

Children's Services Overview Committee

Minutes of a meeting held at County Hall,
Colliton Park, Dorchester on 1 July 2014.

Present:

Michael Bevan (Chairman)

Pauline Batstone (Vice-Chairman)

Dan Brember, Steve Butler, Barrie Cooper, Beryl Ezzard, Susan Jefferies, Mary Kahn, Mike Lovell and Margaret Phipps.

Rebecca Knox, Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Families and Toni Coombs, Cabinet Member for Education and Communications, attended under Standing Order 54(1).

Officers attending:

Sara Tough (Director for Children's Services), Vanessa Glenn (Head of Family Support), Anne Salter (Head of Strategy, Partnerships and Performance), Jay Mercer (Head of Learning and Inclusion), Siân Dobson (Children's Services Group Finance Manager) and Paul Goodchild (Senior Democratic Services Officer).

The following officers attended for certain items, as appropriate:

Roger Bushell (Interim Strategic Lead for SEN), Sandra Conroy (Senior Manager for Strategy, Partnerships and Performance) and Jackie Groves (Senior Manager for Learning and Inclusion).

(Note: These minutes have been prepared by officers as a record of the meeting and of any decisions reached. They are to be considered and confirmed at the next meeting of the Children's Services Overview Committee to be held on **14 October 2014**.)

Apologies for Absence

57.1 Apologies for absence were received from Mike Byatt, Peter Hall, Daryl Turner and Michael Turnbull.

57.2 The Chairman reported that Stephen Hill had resigned from the Committee as a Co-opted Member.

Code of Conduct

58. There were no declarations by members of any disclosable pecuniary interests under the Code of Conduct.

Terms of Reference

59. The Committee noted their Terms of Reference.

Noted

Minutes

60. The minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2014 were confirmed and signed, subject to the last sentence of minute 40.15 being amended to read "Minor changes to the policy were highlighted and members informed that there was no entitlement to post 16 transport, however when seats were available they would be offered at concessionary rates and preference would be given to children with Special Educational Needs."

Public ParticipationPublic Speaking

61.1 There were no public questions received at the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 21(1).

61.2 There were no public statements received at the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 21(1).

Petitions

61.3 The Chairman confirmed that he had received one petition before the meeting and it would be handed to the Senior Democratic Services Officer and processed in accordance with the County Council's petition scheme. The petition concerned Christchurch Junior School admission arrangements.

Children's Services Forward Together Programme (Time for Transformation) – Progress Update

62.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Children's Services which provided a further update on the progress with the Forward Together Programme which was being implemented within the Children's Services Directorate. The report included progress since the previous update to the Committee in January 2014.

62.2 The Director introduced the report and drew attention to the new Directorate structure which had now been fully implemented. She highlighted that the Programme had achieved savings of £700k in 2013/14 and was forecast to deliver a further £1344k in 2014/15, £810k of which had already been realised. Phase 4 of the Programme would focus on new ways of working and cultural changes to help the Directorate achieve its future objectives. The objectives were in the areas of simplifying systems and processes, developing different options for the care of older children, strengthening families, building community capacity, and delivering a workforce development programme which helped staff to support families in a different way. Further to this, members noted that an appointment had been made to the role of Business Change Lead. This post was time limited for 18 months.

62.3 One member asked how the 10 senior management positions within the Directorate were set out in the Children's Forward Together Project Structure chart. The Director explained that the project involved 18 areas of work. Not all of the senior managers were leading an area of work, whereas some were leading in more than one area. A full structure chart of the Directorate's management was available for members on the Member's Gateway.

Resolved

63. That the Committee supported the direction of travel of work being undertaken towards the Children's Services Forward Together Programme.

Reason for Decision

64. The programme was critical to Children's Services' ability to meet the challenge of sustaining high quality services for children and families whilst at the same time delivering those services within a reduced financial context.

Inspection of Local Authority Services for Children in Need of Help and Protection, Children in Care and Care Leavers: National Overview and Local Improvement Programme

65.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Children's Services which provided details of the national position regarding children in need of help and

protection, children looked after and care leavers, and also outlined local preparation and planning that was currently taking place as part of the wider improvement agenda.

65.2 The Senior Manager for Strategy, Partnerships and Performance introduced the report and explained that it provided an update on the issue which had previously been considered by the Committee in November 2013. She explained that the new framework looked at frontline practice and how it impacted upon children and young people. Ofsted had conducted a review of the new framework, which had also been reviewed by Professor Eileen Munro, and they supported the view that it had a beneficial impact on standards and helped to drive cultural change. Concerns had been registered, however, that there would be increased demand on Local Authorities and Inspectors as a result. A successful trail run of the new multi-agency audit process had been undertaken, and teams had been able to complete the audit within the allotted timescale. It was recommended that action be taken on independent reviewing as a result of the new framework.

65.3 One member noted that a common theme, which had arisen from the review of inspection reports had been a high number of agency social workers. The Senior Manager explained that nationally there was a high percentage of agency social workers, with some Local Authorities employing as many as 40% through agencies. The number in Dorset, however, was much lower. Agency workers were only used in the short term to bring work down to a manageable level. In response to a further question the Director confirmed that all agency employed social workers were professionally qualified and registered, and that all checks were undertaken in advance of recruitment.

Resolved

66. That the Committee agreed:
- (a) to support the continued programme of audit and benchmarking of practice;
 - (b) to the review of the Independent Conferencing and Reviewing Manager service;
 - (c) to support the focus on front line practice involvement as part of a continuous improvement programme; and
 - (d) to the continued support for the range of work streams resulting from Time for Transformation Phase 3.

Reason for Decision

67. To support the continuous improvement programme within Children's Services.

Review of Specialist SEN Provision – Update

68.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Children's Services which provided a further update to the report considered in March 2014 which provided an analysis of responses to a consultation on a review of Special Educational Need (SEN) specialist provision and outlined the proposed implementation process phased over three years. The update report outlined progress and provided examples of the proposed changes and their intended impact.

68.2 The Interim Strategic Lead for SEN introduced the report and explained that one of the report appendices had been repeated and a copy of the missing appendix would be emailed to members following the meeting. He explained that there was a specific request for the Committee to nominate the Chairman of the Committee to serve on the external Reference Group which had been established to offer external support and challenge the process.

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68.3 Members noted that the process of change was very complex as there were a lot of stakeholders involved and required changes to a wide range of systems. The aim was to build service capacity and strong governance by examining the needs of the service, and identify what would work best after looking at the evidence. Officers aimed to describe a pattern of pupils the authority should make a provision for which was linked to specifications and funding models. The original four local areas had now been reduced to three - East Dorset, Purbeck and Christchurch, Weymouth and Portland and North and West Dorset – that are aligned with the area structure for Family Support and Challenge and Improvement for schools.

68.4 One member observed that the plan was difficult to explain to parents. The Interim Strategic Lead highlighted that parents were anxious that their child's provision would be changed. It was important to explain that the provision would not be changed at least until they had reached their next school transition. New SEN reforms were designed to put the needs of children and young people first, and it was important to work with children and young people in making the decisions.

68.5 Regarding financial information, it was explained that the usual arrangement was for children with SEN in resourced mainstream provision to be funded at a flat rate of £10k. In future funding would be based upon a flat £10k for each filled place plus additional top up funding for children with high level SEN. Current modelling suggests that, for provision for children with complex communication difficulties, this might equate to an additional £6,300 in top up funding. This would also be applicable for academies. Funding for the proposed provision for children with social, emotional and mental health needs will take account of the fact that the children and young people concerned will be expected to remain on the roll of their home school, even if they receive specialist support at a resourced mainstream for some of their education.

68.6 It was explained that, in addition to the Chairman of the Children's Services Overview Committee, the external Reference Group would be made up of the Chairman of the Schools Forum, the Chair of the Dorset Learning Partnership, colleagues from other Local Authorities and children and young people. The Chairman explained that if members supported the view that he should attend the Reference Group he would report back, and would look for the input of members of the Committee if required.

Resolved

69.1 That the Committee noted the progress to date in the implementation of the outcomes of the consultation and that further reports be presented at key points during the implementation process.

69.2 That the Committee agree that the Chairman of the Children's Services Overview Committee serve as a member of the external Reference Group established in order to offer external support and challenge to the process.

Reason for Decisions

70.1 This was a complex agenda with many stakeholders, which represented a range of interests and needs, and would involve change across more than one system.

70.2 The implementation process must align with and complement work to implement the far reaching SEN reforms set out in the Children and Families Act, which came into force 22 April 2014.

70.3 Engagement from the Chairman on the Reference Group would strengthen the ability of the Committee to maintain a close overview of and shape this important development.

Schools Converting to Academy Status

71.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Children's Services which provided an update on the County Council's strategic response to schools becoming academies.

71.2 The Senior Manager for Learning and Inclusion introduced the report and highlighted that a further 22 schools in Dorset had proposed conversion to Academy status. This had been prompted by a number of schools joining together to form Academy chains, whereas previously schools had been encouraged to convert individually. The role of the Local Authority in supporting schools in this had been discussed, as there were currently no measures in place if the partnership arrangements between schools were dissolved. Schools should be given advice on whether certain partnership arrangements with other schools were right for them.

71.3 It was highlighted that the government had offered schools funding incentives if they were prepared to convert to Academies before the summer holidays in 2014, and so some schools did not have the chance to fully consider their options before making a decision to form an Academy chain. In response to a question it was confirmed that the County Council was duty bound to cover the legal and financial costs when a school converted to Academy status. The particular costs differed between schools depending on the complexity of the arrangement.

71.4 The Director commented that the majority of Dorset schools were choosing to convert to Academies as opposed to being required to becoming a Sponsored Academy. Locally the County Council had remained neutral and supported schools in their choices. The Director had met with Secondary School headteachers the previous week and had suggested a strategic planning day to be held in autumn 2014. This would be to consider a more strategic approach towards Academisation.

71.5 One member asked a question regarding the benefits of Academy status. The Senior Manager explained that if schools were operated by the County Council they were tied to the County Council's terms and conditions, although a lot of schools chose to keep the same terms and conditions when they converted. The Local Authority retained statutory responsibility for the school, but with Academy status schools could become more community focussed. Academies could choose to buy back some services from the County Council, whereas other services including school buses and school admissions were statutory roles.

71.6 In response to a question on funding, the Senior Manager explained that if more schools converted to Academies there would be a slight reduction in the amount of funding the County Council received from the government. The amount would reflect the responsibilities retained by the Local Authority and would be reduced proportionately. Any capital works would still be funded by the County Council as Academies did not own their school buildings. A new baseline property design had been implemented which would still provide quality services, but would not provide schools with bespoke arrangements.

Noted**Corporate Performance Monitoring Report Fourth Quarter 2013-14
(1 January – 30 April 2014)**

72.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Children's Services which set out the results of the monitoring of the County Council's Budget and Corporate Plan for the fourth quarter of 2013-14 and presented the Corporate Balanced Scorecard.

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72.2 The Children's Services Group Finance Manager presented the report and explained that the performance trends had not changed since the previous quarter, but there had been a reduction in complaints. Members noted that this would be the last report under the previous performance monitoring system. In response to a question it was confirmed that the corporate underspend would be fed back into the central pot of County Council monies.

72.3 One member commented that it would be useful to just have Children's Services information and not the full performance monitoring report for all Directorates. The Director commented that this would affect all Overview Committees but would feed the comment back to the County Leadership Team.

72.4 One member asked for an update on progress with work on transport for Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). The Director explained that an external report had been commissioned to look at transport for all Children, and this had been presented to Directors the previous week. The report specifically looked at taxi provision and passenger transport assistants, amongst other areas. Work was underway to bring transport from Children's Services and the Environment Directorate together so that performance could be managed in a simpler way. A report on the matter would be considered at the next meeting of the Committee.

