

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Children and Families Scrutiny Committee**
held on Tuesday, 31st May, 2011 at Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields,
Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

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

Councillors L Brown, J Clowes, S Gardiner, P Hoyland, D Mahon, D Neilson,
W Livesley, G Merry, M Sherratt and B Silvester

Apologies

John McCann and Jill Kelly

In attendance

Councillor Hilda Gaddum

Officers

Fintan Bradley	Head of Strategy, Planning & Performance
Cath Knowles	Head of safeguarding & Specialist Services
Tony Crane	Head of Service - Early Intervention & Prevention
Mark Grimshaw	Scrutiny Officer

51 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED – That subject to the minutes be amended to show that Councillors Livesley and Merry were in attendance, the minutes of the meeting held on 12 April 2011 be approved as a correct record.

52 DECLARATION OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

None noted.

53 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

A number of members of the public wished to make a statement to the Committee regarding the Home to School Transport item.

Firstly, Alex Scott, Director of Schools from the Diocese Shrewsbury made the point that the proposed changes would cause serious disruption to local children and that there would be considerable consequential impacts on the environment and on educational attainment. He also argued that the proposed changes would only result in 'false economies' and it was contended that they were undermining national policy.

Heidi Reid, a Bollington parent of an SEN child made the assertion that there were already significant barriers to education for children and young people with SEN and that the proposed changes would only add to this. Indeed, it was argued that whilst employment figures for adults with SEN were already very poor, restricting access to educational opportunities would continue to exacerbate this further.

54 HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT UPDATE

The Committee considered a report from Fintan Bradley which provided an update on the progress and emerging issues following the consultation as part of the Home to School Transport Review. It was made clear that this was only an update paper as full feedback from the consultation was still being collated and analysed for further consideration at a later date.

In presenting the report, Fintan Bradley began by setting the context of the review, explaining that there had been the need to review the Council's Home to School Transport Policy due to the tight financial framework that Cheshire East and other authorities had to operate within. After reporting on the legal and financial ramifications of the proposed changes, Fintan Bradley moved on to provide a brief review of the consultation process and the initial findings emerging from this. It was explained that there had been a number of issues that had arisen from the consultation and that the service had grouped these into 28 themes which they had then provided an initial response to. These were outlined in appendix 3 of the report.

Following the introduction to the report, the Chairman invited a number of visiting Councillor to voice their views on the issue.

Speaking first, Councillor Corcoran explained that he was a parent whose child used the school bus to go from Sandbach to Alsager. Without this service, he described how he would have to take his child himself, losing up to 7 ½ hours of work time. Moving on to make a number of more general points, Councillor Corcoran asserted that firstly the proposals were unfair. Parents, it was suggested, would be retrospectively charged for their choice of educational setting under the proposed changes. Additionally, the point was made that changing schools would be detrimental on the educational outcomes for Cheshire East children and that it would also be disruptive to families to have siblings in different schools.

Secondly, it was argued that the proposed changes would have a negative impact on the environment. The point was made that Cheshire East should be encouraging the use of public transport rather than taking it away. Thirdly, it was purported that the proposed changes would be disproportionately harsh on poorer parents, further exacerbating the poverty trap that many families found themselves in. Lastly, it was asserted that the proposed changes would erode the number of faith schools in Cheshire East.

Speaking second, Councillor Keegan made a number of points regarding the presentation of figures in the first two tables of the report. He queried why the gross expenditure for denominational travel based on the approximate number of pupils affected in Table 1 differed from the denominational cost saving figures stated in Table 2. On the whole, Councillor Keegan asserted that the report did

not demonstrate enough information about what the potential savings would be and that there was not enough detail about the potential consequences of the savings. It was suggested that this would need to be rectified before the Committee received the report again. On a separate issue, Councillor Keegan made the point that the proposed changes would put a large burden on parents with children who were post-16 with SEN and that this would mean that Cheshire East would be failing its obligations to its most vulnerable populace.

Councillor Shirley Jones was the last speaker. She made the point that denominational schools had been very careful in where they had situated schools in order to keep the burden of travel to a minimum. Indeed, it was stated that the respective faiths had invested a large amount of money to manage this and Cheshire East had benefited from this investment. Councillor Jones continued to make the point that a number of towns and villages in Cheshire East were dependent on faith schools in order to fill a school places shortage. If these schools no longer were viable and closed this would result in Cheshire East having to invest in building more schools, inducing an obvious cost burden. Councillor Jones also argued that Cheshire East needed a skilled workforce and that by increasing the charges for transport the authority would be discouraging young people away from further education – having a detrimental effect on the economy.

The Chairman thanked the visiting Councillors for their views and then opened the discussion to the Committee. Before doing so, he reminded Members that the purpose of the meeting was to put questions to the officers so that consideration could be given to them in time for the proposed special meeting rather than debating the efficacy of the suggested policy.

A number of Members agreed that the figures in the report were difficult to follow based on a lack of clarification on how the savings would be made and where they fitted in the 'bigger picture' of the Children and Families budget. It was also suggested that the potential impacts to specific areas and/or groups was also unclear and needed further clarification. It was stated that it would be useful for the Committee to see some school places modelling as a result of the proposed changes in order to fully understand the potential impact.

