – How would individuals who

did not embrace change be managed? In response, Caroline Corcoran explained that a transparent system of monitoring was being put in place, whereby all stakeholders would be asked to inform the project team if another stakeholder was not adhering to the agreed systems. Monitoring reports would be presented to EMT for consideration and action.

In answer to a question from a member regarding the capacity of the new system to evolve, Caroline Corcoran commented that the system was flexible enough to evolve over time. The Schools Communication Unit were able to make minor changes to the system but more significant changes would be referred to the project board for approval.

10.30am Mr D Watson joined the meeting.

The Chairman thanked Caroline Corcoran, Graham Norris and Michael Moore for their contributions and requested that the Committee should receive a further short report on the progress of the project in February 2006.

5. SERVICES FOR SCHOOLS PROJECT

The Committee received a report from Caroline Corcoran, Education Officer, introducing the Services for Schools Project, which had recently begun. This project was again part of the Post OFSTED Inspection Action Plan and an audit of stakeholder's views on service delivery had been undertaken, using a similar method to the Communication with Schools Project. The recommendations of the project would be the subject of a Cabinet decision in March 2006 and it was anticipated that at least a further twelve months would then be needed for planning the implementation of any changes.

A member commented that BCC had a conflict of interest in offering services to schools whilst also being approached by schools for advice. Schools sometimes felt that they had no choice but to take services from BCC. In response, Caroline Corcoran asserted that it was necessary for BCC to separate advice and trading issues. It was important that BCC services treated schools like any other external client.

A member asked if the Services for Schools project was a response to Government guidelines. Caroline Corcoran reported that the LEA had a responsibility to ensure that schools were informed purchasers. The project was a response to national expectations, comments from OFSTED and issues with services that schools had raised.

The Chairman thanked Caroline Corcoran for attending the meeting and suggested that a member of the Committee should keep in touch with the progress of the project. Michael Moore volunteered to report in to the Chairman on progress.

6. DEVELOPING CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The Chairman welcomed Marion Clayton, Cabinet Member for Schools, Lin Hazell, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Sue Imbriano, Chief Education Officer and Stephen Bagnall, Head of Policy, Planning, Commissioning and Performance to the meeting.

The Committee received a presentation from Sue Imbriano on Developing Children's Services – a copy of the slides are attached as Appendix 1.

During the presentation and the subsequent discussion the following points were made:

- The development of Children's Services would be a complex change programme that would touch anyone involved with caring for or working with children.
- The main driver for integration of services was to make a positive difference for children and young people. Successful integration would rely heavily on effective and genuine partnership working. Sue Imbriano offered her own working definition of genuine partnership working as 'not only working together towards shared objectives, but also helping each other to achieve own objectives.'
- Integrated governance arrangements would be key to the development of a Children's Trust. A number of different models were being implemented across the UK at different levels, which could be considered for Buckinghamshire. It was recognised that integrated governance would be a real challenge, where there were a large number of individual stakeholders with very different governance arrangements.
- Culture change would be necessary for the successful integration of services but it was recognised that this would only happen over time.
- Individual organisations would need to share information more readily. This was already a high profile issue for multi-agency working following the Climbié case.
- Performance management and monitoring systems would need to be integrated, which would again be complicated due to different performance measures and systems being used within different organisations. It would be important to have robust monitoring systems shared by all partners in order to measure the success of integration and to demonstrate this success to inspectors.
- It was noted that whilst changes were implemented, the standard of services for children and young people must at least be maintained and ideally improved.
- A comprehensive countywide Needs Analysis for service users was required. Whilst different agencies already held lots of useful data, this needed to be collated to produce a coherent analysis, which would inform the development of the Children and Young People Plan for Buckinghamshire.
- Once a Needs Analysis had been completed this would inform commissioning, which was currently very underdeveloped in children's services. It was envisaged that children and young people and their carers would also be involved in the design and delivery of services.
- It was noted that the safeguarding agenda would continue to be a high priority.
- Methods of evaluating the impact of policies and service delivery on children and young people had to be considered. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had a role to play in evaluating the success of changes and in holding all partners involved to account.
- The Programme Manager was developing a local project timescale, which would be circulated shortly and the intention was to consult on working models during July, August and September. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be involved in this consultation.
- Some measures of success would be based on the five outcomes detailed in the Children Act and staff were currently working on how to translate these outcomes into useful measures that were relevant to children and young people within Buckinghamshire.

