

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Tuesday, 25 May 2010 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 12.45 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Ann Bonner – in the Chair

Councillor Neil Owen
Councillor Alyas Ahmed
Councillor M. Altaf-Khan
Councillor Marilyn Badcock
Councillor Mrs Anda Fitzgerald-O'Connor
Councillor Don Seale
Councillor Dave Sexon
Councillor Val Smith
Councillor Nicholas P. Turner

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Louise Chapman
Councillor Michael Waine

Co-opted Members: Mrs Sue Matthew

By Invitation: Ms Carole Thomson (Oxfordshire Governors' Association)

Officers:

Whole of meeting The Director for Children, Young People & Families, Ms L Michelson and Ms M Holyman (Corporate Core)

Part of meeting

Agenda Item

	Officers Attending
8	Mr J Evans (Children, Young People & Families) and Ms B Holligan (Oxford Trust)
11	Ms M Hartley, Mr A Lindsay and Ms R Thompson (Children, Young People & Families)

The Scrutiny Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting, together with the following additional documents circulated at the meeting:

Briefing Paper on the Use of Breathalysers in Young People's Centres in Oxfordshire – Admittance Issues

Advisory Service for the Education of Travellers (presentation)

Science in Oxfordshire Schools (presentation)

Range of Pathways possible in Science

Key Oxfordshire Providers of the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Programme

and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda, reports and additional documents are attached to the signed Minutes.

60/10 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN FOR THE 2010/11 COUNCIL YEAR

(Agenda No. 1)

RESOLVED: to elect Councillor Bonner as Chairman of the Committee for the 2010/11 Council year.

61/10 ELECTION OF DEPUTY CHAIRMAN FOR THE 2010/11 COUNCIL YEAR

(Agenda No. 2)

RESOLVED: to elect Councillor Sexon as Deputy Chairman of the Committee for the 2010/11 Council year.

62/10 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 3)

Apologies for absence were received from Mr C Bevan and Mrs G Kildyushova (co-opted members) and Ms B Williams (COTO).

63/10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(Agenda No. 4)

Councillor N Turner declared a personal interest in item 12 (Youth Centres Admittance Policy) as he runs a youth group where young people play golf.

64/10 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 5)

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23 February 2010 were approved and signed.

65/10 ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Committee agreed to take agenda items 7 and 9 together as the items had issues in common.

66/10 DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & FAMILIES - UPDATE

(Agenda No. 7)

The Director for Children, Young People & Families reported that her priorities were the budget, performance, parents, young people and children and people and partnerships. On the budget, she had taken action on the projected budgetary overspend of £1½m by the end of the financial year 2009/10 and the report to be submitted to the Cabinet on the outturn for the year would now show a balanced budget. However, it needed to be recognised that expenditure was demand-led. She wanted to ensure that there was effective use of resources and that financial

value for money was delivered. On school improvement, she wanted to consider sharing good practice.

She said that there had been increased demand for safeguarding services after the Baby P case and, since 2007, the number of child protection plans had increased by 102% from 55 to 111: this was in comparison with demand for safeguarding services after the Victoria Climbié case where it had decreased a few years later.

She had been meeting parents and children to find out their views on services. The Environment & Economy Directorate had been involved in providing more transport for children with disabilities to enable them to access leisure services. She had met young people at a sounding board event on poverty where children in Blackbird Leys, Oxford had been given advice on making the right choices at school.

She had reviewed information provided to parents and members and wanted improvements to ensure that it was the right information in the right format and that it was customer-focused.

On school admissions, 97% of applicants had received their first preference. In March, she had attended a conference of primary headteachers on how the brain worked and how children learnt: ideas from the conference would be taken forward with headteachers and governors.

On educational effectiveness, she was taking stock of the current position. There were likely to be changes to the management structure of her directorate. She would like to see a review of resources with partners and the district councils to maximise their use and a review of assets, for example of schools and health resources, with partners on the Children's Trust.

The following is a summary of questions asked/comments made by members.

- In balancing the budget, had cuts to services been made or services ceased? The Director for Children, Young People & Families said that some services had been stopped and these would be set out in the report to the Cabinet but front-line services had been prioritised to ensure there would be no reductions in these services. Statutory responsibilities had also been prioritised and priorities in the Children and Young People's Plan had been addressed. Duplication needed to be reduced and resources used more effectively.
- On safeguarding children, information needed to be shared more as people found it confusing having to meet with many organisations and it had been agreed, for example, that children with disabilities would have a named worker who would be their point of contact. This did not appear to be happening.
- On school admission appeals, were members permitted to accompany appellants to hearings as some people wanted support and help with presenting their case?
- On casework, could members have lists of officers in the Directorate whom they could contact direct on enquiries?

- What action was being taken to relieve social workers of tasks, for example health and safety, which could be undertaken by other officers to enable them to undertake their own duties? The Director for Children, Young People & Families said that Mr Leivers had been asked to follow-up actions recommended by the Social Work Task Force.
- What changes were proposed on CRB checks and what was the future of the Building Schools for the Future programme. On CRB checks, the Director for Children, Young People & Families said that the Independent Safeguarding Authority would be undertaking the vetting and barring arrangements. The County Council's Human Resources would be providing guidance to schools on this and on good practice. On Building Schools for the Future, the Government had advised that it would be reviewing commitments. The County Council was continuing to plan for the programme until it was advised of any changes to these arrangements.

The Committee AGREED:

- (a) to note that the Director for Children, Young People & Families had undertaken to:
 - (i) respond to Councillor V Smith on whether members could have a list of officers in her Directorate whom they could contact direct on enquiries;
 - (ii) send information on sounding boards for children to members.
- (b) to invite the Director for Children, Young People & Families to update the Committee several times a year on issues.

