

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Thursday, 28 February 2013 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 13.00

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Michael Waine – in the Chair
Councillor Janet Godden
Councillor M. Altaf-Khan
Councillor Mrs Anda Fitzgerald-O'Connor
Councillor Pete Handley
Councillor Caroline Newton
Councillor Gill Sanders (substitute)
Councillor David Wilmshurst (substitute)
Councillor Lawrie Stratford (substitute)

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Melinda Tilley

Co-opted Members: Mr Chris Bevan
Mrs Sue Matthew

By Invitation: Mrs Carole Thomson
Mr Ian Jones

Officers: Graham Clare
Roy Leach
Lisa Michelson
Frances Place
Clare Rowntree
Kevin Mannion
Graham Shaw
Janie Slaymaker
Richard Byard
Richard Kennell

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.

5/13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Ann Bonner and Councillor Marilyn Badcock.

Cllr Gill Sanders substituted for Cllr Val Smith, Cllr Lawrie Stratford for Cllr Dave Sexon, Ian Jones for Bob Martyn and Cllr David Wilmshurst for Cllr Neil Owen.

6/13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE BACK PAGE

(Agenda No. 2)

None.

7/13 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 3)

Cllr Waine wished to clarify that comments he made about Cllr Godden's visit to Paris were misconstrued by the Press as she was there on a business trip, not for pleasure.

A report on the Reading Campaign should come to the next meeting with the report from the Educational Transformation Board.

8/13 SPEAKING TO OR PETITIONING THE COMMITTEE

(Agenda No. 4)

None.

9/13 FORWARD PLAN

(Agenda No. 5)

Lisa Michelson joined the committee to update on discussions held with legal services, democratic services and the communications team about whether the April meeting can go ahead considering the restrictions of the pre-election period.

The advice received is that the meeting may go ahead as long as care is taken over the choice of items and that committee members are mindful of what they say during the meeting.

The committee discussed the options and decided that they will hold the meeting in April.

Cllr Tilley informed the committee that it was suggested that the Young People's Wellbeing Group should have a representative from the scrutiny committee on it. The committee agreed that this should happen.

The committee requested an overview of spending in the Chill Out Fund to come to the next meeting.

10/13 CAPITAL BUDGET UPDATE

(Agenda No. 6)

Roy Leach (RL), School Organisation and Planning Manager, and Graham Clare (GC), Programme Finance Manager, joined the committee to give an update on capital budget which was not ready at the budget meeting in January.

They reported that final settlement information had still not been received from the government, but gave an overview of the predicted budget based on the assumption that basic need programme funding will remain roughly the same and structure maintenance budget will decrease (as academies receive this directly from the government).

Chris Bevan asked whether there is an assumption that growth required because of housing demand will be part funded by developers?

RL agreed that it is assumed that all developers will make a contribution. This will continue for large developments and pooled with funding for small developments which is received in a different way.

Cllr Wilmshurst queried whether it is normal to have to wait for settlement information or whether it might signal bad news.

GC clarified that the information should have come through already but the government were reviewing more information.

RL explained that it is likely due to the Department for Education receiving more demand than expected for more school places. He expressed confidence that the council's demand is robust.

Sue Matthews queried whether schools on the capital building programme are safe to carry on?

RL confirmed that where there is already an agreement and firm investment it will go ahead. Schools which are already academies still receive funding for expansion for school places

However we may not provide funding where schools are expecting funding but get academy status before going into the firm programme.

Cllr Godden requested that updated information is provided on academy conversions.

The committee were assured that they would be updated when the final information comes in.

11/13 DISCUSSION WITH OFFICERS FROM THE JOINT HOUSING TEAM
(Agenda No. 7)

The committee were joined by Clare Rowntree (CR), Commissioning Manager, and Kevin Mannion (KM), Senior Practitioner, Housing Development Manager to receive a presentation on the work of the Joint Housing Team.

Cllr Wilmshurst asked who is ultimately responsible for housing.

CR explained that Children's Social Care and the housing departments in the District Councils have different responsibilities but work together. OCC do not have a bank of properties so for emergency accommodation have to look to private landlords whereas Oxford City/Districts have a set of housing that they can use

KM added that they have worked to make the process uniform across OCC and the districts so that they all work together and understand both side's procedures and legislation. KM explained his role is to foster these joint working relationships.

Cllr Stratford asked whether we are ready to manage a potential increase in demand for housing help following the upcoming changes to universal credit changes.

KM assured that they are preparing the best they can for this.

Sue Matthews asked whether there is close working with the early intervention hubs and children's centres for preventing intentional homelessness.

CR explained that there is some work with them already in place and will continue.

Cllr Godden asked how often a solution is found for families and whether "At risk of homelessness" is a category for thriving families?

CR referred to a paper last year about how long people are supported for. They are seeing increase in how long people have to stay in emergency accommodation due to difficulty in finding long term accommodation.

KM explained that other issues may become clear for families at risk of homelessness that make them eligible for thriving families, or families in the thriving families programme may need help from housing.

12/13 RESPONSE TO ENQUIRIES FROM THE EMPLOYEE'S JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE
(Agenda No. 8)

Graham Shaw (GS), Deputy Director for Oxfordshire Customer Services, Janie Slaymaker (JS) from Unison and Catharine Darnton, headteacher of Gillotts School,

joined the committee to discuss the ongoing provision of services to schools. Cllr Tilley was also invited to the table.

Cllr Waine explained the background to this item.

GS presented a breakdown of services that his area provides. This year they have removed £250k of subsidy out, more will come out next year. The changes will go out to all schools as a service catalogue w/c 11th March and it is hoped that schools will decide what services they want by April

Discussion focussed on the ongoing provision of services to schools and the desire of schools to continue to buy services from the council.

Cllr Waine stated to his knowledge the vast majority of schools and academies were buying in to Oxfordshire services, and wished to continue to do so given their quality and competitive costing. He invited Catharine Darnton to speak on behalf of Schools Forum headteachers. She stated that schools were anxious that Oxfordshire County Council service provision should continue for all schools, especially Oxfordshire's many small schools.

GS asserted that the main focus is continuity of service and they are working to provide continuity of service for services schools want in the future. Changing times mean the way they are delivering services may have to change whilst ensuring schools have access to the services they need. Investment and innovation are 2 big factors, we need to be clear the avenues for where this will come in the future.

Cllr Tilley emphasised that we will continue to provide services to schools, the only change has been to remove the subsidy. If we do decide to outsource services then schools will be fully consulted. We need schools to continue to buy in to keep the economies of scale. Other companies may be able to deliver cheaper services, but not always better services.

Cllr Waine asked that a letter be sent to headteachers and governors clarifying the situation and giving the assurance offered at the meeting. Cllr Tilley agreed.

13/13 COMMITTEE DISCUSSION ABOUT THE WORK OF SCHOOLS PREPARING YOUNG PEOPLE FOR EMPLOYMENT (Agenda No. 9)

The committee were joined by Richard Kennell (RK), Vice Chairman of the Oxfordshire Skills Board, and Richard Byard (RB), Service Manager - Economy & Skills to discuss the recent series of visits to schools and colleges in the county exploring best practice in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) subjects and business links.

Cllr Waine stated that the aim of the visits had been to find best practice and the challenge now is sharing this across the county.

RK explained that the Oxfordshire Skills Board (OSB) has two main priorities. The first is the STEM agenda and the second is business skills. The OSB reports to the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and is hoping to get some funding from them to put some resource behind an initiative to look at best practice to share and roll out across Oxfordshire.

The committee held a discussion about the visits and particularly focussed on the need for links with businesses to be reciprocal arrangements, and for careers related work to be embedded into the curriculum, not just through one-off events.

RK agreed to take forward the exemplar practice below and ensure it is disseminated through the Oxfordshire Skills Board.

