

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

TUESDAY, 19 JULY 2016

PRESENT: Councillors Edward Wilson, Marion Mills, Nicola Pryer and Eileen Quick and Lynne Jones

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: Mrs Brown and Mr Louden

Also in attendance: Cllr Mrs Airey

Officers: Edmund Bradley, Kevin McDaniel, David Cook, Alison Alexander, Hilary Hall and Andy Carswell

ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN

Cllr E Wilson proposed Cllr Quick as chairman of the Panel. The motion was seconded by Cllr Mills and passed unanimously.

Cllr E Wilson proposed Cllr Mills as vice chairman of the Panel. The motion was seconded by Cllr Pryer and passed unanimously.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received by Cllr D Evans and Cllr McWilliams.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor E Wilson declared a personal interest in item 6 as his wife worked at St Edwards First School. As this was not a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest he stayed and considered the item.

Mr Louden declared a personal interest in item 6 as he was a School Governor. As this was not a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest he stayed and considered the item.

MINUTES

The Part I minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 19 April 2016 were approved as a true and correct record.

CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION - UPDATE ON PROGRESS

Members were reminded that last year Cabinet agreed an action plan relating to tackling child sexual exploitation. A sustainable action plan relating to data monitoring and raising awareness continues to be developed by the Council.

The Head of Commissioning for Adults, Children and Health informed that a recent multi agency conference involving Council Officers had been very successful. She said one was not being held this year, although another was being planned for the following year.

Cllr E Wilson said that the diagram relating to governance of child sexual exploitation on page 12 of the report did not state what the outputs were, or who the responsible Council Members were. The Head of Commissioning for Adults, Children and Health said that this would be rectified in future reports and comments would be passed on to the Safeguarding Board.

The Director of Children's Services said that the meetings involved in the governance of child sexual exploitation were all operational and Council Members were welcome to attend meetings or request minutes.

Cllr Jones asked how it could be ascertained that the MASH was working effectively. The Director of Children's Services said that the number of cases that had been tracked from first contact through to a referral had increased significantly since the MASH was set up, thereby safeguarding an increased number of children.

The Chairman said Officers who had helped set up the MASH should be congratulated for its success, adding she hoped more local authorities would implement a similar system.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services said creating the MASH had been a high priority for the Council, as monitoring exploitation cases had hitherto been difficult. She said the new body helped to pull together all the parts of any investigation.

Panel Members commented that they would have liked to have received the Supplementary Agenda several days in advance of the meeting. Cllr E Wilson stated the lack of available papers in advance of the meeting did not allow proper scrutiny and the chance to give sufficient feedback to Cabinet. The Director of Children's Services apologised for the delay, telling Members that Officers were waiting for financial figures to be given to them before the report was compiled. The Chairman commented that the report could have been circulated earlier, with a reminder that financial information was to follow.

Resolved Unanimously: That the Children's Services O&S Panel considered the report and fully endorsed the recommendations to Cabinet.

EXPANSION OF SECONDARY SECTOR PROVISION

The Panel considered the Cabinet report detailing the revised costs of the secondary school expansion programme.

The Head of Schools and Educational Services informed the cost of providing additional secondary school places had increased significantly from the initial £20.5million estimate. The proposals in the report had come following six months of negotiations with the schools in the Borough.

The Head of Schools and Educational Services said three levels of solution had been suggested. The technical minimum, which was the cheapest, was not appropriate to four of the schools consulted on and was therefore not being considered in relationship to them.

The practical minimum, which would meet the needs of the schools being consulted, would cost an estimated £23.6million, with an additional £3million contingency being set aside. The cost of the recommended schemes would cost £29.6million, which includes a £3.7million contingency provision. The third option was 'sufficient for excellent education' which also included support for vulnerable children.

The Head of Schools and Educational Services told members that £13.3million of the money needed for the project will come from a grant from the Government, and £6.5million of local money would be used. This results in a £7.8million shortfall; however the Head of Schools and Educational Services said this scheme would be one of the first to benefit from money the Council receives from the sale of Maidenhead Golf Club.

The Chairman noted that the recommended sums for Windsor Boys and Windsor Girls Schools were the minimum amounts. The Head of Schools and Educational Services said this was because only classrooms were being constructed as part of the expansion projects at those schools.

Cllr Jones asked if any of the schools could accommodate more places in their Sixth Forms. The Head of Schools and Educational Services said that in principle they could, and that all of the schools had recognised that running a Sixth Form was important.

Cllr E Wilson questioned why the report did not make any reference to Primary expansion or Pupil Premium. He also raised concern that we were spending tax payers money expanding academies where there were schools such as Desborough College and Churchmead School having places available for pupils, and said more should be done by the Council to fill them. Mrs Brown reported that Desborough College was near to capacity with only 10 spare places. The Director of Children's Services said the recommendations in the report were the result of a series of discussions at Cabinet, which would hold further discussions in the future to determine which schools would be expanded in the future.

The Director of Children's Services stated further that the purpose of the report was to outline which schools the Council would focus on expanding. Officers had been working on the assumption that every school place in the Borough would be filled.

Cllr E Wilson said that the issue surrounding a potential new school should have been addressed in the report. The Director of Children's Services said that the Council would be the body responsible for a new school, and the Council would be expected to fund a new Free School even if it asked the Government for one. She said that at the moment the Council is seeking to expand its basic provision, as it is anticipated there will be insufficient school places for the 2017/18 academic year unless expansion work takes place now. Whilst there remained basic need any expansion programmes would have to be funded locally and thus academies would not be eligible for Government funding.

The Chairman questioned whether the Council was making it clear enough to parents to select more than one school choice during the admissions process, as it would make it easier for a place to be allocated. The Head of Schools and Educational Services said parents were encouraged to select more than one option, but said it had been suggested that information perhaps wasn't as clear as it should be and this would be reviewed.

The Chairman also questioned if there were contingency plans in place if one of the Windsor upper schools wished to adopt a two tier system. The Director of Children's Services said that if an Upper School wanted to take in year seven pupils it would have to formally apply to the Secretary of State, giving the Council time to reconsider its approach to secondary school places.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services reiterated that the report was only being reconsidered by Cabinet because the costs had been increased from the initial £20.5million estimate. There had already been lots of debate, consultation and negotiation of the expansion programme and thus report was requesting the increased funding as the expansion programme moved forward.

Cllr Mills mentioned that the charts in the presentation had been very useful in explaining why the proposals were being made for each school.

Cllr Jones said she did not agree with the wording of part i of the recommendation and said the national average of £18,554 should be used instead of the £10k figure relating to the Holyport College project as it was more logical and Holyport had been costed as a new build and not an expansion project. Cllr Wilson said the figure in the recommendation related to the last big schools project made in the Borough, with the Chairman adding that the figure showed how good value it was. Cllr Jones said she agreed with the report's proposals in principle, but wanted her comments on its wording noted as she felt that the national average should be used and not the cost associated with Holyport College. The Director of Children's Services said that the Leader of the Opposition's comments would be passed to Cabinet.

Resolved Unanimously: That the Children's Services O&S Panel considered the report and endorsed the recommendations to Cabinet, subject to it being noted that Cllr Jones had raised objection to the use of Holyport College average price per place rather than the national average.

FINANCE UPDATE

The Finance Partner told the Panel that part I of the report summary was incorrect and should instead state that the non-service variances are projected to have a £70k underspend, meaning there is a projected £41k overspend on the General Fund. The Finance Partner apologised for the error, adding that the appendices to the report were correct.

The Finance Partner said the Council had received a lower DfE condition grant than had been anticipated for Children's Services when the budget was set, resulting in a £532k reduction to the capital programme. He said some of the lower priority Children's Services capital schemes would be postponed until 2017/18 and form part of the Capital Programme's budget setting process.

The Finance Partner said most of the £155k projected revenue overspend within the Adult Children's and Health Directorate related to Adult Services. Children's Services overspending was predominantly on the costs of temporary agency staff, particularly with regards to safeguarding. However, these overspends are being compensated for by underspends elsewhere. The Finance Partner said there are plans in place to cover most of the spending and it is anticipated the Council will come in on budget.

Mrs Brown asked why the Council used so many agency staff. The Director of Children's Services said it was due to a shortfall in social workers, this a national issue and proposals had just been put the Council's Employment Panel.

Cllr Jones questioned if the additional agency costs were being offset by increasing case loads. The Panel were informed that increased case loads was part of the temporary solution along with savings such as managed vacancies in other areas of the Directorate.

Resolved Unanimously: That the Children's Services O&S Panel considered the report and fully endorsed the recommendations to Cabinet.

FORWARD PLAN

The Chairman asked for a presentation before full Council reminding Members of their responsibilities as Corporate Parents, in light of there being so many new Members. She said permission would need to be sought from the Mayor first.

The Chairman added the Panel had an update on the Family Support Programme, which should go on the Forward Plan.

Cllr E Wilson asked for a paper from officers outlining the responsibilities of Academy Trusts. He said he wanted this to clarify concerns and confusion amongst residents who were questioning why the Council was financially supporting Academies, when it does not have any administrative control over them.

Cllr Jones said she wanted an update on the progress being made by Children's Centres.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

It was **RESOLVED** that the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting.

The meeting, which began at 6:30pm, finished at 8:20pm.

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....