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CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

WEDNESDAY, 27 JANUARY 2016

PRESENT: REPRESENTATIVE), Edward Wilson, David Evans (Chairman), Charles Hollingsworth (Vice-Chairman), Lynne Jones, Ross McWilliams and Wesley Richards

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: MR LOUDEN.

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 Councillors Mills and N Airey, Mrs Mathews and Mr Post.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

MINUTES

The Part I minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2015 were approved as a true and correct record subject to Cllr Hollingsworth not being in attendance and that on page 10 it should read Furze Platt Senior School and not Junior.

With regards to Schools Asset Management Plans it was asked if any had been received since the new requirement was in place and if the Council had requested them. The Panel were informed that there had been none received and they would be expected during the School Expansion Programme; officers would be asking for them to be submitted earlier than usual.

COMMUNITY LEARNING AND SKILLS SERVICE - ANNUAL REPORT

Hillary Hall introduced the report that provided an update on work of the Community Learning and Skills Service. It was a shared service between the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and Slough Borough Council established in August 2012 delivering adult and community learning courses.

Funding for service came from the Skills Funding Agency through two funding streams:

- The Adult Skills Budget
- Community Learning

Slough were the accountable body and thus the service came under their Ofsted inspection.

Phillip Wright, Slough Borough Council, was responsible for delivery of the service and provided a examples of its successes / initiatives; such as:

- A 23% increase in learning since established.
- Working with Hillary Hall introduced a more focused approach and better use of children's centres and libraries. Vulnerable targeted families referred by schools and health visitors had been engaged.

- As childcare was seen as a barrier to accessing the service they introduced childcare provision.
- Working with the library service and took over a small part in Windsor and Maidenhead to introduce a learning ICT suite.
- Engaged with Grow Our Own and the job centre to introduce a referral process for better engagement with the unemployed.
- Targeted parents who needed support with languages.

Hillary Hall informed that the service was now focused on RBWM's priorities and how they can help maintain delivery during the transformation period.

In response to questions the Panel were informed that the budget was split to meet RBWM's expectations and supporting the shared service; community learning for RBWM was £400k and 30% of funding from adult skills had been earned. It was noted that the services would continue to be commissioned and thus remain in services.

Cllr Jones asked if table 2 was in line with the demographics of the Borough and was informed that they had targeted minority groups and therefore they would be higher. With regards to people access the service with disabilities it was not always easy to define as it depended on them completing the form, RBWM had been asked to refer people with disabilities to see how the service could meet their needs.

The Chairman asked if high needs funding was linked into the services support and was informed that when children centres were assessed additional needs would be identified and then the service would be accessed when appropriate.

The Panel felt that a borough news letter or / and an article in Around the Borough should be used to highlight the services success and promote their work.

Cllr Wilson mentioned that there was a need for School Business Managers and military personnel were well suited to this, it was agreed that Hilary Hall would liaise with Cllr Wilson on this.

Cllr Jones raised concern that a lot of the service was west of Windsor and accessing these had additional cost of transport, it would be good for Windsor residents to access some of the services in Slough. Allion Alexander said moving forward they would look at needs and where they can be accessed.

Resolved: That the update be noted.

FINANCE UPDATE

Edmund Bradley introduced the report that provided an update to members on the Council's financial performance with services currently projecting a £192k underspend. The combined General Fund Reserves sat at over £6m which was £1m more than when the budget was set.

With regards to the Children's Directorate they were reporting a projected year-end underspend of £11k against the net controllable budget of £17.9m. The net budget now reflected the transfer of the Elections service budget (£352k) from Children's Services into Corporate Services.

Councillor Jones questioned if the reported underspend was after the injection of £2m and was informed that this was the case and without that there would be an overspend. Appendix D of the report showed the movement of the additional funds that went into the Development Fund.

Resolved Unanimously: That the Children's Services O&S Panel endorse the recommendations.

BUDGET 2016/17

Edmund Bradley gave a presentation on the proposed 2016/17 budget that included an overview of the national and local context. This included issues such as an increased demand for adult social care and a decreased grant settlement.

The Panel were informed that appendix J detailed the Medium Term Financial Plan that set out areas such as out income and expenditure assumptions over next three years, 1000 new houses per year and Adult Social Care precept of 2% pa.

The Panel were shown the recommendations and main points which were contained within the budget report including the proposed freeze in council tax at band D rate of £906.95.

With regards to Children's Services issues these were shown to be:

- Growth of £0.735k mainly for high cost placements and HTST
- Cost reductions of £1.046m achieved through more efficient service delivery and reduction in spend on back-office functions.
- Continued focus on integration of services for children.
- Challenges for 2016-17:
 - Recruiting and retaining permanent social workers and managers.
 - Demand for high needs places.
 - Ensuring that appropriate and sufficient foster care and residential placements are available at affordable rates.
 - Increase in complexity of CP and safeguarding cases.
 - Increase in numbers eligible for home to school transport and costs.
 - New responsibilities for 'Staying Put' for young people in foster care and residential provision.

With regards to schools funding the Panel were informed that:

- Dedicated Schools Grant Schools Block per pupil rate was protected in cash terms for 2016-17.
- DSG 2016-17 settlement (incl academies) was £104.8m, an increase of £1.2m on 2015-16 mainly due to addition pupils and increased high needs.
- Pupil premium rates remains same as 2015-16.
- Minimum Funding Guarantee continues at -1.5%. More schools dependent on MFG funding in 2016-17.

For the Children's Service Budget there was a proposed growth in the following areas:

- £240k for potential pressure in high cost safeguarding placements.
- £300k for increase high needs pupils requiring transport to school.
- £176k to cover removal of 'contracting out' NI rebate.
- £19k for increased insurance premium tax.

With regards to the savings proposals the majority of these had been approved by Cabinet in September 2015 and totalled just over £1m.

(Cllr E Wilson left the meeting)

The Chairman questioned if there had been any changes to proposed savings previously discussed by the Panel and was informed that they were as discussed and that £14m of savings were required over the next three years.

Changes to savings identified were:

- Business support.
- Early help contracted services.
- Children's centres.
- Restructure removing heads of service and retaining team managers.

Cllr Jones raised that for schools although no increase in funding was the equivalent of a reduction in their funds due to increased pressures such as increased staffing costs and that the recruitment of teachers was a concern. The Panel were informed that the LEA had spoken to schools about this concern especially as some are spending 80% of their budget on staff. The Council were working with schools on a better use of resources and how to help make education a better career choice.

Councillor Jones raised concern that throughout the report there was reference to a zero % increase in Council Tax where in fact there was a 2% increase because of the Adult Social Care Precept.

The Chairman questioned if the assumption to build 1000 new homes per annum was realistic and was informed that the Borough Local Plan would say 750 properties per year, the 1000 estimate was based on what was built last year and what we know was coming through the system.

In response to a question raised by Cllr McWilliams on behalf of Cllr Wilson the Panel were informed that line 6 was the directorates savings as part of the £14m required by the Council. The £6m mentioned would be for the new combined directorate.

In response to a question from Cllr McWilliams regarding academies the Panel were informed that the Government wished to see all school becoming academies and the Council had talked to school to see how they could come together; however they can't be forced. We would start to see an increase in multi agency trusts.

Cllr McWilliams also asked if there would be increased funding when the Government increased free childcare to 30 hours per week. The Panel were informed that any additional funding was not expected to meet additional costs and that the Schools Forum were reviewing this.

Resolved that the report be noted.

MASH UPDATE

Theresa Leavy introduced the report that provided an update on the progress being made with the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and the Early Help Hub (EHH).

The Panel were informed that the MASH and Early Help Hub were the single point of contact for all safeguarding and well being concerns regarding children and young people in the Borough. There had been a successful launch leading onto discussions in making better referrals.

During it first week there had been 10 referrals to the Early Help Hub; which unless urgent has to be in consultation with the family for self referral. The staff had worked hard to ensure that the launch went well and Officers were confident that tangible outcomes will be shown over time.

Cllr Hollingsworth questioned how the MASH was staffed and if it was possible to visit. The Panel were informed that because of the access to information it was regulated; however Members could visit the space and meet the team. With regards to staff it was mindful of the potential effect on them so staff were rotated on a three month basis.

Cllr Jones asked if staff had bought into the different culture of working and was informed that all the staff in the room had to go through training and there had been a series of workshops for all bodies involved that had been attended by between 6000 to 7000 participants.

Cllr Jones also questioned how success could be measured and was informed that this would be against the data set, positive feedback and speed. Feedback from service users would be an important measure.

Cllr McWilliams asked how they were going for other Council's and was informed that the Home Office had reviewed existing MASH's and felt that it was the way to better help safeguarding. Larger County Councils had struggled due to their size.

Resolved that the update be noted and the Panel gives its thanks to all involved in setting the services up.

FORWARD PLAN

The Forward Plan was noted.

MINUTES

The Part II minutes of the meeting held on 24th November 2015 were approved as a true and correct record.

A) LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting whilst discussion takes place on items 5-8 on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

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

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....

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