



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 13 OCTOBER 2005, IN MEZZANINE ROOM 1, COUNTY HALL, AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT 9.50AM AND CONCLUDING AT 1.15PM.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr S Adams, Mr D Carroll, Mr C Ditta, Mr N Hussain, Mrs B Jennings (Chairman), Mr D Polhill, Mr P Rogerson (Vice-Chairman), Mr F Sweatman, and Mrs C Willetts.

CO-OPTED MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr D Ashburner and Mrs A Howe.

OFFICERS PRESENT

Mrs J Burke, Mrs P Cue, Mr R Edwards, Mr S Powell, Mr N Powley and Mrs C Street.

GUEST SPEAKERS

Mr S Chesterman - Thames Valley Police, Mr A Goodrum - Chiltern District Council

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

Apologies were received from Mr D Anson MBE, Mr P Hardy, Mr P Monk, Mrs L Clarke, Mr M Moore, Mr P Smith and Mr D Watson. Mr S Adams substituted for Mr D Watson for the duration of the meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None were declared.

3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services held on 15 September 2005, were agreed as a correct record.

Approaches to Scrutinising the New Children's Services Agenda

Members were informed that priorities identified by members for scrutinising children's services would be kept in mind for the forward work plan.

Admission Arrangements:

Members had been circulated with a copy of a report written by Legal concerning whether the Cabinet Member report for the revised admission arrangements had followed due process. It appeared from the report that it had, but members had a number of questions about the report that they were passing to the Lead Officer for Scrutiny.

The report from the OSC for Children's Services would be circulated to all members of the Admissions Forum. A special meeting of the Admissions Forum had been called to discuss this issue. It was agreed that Nick Powley would be asked to produce a paper on issues raised concerning admissions at the September OSC meeting and give suggestions for the way forward (including information on the Education Bill). The OSC could then decide how it wanted to progress matters.

4. CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE ON KEY ISSUES**PRU Working Group Update**

The Chairman of the PRU Working Group reported that 10 visits had so far been carried out to three PRUs, four primary schools and three secondary schools. Another three visits had been arranged. Members of the PRU working group would be meeting with Janet Sparrow (Acting Head of Service - Integrated Services for Special Education), Lesley Galloway (Education Manager - Social Inclusion) and Steve Edgar (Senior Adviser) to help inform their work. Results so far had not shown a big increase in referrals during the transition stage. The Working Group had identified that there was a need for better communication between schools and PRUs. Developing a set proforma for use at the referral stage could help this. Members had also identified concerns regarding the dual registration of pupils, and the tracking of pupils. The PRUs visited seemed to be effective, and carried out important outreach work with young people.

Every Child Matters

The Chairman reported that the report of the OSC concerning the Every Child Matters Programme was to be presented to the Every Child Matters Working Group, later that day. It was noted that the OSC would require regular updates to keep abreast of developments in the programme.

5. CHILDREN'S SERVICES - DEVELOPING THE PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

Members received a presentation from Alan Goodrum, Chief Executive of Chiltern District Council (CDC) on how the partnership was developing in relation to the five outcomes of Every Child Matters.

Alan informed members that CDC had a long history of working with young people through such initiatives as the Countywide Youth Strategy and Local Action Plans for young people, and by helping to identify the needs of young people in Town and Village Appraisals.

Alan reported that the DfES did not communicate well with the District Council regarding the ECM programme; it seemed that the CC was the main focus as the lead authority. He saw the County as having a statutory role in providing services in contrast to the District who would provide discretionary activities for young people. Alan referred to the 'Youth Matters' Green Paper, which made explicit reference to District Councils. A joint response to this was being compiled through the Countywide Youth Group.

Alan thought the main focus should be on capturing current services for young people and programme managing them in a way which reflected the five key outcomes in Every Child Matters. He saw the greatest risks to children and young people (in terms of the new agenda) as being:

1. Accessibility (transport and housing, difficult to prioritise for this group, constrained by funding)
2. Sharing of information (lack of 'case based' information)

A member asked how CDC was supporting young families, and how this group was recognised in terms of CDC's grant giving powers. Alan replied that grants were allocated on the basis of set criteria and that this group was not given any particular priority. Alan thought that the DC was more likely to focus on how the Every Child Matters programme would affect teenagers, but this would need to be debated at member level. It was unlikely that CDC would have sufficient resources to cater for all groups of young people, therefore focusing on one group might be more productive.

The Vice Chairman referred to an internal 'structure' that had been developed to give an idea of how the Every Child Matters programme might be delivered. The development of the structure had indicated that delivery of services was likely to be at a local level. The Vice Chairman was keen to find out more about how the County and District would work together to make a difference to services for young people. Alan gave an example of how 'open space' was being used more effectively through a public space utilization tool, which could take into account a range of issues including the needs of young people. Members were reminded that the new Licensing Act contained a requirement to take account of child protection matters. Alan thought other ways in which CDC and the other partners involved in delivering children's services could work together was through the 'Getting Closer to Communities' agenda, which emphasised cluster working and would encompass Parishes. Alan suggested that area structures would be useful in this capacity. The skill would be in pulling together the various stands of work undertaken by partners to achieve 'joined up' services, particularly where there were a variety of targets that partners individually were trying to meet.

The Cabinet Member for Schools reminded members that the new inspection regime would include assessing how partners worked together, as well as looking at the quality of services for young people.

A member raised the problem of ensuring effective information sharing. The Cabinet Member for Schools advised that a common referral framework had been introduced for young people, which had improved information sharing considerably. However, the Data Protection Act could sometimes act as a barrier and the County Council had been lobbying central government on this matter. Alan advised that he did not think the Common Assessment Framework was properly linked with the benefit system, and that better integration was needed in this respect. A member referred to the fact that children were issued with individual identification numbers on entry to schools, which could be used to track them throughout the time they were in full time education. Another member of the OSC advised that trust between partners needed to be developed to ensure information was passed on between agencies.

A member reported on the general problem of how to lift children out of poverty. Alan advised that CDC did take some actions to help those young people living in deprived areas, such as offering subsidised rates for facilities, but there were limitations as to available resources. The Cabinet Member for Schools advised of the need for all agencies to work together to try and break the cycle of deprivation, and of

the need to raise the aspirations of young people and educate their parents to support them to achieve.

The Chairman thanked Alan for his contribution. Members asked if he would provide a written answer to the questions contained in the brief that he had been circulated with in advance of the meeting.

Members welcomed Simon Chesterton from Thames Valley Police (TVP) to the meeting. He reminded members that TVP had undergone a major reorganisation in the past 18 months and was now managed by a series of basic command units (BCUs). Simon was a Commander of the Buckingham BCU, and was a member of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board (CYPSPB), which was likely to change into a Children's Trust in due course.

Simon reported that TVP were likely to view the new agenda for children in terms of preventative work (i.e. child protection), and services for children once harm had taken place. He informed members that cases of sexual assault and child protection were currently managed through Child Protection and Sexual Crime Units (CPSCU) but over the next six months these matters would be devolved to local areas through Police Protection Units (PPUs). A major concern for the police was the number of incidents of domestic violence in Buckinghamshire, which currently stood at 400 reported incidents per month, of which 15% were deemed to be high risk. Most female homicides occurred as a result of domestic violence. Domestic violence was managed through the PPU's and a new risk assessment strategy had been put in place to support victims and help prevent them from further injuries. Domestic violence was also being targeted through the Local Area Agreements (LAAs).

Simon saw the greatest risks to children and young people as resulting from:

- Alcohol / drug abuse (both child and parent)
- Domestic violence
- Poor health care
- Poor education

The last two points were particularly related to young people who were living outside the 'normal' network of care.

In terms of what TVP was doing to minimize risks to children and young people, Simon referred to a multi-agency group, which met every six weeks to discuss children at risk from sexual exploitation, and the CPSCU, which had a Referrals Manager who looked into cases referred from Social Services. Further resources included the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), who played a key role in safeguarding the public and managing dangerous offenders in the community. Simon informed members that he was also involved in the setting up of a Multi-Agency Risk Management group (MARM), which would focus on managing domestic violence cases. TVP were keen to set up a sexual assault referral unit and were currently trying to secure funding for this. TVP liaised closely with Social Services and the Youth Offending Scheme (YOS), and placed some police officers in local schools, which fitted well with the current drive towards neighbourhood policing.

In terms of how TVP worked with other partners to keep children and young people safe, Simon advised members that the people were involved in joint investigations and undertook joint training. They also took part in 'Working Together' multi-agency training. Each child protection case was allocated its own strategy meeting, which

involved a number of different agencies, and TVP also worked with voluntary agencies to help keep children safe.

Simon saw the greatest challenges to the partnership as being:

- Developing strategies for helping people to become better parents
- Engaging with those most at risk
- Reducing bureaucracy
- Sharing data / information
- Lack of resources.

