

Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Monday, 1 September 2014.

PRESENT

Mr. L. Spence CC (in the Chair)

Mr. J. Kaufman CC

Mr. P. G. Lewis CC

Mr B. Monaghan

Mr. T. J. Pendleton CC

Mr. J. Perry

Mrs. C. M. Radford CC

Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC

Mr. E. D. Snartt CC

Mr. G. Welsh CC

15. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2014 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

16. Question Time.

The Chief Executive reported that one question had been received under Standing Order 35.

Mr Richard Carter, a resident asked the following question:

“Background

Planning Officers were approached in July 2013 to approve an application from Officers responsible for education, to extend for a further 5 years the renewal of permissions for the Temporary Classrooms at Cossington Primary School.

The School continued to operate from August 2013 without planning approval. The Development Control and Regulatory Board considered the request in February 2014, and collectively objected to the application, and only gave approval for a one year extension to expire in July 2015.

The Board also required further information to be presented to them in February 2015.

Officers were informed that the Board were not presently minded to extend any further temporary permissions for these classrooms.

Question

In view of the normal lengthy timescales required to build/extend/develop School premises, I would ask what action/decisions/progress has been made to date?”

Mr Spence CC replied as follows:

“No decisions have been taken to date regarding the replacement of the mobiles with a permanent extension to the school buildings. However, it is clear from forecasts of pupil numbers that the demand for places at the school is predicted to remain high in future years. The current mobile classrooms form a significant contribution towards the overall provision of floor space at the school, it is therefore expected that any permanent extension would be of a similar size.

The planning consent for the modular classrooms and hall at the School is due to expire at the end of July 2015 and it is a condition of that planning consent that a report be submitted to the County Council's Development Control and Regulatory Board (DCRB) six months prior to that date i.e January 2015, to advise on the progress made with the provision of permanent accommodation at the school site. In this context, discussions will be taking place with the Governors and Head Teacher of the School early in the Autumn term regarding the options available.”

Mr Carter asked the following supplementary question:

“Why was this meeting not held a year or even six months ago when it could have triggered a series of procedural responses concerning budgets, draft strategy, community consultations, potential academy status, site surveys, highway provision, under provision in labour of catchment and all the necessary steps needed to be taken to manage the steps in a timely fashion?”

The Director of Children and Family Services, on behalf of the Chairman replied as follows:

Mr Carter was thanked for bringing the issue to the Director's attention. It was the Director's understanding that there was time to manage this and that she would ensure that discussions commenced with the headteacher of the School early during the autumn term. The department would then take the appropriate action in good time to make sure that the children in Cossington had access to the facilities that were required on an ongoing basis.

The Director was happy to provide to provide further information to Mr Carter about the progress made if required.

17. Questions asked by members under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

18. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

19. Declarations of interest.

The Chairman invited members who wished to do so to declare any interest in respect of items on the agenda for the meeting.

Mr D. Snartt CC, Mr L. Spence CC, Mr G. Welsh CC, Mr J. Perry and Mr B. Monaghan declared personal interests in matters relating to schools, as they had family members who taught in Leicestershire.

Mr L. Spence CC indicated that, whilst this did not amount to an interest to be declared at this meeting, he felt it relevant to report that he sometimes worked for an academy within the County.

20. Declarations of the Party Whip in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16.

There were no declarations of the party whip.

21. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

The Chief Executive reported that no petitions had been received under Standing Order 36.

22. Quarter 1 2014-15 Performance Report

The Committee considered a joint report of the Chief Executive and Director of Children and Family Services which presented an update of Children and Family Services performance through to the end of quarter 1 2014/15. A copy of the report, marked 'agenda item 8', is filed with these notes.

Arising from discussion the following points were noted:-

- i) That this was the first quarterly performance report to include progress with regard to Supporting Leicestershire Families following its integration into the Service's area of work. It was pleasing to note that all families participating in the first stage of the programme had been successfully turned around and that phase 2 was now being implemented;
- ii) Educational attainment for key stage 1 was improving and now close to the top performance quartile, with improvement also being shown in key stage 2 which was above the national average;
- iii) A number of long term foster carers had retired during the last year which had led to an increase in the number of children with three or more fostering placements during the year, or in the same placement for over two years, or placed for adoption. Particular steps were being taken to address this through the process for remodelling social care in order to bring back up the number of foster carers in future years;
- iv) Whilst it was pleasing to note the percentage of schools being rated good or outstanding had climbed to 83.2%, it was noted that the number of special schools rated good or outstanding had fallen. The Director reported that this fall related to a specific residential element of a school which had now been addressed, with the expectation that the school's next inspection would restore its previous OFSTED rating;
- v) Whilst secondary school persistent absence rates of below 85% attendance had reduced during the quarter, the Service continued to work with behaviour

partnerships, with academies and to raise the issue more generally through the Leicestershire Educational Excellence partnership to improve this further.

RESOLVED:

- a) That quarter 1 performance be noted; and
- b) That officers be requested to bring a report to the next meeting of the Committee setting out progress in remodelling the foster caring service.

23. Reform of SEN and Disability.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided information about the Government's reform of Special Educational Needs and Disability Services (SEND) and Leicestershire County Council's response to the required changes. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 9', is filed with these minutes.

The Director explained that the implementation of SEND reform was at the beginning of a three year programme of work which would introduce both cultural and system change both within the County Council and in its partnership working practices.

The Director also reported that the Department for Education, in visiting the Service during the previous week, had provided very positive feedback regarding the County Council's development of its local SEND offer and its integration into the wider strategy for change within the Authority and engagement with local partners and families.

Arising from discussion it was noted that:-

- i) Although there was multi-agency responsibility for implementing the change required, accountability lay with the Director of Children and Family Services and the Lead Member for Children and Families, with progress updates to be provided to the Committee on a regular basis;
- ii) The collective relationship between Children's and Adults Social Care Services, the health sector and parents in whole life planning had improved significantly over the last 18 months allowing consideration at an early age into what a child's life would be like as an adult, their likely health needs and therefore an ability to plan their long term pathways appropriately to meet required needs and outcomes;
- iii) The financial spend on out of county SEND placements had increased since 2013. Costs varied from case to case based on individual needs within the independent/non maintained sector. In county provision continued to be developed but currently demand outstripped supply, with the number of SEND statements rising, particularly those on the autistic spectrum;
- iv) By 2018, all 2800 children who were the subject of SEN statements would be moved to Education, Care and Health (EHC) plans. Initially officers would focus on children moving schools and in transition from primary to middle and upper schools, with those children also requiring early conversion due to particular needs being moved as well;

- v) The transfer rate to EHC plans were likely to be 30 per week between 2014 and 2018, utilising the Capita One system that was also being used by an number of other authorities.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the contents of the report be noted; and
- b) That officers be requested to bring a progress report to the Committee in 12 months setting out how the County Council's response to reform of Special Educational Needs and Disability Services is embedding itself both within the organisation and in joint commissioning arrangements with health partners.

24. Service Developments and Plans to Meet MTFS Savings.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which detailed the planned programme of departmental savings across Children and Family Services forming part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy 2013/14 – 2017/18 and information about the Council's Transformation Programme including where the Service's required MTFS savings would fit within that. A copy of the report, marked 'agenda item 10', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following principal points were noted:-

- i) A number of the separate savings areas for the Children and Families Service had been brought together to create four transformation projects, within the wider context of the County Council's 24 projects, which would remodel:
 - a. children's social care;
 - b. early help services;
 - c. special educational needs and disability services; and
 - d. education services.
- ii) The context of the programme would be set within a stable vision and mission, with the Service continuing to meet its statutory obligations whilst promoting independence and collaboration through partnerships and local integration of services through a planned and effective commissioning approach, in order to provide service users with the right help at the right time,
- iii) With an increasing difficulty in achieving further efficiency or savings within statutory areas, the 30% of departmental budget currently spent on non statutory early help services would need to be the focus of future savings in order to meet MTFS targets;
- iv) Engagement of partners and providers such as Health, the Police, District Councils, Schools and other learning providers likely to be affected in those service areas had already begun, as had engagement with parents, young people and families, which would continue as the Service, having already saved £4m in the current MTFS, formulated its remaining £9.84m savings required between 2015 and 18;
- v) Members noted that it was clear that further savings would be required for at least 2018/19 as well, with the Government continuing its austerity programme in the public sector;

- vi) In respect of the transformation project to remodel children's social care, the Director reassured members that First Response measures to deal with specialist intervention and safeguarding would continue to be delivered at the right time and by the right provider in line with statutory requirements. It was hoped that by improving the way in which early help was delivered, such as through the Supporting Leicestershire Families (SLF) programme, that demand for high cost intervention services would be reduced;
- vii) In noting the ongoing SLF programme was not funded in the current MTFs, the programme needed to be aligned better with other services in order to provide for management level savings. A cost benefit analysis would also be undertaken with all partners to ensure that those funding the programme were properly recompensed by partners achieving a return on that investment through either reduced actual demand or reduced levels of future demand that would have arisen;
- viii) Children's Centres remained a statutory responsibility and whilst there were no current plans to close any of the Centres, innovative ways would need to be explored to ensure full and thriving participation within available budgets;
- ix) The Service was engaging with schools to see where the co-commissioning of staff may be appropriate in order to use budgets more effectively and to work together in other areas through the LEEP;
- x) The Scrutiny Committee would receive further reports on progress in respect of each of the four transformation projects at regular intervals as they progressed.

RESOLVED:

That the implications of the planned programme of departmental savings across Children and Family Services, required as part of the County Council's MTFs and Transformation Programme, be noted.

25. Children's Social Care Panel.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided a narrative commentary to accompany the structure chart for the new children's social care governance arrangements. A copy of the report, marked 'agenda item 11', is filed with these minutes.

The Committee welcomed the new structure, noting the high level of involvement between the Lead Member, officers and Group spokesmen in ensuring the continuity of oversight of process, transparency and accountability of children's social care services, following legislative and structural changes both nationally and locally, in order to deliver the best outcomes for young people.

RESOLVED:

That the new governance arrangements for children's social care be noted.

26. Date of next meeting.

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Monday 3 November 2014 at 2.00 pm.

2.00 - 3.45 pm
01 September 2014

CHAIRMAN