

CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

24 January 2008 at 6 p.m.

Panel Members present E. Hughes (Chair)
 C Micklewright
 M Ahmed
 H Khan
 K Chambers
 G Wilkes

Non-Elected Non-voting Members

B. Grainger	Secondary School Teacher Representative
D. Jones	Primary School Teacher Representative

Non-Elected voting Members

Evelyn Chawira	Parent Governor
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Officers present

Lloyd Haynes	Group Account
Louise Hughes	Assistant Director
Karen Adderley	Project Manager Education Contract
Barry Fielding	Commercial Consultant
Pauline Pilkington	Assistant Director
Melanie Harmitt	Head of Finance - Children's, ICT and Procurement Services

49/07 CHANGE TO THE AGENDA

The Chair informed the panel of a change to the agenda, this was to receive item 8 prior to item 6.

50/07 APOLOGIES

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors Cassidy and Martin.

51/07 SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor Wilkes substituted for Councillor Cassidy for the duration of the meeting.

52/07 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or party whip identified at this meeting.

53/07 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The private minutes of the previous meeting held on 20 December 2007 were tabled to members of the panel (annexed). The public minutes of the previous meeting held on 20 December 2007 were tabled (annexed).

54/07 FORWARD PLAN

Members noted the forward plan. Officers stated that it was their intention to take the Connexions report to Cabinet in March 2008 and scrutiny in February 2008.

55/07 LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

The Panel considered that the item for consideration under item 26/07 below was exempt information by virtue of the paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) and accordingly resolved to consider that item in private.

56/07 EDUCATION CONTRACT

Officers recapped on the position of the education contract. The panel were informed that 150 points of clarification had been made. Officers had met with the education board which contained cross party representation including Councillor E.E.Pitt, Councillor Chambers and Councillor Zahid. The board have been informed of the recommendation for the preferred bidder, which will go to Cabinet on 6 February 2008.

The panel were informed that there was an exit strategy in place, in case the preferred bidder, was to withdraw from the process so that education arrangements are not disrupted. Members were assured that the exit strategy was robust.

Councillor Hughes informed the panel that the meeting would now commence in public session.

57/07 DRAFT BUDGET 2008/09 PROPOSALS – CHILDREN’S SERVICES

Melanie Harmitt presented the children’s services draft budget for 2008/09 (annexed). Members were informed that other scrutiny members had, had the opportunity to comment on those bids submitted which were not included in the draft capital programme but that this was not an issue for this panel, as all projects had all been included in the draft capital programme for children’s services.

Melanie Harmitt presented the 2008/09 draft corporate budget to the panel (annexed).

Melanie Harmitt gave further information on the draft capital programme 2008/09

- School access initiative – this was to ensure that the Disability Discrimination Act requirements were met.
- Basic need – this was to provide new pupil places
- Modernisation of all schools – this was a recurring annual item
- ICT and Harnessing technology grant – this was new, and dedicated a sum of money for ICT to schools

- Youth service building refurbishment – this was a sum of money to improve buildings, part of a 5 year rolling programme
- Targeted capital bids – large scale school improvements
- Children’s Centre maintenance – maintenance funded by the government for the new centres
- Devolved formula capital – 3 year grant which would be devolved out to schools
- Early years – this was a sum of money which would be spent on early years setting that aren’t owned by the local authority

Members were advised that the Council had received individual allocations from Government for these projects and Cabinet had approved all of the projects put forward for capital allocation.

Councillor Khan asked for clarity about the investment option in appendix 1.

Louise Hughes discussed the new items for which she had responsibility in appendix 2. In relation to the remodelling and integration of youth and youth offending service – efficiencies, members were informed that integration of services could produce a saving, without reducing quality; this was the same for remodelling and integrating. Louise Hughes reminded the panel that a Positive Activities working group had been established to consider the requirements.

Melanie Harmitt informed the panel that the youth service budget per child aged 13 – 19 years was £125 in Walsall and in statistical neighbours the budget was £95.

Councillor Chambers asked if there were any redundancy issues relating to the efficiencies. Officers stated that there wouldn’t be any redundancy issues. Pauline Pilkington explained that this was to delete the specialist consultant, who had been employed to ensure that the Council complied with requirements; this had now been mainstreamed and completed within the existing team.

The efficiency ‘Reduce support to looked after children’ was a historical under spend and not a reduction in services.

Melanie Harmitt asked if there were any options which the panel did not support.

Councillor Khan stated that the savings should be true efficiencies and the high quality service should stay the same. Councillor Khan stated that although Walsall spent more on each child than statistical neighbourhoods, it may be because Walsall is better than these authorities and that the Council should be considering the service it wanted to provide rather than the cost of services.

Members agreed that the options should be ‘true efficiencies’. Louise Hughes explained that in support of the Council efficiencies officers had tried to identify areas which would have minimal impact, and these would need to be monitored.

Councillor Chambers suggested that if the efficiency savings became unachievable during the year an update would be brought back to the panel.

The panel agreed with comments.

RESOLVED

The Children's and Young People Scrutiny panel supported the new savings proposals based on the information that these proposals were genuine efficiencies and that quality of service would not be affected. To ensure this, the panel also requested that if these savings became unachievable during the year an update would be brought back to the panel.

58/07 Draft Corporate budget 2008/09

Melanie Harmitt explained that her corporate colleague was not able to attend the meeting and gave apologies for this. Melanie Harmitt explained that the amount of final settlement would be announced that week.

Melanie Harmitt stated that this information was for the panel's information and to put other information into context.

Councillor Chambers asked for Melanie's views on the settlement, Melanie Harmitt explained that the Council attempted to budget 3 – 5years in advance and had been prudent in their assumption, consequently expected to receive slightly more than anticipated.

Bob Grainger asked if the panel would see figures for the disposal of education premises. Melanie Harmitt explained that this information would be in the remit of the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel. Also that the playing fields element of schools' capital receipts could not be put back into the general capital budget, proposals for use had to be submitted to and approved by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and could only be used for

- Improving sports facilities at other schools
- Educational priorities to improve educational attainment

Councillor Hughes welcomed this information.

48/07 DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 14 February 2008.

The meeting terminated at 6.55pm.

Chair:

Date: