

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Wednesday, 16 February 2011 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 12.50 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Ann Bonner – in the Chair

Councillor Dave Sexon (Deputy Chairman)
Councillor Janet Godden
Councillor Neil Owen
Councillor Alyas Ahmed
Councillor M. Altaf-Khan
Councillor Marilyn Badcock
Councillor Mrs Anda Fitzgerald-O'Connor
Councillor Don Seale
Councillor Val Smith
Councillor Nicholas P. Turner

Other Members in Attendance:

Co-opted Members: Mr Chris Bevan
Mrs Sue Matthew

The Scrutiny Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda and reports are attached to the signed Minutes.

105/11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 1)

Apologies were received from Mrs Brenda Williams (Council of Oxfordshire Teacher Organisations) for this meeting and retrospectively for the meeting held on November 9th.

106/11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE BACK PAGE

(Agenda No. 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

107/11 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 3)

The minutes of the meetings held on 9 November 2010 and 20 December 2010 were approved and signed.

108/11 SPEAKING TO OR PETITIONING THE COMMITTEE

(Agenda No. 4)

109/11 SERVICE AND RESOURCE PLANNING

(Agenda No. 5)

Members agreed that items 5 and 6 should be taken together. The Director of Children, Young People and Families provided an update on the latest issues affecting the Directorate. Members welcomed these regular presentations as a means of keeping up to date with the rapidly changing world of schools and services for children. It was agreed that they should continue to be a standing item on the agenda.

A discussion took place around a range of current issues. The following were the main points made:

- The Munro Report on Child Protection – Professor Munro is undertaking on behalf of the Government an independent review of the child protection system, problems within the system, how they have arisen and how the service could refocus on the child's journey from needing to receiving the right help and ensuring that the needs of the child is at the core of all safeguarding.

So far Professor Munro has published two interim reports and she intends presenting her final report and recommendations to the Government in April. This could lead to changes in areas such as inspection, performance monitoring, and referral and assessment and the Committee will need to be aware of proposals for change in the future.

- Health and Wellbeing Board – must ensure that the voice of children is included. The Director of Children's Services will be one of the posts that will have statutory membership of the Board.
- Consultations on two Directorate reviews are being undertaken at present – one on Service Redesign and the other on the new structure of the Directorate. Members were provided with intranet links to both reviews. The consultations will run from February through to April 4th from when the Directorate's name will change to Children Education and Families.
- Service redesign – the "support tap" for schools and governors will not be turned off but the reduction in funding will plainly have an effect on the type of response available.
- Youth services – "hubs" will not be just youth centres by another name. They will provide a completely different service with "the right professional in the right place". "Outreach" services will be provided with professionals going out to where people are using local resources e.g. Children's Centres.

- Members asked for a further update on hubs at their next meeting in May. The Director undertook to ensure this happened and that members would be updated on a regular basis on the progress of the hubs and other service developments.

110/11 BUDGET MEETING 20 DECEMBER 2010

(Agenda No. 6)

See above.

111/11 ANTI-BULLYING STRATEGY - UPDATE

(Agenda No. 7)

Members received a presentation that provided information about the Anti-Bullying Strategy's response to recommendations made by the Committee last February. The report provided information about how committee recommendations had been addressed and other key areas of work that had been undertaken over the last year.

The Anti-Bullying Strategy is a collaboration of multi-agency partners with the overall aim of reducing levels of bullying across Oxfordshire.

Members were pleased to see the degree to which their recommendations had been incorporated into the anti-bullying strategy. They were further pleased to see that progress was being made in reducing levels of bullying.

During the discussion members emphasized the importance of school governors being made aware of what was happening in their schools. Anti-bullying reports should therefore go to governing bodies as well as the head teacher.

The issue of cyber bullying was discussed. Attention was drawn to the importance of ensuring that parents are aware of the dangers of this form of bullying and educated in how to recognize and combat it.

Members were very interested to hear about the Junior Citizen Trust. Junior Citizen has been running since 1991 and is offered free to every year 6 state school pupil in Oxfordshire. Every year about 4,500 children visit Junior Citizen.

During their two hour visit the children experience 7 different safety scenarios and each child gets the chance to practice making a 999 telephone call. Each of the scenarios is run by staff from the various agencies involved with the Junior Citizen Trust.

Around 25% of schools do not take part in the scheme and action is being taken to encourage them to participate. It was agreed that a visit for members to see the work of the Trust would be beneficial.

Members were informed that the strategy would be updated in August. They asked to be informed about the contents of the new strategy and it was agreed that this would be done as soon as the new strategy becomes available. Members also requested that the Anti-bullying Coordinator and her colleagues should return to the Committee in February 2012 to update them on progress.

112/11 FREE SCHOOLS

(Agenda No. 8)

Roy Leach, Strategic Lead for School Organisation & Planning, presented a paper on the development of Free Schools and Academies in Oxfordshire. In addition to the information contained within the paper, the following points were made.

Mr Leach explained that a meeting had taken place with about ten promoters of free schools in Oxfordshire. The County Council's aim is to see such schools develop via a collaborative approach. The situation is changing almost weekly as more advice and guidance comes from the Government. It is unlikely that there would be more than two free schools launched in Oxfordshire by September 2011.

The criteria for developing academies have now changed. Previously they would have come out of "failing" schools however now outstanding or very good schools can also become academies.

In answer to members' questions the following emerged in addition to the information in the paper provided with the agenda:

All free schools will be new schools but both they and the academies will have to abide by the same admissions code of practice as existing schools. They will however be able to form their own admissions policy within that code.

A free school could be set up even if it would be in an area where there are surplus places provided that the business case was sufficiently robust.

If an existing secondary school were to become an academy it could, in theory, delete feeder primary schools. None to date have done that.

The Local Authority would continue to make available advice on matters such as teacher contracts and Health and Safety. However new schools would have the option of whether or not to purchase the services from the LA or elsewhere.

There is a lack of clarity around the position of pupils with SEN statements but it is expected that they would have any right to go to a free school or academy that was named in their statement; refusals to admit would need to be referred to the Secretary of State.

Concern was expressed as to what might happen if all City secondary schools were to become academies and not take SEN statemented pupils. It was explained that the LA is only a consultee in this process and that the business case has to address need and, crucially, demand. So, if all other aspects such as finance were in place a school would get the go-ahead if a demand could be demonstrated. It was explained that most of the current crop of promoters had expressed a willingness to work with all children. Despite that members remained very concerned over this aspect.

The LA would have no right to be represented on governing bodies but could be invited in.

Finally, members were assured that they would be notified of any plans for free schools or academies in their divisions.

Mr Leach was thanked for his input and invited back for a further report later in the year.

113/11 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AT KEY STAGE 1- PROPOSAL FOR A SELECT COMMITTEE REVIEW

(Agenda No. 9)

The Committee AGREED to undertake a Select Committee style review of Educational Attainment at KS1 across the whole of Oxfordshire. The meeting would take place in July. A number of initial questions were identified. These were:

- How does Oxfordshire, and in particular the City, compare with similar places elsewhere?
- If some are better; what are they doing that Oxfordshire could adopt?
- What is being done already to try to deal with this problem?
- English as an additional language (EAL) is often put forward as a major factor in low attainment - but is it?
- Did the change from 3 tier education to 2 tiers have any effect on attainment?
- How do the figures appear when added value/improvement is taken into consideration?

Members were asked to forward any further questions or comments to Roger Edwards.

114/11 YOUTH CENTRES ADMITTANCE POLICY

(Agenda No. 10)

Members AGREED to accept the report and asked that there should be a report back in twelve months time to evaluate the success of the procedures.

115/11 FORWARD PLAN

(Agenda No. 11)

A short discussion took place around the question of funding for school sports activities and the level of sport undertaken in Oxfordshire schools. Members AGREED to add school sports activity to the future work programme.

116/11 CLOSE OF MEETING

(Agenda No. 12)

..... in the Chair

Date of signing