

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Children and Families Scrutiny Committee**
held on Tuesday, 17th July, 2012 at Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields,
Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

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

Councillors G Barton, R Domleo, L Brown, P Hoyland, W Livesley, G Merry,
M Sherratt and B Silvester

Apologies

Councillors H Gaddum, P Butterill and D Neilson

In attendance

Councillor Rhoda Bailey

Officers

Fintan Bradley - Head of Service: Strategy, Planning & Performance
Dominic Oakeshott – Head of Business Management and Challenge
Janine Evans - Capital and Land Development Manager
Mark Grimshaw – Scrutiny Officer

11 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Members considered the minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2012. It was suggested that a system was required for tracking the Committee's information and update requests. The Scrutiny Officer agreed to explore options and report back to the Committee. A number of amendments to the minutes were also suggested.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the Scrutiny Officer explore options for developing a system to effectively track the Committee's information and update requests.
- b) That subject to the following amendments, the minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2012 be approved as a correct record:
 - a. That on page 2, in the first paragraph under Item 5, the words 'for this item' be added after the words 'co-opted onto the Committee'.
 - b. That on page 7, in the fourth paragraph under Item 8, the sentence beginning 'She asserted' be removed.

12 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor M Sherratt declared a personal interest with regard to Item 6: Electronic Recording System replacement – update on the grounds that her husband worked for Shared Services on ICT projects in Cheshire East schools.

13 DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIP

None noted.

14 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

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

15 ELECTRONIC RECORDING SYSTEM REPLACEMENT - UPDATE

Dominic Oakeshott, Head of Business Management and Challenge attended to provide the Committee with an ICT Strategy update. Dominic explained that an ICT strategy group had been established to develop the themes, programme and vision for the strategy. This Group was comprised of officers from the senior leadership team across the Children and Adults directorates and had been meeting since April 2012. Dominic explained that the Group had developed the following work streams:

- Integration
- Case Management
- Financial Management
- Information Management
- Directories
- Information gateway
- Citizen Access

In the autumn of 2012 it was expected that the requirements from each work stream would be collated and that this would form a business case which would require Member approval in order to progress. Dominic noted that the actual procurement route had yet to be determined and therefore the Council could decide to move to tender for a number of systems rather than a single system. In terms of funding the resulting ICT system(s), Dominic reported that existing departmental capital funding would be utilised alongside 2012/13 capital funding which had been pooled together to form an overall implementation funding source. Dominic explained that the funding would be used to not only develop and implement the new system but to also maintain existing systems to comply with statute and ensure a smooth transition.

With regard to the current situation, Dominic explained that the ICT Strategy group were conducting a review of the 70+ current systems that were currently in operation. Each of these systems was being analysed against the following options (more than one outcome possible):

- Agree to maintenance only
- Development required
- Decommission

- Replace with new main system

For the 30 systems used in Children and Families, the group had identified:

- 3 agreed for decommission
- 12 would be replaced by the new system when implemented
- 9 could just be maintained
- 12 would need development.

In terms of maintaining existing systems, Dominic explained that the Council needed to balance retaining resources for the implementation of the new system with ensuring that statutory requirements were still being met by the existing systems. In conclusion, Dominic noted that in purchasing a new ICT system, the Council had an ideal opportunity to develop a new approach and system(s) for Children, Families and Adults working together.

A general comment was made about the track record (nationally) of purchasing information systems. It was noted that they were often fraught with difficulties and therefore it was hoped that the Council had cognisance of the associated risks.

It was queried what the Council wanted out of a new ICT system. Dominic reported that in terms of Adults and Children services, they would want a system that would aid in making accurate and correct payments to service users and providers. A new system would also help the Council to analyse information at a client, provider and familial level providing vital intelligence.

It was questioned whether the Council would be looking to tender a bespoke system or whether they would purchase an existing system. Dominic explained that it was difficult to provide an answer at the current time as the review had not been completed. He added that purchasing an existing system would possibly result in the Council reviewing some of its own operational processes and practices in order to align with a new system and make best use of new and emerging technologies.

It was commented that the Council was increasingly working with partner organisations such as Academies/Schools, the Police and the Fire Authority. It was queried whether these organisations would be linked in with the new system in any way to aid information flow. Fintan Bradley, Head of Service: Strategy, Planning & Performance, explained that whilst other agencies would be unlikely to have an integrated ICT system with the Council, there would be a strong culture of connectivity and data sharing across Cheshire East.

It was queried what the timescales were for implementing the new system(s). Dominic explained that it was difficult to provide a definitive answer at the current time but it had been approximated that it would take three years to get the system fully operational. The Committee was assured that there was a desire within the Council to shorten this timescale.

It was questioned how much the new system(s) would cost and whether there was a cost/benefit business case. Dominic noted that, once again, until the business case process had completed it was difficult to provide an accurate figure. He confirmed that once the business case had been drafted this would be brought for Member approval and that this would include the estimated costs for

the implementation of a new system. Dominic also agreed to circulate the approximate figures to the Committee when they became available.

It was asked whether the Council had looked at best practice examples from other local authorities. Dominic explained that whilst the Council had visited other local authorities such as Wakefield, it had been difficult to commit resources to carrying this out any further, particularly in terms of senior officer time. Following this, it was queried whether sufficient resource and senior officer time had been allocated to developing the new ICT system. It was asserted that the new system would have an important impact on how well the Council safeguarded its most vulnerable residents in the future and therefore an argument could be made for its prioritisation in terms of resource allocation. It was suggested that a letter be sent from the Chairman to the Strategic Director of Children, Families and Adults and the Portfolio Holder for Children and Families Services outlining this point.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the update be noted.
- b) That the Head of Business Management and Challenge be requested to circulate approximate figures for the cost of implementing a new ICT system to the Committee when available.
- c) That the Chairman send a letter to the Strategic Director of Children, Families and Adults and the Portfolio Holder for Children and Families Services to express the Committee's opinion that:
 1. The Council should continue to explore best practice in terms of information management from other local authorities alongside internal evaluation and review.
 2. The development of a new ICT system be recognised as a resource priority due to its considerable impact on the future reputation and operation of the Council.
- d) That quarterly updates on the progress of the new ICT system be provided to the Committee.

16 CHILDREN AND FAMILIES CAPITAL PROGRAMME

Janine Evans, Capital and Land Development Manager attended to provide a summary report on the current position of the Children and Families Capital Programme.

Janine drew attention to the overall Children and Families Capital Programme which, at the current time, equated to £109.5m. For 2012/13 the In Year Budget was £29.8m and this was being funded by a variety of sources including:

- Devolved Formula Capital (£4.9m)
- Other Government Grant (£16.9m)
- External Contributions (£0.1m)
- Supported Borrowing (£2.4m)
- Unsupported Borrowing (£5.2m)

- Capital Reserve (£0.4m)

Janine continued to outline the 2012/13 New Starts which equated to £9.682m out of the total budget of £29.8m. Janine noted that Appendix 1 of the report provided the detail to the Children and Families Capital programme and that it included both open and closed schemes.

It was queried how much of the 2012/13 In Year Budget (£29.8m) was slippage from previous years. Janine confirmed that she would distribute this information to the Committee via email.

Referring to Appendix 1, it was questioned how the Committee could be made aware of whether a given scheme was on or off budget or whether it would be completed on time. Fintan Bradley acknowledged that some thought would be required to determine the best way to report such information but that it could be possible to include a capital projects status in a regular performance report.

Similarly, it was queried whether a mechanism could be put in place to inform Committee Members of when major (over £500k) capital projects were in development. It was suggested that a list be forwarded to the Chairman and Scrutiny Officer on a regular basis and from this relevant projects could be drawn to the attention of the Committee.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the report be noted.
- b) That the Capital and Land Development Manager circulate information on the amount of slippage in the 2012/13 In Year Budget to the Committee via email.
- c) That the Head of Service: Strategy, Planning & Performance explore the most effective mechanism to report capital project over/under spends and missed deadlines to the Committee.
- d) That the Capital and Land Development Manager provide a list of upcoming capital projects with a budget of over £500k to the Chairman and Scrutiny Officer so that they may be passed to the Committee for further exploration.

17 WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

Members considered the work programme. A number of future items were suggested.

Fintan Bradley noted that the service was working to provide a school funding training session in September 2012.

As the representative of the Budget Task Group for the Committee, Councillor Silvester provided an update from the first meeting. He reported that the Committee could request financial information as it was made available to Cabinet.

RESOLVED –

- a) That the work programme be noted
- b) That the following items be added to the work programme for consideration:
 - a. Performance Management information
 - b. Update on the progress of the ICT Strategy Group (November 2012)
 - c. Progress report on the Autism Special School in Church Lawton
 - d. Update on Wilkinson House, Sandbach
 - e. Update on Residential Provision Houses.

18 FORWARD PLAN - EXTRACTS

The Committee gave consideration to the extracts of the forward plan which fell within the remit of the Committee. It was noted that the item relating to the Determination of School Organisation Plan 2011-16 was already scheduled on the Committee's work programme.

RESOLVED – That the forward plan be noted.

The meeting commenced at 1.35 pm and concluded at 3.40 pm

Councillor A Kolker (Chairman)