- In response to a member's question on providing for future needs, Sue Imbriano explained that a robust methodology for Needs Analysis was needed to enable planning for future service needs.
- Although BCC would be the lead partner and was required to appoint a Director of Children's Services and a Lead Member for Children's Services, there had been little guidance from government as to what sanctions would be available to BCC if other partners failed to contribute. As the lead partner BCC would have a responsibility to draw attention to any deficiencies of service and issues regarding lack of investment. However to date there had been no clear guidance on how to approach these issues once they had been identified. Integrated governance arrangements would therefore be crucial.
- With regard to integrated systems for sharing information and performance measures, a member commented that some voluntary organisations lacked resources to put such systems into place. Sue Imbriano recognised this and added that part of BCC's role would be to support voluntary organisations in developing their infrastructure and through training. Building the capacity of the voluntary sector would be a challenge faced by all local authorities.
- A member expressed concern about a lack of support for families with young children and in particular, young mothers. The work of Parents as First Teachers and Homestart was commended but more support was needed to ensure that children had the best start in life. In response, Sue Imbriano agreed that supporting children in their early years was an important part of the preventative agenda. Support for teenage parents had received additional funding from BCC and the development of children's centres would have a major impact on support for families and young children. However it was emphasised that often the positive impact of such initiatives might not be realised for a generation.
- Sue Imbriano was asked to outline the process that was being followed in order to develop a Children and Young People's plan for Buckinghamshire. The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board (CYPSPB) were leading on the development of the plan. Thirty different bodies were represented on the CYPSPB, which was chaired by Chris Williams, BCC Chief Executive. The plan would be published as a public document by April 2006 and would replace a number of different plans that already existed. The challenge was to extract the best of the existing plans, whilst also looking at how to deliver improved outcomes. The CYPSPB was also keen to produce a succinct document.
- The Overview and Scrutiny Committee would have an opportunity to comment on drafts of the plan and other stakeholders would also be consulted. It was also important to ensure that the Children and Young People's plan would link in with the BCC Corporate Plan and plans of other partners such as Health.
- In response to a member's question on the role of the church as a voluntary sector partner, Sue Imbriano advised that there had not been a representative from the diocese on the CYPSPB, although this was now being rectified. It was hoped that church organisations would support the plans as the well-being and quality of life of children was at the heart of the change programme. It was noted that face-to-face working would be important in building relationships with key partners.
- A member asked what progress had been made on the development of a Children's Trust. Sue Imbriano explained that there was a need to debate what type of Children's Trust model would suit Buckinghamshire's Children and Young People best.

The Chairman thanked Sue Imbriano, Lin Hazell, Marion Clayton and Stephen Bagnall for attending the meeting.

7. WORK PROGRAMME – SCOPING OF NEXT REVIEWS

Jackie Fisk, Policy Officer gave a brief overview of the work of Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and explained that an issue had been highlighted by the previous Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Lifelong Learning with regards to children in PRUs during the transition stage between primary and secondary schools. It was proposed that referrals to PRUs during primary/secondary transition years should be the subject of a working group and members were asked to volunteer if they were interested in taking part in this review. The working group would have an initial meeting in early July to agree the scope of the review and to discuss a schedule for site visits, which would take place in September and October. Derek Ashburner, Alison Howe, Niknam Hussain, David Polhill and Peter Smith expressed an interest in joining the working group. The working group would report back to the full Committee on a regular basis.

Members also considered the scoping paper for the initial research phase of the Developing Children's Services topic. A member commented that the work programme seemed very process driven and suggested that underachievement of schools should be considered by the Committee. It was agreed that the Committee would review the work programme and the Committee's priorities in September/October.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 14 July, 10.00am, Mezzanine Room 1, County Hall, Aylesbury.

CHAIRMAN