67/10 CLASS OF 2010
(Agenda No. 9)

The Director for Children, Young People & Families reported that this was an initiative undertaken this year to help children with their GCSE. All secondary schools had been involved in the initiative. The outcome of and feedback from the initiative would be reviewed so that next year the right level of support was provided at the right time as part of an overarching initiative. Many young people had responded positively to the Website www.class2010.co.uk.

The Committee noted the Director for Children, Young People & Families' oral report.

68/10 SCIENCE IN SCHOOLS
(Agenda No. 8)

Mr J Evans (School Improvement Lead, South & Science Adviser) and Ms B Holligan (Oxford Trust) gave a presentation to the Committee on science teaching in schools. A copy of the presentation slides, a copy of information on the range of pathways possible in science and a list of key Oxfordshire providers of the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Programme are attached to the signed copy of the minutes.

The Committee AGREED:

- (a) to thank Mr Evans and Ms Holligan for their presentation;
- (b) to ask the Corporate Performance and Review Officer to invite members of the local science community to discuss their views on recruiting locally and how to strengthen the links between businesses and universities with county schools and the County Council.

69/10 SCRUTINY UPDATE

(Agenda No. 10)

Ms Michelson reported that:

- (1) the seminar on the dissolution of the Learning & Skills Council, Transitioning Young People into Employment and Reducing Young People not in full-time education, employment or training (NEETs) in Oxfordshire had been held. She said she would circulate the findings from the discussion at the seminar. It was noted that further work on the topic could be considered as part of the new work programme;
- (2) there would be a select committee on educational attainment in June;
- (3) a note had been circulated to the Anti-Bullying Service with the points the Committee had asked be considered when the Anti-Bullying Strategy was reviewed. Once a response was received, it would be circulated to members of the Committee. The Committee might wish to revisit this topic as a part of the new work programme.

The Committee AGREED:

- (a) to ask the Director for Children, Young People & Families to report on long-term plans for NEETs;
- (b) to consider the issue of reducing NEETs in Oxfordshire when it considers its work programme.

70/10 TRAVELLER CHILDREN - EDUCATIONAL PROVISION

(Agenda No. 11)

Ms Thompson, Ms Hartley and Mr Lindsay gave a presentation to the Committee on the advisory service for the education of Traveller children (a copy of the presentation is attached to the signed copy of the minutes).

Ms Thompson said that changes had been made to service provision to bring advisory services for Travellers and educational achievement of children from ethnic minorities together.

Ms Hartley said that it can be difficult to get Roadside Traveller children established in schools as the families might be moved on frequently. During March to October, when fairs were held in Oxfordshire, children would be taught on the sites of the fairs/circuses. Some Traveller children did not transfer to secondary schools. She pointed out that some parents found it difficult to understand paperwork from schools, for example the parents might not be able to read. The e-learning and mobility project was aimed at children who were very mobile, for example some children could be out of school for six months of the year: under the project, schools corresponded with pupils through distance learning as part of the Elamp project. She pointed out that, on the Oxfordshire County Council's pupil enrolment form, at present there were two choices 'White Gypsy/Roma' or 'White Traveller of Irish Heritage'. From the point of view of accurate data, some local authorities had separated 'White Gypsy' from 'Roma' as they had very different needs and attainment. The Director for Children, Young People & Families agreed to review the categories on the forms.

In response to a question, Ms Hartley reported that educational attainment levels for gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities had not deteriorated but there was always more that could be done. Mr Lindsay said that years 11 and 6 underachieved compared with black and ethnic minority children and steps were being taken to address this. In response to a question on whether children had to attend school, Ms Hartley said that there could be prosecutions if children were on school rolls but did not attend. Ms Thompson pointed out that parents could choose to educate their children at home. Mr Lindsay said that attendance at school was good in Oxfordshire. The Director for Children, Young People & Families said that children missing education was a priority in Oxfordshire. The Children's Trust needed to track children to make sure that they received education and safeguarding.

Mr Lindsay reported that £18,000 of Local Authority funding was made available to the refuges across Oxfordshire to support their liaison work with schools. In addition mothers in refuges were encouraged to work with their local children's centres who could also provide further support for them and their children.

The Committee AGREED that, after the restructuring of the service had been completed, officers would be invited to report to a future meeting of the Committee on attainment of Traveller children in Oxfordshire and what action was being taken to improve attainment.

71/10 YOUTH CENTRES ADMITTANCE POLICY (Agenda No. 12)

The Committee considered a briefing paper on the Use of Breathalysers in Young People's Centres in Oxfordshire – Admittance Issues.

Councillor Chapman reported that the Sweatbox, Wantage had reopened on 21 May 2010. She asked the Committee to consider undertaking a scrutiny review of the use of breathalysers and drug taking at youth centres.

The Committee AGREED (by 9 votes to 1):

- (a) to include a review of youth centres in the 2010/11 work programme;

- (b) to invite Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny and Safer & Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committees to join as part of a joint working group;
- (c) to liaise with Tan Lea, Strategic Lead - Youth, Young People and Access to Education, to provide officer support with the review.

72/10 FORWARD PLAN

(Agenda No. 13)

The Committee identified no items from the current Forward Plan on which it wished to have an opportunity to offer advice to the Cabinet before any decision was taken.

73/10 WORK PROGRAMME 2010/11

(Agenda No. 14)

The Committee AGREED to ask members to let the Chairman (Councillor Bonner) or Ms Michelson have any suggested topics for consideration for inclusion in the work programme and also if they wanted to be involved in the scrutiny review on the use of youth centres.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing