



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 17 NOVEMBER 2005, IN MEZZANINE ROOMS 1 AND 2, COUNTY HALL, AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT 9.45AM AND CONCLUDING AT 1.35PM.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mrs M Baldwin, Mr D Carroll, Mrs L Clarke, Mr C Ditta, Mr P Hardy, 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, Mrs A Howe, Mr P Monk and Mr M Moore.

OFFICERS PRESENT

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

GUEST SPEAKERS

Mr B Allen - Chairman, Admissions Forum
Mr P Bennett - Chief Executive, Wycombe PCT
Mr D McPhail - Chairman, Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC)
Mrs C Petford - Commissioner for Children's Services, Wycombe PCT.

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Mrs M Clayton.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

Apologies were received from Mr D Anson MBE, Mr P Smith and Mrs S Imbriano - Strategic Director for Schools.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mrs M Baldwin declared a prejudicial interest in relation to the item entitled 'School Admissions' as a member of the Admissions Forum, which had recently debated and voted on this matter. Mrs Baldwin informed members that she would be leaving the room whilst this item was discussed.

3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services held on 13 October 2005, were agreed as a correct record. There were no matters arising from the minutes.

4. CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE ON KEY ISSUES

Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) Working Group Update

The Chairman of the Working Group reported that members had carried out a series of visits to the PRUs and schools in Buckinghamshire to investigate claims of an increase of referrals to PRUs at Key Stage 3. The Chairman commented on the impressive work being carried out by the PRUs.

Children's Services Agenda Steering Group

A small group had met to discuss proposals for the Forward Work Programme, which would be reported to the December meeting of the OSC.

Every Child Matters Programme and Children and Young Person Plan

The Chairman had asked Chris Williams, Chief Executive, to keep the OSC informed of progress with these initiatives. Members were informed that a presentation of the CYP Plan would take place at the February meeting of the Committee; and the Plan would subsequently be submitted to the March meeting of the Cabinet.

Corporate Task Group

A meeting of the Corporate Task Group would be taking place on 18 January 2006 to begin to consider the cross cutting aims and targets contained in the Corporate Plan.

5. CHILDREN'S SERVICES - DEVELOPING THE PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

Members received a presentation from Mr P Bennett, Chief Executive of Wycombe PCT, and Chris Petford, Commissioner for Children's Services, on how the Children's Service was developing in relation to the five outcomes of Every Child Matters (ECM), from the point of view of the NHS. A copy of the presentation was circulated to members/

Chris stressed the importance of the Children's National Service Framework (NSF) to Health and explained how this would work in parallel with the Every Child Matters Programme. She went through the Standards involved in the NSF, some of which related to the outcomes for Every Child Matters. Chris added that there was no funding attached to the Children's NSF.

A member asked how Health would work with Children's Centres and through extended provision in schools. The same member referred to a lack of expertise in schools to pick up on the mental health problems of primary school children. In response, Chris spoke about the Child and Adolescence Mental Health Service (CAMHS), where work had previously been concentrated on building up specialist services, referred to as Tier 3. Work had now begun to develop services at Tier 2, which would involve the co-ordination of a range of services such as education. CAMHS had an outreach team that worked with young people identified as having mental health problems in schools. Further resources included a Mental Health Worker that was based within the Youth Offending Team, and a Health Drop-in at Wycombe. Chris acknowledged that mental health provision for young people was an area that required further development, and was an area that had been poorly resourced nationally.

A member referred to the importance of establishing roles and responsibilities within the new Children's Services agenda, and the importance of partnership working. The member wondered how this would happen in Health when the NHS and the County worked to different boundaries. Chris and Paul recognised that this was a difficult issue. Attempts were being made to push back the boundaries and not let them get in the way of appropriate services being offered to children.

In response to a query from a member, Paul advised that the biggest hurdle to good partnership working was likely to be the different cultures and different ways of working involved. There would have to be a good understanding of what was meant by joint commissioning of services. It was acknowledged that joint structures were a good way forward but could be very complex to carry out.

