

CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

20 January 2010 at 6.00 p.m.

Panel Members present E. Hughes (Chair)
K. Chambers
R. Martin
A. Paul
B. Cassidy
H. Khan
M. Munir
L. Beeley

Non-Elected Voting Members A. McDevitt

Non-Elected Non-Voting Members B. Grainger

Officers present

Louise Hughes	Assistant Director – Children's Services
Avril Walton	Assistant Managing Director – Serco
Dan Mortiboys	Service Accounting & Financial Reporting Manager
Tim Luker	Connexions Services Manager
Matthew Underhill	Scrutiny Officer

63/09 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor E. Pitt, and P. Williams.

64/09 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions submitted for the duration of the meeting.

65/09 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

66/09 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting were noted.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meetings held 4 and 17 December 2009, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

67/09 REVISED DRAFT REVENUE AND DRAFT CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2010/11 FOR THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO

The Service Accounting and Financial Reporting Manager introduced the report (annexed) explaining that in respect of the Draft Revenue Budget 2010/11 presented at the previous meeting there had been no changes. The main points of the report were as follows:

- The Draft Capital Programme 2010/11 was included in the report and was divided into Mainstream, the Council's own resources, and Non Mainstream, external grant funding;
- Mainstream funding is divided into three elements: Supported Borrowing which is allocated by government via the Formula Grant and broken down into: **Basic needs** which relates to the provision for new pupil places within existing Walsall schools; **Modernisation** which is capital allocation and relates to improving the physical infrastructure of schools; **School's access initiative** which funds alterations to enable pupils with disabilities to attend mainstream schools. For example, the construction of a wheelchair ramp at the entrance to a school building;
- Prior Year Approvals included funding for the construction of a new Barcroft Primary school on the Elm Street Site as well the Council's Targeted capital fund contribution to project costs for Mary Elliot School, Daw End (now Phoenix and Elmwood) Special Schools and Joesph Leckie School;
- The Assistant Managing Director – Serco explained that Supported Borrowing was a way in which schools were able to access funding for improvements where necessary. For example to determine whether further provision for pupil places is required, an assessment is made as to the popularity of the school, including how many prospective pupils make it their first choice, in order to project future pupil levels. She agreed that it was possible that a popular school with modern facilities and with apparently less immediate funding needs than others within the borough might qualify for Basic needs funding;
- The Service Accounting and Financial Reporting Manager explained that there were also various types of external funding. This includes Devolved Formula Capital funding received from government which provides each school with a capital grant allocation to support areas ranging from ICT to refurbishment. Officers explained that Devolved Formula Capital entitlement is calculated based on a range of criteria including the number of pupils and the footprint of a school;
- Following a Panel query the Assistant Managing Director – Serco explained that Devolved Formula Capital was funding over which schools had spending discretion. However, in respect of funding provided from the capital programme, schools are expected to make a contribution towards any work undertaken, including that identified by Serco. e.g. repairs to a leaking school roof;
- Targeted capital funding is directed to specific school projects which demonstrate educational improvement as a result of investment. Other funding streams provide support for the maintenance of children's centres as well as meeting the aspirations of disabled children. The Youth Capital Fund aimed at helping the Council achieve statutory positive activities targets has included a bid for a skate park;
- In response to a Panel query, Officers explained that in relation to external funding within the capital programme some elements would not be confirmed until June 2010. However, a number of external funding streams for 2010/11 have been received and allocated.

RESOLVED:

That:

- 1. the Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel welcome the draft budget proposals.**

and;

2. the Service Accounting and Financial Reporting Manager will provide a briefing for Panel Members setting out further details of the draft capital programme.

68/09 UNAUTHORISED ABSENCE WORKING GROUP

Councillor Cassidy introduced the briefing (annexed) explaining that the working group's key objective was to seek a consistent approach to absence across the borough and promote understanding of the absence and its impact. The working group identified early on in its activity that in addition to unauthorised absence (absence not authorised by head teacher) there were a number of other types of absence, including authorised (where a head teacher is satisfied with the explanation for absence) and persistently absent (where a child may have a mixture of absences).

The main points of the briefing were as follows:

- The working group has met with local head teachers who considered all types of absence as a problem given the detrimental impact it has on a child's education. However, inconsistent practices across schools can create friction and result in head teachers being placed under some pressure to authorise absence;
- The important role of governors was also highlighted to the working group. Particularly in supporting head teachers in challenging absence. The working group has also met with governor support to determine how governors might be engaged to proactively reduce absence in schools;
- Future activity includes consultation with community leaders.

The Panel agreed that head teachers face significant pressure in relation to absence. This difficulty was compounded by the sometimes inevitable choice of parents to take lower-priced holidays outside of normal school holiday periods.

69/09 WORK PROGRAMME 2009/10

The Chair explained that a number of meetings had been held between the Leader of the Council and the respective Chairs of each of the Scrutiny and Performance Panels to consider future improvements. This included how to further empower Panels by focusing on a number of key themes to enable more in-depth investigations. Other potential developments include increasing the number of key items that are considered by Panels before Cabinet. The Chair also explained that he would be contacting Panel Members to enable them to share their views on the types of issues and themes that they might be interested in considering in the future.

The main points of the discussion regarding the work programme and Forward Plan 2009/10 were as follows:

- The Panel agreed to receive a briefing regarding the introduction of a one-to-one mentoring scheme involving for Looked after Children (LACs) and sixth-form pupils at Queen Mary's Grammar School;
- In response to a Member query the Assistant Managing Director – Serco agreed that schools balances remained a controversial issue. However schools are encouraged to spend funding rather than it being removed from the schools' accounts and returned

to the DSG at year end. Schools can apply to retain excess balances for specific projects but if they do not make a convincing case they can lose them;

- Following a Panel query regarding Forward Plan item 73/09 **Leisure centres**, the Assistant Director explained that the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme would be seeking to maximise opportunities for local communities, including the co-location of facilities. Following a further Panel query the Scrutiny Officer explained that as part of discussions around how Scrutiny and Performance Panels operate in the future consideration will be given as to how scrutiny of BSF would be undertaken;
- The Connexions Services Manager explained that the borough's Not in Education, Training or Employment (NEETs) outturn for December was 8%, this followed outturn of 8.2% in November. The Panel expressed support for the achievement of this outcome particularly given the current economic climate.

RESOLVED:

That Members will be provided with further information regarding the introduction of the LACs one-to-one mentoring scheme.

70/09 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair confirmed the date of the next meeting was 2 March 2010.

The meeting terminated at 6:51 pm

Chair:

Date: