

## CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES** of the meeting held on Thursday, 18 April 2013 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 12.00

**Present:**

**Voting Members:** Councillor Michael Waine – in the Chair  
Councillor Marilyn Badcock (Deputy Chairman)  
Councillor Ann Bonner  
Councillor Mrs Anda Fitzgerald-O'Connor  
Councillor Caroline Newton  
Councillor Neil Owen  
Councillor Dave Sexon  
Councillor Val Smith  
Councillor Roz Smith (substitute)

**Other Members in Attendance:** Councillor Melinda Tilley

**Co-opted Members:** Mr Chris Bevan  
Mrs Sue Matthew

**By Invitation:** Mrs Carole Thomson  
Mr Ian Jones  
Councillor Steve Curran (Oxford City Council)

**Officers:** Roy Leach  
Creighton Muirhead  
Frances Craven  
Ruth Ashwell  
Frances Place

**Agenda Item                      Officer Attending**

*The Scrutiny Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting [, together with a schedule of addenda tabled at the meeting/the following additional documents:] and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda and reports [agenda, reports and schedule/additional documents] are attached to the signed Minutes.*

**15/13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS**  
(Agenda No. 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Peter Handley and Cllr M. Altaf-Khan. Cllr Roz Smith substituted for Cllr Janet Godden and Ian Jones replaces Bob Martyn as the COTO representative.

**16/13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE BACK PAGE**

(Agenda No. 2)

None.

**17/13 MINUTES**

(Agenda No. 3)

The committee agreed that any issues from this committee should be passed on to the next committee post-election, whatever form it takes.

**18/13 SPEAKING TO OR PETITIONING THE COMMITTEE**

(Agenda No. 4)

None.

**19/13 FORWARD PLAN AND COMMITTEE BUSINESS**

(Agenda No. 5)

The committee agreed that the following items need to go to the future committee:

- Member-led Children's centres review
- Monitoring of the introduction of increased funding for social workers
- Out of county placements

The committee discussed where children's social care would fit in the new scrutiny organisation and stressed that all members post-election must ensure that it is picked up somewhere.

Cllr Fitzgerald-O'Connor also suggested that close working is needed with the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Cllr Melinda Tilley was invited to join the discussion. She reminded the committee that the new structure is on trial for a year and they will need to ensure that children's social care is dealt with at a public meeting. The Corporate Parenting Panel is not a public meeting but Cllr Tilley reminded the committee that all members are welcome to attend, and encouraged more to come to the meetings.

Chris Bevan declared an interest that he represents the Portsmouth Diocese so was interested in the schools consultation in Didcot. He asked for more information about the county council responsibilities regarding the proposals and how that fits in with the Department for Education's (DfE) role.

Roy Leach explained that the role of the local authority is to form the specification, i.e. the quantity, quality and when they need the schools.

Cabinet receives and agrees this specification then puts it out to the market to invite expressions of interest.

Cabinet then take advice from officers and decide on their preferred operator. This recommendation is then sent to the DfE to make the final decision. From experience, provided the council's process is robust and the recommendation is sound, the DfE are likely to agree.

## **20/13 EDUCATION STRATEGY**

(Agenda No. 6)

Frances Craven (FC) gave a presentation on the Education Strategy.

Discussion first focussed on the work with targeted schools- those who have received 2 satisfactory Ofsted ratings with the same Headteacher. Meetings are held with these schools to see how to get improvement. This work is part of the council's role as champion for children.

FC explained that there has been a mixed reaction from the meetings. The schools that have taken the meetings well are the ones where the headteachers and governors know their pupils well and can identify from the data those affected. They have then taken on the feedback and improved.

There has been some resistance as schools are not used to being challenged.

Cllr Waine congratulated FC on this work and stressed that challenge should be welcomed as it is working to get the best outcomes for students. He asked how it is ensured that these conversations go through to the governing body.

FC replied that the chair of governors is involved in all the conversations so should provide feedback for the governing body.

She added that they are planning to review the process of these meetings to identify lessons learnt, including how to further engage governors with the process.

Cllr Waine suggested that the minutes of the meetings could be disseminated to the governing body.

Cllr Tilley highlighted that the best way of getting information out to the governing body is to send it through the clerk.

The committee discussed the challenges in attracting new headteachers into the area and the need to support headteachers.

FC talked about the leadership programme which is for leadership at all levels. She also highlighted the ways that they are celebrating the good work of schools, for example in the recent celebration event for schools with improved Ofsted ratings.

Carole Thomson asked about how the partnership working between schools is developing.

FC explained that the partnership working is variable across the county but new partnerships are evolving as schools evolve, for example the aspiration networks are creating strong new partnerships. It is the council's role to support and shape the partnerships but schools take the lead.

Cllr Newton asked what sanctions were available for those targeted schools that were not responding positively and making improvements.

FC explained that at the meeting recommendations are made and actions agreed that are followed through. These are then reviewed with further conversations with the Headteacher.

Roy Leach (RL) stressed that intervention powers are only for maintained schools. The situation is different for academies, they could speak to multi-academy trusts but the local authority is not empowered to intervene in these schools.

Chris Bevan asked about how officers are working with academies to share their good experience.

RL replied that they already have good relationships with academies, particularly around place planning. A few have isolated themselves but this is not the norm.

Cllr Tilley added that the council is working very hard to maintain strong relationships with all schools whatever their status as we retain statutory responsibility for attainment. She emphasised that this is going well so far and that if a school is failing children we will do anything to improve it.

### **Reading Campaign**

Cllr Steve Curran from Oxford City Council joined the committee to provide an update on the city's initiative.

He explained that the intention is to get world class teaching in the city schools-particularly in deprived areas. He also added that the good cooperation between the city and county council is crucial and he would like to see even more.

Creighton Muirhead (CM) gave an overview of the results so far from the county council's reading campaign.

He explained that they have not met the target for the number of schools to sign up as they do not have a mechanism to make schools sign up to it. There are a range of reasons why schools do not join: some are part of the Oxford City campaign, some already have their own methods for improvement and others are already using the project x method in a different way.

Cllr Waine stated that it comes down to the headteacher's choice so it is important for the governing body to be aware of options. He asked how we can challenge schools that have not joined up and not improved their results.

CM replied that the SATs results will give them the evidence needed to show schools that they need to join campaign.

Cllr Waine sought assurance that data will be used to challenge schools through the Headteacher and the governing body.

FC confirmed that this will happen and they will make sure the governing body are fully included.

Cllr Newton was impressed by the testimonials and asked if anyone can we see the project x code.

CM replied that there are examples on Oxford University Press' website, but encouraged the councillors to visit schools and see it in action.

Ian Jones asked about the sustainability of the project as the funding is finite.

CM explained that the way the funding is being used will support sustainability as the money is being spent on training for the schools, the media campaign and volunteer training. Schools have had funding for training but not to run the programme. The hope is that the schools will see how well the training has worked and continue the programme themselves.

Cllr Tilley added that other children not involved in the programme are starting to use the books which is embedding it into the school and results are already being seen very quickly.

Sue Matthew agreed that good programmes do get embedded, particularly when training is done for the school. She also expressed that there is a need to be honest with ourselves that there will be valleys/plateaus in results from the programme.

Cllr Waine added that the other end of this is picking it up in KS2 and beyond in secondary schools. He stressed that momentum in KS1 improvements needs to be carried through.

Cllr Newton asked whether numeracy and science will be picked up.

FC explained that they will need to look at data and get funding to develop this.

## **21/13 CHILL OUT FUND** (Agenda No. 7)

Ruth Ashwell (RA) provided an overview of the Chill Out Fund.

The committee discussed the successful bids and questioned the uneven spread of funding.

RA explained that the lower numbers in some areas were due to a lower number of applications, rather than more unsuccessful bids. Overall, only around £20,000 of bids were unsuccessful, some because the project was complete before the funding had been requested, and others for specific reasons, for example one project requested funding for a minibus but then returned it.

..... The committee then discussed how the fund could be better advertised in areas with less successful bids.

RA outlined the application process for the fund and agreed to look at new ways of advertising it, although she noted that the fund is never underspent as demand is always high. She also explained the review process of bids which involves young people.

Cllr Waine summarised the suggested approach. He highlighted that the new councillors need to be briefed and there needs to be good quality information available everywhere- perhaps via an online information pack with posters that can be printed and put in communities.

He also requested an overview of the last few years of the fund to identify any trends of imbalance in funding that could be addressed with targeted advertising.

**22/13 CLOSE OF MEETING**

(Agenda No. 8)

The meeting closed at 12.00

..... in the Chair

Date of signing