The Vice-Chairman highlighted the importance of addressing how agencies would work together. Paul advised that much work was ongoing to facilitate the sharing of information between agencies. An example of this was an Information Sharing Protocol, which had been circulated for signing. It was noted that information sharing had become an area of contention since the introduction of the Freedom of Information Act. Paul advised that there were many myths about what information could and could not be shared, which needed to be exposed. Ultimately, people should act in the best interest of the child.

Paul further reported on a pilot initiative taking place in Buckingham to examine ways in which partners could work together. The Local Member for Buckingham North commented that he had not been aware of the pilot. Paul further advised that the new safeguarding agenda would force changes in how people worked together.

The Chairman welcomed Donald McPhail, Chairman of the Buckinghamshire Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC), to the meeting. Donald had been invited to talk about the role of the new Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), which he would be chairing.

Donald advised members that the ACPC had been a requirement for the last fifteen years and had been established as a result of secondary legislation. It was constructed from agencies involved in supporting children and its accountability was back through its members. The role of the ACPC was to ensure agencies worked together to safeguard children.

The LSCB had been brought about through primary legislation and would have a much wider remit to provide a mechanism for agreeing how the relevant organisations in Buckinghamshire would co-operate to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in the County. Included in its functions was the development of policies and procedures for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in Buckinghamshire, and a responsibility to ensure training was provided for those working with young people in the area. A main focus would be on the effectiveness of partnership working and as such, auditing and inspection would be a substantial portion of the LSCB agenda.

One of the themes of the Bichard inquiry had been how staff working with young people were appointed, and how problems with staff were managed. This would be addressed through the formation of a Safety and Employment Sub Committee. It was noted that the work of group would include information on how staff could keep themselves safe. It was proposed that a number of other sub committees would be formed as follows:

- Policy
- Training
- Monitoring and Inspection
- Serious Cases
- Child Death Review
- Inspections Scrutiny Group

Donald advised that the LCSB would have to review every child death in the County, including death by suicide, to identify any underlying themes. This would bring into the multi-agency arena some aspects of work previously undertaken primarily by Health. It was thought that the Child Death Review Sub Committee would be chaired by the Director of Public Health.

There would be a Coordinating Group consisting of the Chairman of the LCSB and the Chairmen of the sub committees, who would work on developing the agendas for the LCSB. In addition to this there would be a number of consultation groups consisting of service users, community based groups and faith groups.

Donald advised that the LCSB would require a budget of approximately £250k to set up - this compared to an approximate yearly budget for the ACPC of £100k. Some of the initial funds would be used to employ a Business Manager, Training Manager and Independent Chairman and to set up the Audit and Inspection functions of the LCSB. Statutory members of the Board would have to contribute to the budget.

David Watson arrived 11.37

Members discussed the difficulty of ensuring that communication filtered down to frontline services. Donald advised that it would be a requirement for agencies to develop a communication strategy for this purpose.

A member asked how the LCSB would obtain information from agencies. Donald responded that there was a duty on agencies to work together and that non-cooperation could be raised with senior management and in public forums.

A member asked how the public would be involved. Donald advised that issues raised via the LCSB would be made public through the production of an annual report. The public would also be involved through the consultation groups. Where a child death review had taken place, the Executive Summary would be made public.

Donald was asked if the LCSB would be looking at preventative work and children on the child protection register. He replied that it was not a function of the LCSB to provide direct services, but it would be expected to ensure agencies were working together to provide effective services.

The Vice-Chairman asked how the LCSB would engage with other forums dealing with the Every Child Matters Programme, and how the OSC could interact with this process. Donald advised that the LCSB would link into the Strategic Partnership Board through the Chair, but would also be willing to link with the OSC if that seemed appropriate.

A member queried how well child protection could be achieved in Buckinghamshire when there had been problems recruiting social workers in the past. Donald reported that historically there had been a problem, which the ACPC had identified. Through the Chairman, the ACPC had written to Chris Williams highlighting their concerns.

Following this the ACPC had regular updates on unallocated cases and of the recruitment drives carried out by the Authority to increase its pool of social workers. The ACPC also agreed a policy on the prioritization of children on the child protection register. At the current time there were no unallocated cases on the child protection register.

Donald, Chris and Paul were thanked for their valuable contribution to the meeting.

6. STANDARDS HEADLINES

Members received a brief update from the Head of the School Improvement Service, on Buckinghamshire's schools' performance against national standards.

Members commented on the following:

- The reduction in standards of English at KS2 and 3
- The differences in achievement between girls and boys
- Query as to whether there were particular schools and areas where under achievement was more common
- More information required on minority ethnic pupils
- The need to separate results at KS3 and 4 between Grammar and Upper Schools.

It was agreed that Pauline Cue would provide members with further information regarding minority ethnic pupils and underachieving schools/areas at a later meeting. A member suggested that Marion Clayton, Cabinet Member for Schools, who was also present at the meeting, could provide a written response to the Officer's report.

It was further agreed that in future OSC members would be sent a hard copy of the Standard Headlines report with areas of concern highlighted. Only if there were specific issues that members wished to discuss would the report be on the OSC agenda. An officer could then address members' questions at a later meeting, if necessary.

Mrs M Baldwin left the meeting at 12.20pm

7 SCHOOL ADMISSIONS

Members received reports from the Head of Policy, Planning and Performance - Schools, in response to queries raised at the OSC meeting in September, and on possible different options for admissions arrangements as requested by members at the October meeting. Member received a further report of the Lead Officer, Overview and Scrutiny based on a report from the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, on the legality of the Burnham Grammar School consultation.

The Chairman welcomed members of the public to the meeting and thanked the parents concerned that had taken the time to prepare letters and emails on this subject, which the OSC had duly considered.

Members had been issued with an assortment of maps showing the September 2005 allocations and preferences for the schools concerned, and maps showing what would have happened if parental preference had remained the same but the admission rules had changed to using the closest catchment school. The Head of Policy, Planning and Performance took members through the maps in detail. A lengthy discussion took place with members concluding that the proposed change for

this area did seem to increase the chance of children living on the edge of the catchment area to secure a place in their catchment school.

The Chairman of the Admissions Forum advised members that the Admissions Forum had discussed the proposed change in detail at a recent meeting and decided that this was the best way forward. It was not thought necessary to make changes in other areas. It was noted that the Admissions Forum could only make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Schools. It was further noted that Foundation Schools made their own admissions arrangements.

The Cabinet Member for Schools was keen to ensure members were fully aware that the proposal to amend the admissions arrangements was a significant change. Capacity within popular schools would not change as a result and therefore one child's gain at a popular school would be another child's loss.

Member's discussed the fact that the Appeals Process put pressure on popular schools as children had to be admitted to schools even if they were full, if the Appeals Process found in favour of the child. The Head of Policy, Planning and Performance - Schools advised that the Appeals Panels were independent. There were proposals in hand to try and improve the quality of presentations given to them to ensure decisions were made on the best information. A member of the OSC commented on the very high standard of training given to Appeal Panel members by the Appeals team.

Members discussed a paper that had been circulated with the agenda papers. The paper was a proposition to be taken to the Cabinet in December setting out the Committees findings on this subject. It was agreed that fourth bullet point in the proposition should be replaced with a paragraph that reflected that, 'The OSC Children's Services accepts the work of the Admissions Forum'. Members of the OSC agreed the rest of the proposition without any changes and the OSC agreed that the proposition should form the basis of the report to the Cabinet.

Officers were thanked for their hard work in preparing the reports.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 13 December 2005, 10.00am, Mezzanine Room 1, County Hall, Aylesbury.

CHAIRMAN