

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Thursday, 5 November 2009 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 12.30 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Ann Bonner – in the Chair

Councillor Neil Owen (Deputy Chairman)
Councillor M. Altaf-Khan
Councillor Marilyn Badcock
Councillor Roger Belson
Councillor Mrs Anda Fitzgerald-O'Connor
Councillor Janet Godden
Councillor Tim Hallchurch MBE (In place of Councillor Tony Harbour)
Councillor Pete Handley
Councillor Dave Sexon
Councillor Val Smith

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Louise Chapman and Councillor Michael Waine

Co-opted Members: Mr Chris Bevan
Mrs Sue Matthew
Mrs Galina Kildyushova

By Invitation: Carole Thomson

Officers:

Whole of meeting Julie Dean (Principal Committee Officer)
Lisa Michelson (Policy & Review Officer)

Part of meeting Item 8 - Julian Hehir (Policy & Review Officer)

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

36/09 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS (Agenda No. 1)

Councillor Timothy Hallchurch attended in place of Councillor Tony Harbour.

37/09 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE BACK PAGE

(Agenda No. 2)

Cllr Hallchurch declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 6 on account of his being a member of the Federation of Small Businesses.

Cllr Fitzgerald O'Connor declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 7 on account of her membership on the Boards of Oxfordshire Play Association and Oxfordshire Playbus.

38/09 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 3)

The Minutes of the meetings held on 22 September 2009 (CH3(a)) and 5 October 2009 (CH3(b)) were approved and signed subject to the addition of Carole Thomson as being present at both meetings and the addition of the following bullet point at the top of page 21, 5 October 2009 meeting, to read as follows:

'A projected £600k would be withdrawn from the central budget if there were to be two academies'.

39/09 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2009/10 - CHILDREN'S SERVICES

(Agenda No. 5)

It was **AGREED** to receive the matrix as set down in CH5.

40/09 LEARNING & SKILLS COUNCIL DISSOLUTION AND LAW CHANGE - PRESENTATION

(Agenda No. 6)

Members of the Committee were given a presentation based on a briefing paper prepared by (**CH5**) by Sandra Higgs, Strategy Leader, 14 – 19, and Richard Savage, Service Manager, Supporting Choices. This item had been one of the three principle topics earmarked at the 22 September meeting for review, the others being 'Bullying in Schools' and 'Science in Schools and the Community'. Plans were underway for presentations to be given to the 23 February meeting on the latter two topics.

Following the presentation, the Committee conducted a question and answer session, some of the responses to which are set out below:

Q Is Health & Safety, and in particular Manual Handling, part of the curriculum?

R Health & Safety is part of the curriculum for both the new Diploma and the Apprenticeship programmes. It is also a stand alone qualification. We have to think about the needs of the learners and, at the same time avoid duplication of courses in order to make them cost effective.

Q Will those that have started in the sixth form at Carterton College qualify for subsidised travel?

R It is the Local Authority's responsibility to organise travel and to ensure access to college courses. However, there are thresholds in place for qualification. We are finding that not all wish to apply for it and, to this end, we are working with Carterton College.

Q In my division there are a significant amount of small businesses, pubs, post offices, corner shops and farms employing young people aged under 18 and access to courses can be impossible without independent transport. In addition, might a number of small business employers lose their day release facilities? Will EU workers qualify for language course?

R Part of the changes is to give more flexibility to employers and providers and to make learners used to different styles of learning. Part of this flexibility could be via learning on the job, receiving both assessment and mentoring support. The challenge in Oxfordshire is to try to communicate this message to employers and providers in a better way and to ensure that types of programme availability matches up to need. Currently there are a large number of employers not giving training as employees are still required to travel to a central venue. Yes EU workers will qualify for language courses.

Q Will 16 year olds who are already in day release training, be breaking the law ?

R There is a nationwide debate currently going on about who to criminalise in these circumstances – the young people (or their parents), or the employers who take them on. We do not have an answer to that at this time. It is a matter of concern.

The Leach report said that young people not receiving training, and not willing to engage in training will be unlikely to remain in a job for a long time. Statistics suggest that young people currently in year 6 and 7 will be likely to have up to 17 jobs before the age of 50.

Local authorities responsible for post 16 training are concerned about the numbers of young people not in employment. Moreover, because they are not in learning, it is difficult to find them. We are working with the Learning & Skills Council to try to secure Government funded, extra learning places within Oxfordshire for young people up to the age of 17.

Q What is in the contract for current year 11's?

R We have a contract with Connexions to provide a range of information via the schools. This includes an area wide prospectus which includes a collation of all apprenticeships available, with the addition of job seeking information which is followed up with advice. For those young people who are struggling there is a guidance and support service, and their parents are also invited to come in to look at what is available. This is backed up by a guarantee that all 16 – 17 year olds will be given an offer of learning and this will be monitored.

Q Do we as a local authority have a legal obligation now to provide a place?

R We will pick up accountability from the LSC next year. There is no absolute legal requirement for the moment.

Q Would, say, a short block of one month's training in Agricultural College meet the requirement over one year?

R Yes, if they are working. There might be visiting assessors to their work etc. This would lead to a nationally recognised qualification. This Authority would provide the assessor.

Q Of the 8 new staff transferring from April, are any of these finance staff?

R The LSC have to employ very capable financial business managers, as they have to be able to manage large business envelopes. Of the staff transferring, 4 are financially competent. However, they are not accountants.

Q How will they be paid?

R The LSC conducts this on a national basis. This will amount to 9 extra monthly payments. The act of paying them will not be a challenge, the challenge will be around working out how much they will receive. The formula is being worked up by the LSC at the moment and then they will instruct the providers. We might receive some administrative support, but we do not expect to get accountants.

Q Could there be significant financial implications for the Council?

R The current Government has made it clear that they are committed to spend on this as much they are doing now. Statistics suggest that there will be the same number of learners in the system in 2013 as now, but there will be a difference in what they will be doing. One could argue that the funding accessed at the moment is expensive.

Q Won't some youth clubs, for example, have some extra facilities which could be accessed?

R Functional skills are firmly embedded throughout all four pathways. For example, all young people are expected to have the opportunity to reach level 2 in English and IT and they are also expected to continue until they reach level 3, regardless of which pathway they are following. We enable this via the curriculum at 14, or by innovative means.

There is also a scheme called 'Back on Track' whereby the youth centre hosts pre 16 learners who are not in school. They provide a range of activities which are well suited to the youth centre environment. The first run of this has just finished in Didcot. All youth centres are getting an update programme in IT which is available to all users. There is not, however, any specialised input.

Q What would a young person do if they had not achieved good grades at GCSE and had not been able to find an apprenticeship?

R The thinking behind the Leach report is that some young people take longer than others to reach higher qualifications; and thus should be able to access skills in different ways. There is a recognition within the education field that the current system is not necessarily maximising the 'pot' of skills which young people can offer. This is already being addressed in a number of ways, one being via the broadening of the curriculum at age 14 giving the opportunity to study a diploma in a particular subject. This constitutes a different angle of learning. We aim to create more opportunities such as this.

Q I understand that the resource envelope remains the same – and you intend to introduce more opportunities? Has the Directorate a sense of where the money will come from to do this? And will there be a shortfall?

R We are very aware that we will have to create more expensive provision for the same amount of funding. At the moment we are receiving primary funding and many young people are benefiting from this. However, it won't last forever. There has been some collaboration and participation in the reduction of cost inefficient provision at the moment. For example, there are very small classes carrying small groups of 3 or 4 in neighbouring schools. We are in the process of reducing the amount of inefficient provision and placing it with good provision, where there are good facilities and the right staff in the right place. We have to look at current provision so that we can pay for more expensive provision. We are also trying to set up seven 14 – 19 consortia comprising representatives from the special, secondary and FE sectors to discuss how needs can be met and what the potential is.

Q Is there any central monitoring? Will the form filling be an extra burden on the School/College? This Scrutiny Committee supported has supported post 16 education into special schools. Has there been any clarity as to the funding streams with regard to this? This Council has put in additional monies to effect this.

R Getting clarity for this is a responsibility which will be retained by the Young People's Learning Agency. A member of the Local LSC will be transferred precisely for that reason. More work has to be done on it.

Q With the delay in will the current situation with regard to funding continue?

R At the moment there is a gap and there is no guarantee of what will fill it. It is currently based on LSC funding. This issue is currently being explored within the Directorate. The Leach report also refers to funding.

Q Few small businesses employ young people, one of the problems being that they need experience.

R Cllr Waine – Many people 'dumb down' lower qualifications. The Council takes the view that people with a lower number of qualifications are fulfilling roles in society which we cannot do without. With regard to young people, I have not seen the new diploma course working, in relation to the different levels of qualifications, as yet

On the conclusion of the above question and answer session it was **AGREED** to:

- (a) thank Sandra Higgs and Richard Savage for their briefing paper and for their attendance for the question and answer session; and
- (b) congratulate the officers on the positive progress to date and request Lisa Michelson to arrange a seminar for the Spring 2010 to which all members of Council will be invited.

Sandra Higgs undertook bring along her colleagues to the seminar who would be able to give the finer detail on funding. She also agreed to provide an electronic link to the Leach Report for members to look at prior to the seminar. Councillor Hallchurch also suggested that representatives from Oxfordshire Economic Partnership be invited also.

41/09 DRAFT OXFORDSHIRE CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLAN 2010-13
(Agenda No. 7)

Members had before them a copy of the draft Oxfordshire Children & Young People's Plan 2010-13. This was an opportunity for the Committee to feed any advice/comment to Cabinet in relation to the draft Plan, prior to its submission for approval to the 15 December Cabinet and to full Council in January.

Sian Rodway, Councillor Louise Chapman and Councillor Michael Waine were present in order to introduce the report and to answer any questions that the Committee had. The Committee had a number of questions, some of which are detailed below along with the response received:

Q Play is very important to a child's development as it enhances trust and self confidence. There does not appear to be much emphasis placed on play in the document?

R (Cllr Chapman) The local authority has a Play Strategy which various people and organisations have signed up to . There is quite a significant amount of information on play on the website. We will have a look at it and maybe strengthen the language in the Delivery Plan.

Q Is there anything extra in the Plan to alleviate the problems Young Carers sometimes experience in school, such a bullying?

R Young Carers are mentioned in the Plan and there will be clear links within the Strategy. We have not started from scratch and we are linking into other Strategies extending into 2010 which are focussed on these young people, such as the Anti Bullying Strategy.

Q This is a very well written, plausible and exciting document – but have you been ambitious enough with some of the targets and milestones? For example, the secondary school absence rate targets? Also some of the statistics are not clear enough – for example those relating to entrants to criminal justice. How measurable are these targets?

R The priorities are the business of all the partners who have signed up to it and everybody will be held to account. The priorities also have to line up with legislative requirements so that we can then extricate funding against them. Some will show a very definite achievement by the end of the first year and some will take much longer. Every year they are reviewed formally, as is the Delivery Plan. LAA targets are set with GOSE and reviewed on an annual basis. It is recognised that the outcomes of some targets by their very nature cannot be predicted as they are set a long time in advance. With regard to the external targets in particular, we need to be very clear as to whose target it is, when it was set, what ability we have to revise it etc and whether we are in a position to move on. The Children's Trust will be monitoring the Plan and of course, scrutiny. We welcome any form of monitoring.

Q Oxford City Council's own response was to direct attention to the neglectful environments which some children were having to live in and proposing that they have a safe place to go to if bullying occurred. The Council also raised concern about patchy youth service facilities in some parts of the City.

R The points you raise are embedded in what we are trying to do with this Plan. We are working with our City Council colleagues on housing issues, with Health Visitors and with the Home/School Link. One challenge we have is that of communication and to ensure that all the links are in place. With regard to your concern about youth service provision in the City area we will be developing three area plans for the northern, central and southern areas of Oxfordshire, via three local area Trust Boards, to address the different priorities and challenges prevalent in those areas. We have already visited one area committee to speak on this area.

The Committee thanked Sian Rodway and Cllr Chapman for their attendance and for responding to the questions from members. It was **AGREED** to **ADVISE** Cabinet on 15 December that this Committee approved the priorities contained in the Plan, subject to clarification being given of some of the statistics contained within the document and an annotation added to some of the milestones and targets.

42/09 MONITORING - YOUNG CARER'S SCRUTINY REVIEW

(Agenda No. 8)

The purpose of this agenda item was to evaluate, 12 months on from the Cabinet's consideration of the review, what progress has been made in implementing the recommendations that were agreed. The review was undertaken by Councillors Anda Fitzgerald O'Connor, Carol Viney and David Turner, together with Ben Jackson, a former co-optee of the Committee.

Councillor David Turner, as lead member, had been tracking the review and he has been invited to attend.

Councillors Michael Waine and Louise Chapman were also in attendance to respond to any questions members of the Committee might have had with regard to the tracking report, together with Children, Young People & Families officers Deborah Parkhouse and Hannah Farncombe.

Copies of the full review were attached at **CH8(a)**, the Executive Summary at **CH8(b)** and the tracking report at **CH8(c)**.

Various follow up questions were asked by Cllr Turner to those contained in the monitoring report, some of which, together with the responses received, are detailed below:

Recommendation 1

Q Was Annex 2 circulated to all schools and why will the Action Plan relating to the work needed in schools not be developed until spring 2010?

R The contents of Annex 2 was sent out to all schools in the County and the contents embedded in the Young Carers Strategy. In addition, the Strategy has gone out to all schools. A new School Development Worker post has been developed to work county wide. This person will come into post in January 2010 and will build on the work done to date.

Q Couldn't the Strategy have been sent out earlier than September 2009?

R Much work was required to develop a Strategy with partners following the Cabinet meeting. Cllr Chapman commented that officers were able to embed a significant amount into the Strategy after consultation. The timing of the review was opportune, as officers were able to incorporate its recommendations into the Strategy.

Recommendation 3

Q How wide has the build up of non teaching support for young carers been? How many single points of contact have been made in schools?

R There have been some, but the situation is inconsistent. We have tried to develop it via integration with the Strategy.

Recommendation 5

Q Has there been any improvement to access to support services for those young carers living in rural areas?

R We have accessed voluntary drivers and other forms of community transport within some rural parts of the north and the south of the County. Also, Lord Williams's School in Thame have done some work on the recognition of young carers in the area. We have supported the School with some of the issues including bullying. However, generally this still remains a challenge area.

Recommendation 6

Q Have you managed to lobby the LGA to consider reviewing the legislative requirements around assessments for young carers?

R Cllr Chapman – This issue has come up at various times. I have raised it locally with MPs and others. I should add that this recommendation drew attention to the problems surrounding services available and provided for 16-24 year olds. We have re-commissioned the services in Oxfordshire during 2009 and this has meant that 16-24 yr olds in particular, have been prioritised. Oxfordshire is the first county to have done so.

Recommendation 7

Q Has the budget gone up or down for young carers?

R (Cllr Chapman) When the report came to Cabinet we were under the impression that we were getting more money for it via the LAA. We had, in fact, bid for it ourselves. We found that part of the agreement was that we were unable to shift monies around into other services. However, we were able to increase funding into other services. This will be available for the next two years. We made a commitment by publicising the Strategy and we therefore found money for the required resources.

Recommendation 7

Q Are young carers allowed to telephone home during school hours?

R Young Carers are allowed to use mobile phones. This issue will be picked up by the development worker and the PCT in their protocols
Cllr Chapman commented that the Council can only encourage schools to allow this. Carole Thomson informed the Committee that the policy decision rested with the Governing Body.

Recommendation 8

Q Are GPs sharing the information – one cannot make allowance for them if they are not disseminating the information?

R (Cllr Waine) I have raised concerns about this. The school may have to take control when really it should be the task of other services. . We shall have to ensure that there is specific support for these young people.

Recommendation 10

Q Why did the bid to become one of the authorities involved in the Children's Society roll out of the development of the Key principles of Practice – Guidance for Practitioners and the Whole-Family Pathway, given the high levels of deprivation in pockets of Oxfordshire?

R Although this authority was involved in the development of it, we were not successful in our bid to become a pilot authority. The Children's Society were looking to other local authorities to do the pilots. However, we have implemented it anyway via the Children's Strategy.

Recommendation 14

Q When were the Princess Royal Trust for Carers approached?

R October of this year. It has now been established.

Q Are you doing anything for young carers of primary school age?

R We are doing something for the first time via new monies coming for a new service targeting young carers under the age of 8.

Q How many of these children are there?

R There are several within the County whom we know of. It is difficult to know if the numbers are rising or whether we are getting better at spotting them.

Councillor Turner and member of the Committee concluded by paying tribute to the work of young carers in the county who displayed a nobility and great maturity beyond their years.

The Committee thanked Councillor David Turner, Cllr Michael Waine, Cllr Louise Chapman, Deborah Parkhouse and Hannah Farncombe for their attendance and for responding to questions.

It was **AGREED** to thank all involved for a very thorough and worthwhile piece of work and for the progress made with the recommendations.

Hannah Farncombe and Deborah Parkhouse undertook to send a copy of the document 'Good Days/Bad Days' to those members who were new to the Committee and who had therefore not received it previously.

43/09 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT SCRUTINY REVIEW - UPDATE
(Agenda No. 9)

The Committee noted the progress report.

44/09 TEENAGE CONCEPTION REVIEW - UPDATE
(Agenda No. 10)

The Committee noted the progress report.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing 2009