He thought that improvements to services could be recognised by reductions in referrals, youth offending, repeat victimization, school exclusions, and a reduction in children admitted to hospital through criminal injuries.

Members discussed the difficulties associated with trying to contact hard to reach children, and if progress was being made in this area. The danger area was where children did not quite meet social services thresholds for help - they could then be reliant on 'ad hoc' resources. Simon advised that progress was difficult to measure, but that he was aware of good work being carried out by outreach workers and through initiatives such as 'Street Dream'. Often problems were picked up by teachers, doctors or the police. Each school had to have a child protection policy in place and a dedicated person for child protection. Simon added that youth clubs and extended schools were places in which vulnerable children might be identified.

A member asked to what extent the target for TVP was crime reduction / conviction as opposed to 'Every Child Matters' in the larger context for all children. Simon advised that the main aim of the police would be to protect children, and then provide proper resources for investigation should they be harmed.

Members discussed the fact that some parents lacked parental skills and required further guidance in this area to ensure the well being of their children.

A member referred to information sharing and asked Simon if the Police were able to obtain all the information they needed from other agencies. Simon replied that problems were sometimes experienced with patient confidentiality. A good way of sharing information would be to set up a co-terminus office with Social Services. Another important source of local information could be the newly formed Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAGs), who would be able to reflect the concerns of the local community.

The Vice-Chairman referred to the proposed structure for delivering the Every Child Matters Programme. Simon advised that he had been consulted on this. Simon was asked if he could provide written comments on the structure and suggestions as to how the Police and the County Council could work together to identify children at risk.

The Chairman thanked Simon for his valuable contribution to the meeting.

Members were asked if they would like to sit on a Steering Group to consider how the OSC could best approach scrutiny of the development of the new Children's

Service. The following members expressed an interest: Brenda Jennings, Paul Rogerson, (Marion Clayton), Alison Howe, David Polhill and Mary Baldwin.

6. SWAN AWARDS 2006

Members received information updating them on the process for the 2006 Swan Awards, and were asked to suggest any changes concerning this. For 2006 it was proposed that schools be invited to apply for an award if they felt that they were able to demonstrate innovation in supporting pupils' health as outlined in the 'Be Healthy' component of Every Child Matters.

Members discussed the information and were concerned that the award should not lose its original focus of recognising schools that although not high achieving, were nevertheless undertaking high quality work in other areas and benefiting the education of their pupils. Members agreed that it should be made clear to schools the kinds of initiatives that they would be looking for. Pauline Cue, Adviser for Assessments, referred members to the examples given in the letter, which would be sent to schools, and the sorts of supporting information that schools would need to provide as detailed in the Swan Awards application form.

The Chairman encouraged all members of the OSC to take part in the school visits, and advised that the visits should be carried out in pairs, where possible. As there were many schools to see, other members would be asked to take part. After moderation the OSC as a whole would make the final decision as to which schools should receive the award. Members did not raise any objections to the idea of having a single Award.

7 POST OFSTED INSPECTION ACTION PLAN UPDATE

Members received an update on the Post OfSTED Inspection Action Plan, which was introduced by Stuart Powell, Head of School Improvement.

Members discussed the update and commented that financial management was a big problem for some schools. There were still issues with Sapphire and members of staff being paid incorrectly. Stuart advised that Payroll were working flat out to address this. Sapphire had started to produce the kinds of financial monitoring information that would be vital in tracking school's expenditure. The Cabinet Member for Schools had met with Headteachers to talk about their concerns regarding Sapphire and had committed to pass their comments back to the Resources Portfolio.

Members referred to the fact that some of the actions seemed to have changed from the original targets. Stuart commented that the actions were first identified as a result of the OfSTED inspection but as time had gone by it had been necessary to modify some of the targets.

Members raised concerns regarding targets that appeared as amber in both January and October 2005. Stuart noted these and informed members that he would feedback concerns to the appropriate areas.

A member referred to an action concerning reviewing the existing KS3 provision in the PRUs and extending successful practice to ensure sufficient capacity. The member commented that it would be helpful if the PRU Working Group could be given further information regarding this.

8 DISCUSSION OF THE MORNING'S WORK

Members referred to the Future Work Programme and requested that raising achievement in low attaining schools be included on this.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 17 November 2005, **9.45am**, Mezzanine Rooms 1 and 2, County Hall, Aylesbury.

CHAIRMAN