

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services held at County Hall, Lewes, on 7 September 2010

PRESENT	Councillor Ensor (Chairman) Councillors Field, Freebody, Kenward, Shing, St Pierre, Waite, Webb and Whetstone. Jeremy Alford (Health Representative) Councillor Jonathan Johnson (District/Borough representative) David Sanders (RC Diocese) Mike Wilson (C of E Diocese) Sam Gregory (Parent Governor) Kym Hearn (Parent Governor)
Chief Officer	Becky Shaw, Chief Executive Matt Dunkley, Director of Children's Services
Scrutiny Lead Officer	Gillian Mauger
Also present	Councillor Stroude, Lead Cabinet Member for Children and Families Councillor Elkin, Lead Cabinet Member for Children's Services Councillor Glazier, Lead Cabinet Member for Adult and Children's Services Debbie Adams, Children's Centre Strategy Manager Jean Haigh, Head of Access and Disability

13. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

13.1 RESOLVED – to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the last Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 7 June 2010.

14. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

14.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Gadd and Mrs Carole Shaves MBE (Police Authority representative)

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

15.1 Councillor Ensor declared a personal interest in that his wife worked as a social worker at St Mary's Special School in Bexhill and that he was a trustee of a youth centre in Bexhill. He did not consider either interest to be prejudicial

16. REPORTS

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

17. RECONCILING POLICY AND RESOURCES (RPR)

17.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive setting out the detailed planning for 2011/2012 and beyond as outlined in the State of the County report. The Committee's views were sought on the policy steers for the Children's Services Department.

17.2 The Director of Children's Services stated that the required savings could not be made without affecting services to vulnerable children. It was therefore important that those services which were cut were those that had the least impact and that by cutting these it would not result in demand being created in other areas. With a reduced role of the state in peoples' lives the focus of the department would be on services that built up capacity in families to resolve their own problems, rather than the department solving them for people.

17.2 The Committee made the following points and observations:

Policy Steer 1

- Concerns were raised that reducing teenage conception rates was not specifically mentioned and assurances were received that this area of work would be captured within this policy steer

Policy Steer 2

- Concerns were raised that bullying was not specifically mentioned and sought clarification that this area of work would be captured within this policy steer. Members were informed that the change in wording did not signal an intention to remove the anti-bullying team. However, as a grant funded service, the team was as vulnerable as all other services that were funded in this way.

Policy Steer 3

- Members supported the shift of emphasis towards helping families resolve their own problems rather than the department solving them on their behalf. However, concerns were raised that the wording was not particularly clear and mention of prevention and intervention should be included within the policy steer.

Policy Steers 4 and 5

- Assurances were sought that children with disabilities and SEN children were included within these policy steers and members were informed that this was the case.

Policy Steer 6

- Members recognised that the emphasis on working with partners was key to minimising the number of young people who are not in employment, education or training. Without employers offering employment and training opportunities to young people meeting this policy steer would be difficult.

Policy Steer 7

- Members stated that the wording was unclear and needed altering to highlight what contribution it was referring to.

Policy Steer 8

- Concerns were raised that rural areas were not specifically mentioned and sought clarification that this did not mean a withdrawal of services in rural areas. Members were informed that this change did not signal a retreat from rural

services in particular. However, it would be difficult to offer services universally in the future and this might impact on rural areas.

RESOLVED – to (1) amend Policy Steer seven to read ‘promote the benefits of young people making a positive contribution to their community and decisions affecting their own lives’; and

(2) establish a RPR board, made up of Councillors Ensor, Field, Webb and Whetstone and Kym Hearn, to act on behalf of the Committee to provide ongoing input into the RPR process until March 2011.

18. CHILDREN’S CENTRE PERFORMANCE

18.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children’s Services on the performance management arrangements for Children’s Centres and the planned response to emerging future policy.

18.2 Members were informed that 59% of people using the Children's Centres were from the vulnerable families that the centres were primarily aimed at. As well as providing some generic services across all Children's Centres the aim was to tailor services to meet local need. In some cases decisions were made locally to reflect local views, including setting up a nominal charge for one young parents group to enable the group to purchase equipment.

18.3 The Committee stated that Children's Centres were a key area of work for supporting families and underpinned several of the department's policy steers. It requested that the importance of Children's Centres be highlighted to national government and assurances over funding streams for them be sought.

18.4 RESOLVED to note the implementation of performance management processes to monitor the performance of Children’s Centres and their impact on outcomes for children.

19. REVIEW OF DISCRETIONARY OF HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT FOR PUPILS ATTENDING A DENOMINATIONAL SCHOOL

19.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children’s Services on the proposals for the Council to cease to assist with home to school transport to church aided schools.

19.2 The Director of Children's Services stated that this review was as a result of the need to make in-year cuts. Wide ranging consultation had been carried out, with consultation documents sent to everyone receiving denominational home to school transport and those parents of pupils who have just joined the final year of primary school Y6. Notices about the consultation had also been placed in local papers and libraries and notifications had been sent to all schools. As the consultation process had begun just before the start of the summer school holiday the time period for responding had been extended until 30 September.

19.3 The Director of Children's Services stated that representatives from the two dioceses had been invited to a meeting with himself and the Lead Member prior to a decision being made on this matter.

19.4 The Denominational representatives on the Committee highlighted the following points:

- The Dioceses recognised the financial situation that the County Council currently faced and agreed that it was only right that all areas of concessionary funding were being reviewed.
- A major concern was the suggested in-year implementation of this change to the policy. This would mean that parents who have previously applied for schools expecting to receive support with transport to that school would be met with a change to it in the middle of the school year.
- The changes could have a significant impact on several families who were just above the low income threshold, particularly those with two or more children. In extreme situations this could lead to pupils changing school mid year.
- Changes to the policy would hit some schools harder than others. There could be a long term move away from sending pupils to catholic schools and this could have an adverse impact on some community schools.
- Many pupils travel to faith schools on subsidised bus routes. If this no longer happened there could be knock on effect in terms of the viability of these routes and could lead to the withdrawal of some subsidised rural transport.
- The dioceses wished to work together with the department to manage how any changes were taken forward.

19.5 Further points were raised by other Committee members:

- All parents had the right to express a preference for a particular school. For those pupils who attended a preferred school which was not a faith school it was down to the parents to bear the cost of transport to that school. This could be particularly high for families living in rural areas.
- Concerns were raised that a change in this policy could lead to vacant places in some denominational schools.

19.6 RESOLVED that the comments made by members of the Committee be taken into account by the Lead Member when making a decision on discretionary home to school transport for pupils attending a denominational school

20. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

20.1 The Committee considered the scrutiny work programme. Members were informed that future agendas would focus on areas of work where the Committee could add value and reports provided for information would be circulated outside of formal Committee meetings.

20.2 RESOLVED to note the work programme.

21. FORWARD PLAN

21.1 The Committee considered the Forward Plan for the period 1 September 2010 and 31 December 2010

21.2 RESOLVED to note the Forward Plan.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 1.15pm