

CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

TUESDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER, 2011 AT 6.00 P.M. AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE

Panel Members Present

Councillor B. Cassidy (Chair)
Councillor E. Hughes (Vice-Chair)
Councillor O. Bennett
Councillor K. Chambers
Councillor R. Martin
Councillor A. Paul
Councillor D. Shires
Councillor R. Thomas

Non elected non-voting members present

D. Jones (Primary Teacher representative)
R. Bragger (Secondary Teacher representative)

Portfolio holder present

Councillor M. Bird - Leader
Councillor R. Andrew - Children's services
Councillor C. Towe - Finance and personnel

Officers Present

Michelle Whiting, Assistant Director, Specialist Services
Darrell Harman, Strategy, Planning and Education Contracts Manager
Andy Stewart, Head of Prevention, Workforce and Partnerships
Dan Mortiboys, Service Accounting and Financial Reporting Manager
Denise Faulconbridge, Managing Director, Walsall Children's Services - Serco
Frank Barnes, Assistant Managing Director, Walsall Children's Services - Serco

118/11 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor J. Barton.

119/11 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

120/11 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip for the duration of the meeting.

121/11 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT, 1985 (AS AMENDED)**

The Constitutional Services Officer advised the Panel that Item 13 'Education Contract' was no longer required to take place in private session as the content of the presentation did not fit any of the criteria under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended). If Members wished to ask questions of a confidential nature, then the Panel could move into private session at this point.

122/11 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting were noted.

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 July, 2011, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

123/11 **UPDATE ON LOCAL SCHOOLS SEEKING ACADEMY STATUS AND PLANS FOR UNDERPERFORMING SCHOOLS**

The Panel were updated with regard to the number of schools seeking Academy status and plans to improve underperforming schools.

The Assistant Managing Director (Walsall Children's Services - Serco (WCSS)) reported that the Government was keen to increase the number of Academies across the country and saw Academy status as the best way to improve school performance. Previously, the Academy programme had been focused on secondary schools but now primary schools were being targeted to become Academies. Academy status was also considered the best way to improve performance at underperforming schools. To this end, WCS - S and the Council had been approached by the Department for Education to explore sponsorship for four schools, namely:-

- Hatherton Primary School
- Croft Community Primary School
- Harden Primary School
- Bentley Drive Primary School

The following were the principle points from the ensuing discussion:-

- Members expressed disappointment that the report did not include detailed plans of how and when schools would be becoming Academies;

- Members also wished to understand the potential impact on the Council if the majority of schools became Academies;
- A Member of the Panel reported that staff at a school which had recently been instructed to become an Academy were disappointed with the direction received from the Department of Education. Previously, the school had been underperforming but results had improved substantially recently;
- It was explained that 2010 school outcomes would have been used to establish whether or not a school was underperforming.

The Chair stated that she would like to see the Local Authority have the opportunity to manage schools.

Resolved

That:-

- (1) the Panel receive a further report detailing the implications of the increased numbers of schools that are proposed to become Academies;
- and
- (2) Members be provided with a copy of the transition plans of those schools proposed to become Academies. This information should be provided before the next meeting.

124/11 SCHOOL BALANCES FOR FINANCIAL YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2011

The Panel considered school balances for the financial year ending 31 March, 2011. The Service Accounting and Financial Reporting Manager explained that there was a balance control mechanism in place for all schools in the Borough. This was a locally agreed scheme by Walsall Schools Forum to ensure that excess balances were not built up by individual schools. The balance mechanism that Walsall Council has in place allows schools to keep uncommitted balances up to a set percentage of their annual budget. This varies between 5% - 8%.

He highlighted those schools whose balances exceeded the balance control mechanism, a list of all school balances for 2011 compared to 2009/10. A table comparing Walsall to statistical neighbours, West Midlands and the rest of England. The following were the principle points in the ensuing discussion:-

- The unique situation at Sneyd was noted and a further breakdown of the budget was requested;
- The Chair stated that she thought schools should spend the money that they were awarded on pupils at the school rather than retain it in their balances;
- Concern was expressed about schools making redundancies where they held surplus income in their budgets. It was noted that some schools would need to retain balances for redundancy payments.

Resolved

That further information on the budget from Sneyd School be provided to Members before the next meeting.

125/11 2010/11 FINAL BUDGETARY POSITION PRE-AUDIT

The Panel were informed of the revenue and capital outturn position for the year ending 2010/11.

The Financial Services and Accounting Manager explained that for services under the remit of the Panel there had been a revenue overspend of £1.12 million and a capital underspend of £410,000.