In response to the concerns raised, Members were reassured that the figures were accurate but it was noted that they could be presented in a more easily understandable way. It was confirmed that this would be rectified when the final report was brought to the Committee.

A query was raised over how Cheshire East had communicated the consultation process to the Headteachers and Governors of the respective schools. It was put to the officers, that two schools in Cheshire East had not been advised of the consultation process. In answering, it was explained that the consultation process was communicated to all Headteachers and Governors of Cheshire East Schools using the usual method of the weekly bulletin. Councillor Gaddum confirmed that the weekly bulletin was a vital tool in communicating to schools and that it was an adequate method in this respect.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the report be noted.

- b) That a special meeting of the Committee be organised in advance of the July Cabinet to consider the options and recommendations arising from the consultation.
- c) That the report brought to the special meeting include the following aspects:
 - The background to the proposals and their relationship to the wider budget
 - Clear and detailed financial information on the savings
 - An impact assessment on the groups/areas affected

55 CHILDREN AND FAMILIES LANDSCAPE

Tony Crane, Cath Knowles and Fintan Bradley as senior officers of the Children's and Families Directorate, attended to provide the Committee both a general overview of the department and then subsequently a more detailed overview of each respective service.

Tony Crane began by describing the vision of the Children and Families Directorate, outlining the fact that they were aiming for Cheshire East to be a place where all children and young people were supported well to maximise their life chances. It was explained that they were going to achieve this by making the most effective use of resources and by developing a high performing workforce.

The Committee were also informed about the achievements of the Directorate since Cheshire East was formed in 2009. In particular it was noted how the service had achieved improvements in educational standards and also how they had strengthened mechanisms for keeping children safe.

Following this general introduction, Tony Crane reported on the function of his service; Early Intervention and Prevention. It was explained how the work of his team was centred on an emerging evidence base which asserted that 'prevention is better than cure'. From this philosophy, the service had identified the following priorities:

- Break the transmission of generational issues to keep families together.
- Blend the offer for those families that want support but maybe don't need it and those families who need it but don't want it.
- Drive the join up in services to families.
- Deploy resources in an efficient and agile manner.

Following Tony Crane, Cath Knowles explained how her service, Children and Families Social Care, had made a number of changes to the way they delivered services. It was reported that since December 2010, Social Care had moved away from the generic social work delivery that was part of the legacy of Cheshire County Council to smaller social work units – in line with what was known as the 'Hackney model'. It was then outlined what the 'must do' service priorities were and how the service planned to meet these.

Lastly, Fintan Bradley described the work of the strategy, planning and performance team. It was reported that the function of this team was to support

the Directorate in the strategic planning and commissioning of services, school places and sufficient child care provision from internal and external partners.

As a final point, Fintan Bradley outlined a number of general priorities that were some of the most pressing concerns for the Directorate. These were as follows:

- Establishment of a Pupil Referral Unit
- Review of SEN provision
- Review of formula funding for schools
- Review of Home to School Transport Policy
- Development and implementation of a new schools business support agreement.

After listening to the presentation, Members expressed a number of queries about aspects of service delivery.

Firstly, it was asked whether the Directorate had the figures on CAF referrals. It was confirmed that these were available and that they could be found in the LCSB performance reports.

Secondly, it was asked how the service had managed to achieve an impressive reduction in social worker case loads. It was explained that this had been done mainly through increased recruitment and an improved, more efficient structure but also because work done as part of the early intervention agenda had meant less children were coming into care.

Lastly, it was suggested that in terms of helping new Members of the Committee to understand the drivers behind the changes in safeguarding practice, it would be useful to review the issues the previous Committee raised as a result of the Laming Report to see the progress made against these.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the presentation be received
- b) That the previous Committee's suggestions following the Laming Report be brought back to a future meeting for review.

56 WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

Consideration was given to the work programme. It was agreed that an item regarding the future of respite care should be brought to a future Committee. It was also noted that an item regarding value for money for out of Borough educational settings should be considered by a future Committee.

It was queried whether it would be appropriate for the Committee to receive a report on the level of educational attainment across Cheshire East. It was confirmed that Members would be welcome to review the 2009-2010 data but it would be perhaps more germane to consider the 2010-11 data when it would be fully available in September 2011.

In terms of Task and Finish groups, it was agreed that the Committee should look to commission a review to look into the 16+ service at Cheshire East. Additionally it was agreed that discussions should take place with the Health and Wellbeing

Scrutiny Committee regarding the setting up of a Task and Finish group to look at health and cared for children.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the work programme be noted and amended to include items on the future of respite care and on the value for money of out of Borough educational settings.
- b) That an item on educational attainment be added to the work programme for the meeting scheduled 20 September 2011.
- c) That at a future meeting the Committee discuss the Membership and terms of reference of a Task and Finish Review of the 16+ Service.
- d) That discussions be held with the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee regarding the joint commissioning of a Task and Finish Review of health and cared for children.

57 TIME OF MEETINGS

Consideration was given to the time and frequency of Committee meetings.

RESOLVED – That the Committee meet every month on Tuesday's with a 1.30pm start time.

58 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.

59 CONSULTATIONS FROM CABINET

There were no consultations from Cabinet.

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 4.40 pm

Councillor A Kolker (Chairman)