Noted

Revenue Budget Monitoring 2013/14 Final Outturn

73.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Children's Services which set out the budget monitoring information for the end of the 2013/14 financial year. The information showed an overspend against service budgets for the County Council of £1,110k which compared to a predicted overspend of £4,462k at the end of January 2014.

73.2 The Children's Services Group Finance Manager explained the Children's Services overspend was to be offset against underspend in other Directorates and not rolled forward. There was a predicted overspend of £3m in 2014/15, although proper budget monitoring had not yet begun for 2014/15.

73.3 The Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Families welcomed the decision that overall control of transport would come back to Children's Services, which would hopefully help address the transport budget in future years. She commented that provision for children in care was a large part of the overspend, and Children's Services managers were reviewing all placements for outcomes and value for money. The detail of this work would come back to the Committee as part of the Forward Together Programme.

73.4 The Director commented that alternative options for older children in care would be considered and this was a key objective for the Directorate. 55% of children going into care were above the age of 13, and so all options should be considered if a decision was made that they should not remain at home. A more detailed report on the matter would be considered in due course.

73.5 Members agreed that the recommendation be amended to include the whole overspend amount.

Recommended

74. That, having taken into account the overall financial position of the County Council, it be recommended to Cabinet that the overspend should not be carried forward to 2014/15.

Reason for Recommendation

75. Close monitoring of the budget position was an essential requirement to ensure that money and resources were used efficiently and effectively.

Pupil Premium – Closing the Gap

76.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Children's Services which provided background information on the Pupil Premium and explained work which was being undertaken by the County Council to address the Pupil Premium gap and concerns in terms of progress made in Maths by pupils who accessed Pupil Premium.

76.2 The Senior Manager for Learning and Inclusion introduced the report and explained that Pupil Premium referred to additional funding given to publicly funded schools in England to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and close the gap between them and their peers. This included money provided for pupils who were eligible for free school meals. Members noted that Dorset was not performing well in this respect when compared to neighbouring south west Local Authorities and statistical neighbours, and it was a continued key issue for the Dorset Learning Partnership. The County Council would examine end of year results to monitor progress, and continue to work with Bournemouth Borough Council and the Borough of Poole, as well as Academies in Dorset, to address the issue. Some Pupil Premium funding would be kept back for projects in all schools in Dorset.

76.3 One member asked what steps had been taken to make sure that parents registered their children for free school meals. The Senior Manager explained that there was a concern that the introduction of universal infant free school meals would result in a risk that parents would not register their older children for free school meals, even if they were entitled to receive them. Officers had written to all schools and advised them to talk to parents about this to raise awareness. In response to a further question it was confirmed that schools would be aware which pupils were eligible for Pupil Premium, but they may not be aware of those new pupils who would be joining the school in September.

76.4 Members noted that the County Council would be held accountable by Ofsted for Pupil Premium, and that Ofsted would look at the issue in great detail during an inspection. It was important to show how the County Council was leading on the matter. Children and young people who were covered by Pupil Premium would be eligible for free school meals and also entitlement to help with transport, school trips and uniform allowance.

76.5 The Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Families highlighted that it was important to separate Pupil Premium from free school meals. She commented that this was an important role for elected members who were also school governors. The challenge to schools on this issue would come from the governing body.

76.6 The Senior Manager explained that schools were targeting induction days to talk to parents about Pupil Premium. There were campaigns in the local press to raise awareness, but these may not reach all families. It was confirmed that any child who had been eligible for free school meals within the last six years would be eligible for Pupil Premium.

76.7 One member raised concern that there was a stigma attached to free school meals, and parents may be wary of it as they were concerned that their child may get bullied. The Senior Manager explained that the benefit of universal free school meals for infants was that the stigma would be removed. There may also be an increasing uptake of older children opting for hot meals at lunchtime as a result. One member explained that a big difference had been made by a cashless system at lunchtime, so that all pupils were

treated the same and other pupils were not aware who received free school meals. The Senior Manager added that the last school meal provider used by the County Council had been asked to look at further cashless systems and online payments.

Noted

Policy Development Panel in Relation to Children in Care

77.1 The Chairman reported that the Chairman of the Policy Development Panel (PDP) in Relation to Children in Care had, following discussion with the Director, recommended that the PDP be held in abeyance as the majority of its responsibilities had transferred to the Corporate Parenting Board. The Director added that when the PDP had been formed the work streams now covered by Forward Together for Children had not been in place. It was therefore recommended that the PDP be held in abeyance until such a time as it was needed to look at other areas of work.

77.2 One member suggested that, instead of remaining dormant, the PDP be disbanded and reconstituted as and when it was required. Members agreed to this proposal.

Resolved

78. That the Policy Development Panel in Relation to Children in Care be disbanded.

Work Programme

79.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Corporate Resources which detailed the updated work programme for 2014.

79.2 The Chairman asked that an item be added to the agenda for the October 2014 meeting of the Committee on children and young people's mental health crisis. He also asked that a press release from YoungMinds, a children and young people's mental health charity, be circulated to members of the Committee by email following the meeting as an introduction to the subject.

79.3 The Director proposed a further item to be added to the agenda for the October 2014 meeting of the Committee regarding models which had been developed for early help and care, and support as part of the Children's Services Forward Together Programme.

79.4 One member highlighted that a review of transport had been mentioned, and that this should be considered before March 2015. He suggested it be added to the work programme for January 2015. The Director commented that this would be included and that, by January 2015, information from the pilot scheme would be available.

79.5 The Vice-Chairman suggested that an item on how complaints were handled in the Directorate would be useful. The Director highlighted that an annual report on complaints was considered by the Committee, but that a briefing paper on the topic could be prepared and circulated to members.

79.6 Additional items were to be added to the work programme as agreed at the meeting.

Noted

Schedule of Member Seminars and Events 2014

80. The Committee received a schedule of forthcoming seminars and events arranged for members in 2014.

Noted**Member Briefings**

81.1 No subjects for future member briefings were identified.

Outside Bodies

82.1 The Cabinet Member for Education and Communications provided a summary of the work of the Salisbury Diocesan Board of Education. She commented that the Board had a good link with the modernising schools programme. Members noted that the main Board of Education would be reconfigured to be more involved with religious policy, and that the role of the County Council representative would be to sit on the buildings and premises sub-committee. She also reported that Chris Sheppard, the Director of Education would be retiring in the summer and the current Deputy Director of Education would be taking over the role.

82.2 The Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Families reported that the Dorset Safeguarding Children's Board did not currently have any serious case reviews. Members noted that the Board hoped to have an agreed safeguarding policy finalised by September 2014 for adoption. She added that the Children's Trust Board was not on the list of outside bodies, but that the Board would report directly to the Dorset Health and Wellbeing Board in the future.

82.3 The County Council Member for Corfe Mullen reported that the Dorset Fostering Agency Panel continued to receive a steady flow of new foster parents, and that the majority seemed ideal for the role which showed that the preparation procedure was robust. Many cases of family and friends foster care were coming forward which had possibly been a result of formalising existing care arrangements. She also reported that the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education was very active in the promotion of Religious Education in schools and had recently held a conference on the matter.

82.4 The Chairman reported on the work of the Dorset Adoption Agency's Panel. He highlighted that it was difficult to sometimes see siblings adopted by different families, but there were genuine circumstances why sometimes siblings could not be adopted together and letterbox contact was encouraged. If siblings could not be adopted by the same parent or parents, they could be adopted by another member of the family if possible. Members noted that the process of adoption was shortening in Dorset, which encouraged more people to become adopters. The Director added that the adoption services in Dorset were highly respected nationally.

Noted**Questions**

83. No questions were asked by members under Standing Order 20(2).