

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Children and Families Scrutiny Committee**
held on Tuesday, 27th July, 2010 at Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields,
Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor R Westwood (Chairman)
Councillor D Neilson (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors A Barratt, D Flude, W Livesley, G Merry, M Parsons and J Wray

Apologies

Councillors J Goddard, T Jackson and M Simon

117 CO-OPTED MEMBERS

Jill Kelly

118 ALSO PRESENT

Councillor H Gaddum	Children and Families Portfolio Holder
Councillor R Bailey	Cabinet Support Member

119 OFFICERS PRESENT

Lorraine Butcher	Head of Service for Children and Families
Barbara Dale	Admissions and Appeals Manager
Annette Butler	Team Manager – Adoptions Team
Julie Lewis	Principal Manager – Cared for Children
Fintan Bradley	Services Manager – Improvement and Achievement.
Mark Nedderman	Senior Scrutiny Officer

120 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2010 be approved as a correct record.

121 DECLARATION OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest.

122 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

There were no members of the public present who wished to address the Committee.

123 ADMISSIONS REGULATIONS

Barbara Dale, School Organisation and Admissions Manager attended the meeting and gave a presentation on the legislation, codes of practice and local arrangements in respect of School Admissions.

Cheshire East had designed a co-ordinated admissions policy which ensured equity and fair access to school places and to protect the rights of all parents and carers and their children.

Two codes were in existence which imposed mandatory requirements and guidelines. One code related to the application process and the other to the appeal process. The admission code did not just apply to the Local authority but to any body concerned with admission to schools, which included:

- Admission authorities
- Governing bodies
- Local Authorities
- Admission Forums
- School adjudicators
- Admission appeals panels.

The Admission code provided the legal framework for the Council, but it was for the Council itself to formulate policy.

Any changes to local admission arrangements were subject to consultation and included amongst other things, oversubscription criteria.

Legislation prescribed that infant class size contained a maximum of 30 pupils per school teacher, and any breach of the regulation required qualifying measures to be put in place which could include reorganisation of classes, employment of an additional teacher, or organising additional accommodation.

The timetable for the admission process contained a number of statutory dates beginning on 12 September for the publication of information 'booklets' and ending on 7 July, the deadline for secondary appeals.

The Council monitored compliance with the code and the overall impact of arrangements in their area for fair access.

The Council also was required to submit to the Schools adjudicator an annual report.

An admissions forum monitored the effectiveness and equity of local admission arrangements with the right of objection and right to report annually

The Schools adjudicator in turn reported annually to the Secretary of State on how fairly access was being achieved locally.

Barbara informed the Committee that the Council managed to satisfy 94% of parents by providing places in their first choice school and that annually the Council dealt with approximately 4,000 applications each at primary and secondary level. On average there were 2 appeals per week throughout a year, although during peak periods such as September of this year, it was expected that 18 appeals would be heard. Annually, approximately 400 appeals were lodged.

RESOLVED – That the presentation be received.

Annette Butler Team Manager – Adoptions Team
and Julie Lewis Principal Manager – Cared for Children attended the meeting and presented a report on the adoption process in Cheshire East.

The adoption service was a regulated service and subject to inspection by Ofsted. Inspections could be undertaken at 2 weeks notice. The last inspection was undertaken at Cheshire County Council in 2007 when the service had been assessed as good.

The Adoption of Children Act 2002 provided the legal framework for domestic and inter-country adoption. Adoption was a way of providing a new family for children who could not be brought up by their own parents and all parental responsibility was therefore transferred to the adopters.

Cheshire East had increased the numbers of adopted Children from 2008 when 15 were completed, to 16 children between April 2009 and 31 March 2010. Also, 5 children had been subject to a special guardianship order. Currently (as at the end of June 2010) 15 children were awaiting adoption in Cheshire East.

The Committee was informed that it was not always possible to make arrangements for Cheshire East Children to be adopted within Cheshire East and that the Council was part of a consortium of 22 authorities throughout the North West.

The report also contained a proposed adoption service structure chart which highlighted a number of vacancies within the service. The Committee was informed that appointments by December.

Annette Butler undertook to provide all members with a written response to a question relating to the mechanisms in place to protect vulnerable children when adoption arrangements breakdown.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report be received;
- (b) That a further report be submitted to a future meeting of this Committee on the Cheshire East Fostering Service.

EARLY YEARS FUNDING REFORM - BRIEFING ON THE NATIONAL FORMULA

Fintan Bradley gave a presentation on the Funding Formula Working Group which was set up in January 2010. The working group consisted of Council officers and education partners and had been set up to review the current schools funding formula and to bring forward proposals for change that:

- Support the effective and efficient distribution of the Council's resources
- Are open and transparent and distribute resources equitably between schools

- Support raising standards and achievement particularly in literacy and numeracy and other key skills
- Match the allocation of resources with the responsibility for ensuring outcomes in terms of school progress, attainment and wellbeing
- Support inclusion within mainstream settings wherever possible
- Enable any special educational needs to be met as early as possible and usually without the need for a statement.

The group had been developing models to simplify the local funding formula to see what the effect that each of the models would have on school funding. It had been concluded that each model would affect the same small number of schools by reducing funding.

The Council had recently received a new consultation document from the Department for Education (DFE) which had indicated that for the new financial year, DSG would remain at existing levels. The Government was proposing to put in place a 'Pupil premium' in order to target those pupils perceived to being left behind in deprived areas. This premium would be additional to the DSG and would be ring-fenced at a high level, but would give individual schools freedom to use the funds flexibly.

It was not yet clear however, what the total grant made available to Local authorities would be.

RRSOLVED – That the presentation be received and noted.

126 **INFORMAL MEETINGS**

The Committee considered the possibility of using some meetings in the calendar as mid-point meetings to receive informal briefings on potential work programme matters.

RESOLVED – That the Chairman and Vice - Chairman discuss the scheduling of mid point meetings with the senior scrutiny officer.

127 **FORWARD PLAN - EXTRACTS**

The Committee considered the forward plan as it related to Children and Family Services.

The Committee noted the date listed for a cabinet decision on the review of residential provision and suggested that as the report of the Task and Finish Group had not been finalised, that the expected date of decision should be amended. It was suggested a special meeting of this Committee should be organised to consider the report on the review of children's homes provision and the re-organisation of schools in Macclesfield.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the forward plan be noted;

- (b) That a special meeting of this committee be arranged to consider the report on the review of residential provision and re-organisation of schools in Macclesfield.

128 **WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Committee considered a report of the Borough Solicitor relating to the Committee's work programme.

RESOLVED – That subject to an item being added to the work programme to receive a briefing on Foster Caring, the report be received.

129 **CONSULTATIONS FROM CABINET**

There were no consultations from cabinet.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 12.33 pm

Councillor R Westwood (Chairman)