

## CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES** of the meeting held on Tuesday, 28 February 2012 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 1.00 pm

**Present:**

**Voting Members:** Councillor Ann Bonner – in the Chair  
Councillor Dave Sexon (Deputy Chairman)  
Councillor Janet Godden  
Councillor Neil Owen  
Councillor Marilyn Badcock  
Councillor Mrs Anda Fitzgerald-O'Connor  
Councillor Don Seale  
Councillor Sarah Hutchinson  
Councillor Nicholas P. Turner  
Councillor Michael Waine

**Other Members in Attendance:** Councillor Melinda Tilley  
Councillor Louise Chapman

**Co-opted Members:** Mr Chris Bevan  
Mrs Sue Matthew

**By Invitation:** Carole Thomson  
Brenda Williams

**Officers:** Lisa Michelson  
Andy Roberts  
Ruth Ashwell  
Clare Dodwell  
Noreen Collins  
Sian Rodway

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.*

**183/12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS**

(Agenda No. 1)

Apologies from Councillor Altaf-Khan

**184/12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE BACK PAGE**

(Agenda No. 2)

None

**185/12 MINUTES**

(Agenda No. 3)

No amendments.

**186/12 SPEAKING TO OR PETITIONING THE COMMITTEE**

(Agenda No. 4)

None

**187/12 EDUCATION STRATEGY DISCUSSION**

(Agenda No. 5)

Andy Roberts, Interim Deputy Director – Education and Early Intervention (AR), and Cllr Melinda Tilley, Cabinet Member for Schools Improvement lead a discussion with the Committee on the recently launched Education Strategy.

AR provided an update on the stages of the public consultation. He related that it was premature to discuss the progress and that he would be in a better position to discuss implementation details in six months' time.

The committee discussed the difficult issue of addressing schools with performance below the floor and that there were inherent challenges in coordinating the many stakeholder groups including national interests.

Brenda Williams (BW) relayed that the lack of communication between national government and the local authority caused unnecessary distress.

Cllr Tilley agreed stating that there were some national actions, by the Department for Education that were taken unilaterally and not in conjunction with the council. However, she disagreed on the point of general unrest in schools – based on her conversations and engagement.

The committee discussed leadership in schools and the difficulty in identifying and recruiting effective heads. Rather than heads being 'good' or 'bad' it is more likely the case that there is a wide range of leadership performance.

There was a view that the strategy unduly criticises schools and that a better approach would focus on building confidence.

Sue Matthew emphasised the importance of including deputy heads as much as possible and including them as a pool for leadership development. She continued that a strategy needs to exude confidence and that it needs to convince people that being a head teacher is one of the best jobs you can have.

Andy Roberts commented that a leadership programme was essential and that other authority's investment in schemes was effective (Surrey).

Carole Thomson stated that there was a duty to challenge (poor performance in schools), but that the council also had a duty to support. She agreed that there were needed efforts to 'swing the schools back' towards the authority and that there was a gap in the support network for schools.

Cllr Tilley was adamant that the challenge not be compromised. She emphasised that the committee needed to fully understand the serious situation in the county, around the slipping position of Oxfordshire schools against other authorities and in some cases the lack of basic skills in reading and writing for some students.

Cllr Turner commended officers saying that remarks had instilled confidence in the strategy and that he looked forward to seeing the implantation details.

Cllr Bonner stated that the education strategy and students' performance was probably the most important agenda item for the committee in the work programme. She agreed with suggestions that the committee needs to assist in disseminating messages to the community.

## **188/12 YOUTH CENTRES' ADMISSIONS POLICY**

(Agenda No. 6)

This item was brought to the committee as a follow up on a review on youth centres policy that took place in the previous year's work programme.

Tan Lea, Interim Intervention Manager (Central), as well as Ruth Ashwell, Youth, Engagement and Opportunities Service Manager presented an updated picture of the implementation of the policies recommended as part of that review.

They reported that the policy is business as usual. A question was raised as to whether this policy was being taken up by partner groups who are running services. Officers confirmed that it was part of any contract the council entered into with other groups.

## **189/12 TEENAGE CONCEPTION UPDATE**

(Agenda No. 7)

The committee had an update from Clare Dodwell, Project Manager on the latest data concerning teenage conception rates for the county. It had been expected that the data would be released from the national database in time to be relayed to the

committee. Unfortunately, delays nationally meant that officers received the data that morning and could only provide a verbal position.

The data indicates that the position for 2010 (the latest figures) has improved again. In the past 3 years' worth of results the number of conceptions has fallen from

347 in 2008  
302 in 2009  
251 in 2010

This calculates to a significant reduction over the past three years of approximately 30%, a major improvement.

Clare Dodwell went on to say that the strategy for the service was refreshed last year to include a particular focus on young men, a risky behaviours training programme for people working with young people, and additional partnering with schools around sex education.

Cllr Chapman commended the service on the positive trend in results saying that it is a significant accomplishment.

Cllr Turner agreed that the data was proof that the strategy was working.

The committee agreed that this item should remain on the work programme for the next year.

## **190/12 TROUBLED FAMILIES INITIATIVE**

(Agenda No. 8)

Noreen Collins (NC) and Sian Rodway (SR) spoke to a presentation about the new national programme, Troubled Families.

There are many details of the programme which have not been clearly defined nationally, and officers are currently working to clarify some aspects.

Cllr Bonner stated that she agreed with the need for the initiative.

There was a discussion about how these families would be identified and that the criteria (as part of the presentation) was open to interpretation. There were concerns that the criteria might miss vital indicators, especially around domestic violence or challenges facing families just above some of the income criteria. The committee also suggested that the number of families identified for Oxfordshire might underestimate the impact of the recession; there may be a larger number of families who meet income eligibility than current assessments indicate.

Officers responded that the local authority has some discretion on how the list of eligible families is determined. They also reported that the criteria has been clarifying on a national level, already reflecting some of the committee's concerns.

Within a national context, the council is progressing proactively in comparison to other authorities. The data analysis to identify the families is well underway and the budget decision to allocate £1.6M means that the initiative can commence immediately.

A suggestion was made that the initiative ensure join up with schools, where possible – which the committee emphasised was a very important consideration.

The committee may consider a working group to track and evaluate progress on the initiative.

## **191/12 OUTDOOR EDUCATION CENTRES**

(Agenda No. 9)

Andy Roberts gave the latest position on Outdoor Centres to the committee. He reported that an expected report to the cabinet has been delayed. This report is now expected to go to Cabinet in May. The committee was disappointed to not have the report available for the meeting, but agreed to bring the item back once an update was available.

Cllr Waine particularly expressed that centre leaders were hamstrung by the bureaucracy which could be alleviated if they were to become trusts.

Cllr Turner agreed that centres do very important work and that the council should find a way to ensure that they have the greatest opportunity to succeed. He agreed that a new governance structure was needed and that they should have independent budgets.

The ensuing discussion resulted in the committee requesting to formally declare that they support a change in status for outdoor centres to become trusts. It was asked that the minutes reflect the following recommendations:

1. Officers need to ensure that property contracts do not restrict outdoor centres.
2. The committee has a preferred model to suggest for governance which is an arm's length trust.

## **192/12 FORWARD PLAN**

(Agenda No. 10)

None.

## **193/12 CLOSE OF MEETING**

(Agenda No. 11)

The meeting finished at 13.00

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CH3

..... in the Chair

Date of signing