

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Wednesday, 26 September 2012 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 13.00.

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Michael Waine – in the Chair

Councillor Marilyn Badcock (Deputy Chairman)
Councillor Janet Godden
Councillor M. Altaf-Khan
Councillor Ann Bonner
Councillor Mrs Anda Fitzgerald-O'Connor
Councillor Caroline Newton
Councillor Dave Sexon
Councillor Val Smith

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Melinda Tilley, Councillor Jenny Hannaby

Co-opted Members: Mrs Sue Matthew

By Invitation: Carole Thomson, Bob Martyn

Officers: Lisa Michelson, Debra Mann, Iain Watson, Frances Craven, Maria Godfrey, Jim Leivers, Jonathan McWilliam, Noreen Collins, Lorna Caldicott

Whole of meeting

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.

216/12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Neil Owen and Chris Bevan.

217/12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE BACK PAGE

(Agenda No. 2)

None.

218/12 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 3)

Cllr Waine referred to page 3 of the minutes regarding the promised joint working with the city council on schools' initiatives. He commented that the recent difficulties were very unfortunate.

Comments were made around the fact that the heads were working well together and that the recent media coverage has not been helpful.

A suggestion was made to consider bringing an item to the forward plan for the committee around the 'family of schools' concept.

219/12 THRIVING FAMILIES INFORMATION UPDATE

(Agenda No. 5)

The Committee was joined by Jonathan McWilliam (JMcW), Lorna Caldicott (LC), and Noreen Collins (NC) to discuss the national initiative 'Troubled Families' which is currently implemented as 'Thriving Families' in Oxfordshire.

JMcW gave an overview of the initiative.

LC let the committee know that the service was in the process of recruiting family support officers. These officers would work to achieve 3 key outcomes:

1. That children are on a different path
2. That outcomes are improved across the piece
3. That public funds will be saved.

She went on to describe the programme which sits within a number of externally facing groups – emphasising that it was important that things were joined up properly.

A question was asked around avoiding duplication with other efforts and whether there were short term success indicators given the 3 year time frame for the initiative. In response, NC stated that the efforts are intended to enhance rather than overlap.

JMcW clarified that the 3 year timeframe was a bit of a distraction. While it is established for 3 years in the first instance, Oxfordshire was taking a much longer

approach. He related that he expected to change the way that the county delivers services.

Questioning continued into the expected savings. NC stated that savings would be seen across the public sector including with partners such as the police and health service.

JMcW indicated that the initiative specifies an interagency approach both in delivery and identifying families for support. He suggested that the councillors might be a useful partner in understanding the local need for services.

Cllr Godden expressed concern that the programme was short term and that it was essential for families that the council be in 'for the long haul'. She also asked about the supporting research on the benefits for this approach.

JMcW responded that the criteria for identification of families is flexible and evolving. He agreed that continued support was important. He emphasised that the council is embarking on a long term approach.

220/12 SPEAKING TO OR PETITIONING THE COMMITTEE

(Agenda No. 4)

None.

221/12 FORWARD PLAN

(Agenda No. 6)

The committee identified an upcoming cabinet report regarding looked after children and requested that it come to the November meeting.

222/12 COMMITTEE BUSINESS

(Agenda No. 7)

The committee discussed that it would like to request an early slot in the day for the upcoming budget discussion.

223/12 EDUCATION ATTAINMENT RESULTS UPDATE

(Agenda No. 8)

Frances Craven (FC) gave an update on what was known about the recent attainment figures for education. She reported that early indications for Key Stage 2 indicated that there was an improvement.

Cllr Waine commended the schools, saying that they have been under the spotlight recently at the committee.

224/12 EARLY INTERVENTION HUBS

(Agenda No. 9)

Cllr Waine opened the topic in reflecting on the recent visits to all the hubs that took place in September. It was his view that the staff had a high level of commitment. He also felt that there was a welcome level of honesty that officers had in some of the difficulties they experienced in transitioning to the new way of working. He believed that officers were 'buying in' to the new structure and ensuring things succeeded.

Frances Craven spoke to the presentation on the Early Intervention Hubs overview.

Delia Mann (DM) spoke to a recent case study which illustrated the joined up services available at hubs and how that contributed to a positive outcome for a particular family.

The committee discussed several aspects of hubs including making recommendations as follows:

Vision and Aims

The committee viewed that there needed to be a level of consistency around the 'core offer' across all Hubs in the county. Better clarity around what this core offer entails can also be useful in communicating what services are not available in hubs.

It is acknowledged, however, that hubs need to maintain their local focus and that the full complement of each individual hub would reflect that area's service needs in addition to the core offer.

Committee Recommendation

- Development of a better articulation of the core offer across all hubs.

Partners and Communication

Partnership working is instrumental in ensuring that the hubs work effectively by providing sources of referrals and resources and knowledge that can be shared. Whilst there was evidence that in many cases this is working effectively, there is a lack of consistency in success across some hubs with some partners. It is essential that there be regular and on-going communication with all partners and expectations need to be clear and consistent from all parties.

The partnership working with schools is especially important as the conduit for the majority of referrals. There is further work to be done bridging hubs to schools and communicating the hub offer to key members of school staff. There was also discussion about the early focus targeting secondary schools; for the next stage of implementation, members suggested a deliberate approach to primary school outreach.

Partnership with the voluntary sector is also crucial as there are many voluntary organisations with skills/volunteers/information to offer the hubs. The hub message needs to continue to go out to the voluntary organisations so that the dialogue about what they can offer is ongoing. In particular, there are many small groups, particularly in rural areas, which could help with hub outreach.

Committee Recommendation

- Continued commitment to widening connections with all schools and projecting the hub's core offer to them.
- Continued development of strong links with the voluntary sector.

Duplication/Overlap

The committee discussed that there need to be clear links and liaison with partners to ensure the hubs are not duplicating work but are recognising each other's strengths and combining to provide a cohesive service.

The committee questioned whether there is joint working with the district/parish/town councils, particularly surrounding housing allocations as this is seen as an important issue that needs to be addressed effectively.

It was also noted that the Thriving Families initiative should be fully integrated with the work of the hubs.

Committee Recommendation

- Invite officers from the district councils to a future scrutiny meeting to explore contributing issues around housing provision.
- Consider investigating options such as pooled budgets with stakeholders or grant payments for some services

Resources

Over the first year of operation, hubs have developed and expanded their service provision. While it was apparent during the visits that they were well utilised and busy, anecdotal evidence from staff indicated that capacity is stretched.

Staff have been increasingly under strain to respond to the levels of demand for services. While there is currently an utilisation of volunteers across all hubs, questions were asked as to whether there is scope to develop further volunteer support. There were also suggestions about the potential to share more 'back office' support functions with other services such as Children's Centres. In addition, given the diversity of service users and provision, the intensity in some areas and the stretch in others, there was concern about the accepted approach to fund all hubs on the same basis.

While the committee recognised the benefit to the 'one front door' approach to services, there was concern surrounding the reach of services for those that do not live near to the hub location. There was best practice evidence at some hub locations

around flexibly providing services 'off site'. Many of the service users value meeting in neutral locations and it needs to be explored how these can be best provided.

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There was also concern that not all of the hubs have adequate facilities. The Littlemore hub was highlighted particularly as it does not currently have its own premises and relies on sharing with the library.

Committee Recommendation

- A re-evaluation of the funding distribution between hubs.
- The committee also requested an explanation for the current year's under spending projection. The committee would seek to ensure that any current year underspend were re-invested in other aspects of the service.
- A continued emphasis on recruitment, retainment, and utilisation of volunteers.
- Enhancing the geographical reach of hubs – particularly with partners or developing other 'neutral territories'.

Overall the committee reflected that they Early Intervention Hubs are off to a 'Very Positive' start, and there is still work to take things forward in the second year.

225/12 CLOSE OF MEETING

(Agenda No. 10)

The meeting finished at 13.00.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing