

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 6 AUGUST 2012

PRESENT:- Councillors Kevin Small (Chair), Peter Heaton-Jones (Vice-Chair), John Ballman, Toby Elliott, Claire Ellis, Brian Ford, Richard Hurley, Colin Lovell, Des Moffatt, James Robbins, Robert Wright and John Haines

Councillor David Renard, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children's Services, was in attendance

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Rod Bluh, Fionuala Foley, Brian Mattock, Maureen Penny, Garry Perkins and Vera Tomlinson.

14. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting.

In accordance with the National Code of Local Government Code, and in relation to the Committee's consideration of matters relating to Children's Services (Agenda Item No. 5 refers), Councillor James Robbins made a personal declaration of interest in respect of his work at the Churchfields Academy and also in his capacity as a foster carer.

15. Public Question Time

No questions were asked under Standing Order 18.

16. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 16th July 2012 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

17. Question and Answer Session - Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Councillor David Renard, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children's Services, was in attendance. Following a position statement in which he summarised performance in respect of the various service areas within his portfolio of responsibility, including his assessment of what he felt had been done well, what might have been done differently and the challenges facing his portfolio, Councillor Renard responded to members' specific questions and observations on the following issues:

- the provision of additional school places, available capital funding and the likelihood of the Wroughton Primary School being replaced in the foreseeable future
- performance in relation to the youth offending service and the reasons for the apparent increasing trend evidenced in the re-offending and further offending statistics

- the “reshaping” of police support of the Council’s Youth Offending Team
- Academy Status and Asset ownership
- new development, increased pupil numbers and the continued use by schools of temporary mobile classrooms to meet the demand for school accommodation
- funding for the construction of a youth centre in the Moredon Area
- obesity and the Council’s and partner organisations’ responses to the identified general increase in the number of overweight and obese children
- the position regarding pension contributions in respect of council employees transferring to Academies
- the presentation and interpretation of the baseline data in the report and the lack of comparative national data in some service areas
- Key Stage 4 results remaining below the national average and the need for a “Swindon Solution” to achieve higher standards
- the presentation of data relating to the Council’s LIFE programme and the consequential effect on members’ and others’ ability to interpret that data
 - the availability of empirical evidence to support conclusions and stated outcomes and to effectively assess the financial effectiveness of interaction with troubled families
- the substantial and sustained reduction in the rate of teenage (under-18) pregnancies
- the outcome of recent OFSTED inspections of neighbouring authorities and implications for the Council’s own children’s and young people’s services, particularly in relation to joint working with partner organisations
- organisational changes to best respond to the “changing landscape” around health services provision
- attainment and progress in schools and the use of the English baccalaureate as an indicator of performance at Key Stage 4
- the Looked After Children Education Services (LACES) and the attainment and educational progress of children in care
- the value of “peer challenge” in determining best practice and initiating service improvements
- the increase in the number of fixed term exclusions from schools compared to the previous year and the Council’s support of schools’ own processes to limit exclusions
 - the identified and particular reasons behind the increase in fixed term exclusions over the specified period
 - the availability of data regarding individual pupils being excluded from school on multiple occasions
 - the diminishing educational role of Councils and co-operative working with maintained schools and academies to limit fixed term and permanent exclusions
- obesity and the range of offers available to young people across the borough to participate in sporting and other activities
 - sporting activity as only one of a range of lifestyle issues that need to be considered in seeking to address the problem of childhood obesity
- Skills Funding Agency (SFA) targets
- the financial position of the Plas Pencelli outdoor centre and the Council’s continuing support of this flagship facility

- the availability and demand in schools for alternative qualifications to A-levels and GCSEs
- the development of proposals for a local scheme to respond to proposed changes in the processes for the payment of council tax, housing and other benefits and the need to shape children's services to limit any detrimental impact on the children of families in receipt of these benefits

It was agreed that information requested by members during the course of the Committee's consideration of this item be forwarded to members via the Committee Clerk.

Resolved – (1) That Councillor David Renard, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children's Services, be thanked for attending the meeting and for his full and open responses to members' questions on service areas and issues within the Cabinet Member's portfolio of responsibility.

(2) That Councillor Renard's assurance of the Council's continuing support of the Plas Pencelli outdoor centre be welcomed.

(3) That the Board Director and his team be congratulated on their work in achieving a substantial and sustained reduction in teenage (under18) conceptions in Swindon over the last 5 years.

(In accordance with the National Code of Local Government Conduct, Councillor Bob Wright made a non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of his membership of the Drove Children's Centre Advisory Board and as a Trustee of a National Domestic Violence Organisation. Councillor Brian Ford made a non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of his daughter's employment at a secondary school in Swindon.)

18. Overview & Scrutiny Work Programme 2012/13

The Committee received a report of the Director of Law and Democratic Services, setting out the details of the Annual Overview and Scrutiny work programmes for the Scrutiny Committee and each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. It was noted that each Overview and Scrutiny Committee was required to have a work programme that detailed the activities that it will be undertaking during the municipal year, including the various topics and issues that each Committee intends to look into during the coming year, with the aim of producing evidence based recommendations intended to provide service improvements for Cabinet and external agencies/bodies to consider.

Resolved – (1) That the 2012/13 work programmes for the Scrutiny Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, as detailed in the report and presented by the chairs of the overview committees at the meeting, be approved.

(2) That the chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees be invited to consider introducing regular items to the agendas of their respective committees providing members with training on specific aspects of that committee's function and responsibilities.

(3) That the Scrutiny Officers amend the work programmes in accordance with the Committee's instruction at this meeting and to make the necessary arrangements for the work programmes to be carried out.

(4) That the details of the Work Programmes for each Committee be submitted to Cabinet for information and comment.

(5) That the Heath Overview and Scrutiny Committee's recommendation that costs associated with (a) the Health Scrutiny Conference, proposed to be held at the

Civic Offices on 4th September 2012, and (b) the design and printing of the new guide to health scrutiny, be met from the Scrutiny Support budget, be accepted.