

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Wednesday, 18 May 2011 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 1.10 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Ann Bonner – in the Chair

Councillor Dave Sexon (Deputy Chairman)
Councillor Neil Owen
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: Councillor Louise Chapman (for whole meeting)

Co-opted Members: Mr Chris Bevan
Mrs Sue Matthew

By Invitation: Mrs Carole Thomson (Oxfordshire Governors' Association)
Mrs Brenda Williams (COTO)

Officers:

Whole of meeting Roger Edwards (Chief Officer's Office)

Part of meeting As set out in the agenda

Agenda Item **Officer Attending**

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.

NOTE: The first three items were added on the day of the meeting thus changing all subsequent agenda numbers .

122/11 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN FOR THE 2011/12 COUNCIL YEAR

(Agenda No.)

RESOLVED: to elect Councillor Bonner as Chairman of the Committee for the 2011/12 Council year.

123/11 ELECTION OF DEPUTY CHAIRMAN FOR THE 2011/12 COUNCIL YEAR
(Agenda No.)

RESOLVED: to elect Councillor Sexon as Deputy Chairman of the Committee for the 2011/12 Council year.

124/11 CHANGE OF MEMBERSHIP
(Agenda No.)

It was reported that, following the Council's Annual Meeting, Councillor Michael Waine had replaced Councillor Alyas Ahmed on the Committee. All other members remained as before.

125/11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS
(Agenda No. 1)

An apology was received from Councillor Janet Godden. There were no temporary appointments

126/11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE BACK PAGE
(Agenda No. 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

127/11 MINUTES
(Agenda No. 3)

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16 February 2011 were approved and signed with one amendment: the addition of Mrs Carole Thomson to the list of attendees at the meeting.

128/11 SPEAKING TO OR PETITIONING THE COMMITTEE
(Agenda No. 4)

There were no speakers and no petitions were presented.

129/11 DIRECTOR'S UPDATE
(Agenda No. 5)

The Director of Children, Education and Families provided her regular update on the latest issues affecting the Directorate. These were:

1. The recent Ofsted inspection of the Looked After Children and Safeguarding service
2. Update on organisational redesign

The Director reported that following the most recent inspection of the Looked After Children and Safeguarding service the Council had been given the second highest rating of "Good". Good in this context means that the service is "exceeding

statutory minimum requirements". This judgement is an improvement on previous inspections and means the Council compares very favourably with other authorities in the country.

Inspectors examined the services relating to safeguarding children and young people and also looked at the quality of support for children while they are in children's homes, foster care or adopted. They interviewed parents, children and young people themselves as well as all of those working with children and young people across all agencies. The report commented that "a well-trained, stable and experienced workforce in Oxfordshire ensures that children, young people and their families receive a consistent service from those who work with them".

Following a short question and answer session the Committee congratulated the Directorate on the excellent findings and paid tribute to the staff working in the field.

The Director reported that work on the Organisational Redesign of the Directorate was continuing. Most new posts in Children's Social care and Education and Early Intervention have now been filled down to and including the third tier level. This will enable the development of the new early intervention service to go ahead more rapidly.

Members of the Committee made a number of comments and asked questions.

The importance of evaluation was stressed and the need for a benchmark of the present position to compare with how the new set up works. It was agreed that the Committee should have a role in that evaluation.

The importance of communication of the new structures was also stressed. There was a lot of uncertainty about just what the future of what the youth service would look like in the future. The Chairman asked that the Director should bring the Committee up to date at the July and subsequent meetings. Also, if anything important were to arise, updates between meetings would be welcomed.

The service would be provided across 7 hubs, 6 satellites and 43 children's centres. There would be a mix of in-house and outreach services as most appropriate to the needs of young people. All members will be provided with a map of where the sites would be.

A member raised the issue of consultation with schools over the new structure for early intervention. There was concern over the lack of information being provided so far. The Director stressed the objective of providing an integrated early intervention strategy across the County by September 2011. This date created a number of difficulties with regard to consultation with schools in view of schools closing for the summer holiday in July. However it was accepted that there was an urgent need to consult with schools and communication will now be stepped up.

A question was asked about future funding for the Oxfordshire Association for Young People (OAYP). The Director reported that the OYAP would continue to receive funding for 2011/12 but that all grants and SLAs for 2012/13 would be reviewed in

line with the agreed Business Strategy. It was **AGREED** that the Committee should have the opportunity to see and comment on the review.

A question was asked about funding for Disabled Children's Respite Care and whether any decision had yet been made on levying a charge based on the ability to pay, as referred to in the Business Strategy. The Director replied that no decision had been taken and that such a decision would require a change in policy. Proposals for such a change would have to be brought before the Committee.

Following comments about the future of the Equality and Diversity Achievement Service it was agreed that a report would come to a future meeting explaining how the service was now performing in the light of the changes spelt out in the Business Strategy.

The Committee thanked the Director for once again producing a helpful and informative report.

130/11 TEENAGE PREGNANCY STRATEGY - AN UPDATE

(Agenda No. 6)

Sarah Breton, Strategic Lead and Head of Joint Commissioning supported by Clare Dodwell, Reducing Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinator presented the report attached to the agenda. They made the following specific points:

There had been a significant reduction in the number of teenage pregnancies across the County with a reduction in the gap between the best and worse areas. It was of particular note that the reduction of abortions in the worst ward was better than in the best.

The number of second conceptions is increasing and new initiatives are being introduced aimed at reducing these.

Evidence points to improved knowledge of sexual health and the role that young men have in preventing pregnancies and in being young fathers.

In response to questions the following points were made:

Generally children born to teenage parents are more likely to have social and other problems in the future.