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee- School Visits February 2013

Oxford and Cherwell Valley College

- Currently offer 68 different apprenticeships.
- Have invested £25k in a project working in partnership with the New Engineering Foundation (NEF) - The Innovation Institute to assess the skills need of the local market and ensure OCVC are delivering the right courses and the curriculum meets employer needs.
 - So far they have discovered that there is a gap in provision of the lower end (level 1) and the higher end (level 4 and above) courses.
- Have created SweetFE - a community interest company. Businesses commission work for the students to do which forms their assignments. This is contracted and monitored by SweetFE. They also run a Dragon's Den-style opportunity to bid for funding to start-up businesses.
- University Technical Colleges (UTCs) take students from 14 to teach science, technology and engineering focussed courses. One in Reading, one likely to be built in Didcot. Students attend from 9-5 which equates to 13 extra weeks of education over 2 years.
- A group in ScienceValeUK are working with secondary school students taking them to see STEM job environments and working on projects with employers.
- Career days offering free, impartial advice- not recruitment for OCVC- have been well received in the community.
- Students are encouraged to get involved in volunteering/paid employment in the college. Aim to employ 40% of their own students.
- Peer to peer teaching through using students as role models in primary schools.
- Developing a system to track students over the long-term after they leave college.

St Gregory the Great Catholic School

- Links they have with businesses are reciprocal arrangements. Would like to share these links with other schools.
- 25% of KS4 students have 1 day out a week at OCVC to do a vocational course but do not miss out on any core curriculum. This is expensive but there can be benefits from economies of scale both from reduced OCVC costs and freeing up staff in the school. The students are from a range of abilities.

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- The college reporting system feeds into the school's system and they have adopted the same praise system. There is also joint training for college and school staff.
- The school has vertical tutor groups, encouraging peer to peer mentoring and using the older students as role models.
- There are weekly mentoring sessions for all students. Looking to bring in businesses as part of this session to motivate and inspire.

The Cooper School, Bicester

- The school curriculum includes GCSE level triple science. The course is available to students with a range of abilities, and has had exceptionally high take up and attainment levels since it was first introduced.
 - This success has carried through into AS and A2 level science courses. Once again take up has been extremely high, with results being the best in the county despite the sixth form only opening very recently.
 - The same has been true of Maths at both GCSE and A level.
- Key to the school's success has been its work aimed at incentivising students to participate in STEM subjects. This has included building strong ties with numerous large employers in the county which have given students a taste of the working world and enhanced their understanding of how a company operates.
- Amongst the many schemes run in collaboration with employers, notable examples include:
 - Nuffield placements: Y12 students completed four week summer placements in research environments, undertaking real research in fields across the STEM spectrum.
 - CERN placement: a physicist at CERN in Geneva hosted a Y12 student for two weeks to work on analysing real data from the Large Hadron Collider experiment.
 - Mini Plant Oxford engineering project: Mini Plant Oxford set a group of Y12 engineering a task to design and build a downhill gravity racer. Parts were provided by Mini, and the group took part in the a national competition with other schools who had participated in the scheme. The group won both the 'Best Engineered' and Mini award for 'Technical Innovative Design'.
- The school has invested heavily in developing its science facilities in particular.
- The school has also worked with younger children to inspire them to achieve from an early age. This has included year 9 pathways events, where students are encouraged to explore opportunities for personal and character development. There are awards for demonstrating initiative in these areas which are also integrated into the curriculum.
- The school has also invested in modern equipment which enables students to record themselves talking to camera and presenting.

Faringdon Community College

- The school has had an engineering specialism since 2003.
- Every student studies at least one STEM subject. Additional STEM content is included in other subjects beyond the requirements of the curriculum, e.g. history includes lessons on science and technology during the period covered in the curriculum.

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- The school holds regular STEM events for families and children outside of school hours. Recent examples have included Flight Days, Ugandan Cooking, and Family Robotics.
- The school has strong links to local businesses in Oxfordshire and Swindon.
- Month long outreach sessions are held in ten local primary schools. These sessions introduce children in the catchment area to STEM subjects before they arrive at FCC. Recent examples have included Robotics, Podcasting Mechanisms, and Electronics & Animation.
- Year 11 students at risk of becoming NEET receive focussed careers guidance from the start of the year. Work is focussed on raising aspirations and preparing students for interviews. The school works in partnership with Swindon Technical College
- Of students going on to University in 2011, 37% chose to do STEM subjects.
- The school has a strong network of business contacts through a number of conduits (e.g. Industrial Trust, Oxford Trust / STEMNET) and through direct contact with employer groups. Direct contacts have led to two-way projects such as a competition to create a brand of soft-drinks for Crown.

14/13 CLOSE OF MEETING
(Agenda No. 10)

The meeting closed at 13.00.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing