

CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

4 December 2009 at 6.00 p.m.

Panel Members present E. Hughes (Chair)
L Beeley
K. Chambers
H Khan
R. Martin
A. Paul
I. Shires

Non-Elected Voting Members Alan McDevitt Parent Governor

Non-Elected Non-Voting Members Bob Grainger Secondary School Teacher

Portfolio Holder Present Councillor R. Walker
Councillor C. Towe
Councillor M. Bird

Officers present Pauline Pilkington
Kay Child
Dan Mortiboys
Nikki Ehlen

47/09 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Cassidy, Councillor E. Pitt, E Chawira, D. Jones, P Williams and K Yeates.

48/09 SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor I. Shires substituted for Councillor E Pitt.

49/09 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

50/09 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 October 2009, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

(annexed)

51/09 DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET 2010/11 FOR THE CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE PANEL

Councillor Walker presented the priorities of Children's Services Portfolio for the year, discussing some of the main themes. The panel were informed that the investment and savings were proposed to protect the work that had been done in a climate of increased pressure due to the high profile case of 'Baby P' and the economic crisis.

Officers presented the draft revenue budget for 2010/11 for Children's Services. Officers were questioned about the impact of savings on the service. The proposed saving were described in more detail and its impact on service. It was stated that a reduction in the number of Local Authority maintained schools had lead to a reduction in the spend on the management of the education contract. Members were reassured that procedure tests on the education contract would be more robust and challenging.

The impact of the increase of catering management fees for 2010/11 on schools budget was highlighted. It was suggested that this increase may lead to a reduction in use of this service. It was stated that this service was heavily subsidised which was a difficult position to be in when the Council was under tight budget constraints. It was agreed that this would be highlighted at the Corporate Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel on 11 December 2009.

Members suggested that further information would be useful when considering the budget to explain the impact on the service. Councillor Hughes stated that it was difficult to strike the balance of too much information and too little information.

The impact of the recession and the case of 'Baby P' had lead to an increased demand on services and investment was needed to help meet the needs of children. Councillor Hughes noted that single families could put significant pressure on the budget. Officers explained that other authorities were also facing significant pressures, and by investing, the Council had an opportunity to maintain progress. Officers informed the panel of plans to work with Black Country neighbours to reduce costs and give them more power to negotiate within the market.

Officers stated that the placement of young children was good although those with complex needs were difficult to place. Members asked what was being done in early year's prevention. Officers explained that there were grants in early year's settings and targeted interventions to families under stress. It was noted that there was a high correlation with an increase in looked after children and an increase in the number of job seekers. Members questioned if the increase in looked after children was due to a more cautious approach by social workers and organisations involved. Officers explained that they were satisfied that cases met the referral criteria, and explained that they had a robust audit framework. It was suggested that the increase in demand was due to a greater awareness.

The ethnicity of foster carers was discussed, and it was stated that there was a difficulty ensuring that Black Minority Ethnic groups were matched, and this meant that there was reduced choice in placements. Although this was the case at other councils. Members questioned what was being done to tackle this, officers explained that the fostering team attended community events and the success of London boroughs was being looked at. It was also something that could be included in the work being completed across the Black Country.

Walsall's response to 'at risk cases' was complimented and it was suggested that Fathers needed to be involved in parenting classes. In response to a question about funding for

children's centres officers stated that there was an opportunity to consider mainstream funding of the centres.

The closure of Willenhall leisure centre and the impact on children in the borough was discussed. Members were advised that this was not in the remit of the panel and had been discussed at the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel and will be addressed at the Corporate Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel.

Resolved

That:

- 1. the draft Children's and Young People Portfolio growth, efficiency, new income and service redesign budget proposals for 2010/11 be noted.**
- 2. it is highlighted to the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel that an increase in management fees in the catering service may lead to a reduction in use of the service.**

52/09 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair confirmed the date of the next meeting was 17 December 2009.

The meeting terminated at 7:00 pm

Chair:

Date: