



# 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 TUESDAY 13 DECEMBER 2005, IN MEZZANINE ROOM 1, COUNTY HALL, AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT 10.05AM AND CONCLUDING AT 12.06PM.**

#### **MEMBERS PRESENT**

Mr D Anson, MBE, Mr D Carroll, Mr N Hussain, Mr D Polhill, Mr P Rogerson (Vice-Chairman), Mr P Smith, Mr F Sweatman, Mr D Watson and Mrs C Willetts.

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

Mrs A Howe, and Mr M Moore.

#### **OFFICERS PRESENT**

Mrs J Burke, Mr R Edwards and Mrs M Keyworth.

The Committee sent their condolences to Mrs Jennings on the death of her husband.

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

Apologies were received from Mr D Ashburner, Mrs M Baldwin, Mrs L Clarke, Mr C Ditta, Mrs B Jennings (Chairman) and Mr P Monk. Mr Rogerson was Chairman for the meeting

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

There were no declarations of interest

#### **3. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services held on 17 November 2005 were agreed as a correct record, with the exception of Item 7. Discussion took place about the accuracy of the minutes for item 7 and it was agreed that comments regarding admissions and the setting up of a working group would be included in a replacement minute, which would be circulated for members to agree. Therefore, the Committee agreed the minutes with the exception of item 7.

#### **4. MATTERS ARISING**

Discussion took place regarding whether 'matters arising' should be included on the agenda because it was not specifically an item for discussion. However, it was noted that 'matters arising' can be included in an agenda, but decisions cannot be taken under this item without public presence. The Committee was advised that the County Council did not consider that 'matters arising' should appear on an agenda.

It was agreed that further discussion regarding admissions should be taken under item 6 – Future Work Programme.

#### **5. CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE ON KEY ISSUES**

Members received a written update from the Chairman. The following was noted:

##### **Swan Awards**

The list of schools that had applied for an award was circulated for members to note and indicate their availability for visits. Members were informed that if they were either a governor of a particular school or had children at a particular school, they were excluded from visiting those schools. Visits would take place between January and March 2006. It was requested that at least two members make visits to each school. Pauline Cue, Education Adviser, or a representative from her team, would be attending the January meeting to talk about the guidelines, which would be issued prior to the visits.

##### **Member Development Questionnaire**

Members noted the excellent response from members. 46% had replied. Most interest was expressed in identifying issues for Scrutiny as well as Critical Reading Skills and Speed Reading. A programme would be set up early in the New Year and two or three issues would be covered in each two hour session. Members were asked to forward to the Policy Officer, any other items in which they were interested, but not identified on the list.

##### **Hard Copy Reports**

Members noted that the following hard copy reports would be circulated shortly:

- Services for Children and Physical or Sensory Disabilities;
- Children's Centres Strategic Plan

It was noted that Ashmead School was getting a Children's Centre. The draft Children's Centre Plan was a lengthy document which was currently being put into a shorter, more user friendly version. If members wished for the longer version, it was available.

##### **Standards Report**

Data regarding numbers of minority ethnic pupils and their progress would not be available until January. It was suggested, and members agreed, that a full report be presented at the February meeting.

Discussion took place regarding the report produced for the Community Relations Forum on progress by ethnic minority pupils and members asked to receive an update on this report, to include a breakdown by area and school.

### **School Visits**

Members noted that the Chairman and Vice Chairman had visited a number of schools in the Aylesbury area to ascertain whether staff were aware of the community involvement in Every Child Matters. It was hoped this information would inform the debate on Children's Services and give evidence on what they believed was happening. The Headteachers from Ashmead, Oak Green and Mandeville Schools have agreed to attend the meeting in February, when the draft of the Children's Services Plan would be available. Concern was expressed that not everyone was conjoined into the process. Further visits would take place.

Although some members were not aware of these visits, they agreed they would be useful and asked to contribute towards the programme. The Chairman commented that this was a low profile, information gathering exercise.

It was also considered useful to look at what services existed which were not actually provided through schools, i.e. Parents as First Teachers and Home Start. There appeared to be a demand for such services where parents and children interact and which could also influence schools.

The Chairman spoke of a current initiative where some grammar schools were taking primary school children one day a week in order to integrate them into their surroundings. This was an inner city initiative aimed at raising attainment aspirations and reducing the stigma which children attach to attending a grammar school when most of their peer groups attend upper schools. It was agreed that a representative from a participating grammar school be invited to give a presentation regarding this work. The Committee agreed this was an excellent initiative.

In answer to a question regarding the timing for the Children and Young People's Plan, members noted that the draft paper would be assembled by the end of December and would be presented, by Ed Mallen, at the February meeting.

### **PRU Working Group Update**

The draft report, in a user friendly version, would be presented at the January meeting. Members noted the Group had been meeting on a monthly basis and had now visited all six PRUs as well as eight primary and four secondary schools feeding into them. Meetings have taken place with Isobel Date, Project Manager – Excellence in Cities, Julia Crane, Senior Educational Psychologist and Carol Tosh, School Adviser for Excellence in Aylesbury. A meeting with Steve Edgar had been arranged for 22 December 2005 at 9.30am for members of the Working Group to discuss the draft report prior to it being circulated to the Committee.

### **Ofsted**

The Committee noted that Bedgrove Infant School had had a particularly successful Inspection and had been mentioned on the television. Other successful schools were:

- Turnfurlong Infant (second mention)
- Dinton Church of England School (second mention)
- Drayton Parslow Village School
- Marsworth Church of England Infant School
- Elangeni School (second mention)
- Holtspur School
- John Hampden Grammar School (second mention)

The Committee wished to extend their congratulations to all schools on their excellent achievement.

## 6. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Members reviewed the draft Work Programme for 2005-2006 and made the following comments:

1. Lengthy debate took place on the admissions policy and catchment areas, and the possible need to set up a working group to look at these specific items. It was suggested that the Committee may wish to wait until the White Paper was published with the possibility of a report on admissions being brought to the meeting in February. However, members agreed that it should be set up sooner in order that membership and remit was in place prior to work commencing. Members agreed to set up a working group on Admissions Policy and Catchment areas.
2. The Children and Young People's Plan would be presented at the February meeting, prior to being presented to Cabinet in March.
3. Children's Service Budget. The Working Group had discussed how the budget might be looked at by the Committee. Information on the 2006-07 budget would not be available until the end of February. The Corporate Task Group would pick up any cross cutting issues. Work on the budget could be tackled in terms of over and under spends; whether the budget is achieving what it should; and particular areas of investment and projection under the MTP. A particular area for discussion could be the single fee share for schools and items which are ring fenced for specific spending. These may be areas which could present difficulties. It was important that discussions were undertaken within the remit of the Corporate Plan.

Members noted there was very little time in which to make comments regarding the budget, as well as the fact that parts of the Children's Services budget would be held elsewhere. The Chairman and Vice Chairman would report on where specific areas were being covered. Further discussion ensued regarding finance which was ring fenced and the need to know about items for which schools received specific funding. Such information could further inform the Committee on how the budget could be spent. The recommendations on spending from the Schools Forum would also contribute towards this work.

It was possible that work on the Children's Services budget could be moved to the March meeting.

4. Under the Corporate Plan there are 18 targets that refer to Children's Services. In this connection, the working group considered priorities relating to 'Be Healthy' and 'Stay Safe'. A member suggested that under performing should be a priority for future work. The Chairman commented that the outcomes 'Be Healthy' and 'Stay Safe' were highlighted because of the Climbie Report and it may be there was more work to be done in that area.
5. Further discussion took place between prioritising the outcomes from Every Child Matters. Some members suggested that 'Enjoy and Achieve' should be given priority because if a school was successful, it was contributing towards children being healthy and staying safe, as well as dispelling the experience of parents who have had unhappy experiences when they were at school.