The Family Nurse Programme provides an intensive weekly programme of support and advice for young mothers and fathers. The programme runs for two and a half years and begins during the pregnancy. Funding for the programme of £750k a year comes from the PCT and it is provided across the whole of the County in rural areas as well as urban.

Members were pleased to see that the trend is in the right direction and they paid tribute to the excellent work that is being done. They asked for a written report to be circulated to all Committee members following publication of the next set of figures in February 2012.

131/11 CHILD POVERTY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

(Agenda No. 7)

Clare Dodwell presented the report attached to the agenda. She explained that, as part of the work to address child poverty in Oxfordshire, the County Council is preparing an assessment of the needs of children living in poverty in its area. The Child Poverty Needs Assessment (CPNA) will be presented to the Children's Trust Board on May 20th. Then the Trust would have to decide whether to develop a separate child poverty strategy or to include it as part of other strategies.

However it is to be done the most important thing will be to produce an action plan against which progress in reducing child poverty could be evaluated.

Members made the following points:

There is a need to address issues around skills deficits, homelessness and understanding money to avoid falling into the hands of loan sharks.

The importance of the issue of rural poverty should not be forgotten. A lack of work opportunities in rural areas can often mean that lone parents have to decide between spending a large part of their income on transport or staying at home. Also the lack of individual self-esteem should be addressed.

The importance of grandparents is neglected in the report. They can provide a secure environment for children to enable lone parents to go to work and/or get an education.

There is a need to identify areas of hidden deprivation.

The Committee would wish to be involved in the development and implementation of the strategy. If a working party or similar were to be put in place to take the strategy forward the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee would wish to have a member involved.

132/11 OUTDOOR LEARNING CENTRES BUSINESS PLAN

(Agenda No. 8)

Charlotte Christie presented her report. The presentation was followed by a question and answer session during which the following points were made:

At present more than 90% of bookings are for Oxfordshire children. However some schools are beginning to struggle with increased charges. There has not yet been a great push to bring in business from outside of the Oxfordshire but this might have to increase in future.

The service is currently on track to achieve the required savings having exceeded the target by £80k. Continuing to make these savings could however prove more difficult in future.

There are cheaper, commercial options to the Outdoor Learning Centres (OLC). It will be important in the future to ensure that there is a full understanding of the difference in the breadth and quality of the service provided by the OLCs compared with the cheaper alternatives. The OLCs do not just provide activities but also a form of self-development that helps young people develop confidence and self-reliance.

Schools should be encouraged to recognise the importance of the residential courses for young people and to help them with funding if necessary.

A question was asked about the Outdoor Centres' Management Board. The background was: there used to be a 'house committee' for the Outdoor Centres which had three Councillors on it and others such as headteachers. This committee ceased to meet several years ago and a 'management group' was set up in its place. However, following an external inspection two years ago it was noted that this was not fully effective as a strategic group, so there was recommendation to establish a more robust group.

One of the actions for the current financial year in the five year business plan is to strengthen the strategic management through the establishment of a new group which would include Councillors and be responsible for monitoring the progress of the plan. It was AGREED that this issue should be addressed as soon as possible.

The Committee was pleased to hear that the business plan is on track and would wish to be told of any deviation from that.

133/11 THE OXFORDSHIRE MUSIC SERVICE

(Agenda No. 9)

Tony Mealings, Head of the Oxfordshire Music Service, presented his report and that was followed by a question and answer session. The following points were made:

The music service is experiencing the same level of school participation as in previous years.

Following the Government sponsored Henley Review of Music Education Music Education, hubs are to be established in each Local Authority area bringing together schools, Local Authority Music Services, music organisations and other delivery organisations. In future funding will be awarded to the hubs rather than to local authority music services. The hub in Oxfordshire will be led by the County Council. Various entrepreneurial partners are joining with the Council on this.

Members expressed a particular interest in knowing about music opportunities for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Mr Mealings referred to the examples in his report and highlighted the ongoing partnership with Christ Church Cathedral

School. The Music Service is seeking to increase opportunities for more children to take part in concerts.

The business plan targets are being exceeded and costs are continuing to be reduced. However cost cutting is clearly going to become more difficult. Funding is unlikely to increase in future. The largest part of the funding for the Music service comes from central government and a new funding formula is being devised. Past experience suggests that “prosperous” areas such as Oxfordshire often lose out when such formulae are instituted. Some charities that have provided support in the past have run out of money and new partners are being sought.

The Committee expressed full support for this very valuable service. Members recognised the benefits it brings to both the children involved and the wider community. In particular the Committee commends the work being done to provide opportunities for young people to perform. Members asked to be kept aware of any future music events.

134/11 FORWARD PLAN
(Agenda No. 10)

Members AGREED to add an item, “Looked After Children; attainment in English and Maths” to the work programme.

135/11 INFORMATION SHARE
(Agenda No. 11)

The Chairman was supported by the Committee in congratulating the County Council on being the first in the South East region to get the Care 2 Work Quality Mark.

The Chairman reminded the Committee that they would be keeping track on those items of concern that had arisen from the five year Business Strategy.

These were:

- EDAS – a report on how the service is performing would come later in the year.
- Charging for respite care for disabled children – see Director’s report earlier
- Early Intervention Centres – as above
- Outdoor Centres – as discussed in the meeting

Junior Citizens Programme – visit to Rewley Road Fire Station. It was AGREED that another date should be sought for the visit to see the Junior Citizens’ programme in action.

136/11 CLOSE OF MEETING
(Agenda No. 12)

The meeting closed at 13.10

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Date of signing