

Children's Services Committee

**Minutes of the Meeting Held on Tuesday 15 July 2014
2:00pm Edwards Room, County Hall, Norwich**

Present:

Mr J Joyce (Chair)

Mrs J Brociek-Coulton
Mrs J Chamberlin
Ms E Corlett
Mr D Crawford
Mr A Dearnley
Mrs M Dewsbury
Mr C Foulger
Ms D Gihawi

Mr P Gilmour
Mr M Kiddle-Morris
Mrs J Leggett
Mr J Perkins
Mr E Seward
Mr R Smith
Mrs A Thomas
Mr A White

Church Representatives

Mrs H Bates

Non-voting Parent Governor Representatives:

Dr K Byrne

Non-voting Schools Forum Representative

Mrs A Best-White

Non-Voting Co-opted Advisors:

Mr M Grimble
Ms V Aldous

Norfolk Governors Network
Primary Education

1 Apologies and substitutions

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Richard Bearman (Adrian Dearnley substituted); David Collis (Julie Brociek-Coulton substituted); Tom Garrod (Tony White substituted); Judith Virgo (Alison Thomas substituted); Tina Humber (Special Needs Education rep); Alex Robinson (Norfolk Governors Network - Mike Grimble substituted); Chrissie Smith (Secondary Education rep); Mr A Mash (Church Representative).

2 Minutes from the meeting held on 17 June 2014

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 17 June were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendments:

- 2.1.1 Paragraph 5.2. A verbal response about why speech and language therapy in schools had been restricted to four sessions per pupil had been received, although the written response was still outstanding. A written response to be provided as soon as possible.
- 2.1.2 Paragraph 6.2, first bullet point to read Mr R Smith would replace Mr B Iles on the Capital Priorities Group.
- 2.1.3 Mrs J Leggett read out a statement regarding Eccles Primary school (attached at Appendix A to the minutes), after which the Chairman read out a statement of apology (attached at Appendix B to the minutes). The Chairman added that a Small Schools Committee had now been established which should avoid such instances in future.
- 2.2 The Committee requested future minutes of the Children's Services Committee are more detailed as these were used to provide evidence of the work carried out by Children's Services Department.

3 Declarations of Interest

- 3.1 Mrs A Thomas declared an interest as a Trustee of the Benjamin Foundation.

4 Items of Urgent Business

- 4.1 There were no items of urgent business.

5 Local Member Issues/Member Questions

- 5.1 The Local Member questions and their responses are attached at Appendix C to these minutes.

6 Children's Services Integrated Performance and Finance Monitoring Draft report for 2013-14.

- 6.1 The Committee received the report by the Interim Director of Children's Services providing an update on performance and finance monitoring information for the 2013-14 financial year. The report set out evidence of improvements and trends for a range of measures and indicators within children's social care services and support for school improvement.
- 6.2 The following points were noted in response to questions from the Committee:
- The key to reducing the overspend in the SEN Transport category would be to educate SEN children as near to home as possible, although it was noted that a cultural change around the inclusion of SEN children in mainstream schools would be required before this could happen.
 - In order to give the Committee a greater understanding of the performance information, the Interim Head of Children's Services would arrange for a deep-dive exercise to be carried out alongside the performance report into

Looked after Children and SEN Transport.

- The Key Stage 4 predictions recently reported in the media had indicated that Norfolk schools were improving, although children who lived in Norwich were not doing so well. The Assistant Director, Education Strategy and Commissioning urged caution when considering the predictions made by the media.
- Members requested that future performance reports include overall trend data, with a dashboard of core indicators and quality analysis.
- A recruitment campaign was underway to recruit additional social workers within the Children's Services Department to carry out visits to children; however the Committee noted that the east of the county was performing well in this regard.
- The overall cost of Looked after Children averaged approximately £46.5k per child. A detailed deep-dive exercise would need to be conducted if members wanted more detailed information about the costs involved in looking after children in care.
- The objective and timescale for more adoption placements was progressing well, although Members noted that further work was needed, particularly in trying to find families for those hard to place children. A national campaign was being undertaken to raise the profile of adoption.
- The judgement from the recent Ofsted inspection was expected in early August.

6.3 The Committee **RESOLVED** to:-

- Agree the format for the dashboard of indicators that would demonstrate Children's Social Care performance trends over time.
- Agree that there would be 'deep dive activity' on indicators of concern linked closely to scrutiny activity.

Note:

- The predicted improvement in outcomes in early years (predicted to exceed the target).
- The predicted improvement in outcomes at KS2 (predicted to exceed the target).
- The predicted improvement at KS4 which indicates we are on track to achieve the 2014 target (within tolerances).
- Ofsted ratings showing 70% of Norfolk schools overall are good or better.
- Significant improvement especially for children eligible for free school meals and girls performance.
- Progress made in delivery of the Early Help Improvement Plan.
- The financial pressures from the delay in delivery of the proposed looked after children savings.

- The financial pressures on the special educational needs transport budget and the historic trend within the dedicated schools grant related to special educational needs.

7 **Budget 2015-18 – developing our approach**

7.1 The Committee received the report by the Interim Head of Finance setting out the proposed framework and timetable for the work between now and February to deliver the County Council's Revenue and Capital budgets.

7.2 The Committee felt that any cuts in children's services needed to fit into the current departmental improvement plan and agreed that the department was well placed to come up with proposals which could be linked to the improvement plan and improving outcomes for Norfolk.

7.3 The following responses to questions from the Committee were noted:

- The Committee agreed to organise a training session on finance so Members could understand the issues faced and propose some suitable suggestions for savings.
- Following a question about the public consultation and what would happen if the respondents rejected the savings identified within the consultation document, the Interim Head of Finance suggested that the consultation document should include more savings than were required to give respondents a choice and to ascertain how the public felt about proposed options.
- Early intervention services had been discounted from the list of possible savings at this stage as insufficient savings would be realised.

7.4 The Committee **RESOLVED** to agree:

- The timetable for budget production.
- The scope of consultation required with residents in respect of 15/16 proposals.

8 **Update on Pathway Planning for Care Leavers**

8.1 The Committee received the report by the Interim Director of Children's Services highlighting the progress to date against the action plan approved at the April Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

8.2 The following points were noted in response to questions by the Committee:

- Although there was no specific mention within the report, the Committee noted that work was taking place to research and establish a list of apprenticeship roles which could be ring-fenced for looked after children.

- The QA monitoring programme was not due to be available until September 2014.
- An exercise was currently underway to restructure the Leaving Care team and it was hoped that this team would be in place in the near future. Work was also taking place to produce a Leaving Care pack and it was expected that this would be available at the end of July, after which the best way to cascade the information it contained would be decided.
- A tendering process was currently taking place for the accommodation at Linden House on Earlham Road. The specification included explicit reference to engaging with pathway plans and care leavers were involved, designing the specification and evaluating the resultant tenders. Once the tendering exercise had been completed, the results would be shared with the Committee.
- The Pathway Task and Finish Group had identified that in the past, young people did not have a Pathway Plan to support them in becoming independent adults. It was hoped that a framework could soon be established which would help young people to become independent well before they reached the age of 18.

8.3 The Committee **RESOLVED** to note progress to date.

9 **Norfolk's Sustainable School Travel Strategy**

- 9.1 The Committee received the report by the Interim Director of Children's Services setting out the strategy and approach to school transport and how Norfolk County Council would encourage more children to travel sustainably to and from school. The report was for information only as EDT Committee were the determining committee.
- 9.2 The following points were noted, which would help form the discussions between the Interim Director of Children's Services and the Interim Director of Environment, Transport and Development to agree the way forward:
- Environment, Development and Transport Committee had confirmed that any comments made by the Children's Services Committee would be included in the final strategy document.
 - The Committee asked how costs would be met if additional costs were incurred in route improvements to facilitate more children walking and cycling to schools and was reassured that a small amount of money was available in the highways capital budget to facilitate such schemes.
 - The responsibility for school crossing patrols rested with Norfolk County Council and the final strategy needed to reflect this.
 - The strategy document should reflect the fact that it was the responsibility of parents to ensure children got to and from school safely.

- The Committee considered that a working group could be established in the future to look at sustainable school transport.
- Norfolk County Council was able to offer cycles as an alternative mode of transport for families who lived over the three mile limit from school as an alternative to a free bus pass.

9.3 Members of the Committee were asked to let the Interim Director of Children's Services have any additional comments they wished to be included in the discussion between herself and the Interim Director of Environment, Transport and Development to finalise the strategy.

9.4 The Committee **RESOLVED** to note the report.

10 Process for proposing and deciding significant changes to School Organisation

10.1 The Committee received the report by the Interim Director of Children's Services suggesting a process for consulting on, proposing and determining decisions regarding major changes in school organisation. The process would include delegation to the Director of Children's Services responsibility for proposing and determining changes with the necessary varying degrees of support from the Committee Chairman, the Vice-Chairman and Members. In any proposal regarding closure, committee discussion would form part of the consultation programme unless specifically waived by Committee Group Spokespersons.

10.2 The Committee **RESOLVED** to agree the process for fulfilling the Local Authority role as Proposer and Decision-maker on School Organisation Changes.

11. Children's Services Committee Plan

11.1 The Committee received the report by the Interim Director of Children's Services presenting the Children's Services Committee Plan. The Plan drew together the core information that Members required to inform decision-making on children's services in Norfolk, such as the Committee's focus, overview of services, current departmental priorities, details of key plans and strategies driving the Committee's work, risks, challenges, anticipated business and overview of performance.

11.2 Members of the Committee felt that the plan should be used to refresh the Children's Services Improvement Plan from September 2014. Committee members were asked to pass any comments about the information they would like to be included into the Children's Services Plan to the Interim Director of Children's Services and the Chairman, who would forward these to the Corporate Planning and Partnerships Manager.

11.3 The Committee **RESOLVED** to note:-

- That at the end of each financial year, the Chair, on behalf of the Committee, would provide an overview of the Committee's progress in

achieving key priorities for children's services in Norfolk. This information would assist the Policy and Resources Committee to monitor overall progress against the Council's key priorities and targets for children's services in Norfolk.

12 Working Groups

The Committee **RESOLVED** to agree to discuss the following three priority topics at the next Group Spokespersons meeting with a view to setting up Task and Finish Groups.

- 1 Children's Services Budget so the Committee could understand the issues faced and determine some suitable suggestions for savings.
- 2 Educational outcomes, especially around the variations in the districts.
- 3 Children's Centres

The meeting closed at 4.55pm

CHAIRMAN



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Statement by Judy Leggett

I would like to ask the Chairman to apologise on behalf of his department and the Council for the upset and disappointment that has recently been caused to the local community and users of Eccles Primary School.

We are extremely disappointed at the way the situation has been handled; while we recognise it is now too late for this decision to be reversed, we must emphasise the need for the Members to be involved in these decisions in the future. The manner in which this decision was made was wrong.

As Members may be aware, Eccles Primary School has been a small school for a long time with more than half of the children in its catchment choosing to go elsewhere and half of the pupils at the school coming from outside its catchment area.

Children's Services have long been aware of the challenges faced by small schools and Eccles has been one that has faced difficulty for some time.

Children's Services had made Councillor Askew, the local Member, aware it was intending to make a decision about the future of the school and Councillor Askew sought the assurance of the Chairman of the Committee the decision would be taken here.

Despite this assurance, the decision was taken under delegated authority in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman to close the school. No-one contacted Cllr Askew to make him aware the decision would not be made at the Committee as promised. No-one contacted him to make him aware that a decision had been made until after he heard the news from a parent. It was a parent of a child at the school that contacted him and asked him about the decision that made him aware of this change.

We note the regrettable lack of clarity around the process of this matter and ask for a full and frank apology for Cllr Askew and the community at large for denying them the chance to have the discussion and debate here.

I ask the Chairman to apologise for giving an assurance not made good and for not ensuring, having given that assurance, the decision be taken by committee.

Statement by the Chairman, Mr James Joyce re closure of Eccles Primary School.

The process to propose and determine the closure of Eccles Primary School has been carried out in line with the procedures set out in the guidance on making changes to school organization published by the Department for Education in January 2014.

The formal process for proposing the closure of Eccles, Hargham and Wilby school has straddled the move from a Cabinet to a Committee structure within the County Council. The possibility that there might be a change in the way the Local Authority makes its decisions with regard to proposals for school organization changes has been acknowledged since the start of the process. It is a matter of regret that the Local Member was not kept up to date with the Committee's discussion of how the process would proceed and I apologise for this.

It was confirmed at the Children's Services Committee in June, that the Director of Children's Services would act as decision-maker with support of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee and the decision was duly made and communicated to parents and community members.

5. Local Member Questions

Question 1 from Mr Jim Perkins.

I would like to ask whether there are any cases of families where a series of children have been removed over a period of years in Norfolk.

Reply by the Chairman:

It is not unusual to have circumstances where children have been made subject of proceedings when a child has been removed previously and this has certainly happened in Norfolk. Although the parenting history is an important factor, it is important to note that whenever this happens, we assess the parenting of any future children quite separately. We would not remove children unless the previous concerns were of a serious nature and assessment shows that the risks to the child are clearly being replicated by the current situation.

Question 2 from Mr Jim Perkins.

I would also like to know whether Norfolk Social Services have had any contact with the families alcohol and drug courts.

Reply by the Chairman:

This is currently not available in Norfolk, please see the attached link for research information on this subject area
<http://www.brunel.ac.uk/shssc/research/ccyr/research-projects/fdac>