He highlighted how each service had performed with its revenue budget explaining that the overspend was caused by an increase in the number of looked after children. He also highlighted a breakdown of the capital outturn and explained there had been significant slippage with the programme into next year. He explained that there was an IT project with a substantial budget which had been cancelled at the end of 2010/11.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

126/11 QUARTER 1 FINANCIAL MONITORING POSITION FOR 2011/12

The Panel were informed of the predicted revenue and capital outturn position for 2011/12 based on the performance for Quarter 1 (to end of June, 2011).

The Financial Services and Accounting Manager reported there was a net revenue overspend of £4,000 and that the capital programme was forecast to be on budget. He highlighted the detailed breakdown of the revenue outturn and the capital outturn for Quarter 1.

The Panel were pleased with the budget position but expressed concern at its vulnerability to overspend should there be a sudden influx of children who required care.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

127/11 FINANCIAL PLAN 2012/13 TO 2014/15: DRAFT REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR CONSULTATION

The Panel were informed of the Children and Young People's portfolio plan for future service delivery along with the approach being taken to delivering service improvements and cost efficiency over the next three years (2012/13 to 2014/15).

The Portfolio Holder for Children's Services explained that a new approach was being taken to budget setting following working smarter principles which were primarily based around customer needs. She explained that a new operating model was being pursued to help reduce costs but ensure that services were still delivered to customers. She explained that the Council was aspiring to be best in class for cost and quality by 2014/15.

The Leader of the Council highlighted one of the proposed savings for 2012/13 involved partnership working with neighbouring Local Authorities to produce economies of scale with contract brokerage.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

128/11 THE NEW OPERATING MODEL FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The Panel were informed about the new operating model being developed for children's services.

The Assistant Director (Universal Services) and Head of Prevention, Workforce and Partnerships gave a presentation (annexed) to the Panel. They highlighted the following issues to the Panel:-

- The children and young people's plan corporate directorate priorities;
- The need for the operating model;
- The key components of the new operating model;
- Existing work;
- Vanguard systems thinking;

- Key systems changes;
- A child concern model;
- The step-up, step-down process;
- The new operating model;
- Next steps for implementation.

The following were the principle points from the ensuing discussion:-

- It was anticipated that there would be a think family hub in each of the Area Partnership areas across the Borough. Each hub would have a target to engage with 160 families per year;
- The idea was that the new operating model would create a situation where partners were working together delivering services to families as a group;
- There was information showing protocol between partners;
- The Panel explained that each of the six Area Partnership areas in Walsall had their own individual needs and some areas would require more resources. It was explained to Members that there would be strategic management of available resources which would ensure they were in the right areas to meet the specific needs of families;
- It was explained that one of the key principles of the new operating model was to see families as customers. The model would seek to understand how families wanted the support that the Council and its partners offered and do its best to achieve this in a co-ordinated way.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

129/11 WORK PROGRAMME 2010/11 AND FORWARD PLAN

The Panel considered the work programme and the latest version of Cabinet's Forward Plan of key decisions. The Chair commented that some of the descriptions of items on the Forward Plan were vague.

Resolved

That the work programme and Forward Plan be noted.

130/11 EDUCATION CONTRACT

The Panel were given a presentation on the Education Transition Programme following a decision by Cabinet to end the contract with Serco to operate education services.

The Strategy Planning and Education Contracts Manager gave a presentation (annexed) to the Panel highlighting the following issues:-

- The Serco contract would end in August, 2013;

- There would be no immediate impact on Serco services to schools and that a closer partnership between the Council and schools to manage the new educational arrangements would be developed;
- Future changes to the education landscape;
- How the transition would be managed;
- The education contract transition team;
- The Children's Services education services governance model;
- Contract management;
- Exit management;
- New partnership with schools;
- The programme purpose.

An education partnership briefing note 1 and 2 was circulated to the Panel for information (annexed).

The following were the principle points from the ensuing discussion:-

- It was acknowledged that continuity with staff was especially important and that all effort would be made to retain key staff to deliver services to schools during the transition period;
- It was particularly difficult to anticipate how many schools would still be in Local Authority control at the end of the contract in 2013. The likely increase in Academy schools meant that it was likely the Council would, if it chose to and schools wanted it, need to promote and market itself as a service provider to schools. Further information was requested on which individuals sat on the Children's Services education service governance model bodies;
- It was not possible to assess the full cost to Walsall Council of cancelling the contract at the current time. This was dependent on the phasing of the handover.

In closing the item, the Chair expressed the wish to keep a close eye on this issue and felt that it should be reported to each remaining meeting of the Panel.

Resolved

That:-

- (1) a structure diagram, including details of which individuals sit on the bodies illustrated on the Children's Services education services governance model, be provided to Members at the next meeting;
- and
- (2) the education transition programme be considered at the next meeting of the Panel.

131/11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the time and date of the next meeting was 6.00 p.m. on 8 November, 2011.

The meeting terminated at 7.45 p.m.