

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services held at County Hall, Lewes, on 16 June 2005.

1. PRESENT - Councillor Gadd (Chairman)
Councillors Elkin, Field (Vice-Chairman), Kramer, Maynard, Ost, St Pierre, Mrs Tidy and Whetstone
- Mr T Campbell (RC Diocese)
Mr J Taylor (C of E Diocese)
Mr S Gregory (Parent Governor)
Mrs S Maynard (Parent Governor)
- Chief Officer - Denise Stokoe, Director of Children's Services
- Legal Adviser - Jonathan Ruddock-West, Assistant Director of Law and Performance Management
- Scrutiny Lead Officer - Mary Hayler
- ALSO PRESENT - Councillor Glazier, Lead Cabinet Member for Children's and Adults Services
Councillor Stroude, Lead Cabinet Member for Children and Families

2. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

2.1 RESOLVED – to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Education and Libraries held on 8 March 2005.

3. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

3.1 Councillor Field declared a potential prejudicial interest on items on the Agenda which considered agency placements, by virtue of the fact that her husband was a business Manager at a private special school. Councillor Field confirmed that if such a matter arose she would withdraw from the meeting.

3.2 Mr Campbell declared an interest in item 11 on the agenda in that he was Principal of St Richards Catholic College. Mr Campbell confirmed that he would withdraw from the meeting if he considered the matters being discussed to be prejudicial.

4. URGENT ITEM

4.1 The Chairman agreed to take as an urgent item a report by the Director of Children's Services on the Consultation on Children's Trust and Safeguarding Arrangements. The Chairman justified taking the report as an urgent item in order that the Committee's views could be reported to the Cabinet on 15 July 2005.

5. INTRODUCTION TO THE DEPARTMENT

5.1 The Committee received a presentation by the Director of Children's Services and an outline of Priorities by the Lead Cabinet Member for Children's and Adults Services, Councillor Glazier, and the Lead Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Councillor Stroude.

5.2 The Director of Children's Services highlighted draft structure proposals for the new Children's Services Department. The proposals were currently out for consultation with colleagues. The Committee requested that the draft proposals should also be circulated to the Committee on the understanding that the documents would be confidential for the time-being.

5.3 The Committee noted that the main priorities for the Department included the creation of Children's Trust arrangements, the development of a Children and Young People's Plan by April 2006, maintaining the focus on safeguarding school improvement, the development of locality/area planning and delivery of services and the configuration of the local health economy.

5.4 Councillor Glazier, Lead Cabinet Member for Children's and Adults Services and Councillor Stroude, Lead Cabinet Member for Children and Families were in attendance to inform the Committee about the policy steers for their portfolios.

5.5 The Committee noted that the main steer within Councillor Glazier's portfolio was to secure effective Children's Trust arrangements in East Sussex including integrated processes for planning and commissioning services. Other steers included improving access to services, particularly in the rural areas and to promote equity and equal opportunity and to promote healthy lifestyles through the promotion of healthy eating.

5.6 The Lead Cabinet Member for Learning and School Effectiveness, Councillor Simmons was not in attendance, but the Committee noted that the main policy steers within his portfolio included continuing to raise the educational achievement of children and young people at each key stage, secure further improvement on the quality of leadership and management of schools and promote excellence.

5.7 Councillor Stroude, Lead Cabinet Member for Children and Families informed the Committee that the main policy steers within her portfolio included continuing the improvement and achievement and wellbeing of looked after children and to develop and maintain an effective strategy to support vulnerable teenagers.

5.8 The Committee requested that copies of the Lead Cabinet Member slides listing their portfolios should be circulated electronically after the meeting. The Committee also noted that the policy steers would be reported formally to the Committee during the autumn and there would be an opportunity to comment upon them in more detail at that stage.

5.9 The Committee noted the presentation from the Director of Children's Services, the Lead Cabinet Member for Children's and Adults Services and the Lead Cabinet Member for Children and Families and also noted that further proposals with regard to the Children's Services Department and the Children's Trust would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee in September.

