

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 24th January 2011 at 4.30 pm in the Reception Suite, Civic Offices, Telford

PRESENT: Councillors A.Stanton (Chairman), C.P.R.Mollett (Vice-Chairman), E.A.Clare, J.A.Dixon, G.M.Green and Y.C.Hicks and Mrs.S.Harris (Headteacher Representative) and Dr.S.Ali (General Public Representative).

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillors S.M. Burrell and E.J. Greenaway (Cabinet Members – Children & Young People).

OFFICERS PRESENT: Richard Partington – Assistant Chief Executive, Laura Johnston – Head of Safeguarding, Clive Jones – Head of Family & Community Services, Angela yapp – Service Delivery Manager: Placements, Stephanie Jones – Scrutiny Officer and Andrew Roberts – Democratic Services officer.

CYPSC-7 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 13th September 2010 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman and the notes of the meetings of the Working Group held on 1st November and 13th December 2010 be received for noting.

CYPSC-8 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Mr.A.Atkinson (RC Diocese Representative)

CYPSC-9 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST OR PARTY WHIP

None

CYPSC-10 SERVICE & FINANCIAL PLANNING STRATEGY 2011/12-2013/14 – CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

The Chairman referred the Committee to the Training and Briefing Session that occurred on the 4th January 2011 and that following the budget presentation that had been given the Committee members discussed the topics and questions that it wished to raise on the budget proposals linked to its Council priority.

Members were reminded that the agreed questions had been dispatched prior to this meeting to the appropriate Cabinet Members – Councillors S.P.Burrell and E.J.Greenaway and senior officers. The Members were reminded of the questions that had been raised and attached as Appendix D of the agenda. The Committee also noted that the appropriate senior officers were in attendance in order to respond to the questions that had been raised.

Question 1 – Grants – Young Carers and Child Development – What exactly is being cut and what impact will the cuts have?

The Cabinet Member: Children & Young People advised that both of these programmes which provided payments for parents to access Children Centres were specific targeted grants that were funded by Central Government. As a result of the economic measures taken by Central Government both of these grants were being stopped. However, it was stated that because this was a national cutback, it did not represent a Borough Council saving. It was mentioned that the cuts related to the grant for parents to take their children to Children's Centres and not to the services themselves. In connection with the Young Carers Grant this grant had been reasonably successful and the Council would seek to retain the key worker programme locally.

Question 2 – Youth Opportunity Fund Grant Cuts – proposed saving of £73k – what percentage of the YOF is this?

Councillor S Burrell informed the Committee that this grant was a nationally funded scheme which was being stopped. The £73k noted within the report was the remaining fund that was unallocated within the scheme. The total grant was £103k, of which £30k had been allocated.

Question 3 – Speech and Language Therapy and SMDS these areas show a combined saving of £71k. What exactly is being cut and how will the service be afforded in the future?

The Committee was advised that SMDS was a joint service with Shropshire Council and Speech and Language Therapy were delivered under a Service Level Agreement with a provider which would end next year. The savings were largely being realised through efficiencies and service restructuring, including the non-replacement of employees that were leaving the Council and posts being left vacant.

Question 4 – Review of milk provision and tender savings – Does this mean that there will be no more milk? Please provide more information.

Councillor S Burrell informed the meeting that the minimum provision would be retained which would see milk being provided in nursery schools 5 days per week and in primary and special schools for 2 days/week. However milk would be provided on a paid for service for the remaining portion of the week. He did mention that schools usually bought milk provision in bulk but there was a lot of waste – he also reminded Members of how the provision of milk was financed through the national milk scheme and that following a review of this wastage had been identified. Schools now provided fresh drinking water within all schools as part of the Healthy Schools scheme, and the Cabinet Member also commented that school milk was no longer necessary to make up the post-war dietary deficiencies that it was introduced to supplement.

Question 5 – (a) How has the additional £1.4 million investment for children's social care and children in care been budgeted? Councillor Burrell advised that this represented the amount that had been overspent for this year and that the budget had been set to manage and maintain current levels of spend. There had been an upward trend of children coming into care, and costs had risen due to the difficulty of moving children back home once they had been taken into care. Investment had been made last year into family intervention which supported families holistically. An evaluation of the cost avoidance from this investment in Q3 was being done, which

Councillor Burrell said pointed at significant cost avoidance, and that costs should start to come down.

(b) Why is this service consistently under-budgeted so that the Council always has to re-invest in this service? The Committee was reminded by Councillor Burrell that it was very difficult to predict costs with accuracy. The average cost of foster care was £400 per week, but specialist care could cost up to £5000 per week. These higher costs were difficult to predict with accuracy and a broad extrapolation would be a misjudgement. The average cost of care per week had reduced over the last three years and there had been an increase in the numbers placed in family unit. In reply to a further question about how the current service review would contribute to the budget, Councillor Burrell replied that the success of the cost avoidance from the Family Intervention Project gave an indication that the family centred approach would impact positively on the cost of service in the future, but emphasised that the broad aim was about delivering the right services and not about cutting budgets.

He also highlighted the tremendous work that was undertaken by officers that ensured that the Council had not encountered a headline case. In reply to a question about parental contributions for children in care, the Head of Safeguarding replied that this was being looked at with Shropshire Council.

(c) There is a perception that the Borough was a net importer of families requiring support from neighbouring conurbations and that these can have a large impact on the budget of the Council. Has this been identified as a problem and has any work been done to mitigate this impact?

Councillor Burrell informed Members that Officers acted robustly to establish whether Telford & Wrekin was the authority responsible for the incoming family, and once this had been ascertained, then a consistent approach to best care for children was adopted. As corporate parent, the Council treated all children in the Borough equally. The Head of Safeguarding stressed that there was a rigorous interrogation of circumstances of people moving into the Borough to make sure that Telford & Wrekin was the liable authority, and pointed out that there was also a net “balancing off” in that some families move out of the Borough as well as moving in.

(d) Are there any other factors such as stated in (c) above that are outside the Council’s control that influence the over spend within this area?

Councillor Burrell commented that he felt that when he was initially appointed as the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services he was of the initial view that there could be more preventative measures that could be employed to help reduce the demand on Children’s Services particularly for Children in Care. He was pleased to pay tribute to the hard work undertaken by officers on this early intervention and preventative work which helped to reduce the number of children coming into care. He also commented on the provision of highly skilled foster parents and the increase in the numbers of prospective foster carers that had been gained through the various recruitment activities undertaken by the Council.

Cabinet Members and officers giving evidence left the meeting at this point.

The Members discussed the evidence that they had heard and agreed that they would like to make the following comments on the budget proposals for Children and Young People to the Community Focused Efficient Council Scrutiny Committee:

1. With regard to the proposed combined savings of £71k across the Schools Multicultural Development Service and Speech and Language Therapy, the Scrutiny Committee noted the minimal impact and understood the reasons for making the savings. However, the members requested further clarification on how the £50k non-staff savings were being made to the Schools Multicultural Development Service (Appendix 5, item 17) and requested a copy of the Equality Impact Assessment on the changes to the service. The Committee reserved the right to monitor the impact of the savings in the future.
2. The Committee was concerned about the impact of the proposed saving on non-mandatory milk and how evidence of wastage had been gathered. The Committee requested that further investigation was done into the wastage figure, and would prefer that a non-carte blanche approach was taken.
3. The Committee understood the financial and budgetary constraints around children in care, but also understood the corporate parenting responsibility of all elected members for children in the authority's care and that this should always take precedence.
4. The Committee accepted the overspend on children in care and understood the reasons for it. The Committee further acknowledged that there were great strides being taken to reduce costs and that overspend on children in care was an annual occurrence which had to be recognised.
5. The Committee recommended that information about what underlies the cost of placements should be made more readily available to members, and reinforced the previous recommendation that corporate parenting training should be made mandatory for all members.

The meeting ended at 6.15 pm.

Chairman:

Date: