

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

TUESDAY, 24 NOVEMBER 2015

PRESENT: COUNCILLORS DAVID EVANS, CHARLES HOLLINGSWORTH, LYNNE JONES, WESLEY RICHARDS, EDWARD WILSON AND MARION MILLS.

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: MR LOUDEN.

ALSO PRESENT: COUNCILLOR N AIREY AND DEREK WILSON.

OFFICERS: ALISON ALEXANDER, KEVIN MCDANIEL, THERESA LEAVY, HILARY HALL, EDMUND BRADLEY, MICHAELA RIZOU AND DAVID COOK.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received by Councillor Hollingsworth and Margaret Brown. Councillors McWilliams and Jones reported they would be late.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received from Councillors. Officers declared an interest in the Leadership Consultation item.

MINUTES

The Part I minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2015 were approved as a true and correct record with the addition of the £382 million from Government being made available for academies to apply for.

With regards to the comments back to the Fair Funding Group it was noted that they had been sent to the Panel but they would be re-circulated to ensure all had received them and they would also be emailed to schools.

REVIEW AND REVISION OF THE S106 EDUCATION CONTRIBUTIONS

Councillor Dereck Wilson introduced the report and provided the Panel with background to how the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) would be replacing S106 developer contributions. The report recommended the approval of an interim methodology for justifying and allocating developer contributions for education as set out in Appendix A, with implementation from 1st December 2015. The interim methodology included updates to the level of contribution sought.

The Panel were informed that school projects would be prioritised as follows:

- Priority 1 – school expansion schemes that were already approved by Cabinet.
- Priority 2 – other compliant schemes.

Schools were requested to present their asset management plans on a yearly basis, although some did not provide them on a regular basis. The report strengthened this requirement.

The Chairman mentioned that the interim measures would be in place for over 18 months and questioned if during this period there would be less funds available than under S106 contributions. The Panel were informed that there would be a reduction in funds received and that was why it was important to have the Local Plan in place as soon as possible.

In response to questions the Panel were informed that the Council was confident of getting CIL approved due to the evidence base that was in place; the examiner may wish to wait for the Local Plan to be approved and hence it was important to have this interim measure in place.

The Panel questioned if the contribution level in appendix B being set at £100k was too high (*It is proposed that schools are notified when applications potentially worth £100k for education contributions are considered, to allow them the opportunity to update their Asset Management Plans*) and were informed that it was felt that if the level was too low schools would start to ignore emails due to the potential volume and resources to follow up.

With regards to transparency the Panel were informed that there would be a dedicated section on the website informing of contributions received and where they are being spent.

Cllr Edward Wilson raised the need to get schools asset management plans into the borough and was informed that schools were invited to send in their plans with academies having the option to submit or not. Officers would continue to inform schools of the importance to submit their plans. Cllr Jones also mentioned that after the issues raised about funding to Holyport College it was important to have schools ASM available for transparency. Cllr E Wilson recommended that academies should submit their plans to be able to access funding.

Resolved unanimously: The Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered the report and fully endorsed the recommendations. The Panel felt that the level of potential education contributions (as mentioned in table 1, section 5 of appendix B) should be added to the policy and that the contribution level in Appendix B should be lower than £100,000. After some drafting issues have been resolved and Cabinet approval the Panel have requested it be brought back to them for final consideration at a future meeting. The Panel felt that given the circumstances of the Borough Local Plan and the introduction of CIL that this interim measure should be commended.

SCHOOLS CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2016-17

Edmund Bradley, Finance Partner, introduced the report that was due to be considered by Cabinet in December 2015. The report was being brought to this Panel's meeting to give Members an opportunity to comment on which schemes they would like to see in the Capital Programme. The programme was going to Cabinet earlier than the usual budget build cycle to allow approved projects to go to tender in time for work to take place during the school summer holidays.

The Panel were informed that the appendix divided the schemes between 'basic need schemes', addressing the LA's duty to ensure there are sufficient school places in the Borough, and other mainly 'condition' schemes based on need.

(Cllr Jones and Cllr D Wilson joined the meeting)

Cllr E Wilson questioned if schools were allowed to combine the Condition Grant (only for use at Community and Voluntary Controlled schools) into a larger project; officers would investigate if this was possible.

It was also questioned why £310k was required for the Wraysbury School staffroom extension scheme. Members were informed that this related to a petition received by Council relating to a proposal to extend the schools facilities as it was used as a respite centre during recent floods.

Cllr Jones questioned the detail in the proposed projects as she felt it was insufficient to properly rank the schemes in order of importance / need. The Panel agreed that there should be a ranking system with areas such as health and safety moved up the list. The Panel were informed that the fifth column ranked the projects.

(Cllr McWilliams joined the meeting)

Resolved unanimously: that the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered the report and fully endorsed the recommendations. The Panel felt that there should be guidance added about the selection criteria; for example health and safety issues should be prioritised. It was suggested that the proposed list of projects would have benefited from more detail to help selection.

FINANCE UPDATE

Edmund Bradley, Finance Partner, introduced the latest financial update report due to be considered by Cabinet. The Panel were informed that there was significant and unfunded demand in Adult Social Care that was offset by savings made by the Operations Directorate and NNDR income.

With regards to the Children's Directorate the year-end outturn was expected to be in line with the net controllable budget of £18.218m. This is an improved position on the £80k overspend reported to Cabinet in October. However there have been some changes, most significant of these is a £230k increase in the projected overspends in home to school transport.

The Chairman asked if the increase demand in school transport was down to a misjudgement in increased need. The Panel were informed that the Home to School transport budget equated to about £2million of which 60 % was for SEN; about 200 taxi journeys per day but with each taxi averaging about 1.8 people per journey which was not cost effective. There had been an increased budget demand by an additional 100 pupils qualifying for transport. Officers were currently reviewing the transport provision at a micro level. The increased budget pressure would be offset by savings in other areas.

Cllr McWilliams questioned if the increased 100 pupils were all from outside the borough or not foreseen and was informed that it would be a mixture and would also include pupils whose needs had changed.

Cllr Jones questioned if the budget adjustment would be going to Council for this years need and if this would be reflected in next years budget build.

Resolved unanimously: The Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered the report and fully endorsed the recommendations. The Panel mentioned that the adjustment of the MRP required approval from Council and noted the mitigating measures being taken. .

SCHOOL ADMISSION CONSULTATION

Kevin McDaniel introduced the report due to be considered by Cabinet for two proposed changes to the school admissions arrangements:

A. Following the recent expansion of All Saints Junior school from 67 places to 90 in order to accommodate pupils from Burchetts Green School, it is proposed that the designated areas (DA) be adjusted to match the number of places available.

- All Saints Junior School DA to be extended to include Burchetts Green Infant School.

- Courthouse Junior School DA to be reduced so that it no longer includes Burchetts Green Infant School.
- Burchetts Green to be identified as a feeder school for All Saints instead of Courthouse.

B.The removal of the single-sex / co-educational admissions rule, as there were no longer any RBWM admitting authority school for which it can apply.

(Cllr D Wilson left the meeting)

It was questioned if the Panel required the whole admission document for a few changes and that it could have been included as a background document, it was also noted that the schools had no objection to the changes and that the admission numbers for Furze Platt Junior School needed amended.

Resolved Unanimously: The Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered the report and fully endorsed the recommendations. The Panel informed that the admission numbers for Furze Platt Senior School required adjustment.

STRATEGIC PLAN

Alison Alexander, the Managing Director and Strategic Director for Children's Services introduced the draft Strategic Plan. It was noted that it had been agreed that this report would go to all Overview & Scrutiny Panels so Members share their views on the document and as it was also due to go to Council for final approval further comments / amendments could be made..

Members were informed that the report proposed a new draft four-year strategic plan for the Royal Borough. It was noted that the report requested that Cabinet approved the draft plan (included in Appendix A) and allowed it to proceed to Council for consideration on 15 December 2015. The plan had a vision to make the Royal Borough a great place to live, work, play and do business. The plan had four strategic priorities; Residents First, Value for Money, Delivering Together and Equipping Ourselves for the Future.

The Chairman mentioned that under paragraph 2.5 'Equipping Ourselves for the Future' of the Cabinet report there should have been more emphasise on investing in staff (as mentioned in the table paragraph 2.6) as this was very important for the Council's continued progression.

Cllr E Wilson felt that as an overarching strategic document there did not need to be the level of factual information or detail. It was a good document pointing the way forward.

The Chairman questioned why the Safeguarding ambition was only to be rated as good and was informed that not one council had been rated as outstanding; however this is something to be taken under consideration.

Cllr Jones suggested that the 'Low Council Tax be the norm' could be better phrased and was informed that there would be a further draft of the document and this would be changed.

Resolved Unanimously: The Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered the report and fully endorsed the recommendations. The Panel felt that under paragraph 2.5 'Equipping Ourselves for the Future' of the Cabinet report there should have been more emphasise on investing in staff (as mentioned in the table paragraph 2.6). It was recommended that the 'Low Council Tax be the norm' could be better phrased and it was noted that the document would be re-drafted prior to Council.

PROCUREMENT OF SPECIALIST LEGAL SERVICES

Hilary Hall introduced the Part I section of the report that dealt with the procurement of specialist social care legal services which were currently provided by the Joint Legal Team in Reading Borough Council under an agreement across the six unitary authorities in Berkshire dating back to 1998. The latest agreement came into effect in July 2013 and was a rolling annual agreement without any fixed term.

Given the length of time that the agreement had been in place, it was appropriate to test whether the current provider offered value for money. Therefore, notice had been given that the Royal Borough would be withdrawing from the agreement with effect from 31 March 2016. The timetable would see the detailed specification published in December 2015, with the new contract effective from 1 April 2016. In giving notice on the existing agreement, the Royal Borough had invited Reading Borough Council to take part in the market exercise.

The Chairman mentioned that as this service dealt with some of the most venerable people in the borough that it was important that quality needed to be paramount in the selection process. Cllr Airey reported that quality would not be compromised.

Resolved unanimously: The Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered the report and fully endorsed the recommendations. The Panel felt that as the service was dealing with the most vulnerable residents that the quality of service should be maintained and thus should be paramount in the selection criteria.

The meeting, which began at 6.30 pm, finished at 9.30 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....