



Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Monday, 9 September 2013.

PRESENT

Mr. L. Spence CC (in the Chair)

Mr. K. Coles CC
Mr. J. Kaufman CC
Ms. K. J. Knaggs CC
Mrs. M. Lawson
Mr. P. G. Lewis CC
Mr B. Monaghan

Mr. T. J. Pendleton CC
Mr. J. Perry
Mrs. C. M. Radford CC
Mr. E. D. Snartt CC
Mr. G. Welsh CC

Also in attendance.

Mr I. Ould CC

1. Appointment of Chairman.

RESOLVED:

That the appointment of Mr L. Spence CC as Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the period ending with the Annual Meeting of the County Council in 2014 be noted.

2. Appointment of Deputy Chairman.

RESOLVED:

That Mr P. Lewis CC be appointed Deputy Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the period ending with the Annual Meeting of the County Council in 2014.

3. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 4 March 2013 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

4. Question Time.

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 35.

5. 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).

6. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

7. 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 G. Welsh CC, Mr L. Spence 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 and Ms K. Knaggs CC indicated that, whilst this did not amount to an interest to be declared at this meeting, they felt it relevant to report that they were employed by academies within the County.

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

There were no declarations of the party whip.

9. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

10. Ensuring Education Excellence: Development of Leicestershire Education Excellence Partnership.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Young People's Service on the progress made in developing the Leicestershire Education Excellence Partnership (LEEP) which had been approved by the Cabinet on 9 July 2013 as the agreed policy for securing educational excellence in Leicestershire's maintained schools and academies. The report also clarified the process for the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee to provide assurance that the LEEP was enabling the local authority to discharge its statutory duties. A copy of the report is filed with these minutes.

The Committee noted that the Church of England Diocese had been represented on the Working Group referred to in paragraph 8 and in the foot note on page 12 of the report.

The following points arose from discussion:

- i. This was a new and very different system from what had operated previously and, as the Authority ceased to have any direct control over a school once it became an academy, partnership working would be increasingly important. The County Council had strong links with schools and well established practices for collaborative working. Its focus in the new school environment had therefore been to build on these existing relationships;
- ii. Schools were themselves best placed to support other schools. However, the County Council continued to have an important role as champion for children. It

- therefore needed to work closely with all schools to enable it to satisfy its obligations;
- iii. Ofsted would inspect all local authority's arrangements for supporting school improvement strategies. To date, positive feedback had been received on the LEEP strategy;
 - iv. It was suggested that there was a lack of clarity between the views of Ofsted and those of the Secretary of State and it would be important to ensure Ofsted took on board any concerns raised by the County Council if an academy did not co-operate, making it difficult for it to fulfil its legal obligations, even when a school was deemed to be otherwise performing well. It would be necessary for a wider view to be taken of the impact this had on overall performance of schools in the County. The Lead Member undertook to raise the Committee's concerns about this issue at the LGA Children and Young People's Board;
 - v. The Committee suggested that consideration should be given to the timescale for the submission of information on the outcome of future Ofsted reports of schools, as it would be important to ensure these were directed to members as quickly as possible;
 - vi. £350,000 had been allocated on a recurring basis in the Medium Term Financial Strategy agreed in February 2013 to support the new approach. However, as demands in future years increased, going forward there would need to be discussions on how to get the best capacity out of existing funding;
 - vii. Members questioned what action the Children and Young People's Service could take if an academy ceased to act co-operatively through the new partnership arrangement. The Committee noted the following:
 - The Children and Young People's Service had and would continue to work to influence and encourage schools to co-operate. The Committee would also play a critical role in monitoring the performance of the Partnership to ensure the County Council's obligations continued to be met through the new structure. Areas of concern which might be identified by the Committee going forward, could feed into future improvements. The new system would evolve as it bedded in over time.
 - It would be necessary over the long term to provide evidence of positive outcomes resulting from the new partnership arrangement. This would ensure all partners continued to support this approach.
 - It was thought that to 'name and shame' schools which were not operating co-operatively would not be helpful in the new environment. Schools were important to the children who attended them, parents and local residents, as well as to the County Council. The priority would therefore be to work closely with those schools in making improvements. Failure to work together and provide such support would have implications for all partners and there was therefore strong support from schools at the present time to ensure the new approach worked.
 - Steps had been taken early on in the process to ensure head teachers of both maintained schools and academies had taken a leading role in shaping the Partnership, making sure that issues identified by the Working Group were taken back to their peers for wider discussion and feedback. Briefings had also been held with head teachers and governors to ensure the right partners were fully involved in the process and kept informed of the proposals throughout.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the contents of the report be noted;
- (b) That the role of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee in undertaking a quality assurance role in respect of the LEEP, as outlined in paragraphs 25 to 27 of the report, be noted;
- (c) That, in the light of the comments now made, the Director of Children and Young People's Service be requested to consider the timescale for reporting to the Committee on the outcome of future Ofsted reports of schools to ensure these are directed to Committee members in a timely way.

11. Provision of School Places in Leicestershire.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Young People's Service, the purpose of which was to update the Committee on the current position regarding the provision of Primary and Secondary School places in Leicestershire and to seek comments on the challenges ahead. A copy of the report is filed with these minutes.

The following points arose from discussion:

- i. The County Council's continued statutory duty to ensure that sufficient school places were available within its area and the need to meet this obligation within its existing resources was a concern. This highlighted the need for a co-ordinated approach to be established with district councils and schools and the further education sector;
- ii. District councils, as local planning authorities, had a key role to play in ensuring appropriate funds were obtained from developers to fund the need for increased school places arising from a particular development. Developer contributions requested by the County Council were calculated based on a national formula and supported by an identified need for school places as a consequence of the planned development;
- iii. Perceptions of whether a school had capacity sometimes varied and it was suggested that this could be confusing for local planning authorities. Some members considered that a clearer picture of the actual capacity available in a particular area needed to be provided early on in the planning process and that closer joint working with schools on this issue might be helpful. The Committee requested that further information be circulated to members on the liaison process undertaken between the County Council and schools on planning the future need for school places arising as a result of new development;
- iv. The County Council was in the process of developing a strategy to manage its expectations for growth/demand for school places and how it would work to mitigate against this. The Committee requested that the proposed strategy be brought to a future meeting of the Committee for its detailed consideration;
- v. It would be difficult to plan precisely what the future demand for school places would be given the number of factors which impacted upon this. Estimates were therefore obtained based on the best information available at the present time. The Committee requested that details of the current capacity figures for Leicestershire primary and secondary schools broken down geographically and by catchment area be circulated to members;

- vi. Policy changes on home to school transport would affect many secondary schools and it would be necessary for wider consideration to be given to this when longer term changes were considered, with input from members of this Committee being obtained when appropriate;
- vii. £0.3m capital funding had been allocated in 2013/14 programme for the development of a 25 place school for children with autism, but this had proved financially unviable and the funding had therefore been transferred to the school accommodation programme. It was questioned what impact this would have on children and their families and whether this might result in the need for such children to be educated out of county. The Director of Children and Young People's Services undertook to consider and provide further information on the concerns raised.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the content of the report be noted;
- (b) That the Director of Children and Young People's Service be requested to provide a report on the proposed County Council strategy for dealing with school place planning to a future meeting of the Committee;
- (c) That officers be requested to circulate to members of the Committee details of:
 - (i) the capacity figures for Leicestershire primary and secondary schools broken down geographically and by catchment area;
 - (ii) the liaison process undertaken between the County Council and schools on planning the future need for school places arising as a result of new development;
 - (iii) the impact no longer being able to proceed with the development of a 25 place school for children with autism might have on children and their families and whether this might result in the need for such children to be educated out of county.

12. Consultation on the future of Oakfield School.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Young People's Service, the purpose of which was to enable the Committee to comment on the consultation on future options for Oakfield School. A copy of the report is filed with these minutes.

The following points arose from discussion:

- i. The consultation had commenced on 12 July after the end of the last school term. To ensure sufficient engagement with head teachers, the consultation would run until Friday 18 October, six weeks into the autumn term. A letter would be sent to head teachers shortly advising them of the ongoing consultation and requesting their response;
- ii. Feedback from school governors would be welcomed and details of the consultation would be highlighted at Governor briefing meetings;
- iii. Identifying links through the Supporting Leicestershire Families programme would be useful to establish how else to best support children who could not attend mainstream schools because of behavioural issues. This would help ensuring that

support was not only focused through the school but also through support for the family as a whole;

- iv. Through consideration of PRU's generally, the benefits of finding locality based solutions had been identified. For example, co-operative working with schools had seen a reduction in the number of children being permanently excluded from 120 to 20 per year. This had a significant impact on families and reduced unsettlement for children at school and at home. Option 4 detailed in the consultation would enable this area to be considered in more detail, in the light of feedback received.

RESOLVED:

That a further report on the outcome of the consultation and the future of Oakfield School be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

13. Safeguarding Assurance.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Young People's Services, the purpose of which was to introduce Safeguarding Assurance to the Committee and how such assurance was achieved. The report also illustrated work undertaken in three priority safeguarding areas which had been requested by the Committee. A copy of the report is filed with these minutes.

The following points arose from discussion:

- i. Safeguarding was a priority area for the Children and Young People's Service and the Committee was pleased to note the amount of work being undertaken in this area. High profile cases reported in the media highlighted the need for such work to continue;
- ii. E-safety was an important area and work was undertaken with secondary schools to raise awareness and provide training. The Committee suggested that consideration should be given to similar support being provided at primary school level, as younger children increasingly had access to the internet.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

14. Adoption Reform.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Young People's Services, the purpose of which was to inform the Committee of the national direction for adoption and the County Council's progress toward these ambitions. A copy of the report is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points arose:

- i. The reforms were substantial and largely focused on speeding up the process. A maximum time scale of 26 weeks had been introduced where court processes were commenced. Members expressed concern at the affect this would have on the processes followed which were in place to ensure minimum risk to children before they were placed with adoptive parents on a permanent basis. It was acknowledged that the process should be undertaken as quickly as possible, but

that this needed to be balanced against the need to ensure the right home for each child was found;

- ii. Implementing the changes within existing resources would be difficult. £1.2m Government funding had been received, but this was unlikely to continue beyond 2013/14. A new strategy was therefore being developed. This would ensure future processes would provide a prompt, but high quality service which would be maintainable in the long term and within current resources.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report and information now provided be noted;
- (b) That the Director of Children and Young People's Service be requested to provide an update on progress on the implementation of national adoption reforms and the County Council's strategy for the future development of the service in the light of funding challenges.

15. Date of next meeting.

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 11 November 2013 at 2.00pm.

2.00 - 3.50 pm
09 September 2013

CHAIRMAN

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