

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Children and Families Scrutiny Committee**
held on Tuesday, 9th October, 2012 at Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields,
Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor A Kolker (Chairman)
Councillor K Edwards (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors R Domleo, L Brown, G Merry, M Sherratt and P Hayes

Apologies

Councillors G Barton, P Butterill, P Hoyland, D Neilson and B Silvester and
John McCann and Jill Kelly.

In Attendance

Councillors H Gaddum and A Thwaite

Officers

Barbara Dale, School Admissions and Organisation Manager
Chris Williams, Transport Manager
Fintan Bradley, Head of Service: Strategy, Planning and Performance
Mark Bayley, Principal Manager: Quality Assurance
Penny Kay, Head of Cheshire East Youth Offending Service
Tony Crane, Deputy Director of Children's Services
Mark Grimshaw – Scrutiny Officer

30 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None noted.

31 DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIP

None noted.

32 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2012 be
approved as a correct record.

33 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

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

34 CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSED SCHOOL ORGANISATION FRAMEWORK 2012

Fintan Bradley, Head of Service: Strategy, Planning and Performance, explained the draft framework had been written at a time of a rapidly changing legislative framework and educational landscape which had seen growth in the number of Academies and Free Schools. Central Government changes in relation to schools and education capital funding, schools admissions and Schools Funding Formula meant that the role of the Local Authority was changing. However, the Council still had a statutory responsibility for commissioning sufficient school places for children and young people in its area. Fintan Bradley therefore noted that it was essential that the key policy that underpinned this role was agreed so that the priorities of the Council informed its school organisation process.

Barbara Dale, School Admissions and Organisation Manager, explained that the draft framework had been informed by a data set relating to the population of Cheshire East and as a corollary this data had therefore informed the proposals. Barbara Dale noted however that his data would be the subject of a biannual review and audit and it was likely that the demographic information would be updated following the data received from the 2012 census.

In terms of the priorities in the draft framework, Barbara Dale explained that previously local authorities had been expected to take action to reduce the number of surplus places in schools in order to maximise efficiency. A change of government had brought a change of emphasis and the Council was now expected retain a number of surplus places to enable parental choice.

The Committee was invited to feedback their comments on the draft framework so that they could be included prior to the consultation closing date of 19 October 2012.

A number of comments were made about the quality of the draft framework particularly around how comprehensive it was.

It was queried whether the Council planned to support those schools with a surplus number of places. Fintan Bradley reported that it would be the responsibility of the school to manage surplus places as there would no extra money provided. Having said this, Fintan Bradley noted that the Council would attempt to maintain the number of surplus places at around 10% overall.

It was requested that the Committee receive a 5 year estimate of school finance as a result of the new school formula funding arrangement. This was suggested due to a concern that the new funding arrangements could affect the viability of schools. Fintan Bradley confirmed that he would be able to provide information up to the end of 2014/15 based on modelling that the Council had produced. Any information beyond that point would be provided in the form of predictions on what the funding landscape might look like.

It was questioned whether the Council would monitor schools with surplus places and if any interventions could be implemented for schools with falling places. Fintan Bradley reported that the Council would work with schools on the best way to re-organise if they were struggling to fill their Published Admission Number (PAN). This could possibly include options such as federation or becoming a free school. As a supplementary point, it was questioned whether the Council would help a school to

maintain a faith ethos, if its future was threatened. Fintan Bradley confirmed that the Council would work closely with the respective Diocese in such a case.

A number of comments were made with regards to the pressure that proposed housing developments could have on school places. Barbara Dale and Fintan Bradley acknowledged that this was an issue, particularly as the Council had a responsibility to ensure that there were sufficient school places in an area. Links with the planning department existed and the Children's Directorate made the case that the requisite Section 106 monies were allocated for education purposes. Barbara Dale noted that this process would become even more important once the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) replaced Section 106 as the Directorate would need to bid for the money, stating that education needed to be made a priority.

Attention was drawn to paragraph 7.3.8 on page 82 of the agenda. It was asserted that the inclusion of this paragraph weakened the Council's position in accessing Section 106 monies for education provision as the distances (2 and 3 miles) were too far. It was suggested that this paragraph be removed from the draft framework. Barbara Dale acknowledged the point but noted that the criterion was taken from the Council's draft Section 106 policy. Therefore, if the paragraph was to be removed, the implications would need to be fully considered to assess its implications and the draft Section 106 policy would need to be amended.

It was suggested that the Children's Directorate should be able to recommend that a planning application be refused if sufficient development monies could not be achieved for fulfilling the education infrastructure requirements. It was agreed that this would be raised with the planning department to verify process.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report be noted.
- b) That it be requested that the Committee receive an estimate of school finance as far as the current modelling allowed within the context of the new school formula funding arrangements.
- c) That it be recommended that paragraph 7.3.8 on page 82 of the agenda be removed from the draft framework and that attempts be made to consolidate this with the Council's Section 106 policy.
- d) That it be recommended that the Children's Directorate should be able to make representations to refuse a planning application if sufficient infrastructure requirements for education provision are not in place.

35 NEW OFSTED SCHOOL INSPECTION FRAMEWORK - UPDATE

Mark Bayley, Principal Manager: Quality Assurance, attended to present on the New Ofsted Inspection Framework and its implications for the Council.

Mark Bayley explained that the current Safeguarding and Looked After Children (SLAC) inspection was being removed after July 2012 and in its place would be the following inspections:

- Framework for the inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children – Mark Bayley noted that this inspection had come into place from May 2012 and that as it was targeted at those authorities whose performance had been no better than 'adequate', there was a chance that the Council could be inspected under the framework.
- Joint Framework for multi-agency inspection of child protection services – Proposed to start in June 2013
- Inspections of Local Authority adoption agencies, Local Authority fostering agencies and services and outcomes for looked after children – Mark Bayley reported that from April 2013 there would be a move from separate inspections into a single 'looked after children' inspection.

Outlining the key features of the new inspections, Mark Bayley noted the following:

- The inspections would be Unannounced. This had resulted in the Directorate implementing a rigorous self-evaluation process so that they were always ready for an inspection.
- The inspections would focus on practice with an increased focus on tracking sample cases.
- The inspections would have a wider brief, not simply focusing on those children within the thresholds of care but assessing the processes for early intervention and post safeguarding arrangements.

Tony Crane, Deputy Director of Children's Services commented that local authorities had been promised a reduction in bureaucracy with the implementation of the new inspection framework. He noted that following a 'dry run' inspection this had not proved to be the case as it was still resource intensive.

RESOLVED – That the presentation be noted.

36 YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICE - UPDATE

Penny Kay, Head of Cheshire East Youth Offending Service, attended to provide a verbal update on the Youth Offending Service (YOS). Penny Kay reported that from 1 October 2012, Cheshire East had established its own YOS after formerly being part of a shared service with Cheshire West and Chester. The Cheshire East YOS had recently received a visit from John Drew, the Chairman of the Youth Justice Board. Following this visit, John Drew had written to compliment the Council's YOS arrangements, noting the considerable improvements that had been made.

Penny Kay described how this had reflected the work and effort that gone into reducing the number of young offenders and re-offending rates since Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). This success was attributed to the innovative preventative and multi-agency practice that had been developed. Penny Kay noted that these improvements had also been made in the context of reducing the YOS staff by a third since LGR.

It was queried whether the YOS did any work with those young people classified as being 'Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)'. Penny Kay reported that NEET was a key risk factor and therefore the YOS had a worker based in the Virtual School which had proved to be a helpful arrangement.

It was questioned whether the Council compares its Youth Offending performance with other authorities. Penny Kay confirmed that Cheshire East YOS was recognised as being in the top two performing authorities in the North West.

A number of comments were made about investing in community assets and activities in order to help prevent youth offending. Tony Crane explained that this was difficult in the current funding environment but that the Council was working closely with community groups to deliver activities. It was asserted that there would be a strong 'invest to save' basis for providing a small budget to support youth activities in communities and community centres.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the update be noted
- b) That it be recommended that a small budget be made available to support youth activities in communities and community centres in line with a preventative and 'invest to save' agenda.

37 AVAILABLE WALKING ROUTES TO SCHOOL

As requested at the meeting held on 11 September 2012, Chris Williams, Transport Manager attended to present the draft updated policy on Available Walking Routes to School.

Chris Williams explained that the need to review the Council's Available Walking Routes to School policy had arisen due to a recent Local Ombudsman Case which had criticised another local authority for the way their policy had been drafted and implemented. As a result, this had caused the Council, among with most other local authorities, to re-examine the approach to their policies and working practices.

Chris Williams noted that as the Council had inherited its policy from the former Cheshire County Council, its walking routes had not been assessed for a significant amount of time. This meant that due to infrastructure changes some routes could now be deemed safe whilst others might have become unsafe. Chris Williams explained that as it would take time to review the routes, changes would occur gradually. When a route had been re-assessed and a change of status was deemed necessary, Chris Williams reported that local ward Councillors would be informed prior to communication with schools and parents.

It was commented that it appeared that the policy had been revised to be much more stringent and therefore a number of routes would become 'safe' walking routes as opposed to being formally 'unsafe'.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the report be noted
- b) That it be recommended that the importance of informing local ward Councillors of a proposed change to a route be emphasised in the report.

38 WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

Members considered the work programme.

RESOLVED – That the work programme be noted.

39 FORWARD PLAN - EXTRACTS

The Committee gave consideration to the extracts of the forward plan which fell within the remit of the Committee.

RESOLVED – That the forward plan be noted.

The meeting commenced at 3.00 pm and concluded at 5.15 pm

Councillor A Kolker (Chairman)