

AT A MEETING  
- of the -  
**CHILDRENS SERVICES  
AND LIFELONG LEARNING  
SCRUTINY AND  
PERFORMANCE PANEL**  
held at the Council House,  
Walsall on **Wednesday, 2  
February 2006** at 6.00pm

PRESENT

Councillor Bird (Chairman)  
Councillor Arif  
Councillor Cassidy  
Councillor Khan  
Councillor Martin  
Councillor Walker  
Councillor Creaney  
Councillor Wilkes  
Mr. M Quinn (Archdiocese of Birmingham)  
Mrs E. Collins (Parent Governor)  
Mr. M.Lee (Parent Governor)  
Mr. R.Grainger (NUT)

OFFICERS

Andy Burns (Assistant Director of Finance)  
James T. Walsh (Head of Finance – Children and  
young people, and Social Care &  
Inclusion)  
Pauline Pilkington (Assistant Director (Children's  
Services) -  
Tony Stainer (Education Walsall)  
Diane Osborne (Teenage Pregnancy  
Coordinator)  
Stuart Bentley (Scrutiny Officer)

APOLOGIES

Apologies for non attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors E. E. Pitt.

SUBSTITUTIONS

The chairman advised the panel of the following changes to the membership of the committee for the duration of the meeting: -

- Delete: Councillor Chambers
- Substitute: Councillor Creaney

## DECLARATION OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest declared at this meeting.

## BUDGET CONSULTATION, DRAFT CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2006/7 – 2010/11, DRAFT CORPORATE REVENUE BUDGET 2006/7-2010/11

Andy Burns and James Walsh gave a combined presentation giving updates on the corporate position, investment and savings changes since previous scrutiny meeting for services within panel's remit and the Scrutiny Panels proposed revenue and capital programme recommendations to Cabinet.

Councillor Bird reported that officers had already made representations to Government over the level of settlement but had not received any response.

Councillor Bird then enquired how the needs allocation was calculated.

James Walsh replied that the formula took into account levels of deprivation, but was made up of a whole raft of indicators.

Councillor Cassidy asked, with regard to the draft revenue budget, what the greatest extra disinvestment was.

Pauline Pilkington replied that an extra £200k in efficiencies had been identified within the budget allocation for looked after children. However, these would carry inherently more risk.

Councillor Cassidy expressed her concerns about how the risk would be managed.

Councillor Bird stated that the implications of these efficiencies needed to be monitored on a regular basis and suggested that the Panel receive regular updates, possibly bi-monthly, in order to track progress.

Councillor Bird then stated that it was difficult to suggest further disinvestments without being made aware of the options that officers had proposed but later rejected.

James Walsh replied that he had looked at the outcomes of the officers' decision conferencing and he stated that all the options discussed had been included in the draft budget. Any further disinvestments would have to be found within the same areas.

Councillor Bird stated that staffing costs had always been the greatest part of the budget and this would have to be addressed. There was a need to start thinking out of the box. He then asked what the position was with regards to agency staffing.

James Walsh replied that agency staffing was seen as an inevitable cost due to high turnover rates, especially in social care, and the work/life flexibility that agency working can offer to employees. He further stated that, due to restructuring and reduced levels of directly provided Council services, staffing

costs were now in the order of 40% of the children social care budget and any further efficiencies would probably fall around overheads.

Councillor Bird raised the issue of the large sums needed to maintain existing buildings and infrastructure and asked how the Council could make better use of its capital assets. He suggested that the 10% reinvestment of capital receipts be increased to improve the state of school buildings within the borough.

Bob Grainger echoed this point and noted the lack funds earmarked for priority one backlog repairs over the next 3 years.

29 Resolved:

- That the Children's Services and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny and Performance Panel recommend that Cabinet revise the level of education capital receipt re-allocation for school buildings up from 10% to 20% in order to reduce to cost of maintenance of the remaining educational assets within the borough.
- That the Children's Services and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny and Performance Panel receive bi-monthly, service specific, budget reports in order to track the progress and effects of the Councils corporate review and capital programmes on service delivery.
- That the Children's Services and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny and Performance Panel request that Cabinet develop a long term strategy to address upcoming priority one backlog repairs.

TERMINATION OF THE MEETING

There being no further business the meeting terminated at 6:45 p.m.