However the steering group considered that being healthy and staying safe would create the right atmosphere for achieving.

6. The Strategic Director for Schools would be attending the February meeting to give a presentation of the implications of the Schools White Paper.
7. With regard to Item 8, Sharing Information Protocols, the Policy Officer agreed to check on whether Members were involved in the Buckingham pilot, as well as putting together a report on the current situation.
8. The Policy Officer agreed to look at including under performing schools under item 12 of the Work Programme – Standards Report, in order that members could debate the causes relating to under performance, and what the Local Education Authority was doing to counteract them. There was a performance gap in the County which needed to be looked at.
9. Discussion took place on what was taught in schools, particularly religious education. The work of the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) was discussed and it was suggested that a report on the work of the Council could be brought to Committee. Members were reminded that whilst these points were of interest to particular members, they were not the remit of this Committee. However, it was whether the Committee had an overview or a scrutiny role in these areas which was of importance. There was a need for a strategic overview with regard to Every Child Matters.
10. Item 15 - Review of the strategic framework for consultation with schools and governors. It was suggested that the Report should encompass communication, consultation and services to schools. It was agreed that Caroline Corcoran be asked to attend a meeting to discuss this report.
11. Item 19 – Performance Monitoring. It was agreed to set up a Performance Monitoring Working Group.
12. Discussion took place on bullying. A member stated that schools had implemented the Government policy on bullying and unless a problem had been identified in a school, there was nothing further that could be done. However, the possibility of looking at whether children are subject to bullying in other places was suggested. In further discussion members considered whether bullying was in fact still going on in schools, despite reassurances to the contrary. Drugs was also a problem, which affected not just the children, but their families and the community. Members agreed to consider the possibility of a future working group on bullying and drugs, pending a report on the subject. A member suggested having a separate item on the agenda in order to discuss this further. Again, it was noted that this should relate to the County Council policy and its influence on schools.
13. Item 5b Increase support for carers. It was suggested that this could be a priority with regard to support given to young parents and carers, which should carry on later into their lives. Members were informed that supporting parents in later life was an Adult Social Care target and would fall under the remit of the OSC for Adult Services.
14. A member commented that the work programme was very schools focused, with no mention of any work related to Social Services, Police and Hospitals. However, it was noted that the contents of pages 11 and 12 were most

important and covered children in and out of school. These pages contained items discussed by the steering group and put in order of priority, one of which was drugs and alcohol. Once the priorities had been agreed, the possibility of working in partnership with other organisations to provide suggested services could be discussed. The Policy Officer suggested a traffic light system be used to identify problem areas.

15. Members discussed the amount of time spent between overview work and scrutiny work. It was suggested by one member that there could be a target percentage of time spent between scrutiny and overview. However, the new system of hard copy reporting to the Committee will free up time which can be devoted to scrutiny.
16. In discussing exclusions, a member asked for an analysis of information received from schools, including the reasons for exclusion. This analysis could help further inform the Committee in such matters as drugs etc.
17. The following service or area for protection within the Council Plan were removed:
  - Maintain funding to schools at the FSS level – this was now obsolete.
  - Maintain the link advisory role – link advisers no longer existed.
18. The Policy Officer drew members' attention to 5b and the Corporate Plan target of development of family centres. There were three family centres, one of which will be closing. The remit for these centres is changing to Child Protection issues and assessment. Children's Centres will be taking on the original role of the family centres.

**7. PUPIL REFERRAL UNITS**

This item was covered as part of the Chairman's Update.

**8. DISCUSSION OF THIS MORNING'S WORK**

Discussions took place under each agenda item.

**9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Thursday 12 January 2006, 10.00am, Mezzanine Room 1, County Hall, Aylesbury.

**CHAIRMAN**