

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services held at County Hall, Lewes, on 28 November 2006.

PRESENT	Councillor Gadd (Chairman) Councillors Elkin, Field, (Vice-Chairman) Kramer, Ost, St Pierre, Mrs Tidy, Whetstone and Waite Sarah Maynard (Parent Governor) Sam Gregory (Parent Governor) Tony Campbell (RC Diocese) Carole Shaves MBE (Police Authority representative)
Chief Officer	Matt Dunkley, Director of Children's Services
Legal Adviser	Jonathan Ruddock-West, Assistant Director of Law
Scrutiny Lead Officer	Gillian Mauger
Also present	Councillor Glazier, Lead Member for Children's and Adults' Services Councillor Stroude, Lead Member for Children and Families Helen Davies, Deputy Director Children and Families (for item 6) Caryl Sequiera, Complaints Manager (for item 10)

22. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

22.1 RESOLVED – to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the last meeting held on 26 September 2006.

23. APOLOGIES

23.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Silverson and Mr Jeremy Taylor.

24. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

24.1 Councillor Gadd declared a non-prejudicial interest in item 10 in that he would be sitting on the next adult services complaints panel.

24.2 Sam Gregory declared a non-prejudicial interest in item 6 in that he is the manager of TAP (Training Assessment and Progression).

25. REPORTS

25.1 Copies of the reports referred to below are included in the minute book.

26. CHILDREN'S SERVICES ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT (APA) 2006

26.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which informed scrutiny of the Children's Services Annual Performance Assessment 2006 judgement, which contributes to the Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA).

26.2 The Committee was advised that East Sussex County Council has achieved the highest rating of Local Authorities in the South East. The outcome of the assessment informs

the Joint Area Review (JAR) and will impact on how 'light touch' the review will be in June 2007.

26.3 In terms of improving standards in schools, the Committee agreed strong leadership and management within schools is essential and the Director of Children's Services advised the Committee that a number of schools had been identified where attainment and achievement needed improvement and their Head-teachers and Chairs of Governors had been invited to meetings to be advised of time-related improvement measures.

26.4 The Director of Children's Services advised the Committee that he is exploring the idea of using Local Authority Governors as a network to brief other governors.

26.5 The Committee congratulated the Director and the staff within the Children's Services Department on an excellent APA result.

26.6 RESOLVED – to (1) note the judgments awarded in the APA letter (attached at Annex 1), the positive improvements in 2006 and the contribution of the APA to the Council's overall CPA score;

(2) note the Action Plan produced by the department in response to the Assessment (attached at Annex 2); and

(3) thank and congratulate the Children's Services Department on achieving an excellent result in the Annual Performance Assessment.

27. PRESENTATION ON THE CORPORATE PARENTING ROLE OF ESCC

27.1 The committee received a presentation by the Deputy Director of Children and Families on the role of the Corporate Parenting Panel and the Councillors' role as Corporate Parents.

28. RECONCILING POLICY AND RESOURCES

28.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive and all Chief Officers which provided amended policy steers and the latest position on financial and policy issues.

28.2 The Committee welcomed the Lead Member for Children's and Adults' Services and the Lead Member for Children and Families who were present to answer questions regarding the amended policy steers.

28.3 The Director explained that schools in East Sussex are 100% funded from 'Direct Schools Grant' totalling £220million. This grant is ring-fenced and the majority is distributed amongst schools. After distribution, the remainder (called 'headroom') is allocated by the Schools' Forum. The Director of Children's Services would be seeking agreement from the Schools' Forum to spend a proportion of the headroom budget to support other Children's Services activities.

28.4 The Director of Children's Services advised the Committee that Children's Services need to find savings of £3.5million to meet the cash limit for the Children's Services Authority budget as a result of increased spending pressures. Some broad options are described in the report, but these will become more detailed proposals following consideration by Cabinet on 12 December 2006.

28.5 The Lead Member for Children's and Adults' Services advised the Committee that the increased level of savings was not through choice, and that he would be looking to make savings firstly in discretionary services, and those where the Council can seek alternative funding. There would be significant impact from the proposed savings in relation to Youth Development Service, Youth Offending Team, Family Resource Centres, and some services to

looked after children and locality services. He advised though that he was now not intending to change the Respite budget.

28.6 Members were concerned that by cutting back on discretionary services, these could impact on statutory services in the future. A request was made for more detailed information on this and estimated figures at the December board meeting, of what the proposed savings would cost the statutory services.

28.7 Members of the Scrutiny Review Board currently reviewing the Youth Offending Team, advised that it is unable to approve savings proposed to the Youth Offending Service as the Board are due to report its findings to Scrutiny in March 2007. It was also commented that the policy steer on youth opportunities would not seem to be in balance with possible cuts.

28.8 The Committee discussed, and agreed, that when assessing the potential impact of savings on services provided, the term 'customers' should be changed to 'service users'.

28.9 The Committee agreed that, at this stage, it was difficult to assess in depth the potential impact of the proposed savings and this would be done at the board meeting being held on 13 December, when a full breakdown of figures would be available.

28.10 RESOLVED – to (1) note the amended policy steers set out in the attached Cabinet report and considered if they are reflected within the key areas of budget spend in the forthcoming year; and

(2) at this stage it was difficult to assess in depth the potential impact of the proposed savings and this would be done at the board meeting being held on 13 December, when more detailed figures would be available.

29. PROGRESS REPORT ON ACTION FOLLOWING THE SCRUTINY REVIEW ON SCHOOL ADMISSIONS

29.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services informing the Committee of progress on the action points and recommendations made within the report.

29.2 The Director of Children's Services advised the Committee that proposed new guidance includes a proposal "to outlaw" the use of first parental preferences for schools. This proposal would mean that the Council would have to change its admission process and therefore a response opposing this change to this effect is being submitted as part of the consultation process.

29.3 The Committee also expressed concern about the proposed changes to the admissions process and agreed to monitor the situation and invite the Head of Admissions to the scrutiny meeting in June 2007 to provide an update.

29.4 RESOLVED – to (1) note the progress of the action being taken following the Scrutiny Review in March 2006; and

(2) invite the Head of Admissions to the scrutiny meeting in June 2007 to provide an update on the proposed changes to the admissions process.

30. PROGRESS REPORT ON ACTION FOLLOWING THE SCRUTINY REVIEW OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT SERVICE

30.1 The committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services informing the Committee of progress on the action points and recommendations made within the report.

30.2 The Director of Children's Services confirmed that the scrutiny review had proved to be very timely and helpful in the preparation for the negotiating process with CfBT on any extension to the contract. Suggested improvements outlined in the action plan of the review were being taken up within the new contract.

30.3 The Director of Children's Services advised the Committee that a report is being presented to Cabinet in December recommending an extension of the CfBT contract for a further two years at a revised rate. Any changes of providers between now and the Joint Area Review inspection in June 2007 would not be advantageous and this would be the lowest risk option.

30.4 RESOLVED – to note the progress of the action being taken following the Scrutiny Review in March 2006.

31. CHILDREN'S SERVICES SOCIAL CARE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE ANNUAL REVIEW

31.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services on the functioning and effectiveness of the Complaints Procedure.

31.2 The Committee requested that the adoption panel should be informed of any complaints received regarding the service.

31.3 The Committee was pleased to see an increase in the number of compliments received and noted the correct raise in figures was 51% rather than the 62% advised in the report.

31.4 RESOLVED – to (1) note and comment on the Children's Services Social Care Complaints Procedure Annual Review Report for 2005/2006; and

(2) request that details of complaints regarding adoption be forwarded to the adoption panel.

32. QUARTER TWO MONITORING REPORT AGAINST THE 2006/07 COUNCIL PLAN

32.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Policy and Communications.

32.2 RESOLVED – to (1) note the selection of early successes and achievements made by the Children's Services Department; and

(2) note the performance measures currently scored red and amber (appendix 1) and the actions being taken to address them.

33. IMPROVEMENTS TO SCRUTINY ARISING FROM AWAY DAYS AND PEER REVIEW

33.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Law and Personnel. The report suggested some practical suggestions for improving scrutiny in East Sussex.

33.2 The Committee agreed the following:

- holding pre-meetings was not considered to be a productive use of time
- in order to involve the public more in the scrutiny process, the language used in reports should be free from jargon and be easier to understand
- structured visits to departments and local areas would be beneficial
- publicise activity of scrutiny committees to Members and the public following quarterly rounds of meetings.

- did not support the suggestion of inviting the Leader of the Council to appear before public scrutiny committee meeting twice a year to answer questions about the overall stewardship of the Council.

33.3 RESOLVED - to consider the emerging themes and practical suggestions for improving scrutiny.

34. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2005/2006 WORK PROGRAMME

34.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Law and Personnel.

34.2 RESOLVED – to add to March 2007 the final report of Scrutiny Review of Youth Offending Team

35. FORWARD PLAN

35.1 The Committee considered the Forward Plan for the period 1 December 2006 to 31 March 2007 with regard to items relating to the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.

35.2 RESOLVED – to note the Forward Plan without comment.