

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Saturday, 7 May 2011 commencing at 3.00 pm and finishing at Time Not Specified

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 Mrs Anda Fitzgerald-O'Connor
Councillor Don Seale
Councillor Val Smith

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Louise Chapman (for whole meeting)
Councillor Michael Waine (for whole meeting)

Co-opted Members: Mr Chris Bevan
Mrs Sue Matthew

By Invitation:

Officers:

Whole of meeting Director of Children, Young People and Families.
Mrs Sue Whitehead, Law and Governance
Mr Roger Edwards, Chief Executive's Office

Part of meeting

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.

117/11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS (Agenda No. 1)

Apologies were received from Mrs Brenda Williams (Council of Oxfordshire Teacher Organisations) and from Mrs Carole Thomson.

Councillor Carol Viney attended for Councillor Marilyn Badcock; Councillor Ray Jelf attended for Councillor Nicholas Turner.

118/11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE BACK PAGE

(Agenda No. 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

119/11 SPEAKING TO OR PETITIONING THE COMMITTEE

(Agenda No. 3)

There were no requests to speak to the Committee or to present petitions.

120/11 CALL IN OF CABINET DECISION ON 19 APRIL - CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & FAMILIES SERVICE REDESIGN

(Agenda No. 4)

The Committee was required to consider the following motion for a call-in.

We request that the decision taken by the Cabinet on 19th April to set up an Early Intervention Service and to end provision of youth work across the County be considered by the Children's Scrutiny Committee so that:

- 1. Risks involved in pursuing this strategy, in particular those related to 1996 Education Act be mitigated.*
- 2. The situation in relation to the provision of services delivered using Youth Work methods and approaches can be clarified for those communities who are listed as losing this provision.*

The Scrutiny Committee had before it the report of the Director for Children, Young People and Schools to the Cabinet on 19 April 2011 together with the draft minutes of that meeting.

The Chairman explained that, if the call-in were to be supported the issue would be referred back to the Cabinet for further consideration. The Committee was not expected to consider the whole issue of the future of the youth service but the specifics of the call-in motion. Did the Cabinet take account of the risks associated with the project? Would the proposed changes “end provision of youth work across the County”? Would referral back be necessary to achieve clarification of the nature of the future service?

Those supporting the call-in proposal were then invited to speak.

Ms Cat Hobbs spoke on behalf of “Oxford Save Our Services” in support of the call in being referred back to Cabinet for further consideration. Ms Hobbs stated that she

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considered that there were risks attached to the proposed changes. Vulnerable children could be put at risk if they had no youth service to turn to.

The proposals for hubs and satellites were unclear and left a number of questions unanswered. For example: Would open access continue? Would youth work be targeted at specific groups? Why was there apparently no requirement for professionally trained youth workers? How many centres would there be? What level of Big Society provision would be needed? Where would young people go if their local youth centre were to close?

Ms Hobbs ended by stating that, in the view of “Oxford Save Our Services” the Cabinet decision had been based on shaky evidence with unclear plans that left the future uncertain.

Councillor Larry Sanders spoke in support of the call in being referred back to Cabinet for further consideration. He considered that there was a serious lack of information and that made the decision unsafe. Councillor Sanders also raised a number of questions: Where will the youth services take place? How will they be delivered? How can meaningful consultation take place when there is such paucity of information? More information, Colonel Sanders said, is needed.

Councillor Val Smith spoke on behalf of the Councillors calling in the decision. Councillor Smith also referred to the lack of information. She referred to the Education Act which requires local authorities to provide activities including youth work. Councillor Smith asked whether the Act would be complied with? She queried why no clear, concise list of youth activities has been published that would enable a judgement to be made on compliance with the Act.

Councillor Smith referred to the fact that there appeared to be no requirement for trained youth workers to be employed in the hubs. She considered that, if that were to be the case, there would be a risk that issues that professional youth workers might pick up on could be missed.

Councillor Smith expressed concerns about just what the provision would be and how it would be implemented. There is more to youth services than early intervention and it would be important to ensure that the range of services should continue.

Councillor Janet Godden stated that she considered that risk analysis was poor and that emphasis on what young people want, rather than what is needed, would lead to woolliness

In response to the above and questions from members of the Committee the Cabinet Member and the Director for Children, Young People and Families made the following points.

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There is no intention to “end provision of youth work across the County”. The service would continue but in a different form and an extra £1.4m had been included in the Council's budget to help with implementation of the new service and to mitigate risk.

They were very conscious of the fact that the exact shape of the hub and satellite model of youth services remains unclear but that development of this had been slowed by the need to restructure management of the Directorate in the face of the County Council's current financial position. Now the restructuring had been completed they could move ahead with setting up the new service. The shape of the service would be based on a needs assessment. Young people would be closely involved with the development of the new set up. There would be an external evaluation of the proposals for the newly developed service.

Open access to youth services would continue.

The provision of the Education Act were very broad. The Council was not required to provide youth services but must ensure that services are available. Thus they could commission services in line with the needs assessment and/or support voluntary and local groups in providing services. Bids for Big Society funding were already being made by groups in villages across the County.

The concerns about trained youth workers were recognised. However, there is a need for a balance of staff with the necessary skills and attributes to provide a wide ranging service.

All of the identified risks have been taken into account. There needs to be a balance of service between open access and targeted services. Which is used depends on the needs and wants of children across the County and what is best for each individual child. The needs assessment would be very important in reaching such decisions.

Following the discussion the Chairman, Councillor Ann Bonner, stated that in her view the Committee had heard nothing that would suggest that the Cabinet had not taken into account any possible risks. There would not be a cessation of youth services but there would be a fundamental change in how services would be provided.

Councillor Bonner did have some concerns about the lack of clarity and information about the future shape of the service and requested that more information be published as soon as possible. The Chairman also asked that the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee should be provided with information at each of their meetings on progress in developing the new youth service.

With regard to the latter point the Cabinet Member gave an undertaking that the Committee would be given the opportunity to scrutinise the proposals for the future of the service.

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The Chairman then asked the Committee to vote on the call-in motion. Two votes were taken; one on each element of the call-in.

On part 1 the proposal was rejected by 8 votes to 3.

On part 2 the proposal was rejected by 8 votes to 2 with 1 abstention.

The Chairman thanked the speakers and the Committee for their attendance and closed the meeting.

121/11 CLOSE OF MEETING

(Agenda No. 5)

..... in the Chair

Date of signing