6. REMIT OF THE COMMITTEE

6.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Law and Performance Management.

6.2 The Committee noted that there would be a further three co-opted Members appointed to the Committee and it was hoped that these would be in place for the next meeting in September.

6.3 The Committee also indicated their concerns about the fact that the diocesan and parent governor representatives only had a vote when the item referred wholly or partly to an education matter. The Committee agreed that as this was supposed to be a more integrated service, all members of the Committee should be able to discuss and vote upon all matters

before them. The Committee requested that the Director of Law and Performance Management investigate further the legislation relating to co-optees and voting rights.

6.4 RESOLVED – to note the report.

7. CENTRALLY MANAGED SCHOOL MEALS SERVICE IN EAST SUSSEX

7.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services. Jane Carter, Contracts Manager (Catering) was in attendance to answer members' questions.

7.2 The Committee welcomed the report, but agreed that more needed to be done to assist schools in using more local produce and also to improve the actual eating facilities within schools.

7.3 The Committee noted that a further report would be submitted to the Cabinet Committee later in the year with further plans for the way ahead. The Committee also agreed that it would be helpful to receive some real evidence of where schools are with their facilities and what progress they have made in improving their facilities.

7.4 The Committee also informed the Director of Children's Services that they would welcome a further report which also included some reference to the behavioural benefits of good eating.

7.5 RESOLVED – (1) to endorse the approach to further develop the support being provided by the departmental team to East Sussex schools; and

(2) following an introductory period of six months, to review the overall provision of support to schools regarding food and health related issues with a view to ensuring that approaches and advice being provided to schools is consistent and clear.

8. PROGRESS REPORT ON ACTION FOLLOWING THE BEST VALUE REVIEW OF ATTENDANCE IN SCHOOLS

8.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services. Bernadine Bacon, Head of Access to Education was also in attendance to answer members' questions.

8.2 Councillor Kramer who had been a Member of the Project Board also updated the Committee about the progress made against the recommendations. The Committee acknowledged what an excellent piece of work the review had been and welcomed the progress made against the ten recommendations.

8.3 RESOLVED - to (1) note the progress made on implementing the recommendations; and

(2) note the progress of the action being taken following the Best Value Review which reported in March 2004.

9. SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS : PROGRESS REPORT ON DEPARTMENTAL REVIEW

9.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services. Jean Haigh, SEN Strategy and Review Manager was also in attendance to answer members' questions.

9.2 The Committee agreed that two Members from the Committee should be appointed to the SEN Project Board. The representatives should be cross party where possible.

9.3 Councillor Kramer was appointed as one of the Members on the Project Board and the Chairman requested that the Director of Law and Performance Management approach Members of the Children's Services Committee outside of the meeting and look for the other representative to be on the Project Board.

9.4 RESOLVED – to (1) note the outcomes of the consultation on the Review of SEN Specialist Provision (Annex 1 to the report);

(2) note the actions proposed in the 'Next Steps' booklet (Annex 2 to the report) as the basis for the future plans for the review;

(3) note the four key priorities arising from the review:

- (a) co-ordinate and publicise the significant number of initiatives and strategies for promoting good behaviour in schools, through the work of the recently established Behaviour Board, with the aim of providing comprehensive advice on resources and support, including those present in specialist SEN provision, for promoting good behaviour;
- (b) review the range and scope of East Sussex maintained specialist provision with the aim of increasing flexibility and reducing out of county placements. This should include consulting on the options for the changed use of St Mary's Special School, Horam, and the development of plans for multi-agency (including education, social care and health) co-ordinated services for children on the autistic spectrum (autistic spectrum disorder – ASD) and their families;
- (c) prepare for the pilot delegation of SEN funds to one or more local partnerships for children in 2006/7 and undertake a cost/benefit analysis;
- (d) extend out of school activities in special schools and specifically:
 - i. produce costed options for increased overnight respite for children with autism and report back to the Cabinet for a decision by December 2005;
 - ii. pilot the establishment of out of school activities in The South Downs Community Special School, Eastbourne; and

(4) to request the Director of Law and Performance Management to appoint a further member of this committee to join the SEN Review Project Board.

10. RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF TEACHERS

10.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services. Janet Bowen, Recruitment Strategy Manager was also in attendance to answer members' questions.

10.2 Councillor Field requested that, in future reports, the Hastings area was separated from the Rye and Bexhill and Rother areas. The Committee also recommended that this report should be submitted to the Joint Advisory Committee in the Autumn.

10.3 Mr Campbell requested that some work should be done on providing information on turnover of teachers recruited from abroad, and Mr Taylor raised the issues of head teacher vacancies, and the age profile of teachers in East Sussex. The Director of Children's Services confirmed that these issues would be looked at in more detail and included in the report due to come back to the Committee in a year's time.

10.4 RESOLVED – (1) to note the report and that no changes to the current arrangements are being proposed; and

(2) to note that a further report is brought to scrutiny in a year's time to update Members on any progress.

11. SCHOOL ADMISSIONS AND HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT

11.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services. Geoff Evans, Head of School Admissions was in attendance to answer members' questions.

11.2 The Committee agreed that any future review in this area should concentrate on looking at what is being delivered by the Council and what the Council is actually trying to achieve as a strategic body in so far as school admissions and transport is concerned.

11.3 RESOLVED – to carry out a review of school admissions and home to school transport; and to appoint the following Members to the Project Board:

Councillors Mrs Tidy and St Pierre and Sam Gregory.

12. COUNCIL PLAN: QUARTER FOUR

12.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Law and Performance Management.

12.2 RESOLVED – to (1) note the achievements during 2004/05 and the end of year monitoring results of both Key Service and PSA Targets; and

(2) establish a scrutiny review board to investigate in detail a number of critical BVPIs and report back to the next committee with its findings and recommendations. (The Chairman agreed to liaise with Members of the Committee following the meeting in order to appoint Members to the BVPI Project Board)

13. FUTURE PROGRAMME FOR SCRUTINY MEETINGS

13.1 The Committee considered the future programme for Scrutiny Committee meetings.

13.2 The Committee requested that the Scrutiny Lead Officer to place an item on the programme which looked at the implications of the post 16 review.

13.3 RESOLVED – to note the report.

14. FORWARD PLAN

14.1 The Committee noted without comment the Forward Plan for the period 1 July to 30 September 2005.

15. URGENT ITEM - CONSULTATION ON CHILDREN'S TRUST AND SAFEGUARDING ARRANGEMENTS

15.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services.

15.2 The Committee noted that draft statutory guidance on the implementation of the new duties under Section 10 of the Children Act 2004, was published for consultation just before Christmas. The Committee also noted the action which has already taken place in East Sussex with regard to the issues raised in the consultation document (which was attached as an appendix to the report). The Consultation document has also been discussed at a

meeting with NHS Trust Chief Executives on 29 April and a report would be submitted to Cabinet in July seeking agreement to the proposals in principle.

15.3 The Scrutiny Committee welcomed the chance to comment upon the proposals. The Committee agreed that it was vital to have targets to measure progress of the implementation of the Trust against. The Committee also agreed that the Diocese and all multi faith organisations should be consulted fully at every stage of the implementation.

15.4 The Director of Children's Services acknowledged that the Committee may need more time to feed their comments back before the report is submitted to Cabinet. The Director of Children's Services requested that Members of the Committee feed back their comments to her by 1 July 2005.

15.5 RESOLVED – to (1) note the proposed arrangements for implementing the requirements of sections 10 and 11 of the Children Act in relation to co-operation in children's services and effective safeguarding of children, as set out in the consultation document at Annex A to the report;

(2) note the arrangements for consultation with partners currently taking place, as set out in the schedule at Annex B to the report; and

(3) offer any views on the proposed arrangements, to be taken into account before proposals are submitted to Cabinet for approval.