

Children's Services Committee

**Minutes of the Meeting Held on Tuesday 13 January 2015
2:00pm Edwards Room, County Hall, Norwich**

Present:

Mr J Joyce - Chairman

Mr R Bearman (Vice-Chair)
Mrs J Chamberlin
Mr J Childs
Mr D Collis
Ms E Corlett
Mr D Crawford
Mrs M Dewsbury
Mr C Foulger

Mr T Garrod
Ms D Gihawi
Mr M Kiddle-Morris
Mrs J Leggett
Mr J Perkins
Mr E Seward
Mr R Smith
Miss J Virgo

Church Representatives

Mr A Mash?

Non-voting Parent Governor Representatives

Mrs K Byrne

Non-Voting Schools Forum Representative

Mrs A Best-White

Non-Voting Co-opted Advisors

Ms T Humber	Special Needs Education
Vacancy	Post-16 Education
Mr C Collis	Secondary Education

1 Apologies and substitutions

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Mrs H Bates (Church representative); Mr A Robinson (Norfolk Governors Network); Mrs S Vertigan (Non-voting Parent Governor Representatives); Ms C Smith (substituted by Mr C Collis) Mr P Gilmour (substituted by Mr J Childs).

2 Minutes from the meeting held on 20 November 2014

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 20 November were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the clarification of the following points:

- Point 3.4. A query was raised regarding the list of decisions provided as the list provided detailed decisions made by the Committee not the Chairman. Members of the Committee were assured that no decisions had been taken by the Chairman since the last meeting and that the Group Spokespersons meeting were now minuted so the Committee would be provided with a more comprehensive list of decisions in the future.
- Point 9.2. A report was promised to come to the Committee members once the NSCB and MASH Board had considered it. This meeting was due to take place on 14 January and Members would be provided with the report subsequently.
- Point 14.3, 4th bullet point. The Committee requested the minutes were re-worded to 'The final structure for the leaving care team would be populated at the same time as the population of other social work teams. This would ensure equality of opportunity for staff applying for those roles.'

3 Declarations of Interest

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

4 Items of Urgent Business

- 4.1 The Chairman informed the Committee that the Interim team in Children's Services would not be leaving at the end of January. The Interim Director of Children's Services, Sheila Lock, would be remaining in post until at least June and the Assistant Directors would remain in role until at least April. This would ensure a smooth transition.
- 4.2 The Chairman informed the Committee that the IEB request regarding the Hewett school had been made to the Department for Education but no response had been received yet.
- 4.3 The Chairman put forward the proposal that from May 2015 the Children's Services Committee meeting would commence at 10am rather than 2pm. The Committee **agreed**.
- 4.4 The Chairman received a petition regarding the Hewett school. The petition, 'We're Backing Hewett' had 766 signatures. The Committee welcomed the receipt of the petition and **agreed** that they supported the Hewett school in its improvement work.

5 Local Member Issues/Member Questions

- 5.1 Ms E Corlett asked the Chairman if he would write to the exam boards regarding the issue of sanctions schools had received for cheating to confirm whether any of the schools in question were Norfolk schools. The Chairman **agreed**.

6 Service and Financial Planning 2015-18

- 6.1 The Committee received a presentation by the Delivery Manager, Business Intelligence and Performance Service. A copy of the presentation is attached at Appendix A to these minutes.
- 6.2 The Interim Director of Children's Services gave an introduction to the report to set the context which included the following points.
- As a consequence of the three reports received from Ofsted the service had been under a lot of scrutiny. Through hard work and a range of Improvement Strategies, the Support for School Improvement Service was now considered to be effective.
 - There had been work done to ensure that the forward strategy for the department linked with the essential financial plans.
 - A Social Care Ofsted inspection was expected in the next term and the director felt that the department was prepared.
- 6.3 The following points were made during the presentation:
- There had been 1165 respondents to the public consultation, with an age demographic of largely middle aged individuals, which could suggest parents being the main respondents.
 - Regarding the cut to subsidising community groups it was suggested that phasing out the subsidies would be a better option than cutting it.
 - In regards to increasing council tax; of the 457 responses, 339 agreed with raising council tax while 101 disagreed.
 - The three main services that people thought should be protected were, Adult Services, Children's Services and Schools (Education).
 - Members raised concern that the number of respondents in regards to the population was very low, although the numbers were higher than in previous years.
- 6.4 The Committee received a report by the Interim Director of Children's Services setting out the proposals that would contribute towards the County Council setting a legal budget for 2015/16 which would see its total resources of £1.4billion focused on meeting the needs of residents and ensuring the continued delivery of the planned improvement strategy for Children's Services to achieve better outcomes for Norfolk's Children.
- 6.5 The following points were noted in response to questions from the Committee:
- The three areas where Children's Services had been facing pressures were Looked after Children, use of temporary staff and SEN transport. The Department had applied effective mitigation strategies to bring these areas of overspend under the line.
 - Areas had been identified where money could be saved. The reduction in the need for legal costs for Looked after Children showed that the strategy for reducing the number of Looked after Children was working.
 - The improvement around early help was key to getting upstream of

potential issues and managing the demand for social care.

- In regard to post 16 transport the Committee was informed that analysis had been done and it had shown a number of things – that colleges already contributed to subsidies and that to implement this saving would put Norfolk out of line with other Authorities where benchmarking of costs had been completed.
- The Looked after Children figure was the lowest it had been for some time and the department had already achieved the target set for March 2015.
- The cost in regards to business travel was being actively worked on and would be further reduced by creating another three locality hubs as part of the restructure, which would mean less business travel.
- Work had been undertaken to review every looked after child's individual circumstances and plans for better outcomes with associated savings where possible.
- A plea was made on behalf of Norfolk Music Service not to make cuts around the arts. It was acknowledged that the Arts was a very important service, although the efficiency challenge was also noted.
- In regards to cuts around SEN transport it was explained to the Committee that children that had a SEN statement should be included in a good local school where possible. This would be a focus of the new inclusion service.
- The reduction in retirement costs for teachers had been brought about largely due to the increase in academy schools.
- The reduction of funding to schools crossings was included in last years budget.
- Members were made aware that the control of the legislation around schools crossing did not sit with the local authority. It was proposed and agreed unanimously that the Chair would write to the Minister to express Norfolk's concern about the issues around responsibilities for this area.

6.5 The Committee **RESOLVED** to:

- **Acknowledge** the findings of the public consultation.
- **Acknowledge** and **note** the findings of the equality and rural assessment, and in doing so, note the Council's duty under the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to the need to:
 - Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;
 - Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected

characteristic and persons who do not share it.

- **Agree** to recommend a budget as set out in appendix A and any associated risks and issues to Policy & Resources Committee for consideration on 26 January 2015, to enable Policy & Resources Committee to recommend a sound, whole-Council budget to Full Council on 16 February 2015

7 Dedicated Schools Grant

7.1 The Committee received a report by the Interim Director of Children's Services presenting the changes to the distribution for the Dedicated Schools Grant from April 2015, in line with the Department of Education's Fairer School Funding arrangements. This included the funding distribution formula that delegated the funding into maintained schools and academies who were responsible for using this to ensure the educational outcomes for their children.

7.2 The following points were noted during the discussion:

- The Committee felt it was very sensible to lift the cap to allow schools to get the appropriate funding they required.
- The Committee discussed the sparsity fund and how it helped schools to provide a full curriculum.
- The additional funding which had changed the allocation of the funding had meant there was an additional £8m for Norfolk schools and credit should be given to officers for coming up with the recommendations.
- The Committee asked for the funding allocation to be explained and was advised that the funding formula was difficult to breakdown as there were factors at each school that had to be reflected in the allocations.

7.3 The Committee **agreed** the Dedicated Schools Grant funding and the changes to the funding formula (as detailed in section 1.27 of the report) that was used to allocate funding to schools and academies.

8 Norfolk County Council's Promise to Children and Young People in its Care

8.1 The Committee received a report by the Interim Director of Children's Services providing an update on the current position with regard to the dissemination of the promise, six months after its launch date.

8.2 The following points were noted during the discussion:

- The Committee raised concern over the responses from staff that seemed resistant to the Promise initiative.
- The Committee was reassured by officers that any resistance came from staff being anxious and uncertain during difficult times and that most staff

had embraced the promise.

- The Committee was informed that the Promise was being built into Learning and Development for staff and support was being provided. If concerns arose and the Promise was not being delivered this would be picked up as a performance issue.
- The core elements on the Promise were key to driving up standards within the service provided to young people in the Council's care.
- The Promise had been distributed to all teams to give to children and young people at the visits undertaken.
- The In Care Council had been kept up to date with the initiative and their experiences and input had been key to developing and promoting the Promise.
- The Committee commented that the 30% of Looked after Children receiving a copy in November seemed low and asked to be kept up to date on the progress.

8.3 Mr J Joyce proposed, seconded by Mr R Bearman, that the Committee write to the staff of Children's Services to highlight how important the Promise was to Norfolk County Council. The Committee unanimously **agreed**.

8.3 The Committee **RESOLVED** to:

- endorse the plan of action.
- Receive a further report in six months when the figures available would be sufficient to collate into a report highlighting dissemination, feedback from children and young people and tracking if there had been a rise in either complaints or advocacy requests as a result.
- Write a letter to staff to highlight the importance of delivering the Promise.

9 Local Growth and Investment Plan

9.1 The Committee received a report by the Interim Director of Children's Services proposing, in the form of a summary of the Growth and Investment Plan for pupil place provision, the strategic direction of travel for areas of the county where pupil numbers were expected to increase in the next 10-15 years.

9.2 The report also asked the Committee to approve the terms of reference for the Capital Priorities Group and for a means of delegation of decision-making to the Director of Children's Services, advised by this group and subject to regular reporting to the Committee.

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

- The need was recognised for keeping Local Members fully informed about the school planning process for their area. This was very much a two way

process whereby Children's Services welcomed comments from Local Members.

- The County Council had a significant role in the planning process for housing development locations where new schools were expected to be needed and also in new developments where existing schools would need to expand over time.
- The County Council had a commissioning role for new schools. Decisions about issues such as the overall size of the new school and if it required a nursery class or a specialist resource base would be part of the commissioning specification.
- Discussions with South Norfolk Council concerning further housing in the Wymondham area had shown that the current position (explained at page 39 of the agenda) did not need to change.
- The current position at Cringleford was set out at page 39 of the agenda, namely, that a further 1,450 houses were anticipated and that plans would include sites for additional 2 Form of Entry primary phase schools, to be commissioned under the 'academy presumption' requirements.

9.4 The Committee **RESOLVED** to

- Agree the strategic direction and financing of the medium/long-term provision of school places as set out in the report.
- Agree delegation of decision-making to the Director of Children's Services, advised by the Capital Priorities Group; and agree the terms of reference for the Capital Priorities Group as set out in the report. In so doing, the Committee agreed that the Capital Priorities Group should appoint its own named substitutes for each political group and for the non-elected members.
- Agree the corporate capital bids considered by CPG at its November meeting.
- Note that Local Members should be kept fully informed about the school planning process for their area and that Children's Services saw this very much as a two way process whereby Local Members comments were welcomed at any time.

10 **Private Fostering Arrangements in Norfolk: Submission of Private Fostering Annual Report for 2014**

10.1 The Committee received a report by the Interim Director of Children's Services about private fostering arrangements in Norfolk. The report included as an appendix the 2014 Annual Report that described the continuing effort being made to improve the efficiency of the private fostering process in Norfolk and most of all to ensure that the quality of assessment was strengthened with the child's wishes and feelings at the core of the work.

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

- Because of the fluid and changing nature of private fostering, it was not possible to provide more accurate information about where the Local Authority should be in terms of numbers of private foster carers as it varied from Local Authority to Local Authority and was dependant on many different factors.
- It was also difficult to make meaningful comparisons between LA areas. The local variables between areas such as the number of language schools and independent and boarding schools varied greatly.
- Close links were maintained with the NHS and with the GP member who served on the Safeguarding Board to identify as early as possible where Children's Services could be expected to have a limited role in private fostering arrangements and to define what that role might be.

10.3 The Committee **RESOLVED** to:

Note and endorse the analysis and findings of the Annual Report, in particular the continuing need to promote the recognition of private fostering arrangements within the communities of Norfolk and the duty to report them to the Local Authority.

11 Final report by Members of the Children's Centres Task and Finish Group

11.1 The Committee received a report by the Chairman of the Task and Finish Group, presenting the final report and recommendations on the future of Children's Centres within the County and relating to current contractual arrangements due to cease in March 2016.

11.2 In the course of discussion the following key points were made:

- Cllr Emma Corlett who had chaired the Children's Services Task and Finish Group placed on record her thanks to the families and staff at each of the Centres which Members of the Group had visited for taking the time to talk to Members. She also thanked the Members and Officers who had supported the Task and Finish Group in its work.
- The Committee welcomed the report and supported the recommendations that were contained in it. Members recognised that further detailed work would be necessary in order to identify how the recommendations could best be implemented and how this could be done at the earliest opportunity. It was, however, suggested that the report of the Group should have explained in more detail what each of the Centres that Members had visited did to offer universal services to its local community and to support families who needed additional support.
- The Committee did not wish to reconvene the Task and Finish Group but did want those Members who had served on it to be kept informed about

how it was intended to implement the recommendations. It was noted that there would be an opportunity to do this at the planned forthcoming stakeholder meeting.

11.3 The Committee **RESOLVED** to:

- Welcome the conclusions of the Task and Finish Group and support the recommendations, as set out in the report.
- Ask that the Interim Director of Children's Services develop an action plan in order to address specific issues raised by Member visits to Centres and develop an options appraisal to provide the Committee with information on possible future delivery models for Children's Centres to tie in with the ceasing of current contractual arrangements in 2016 in order to report back to the March 2015 meeting of the Committee.

12 **Emotional Wellbeing & Mental Health Strategy**

12.1 The Committee received a report by the Interim Director of Children's Services setting out how Children's Services, through an early help offer, wished to provide services to support children's emotional wellbeing and mental health at the earliest opportunity, based on understanding the needs of individuals, cohorts of children, their families and communities.

12.2 The following points were noted in response to questions from the Committee:

- The Interim Director of Children's Services agreed to meet with Members of the Teachers Joint Consultative Committee to explain the issues contained in the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy.
- The Interim Director of Children's Services also agreed to let Mrs Leggett have details as to the number of children and young people with a recognised mental health disorder in the Broadland area.
- Norfolk County Council was seen to be ahead of the game in offering services to support the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children at the earlier opportunity, based on developing an understanding of the needs of individuals, their families and communities. This was very much a successful Children's Services strategy that needed further work with partner organisations to develop a jointly approved strategy.
- A recent poll of young people had identified Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health to be a priority issue for the UK Youth Parliament to consider.
- It was noted that the County Council was looking to sign up to the "Time to Talk" campaign and that Children's Services would be looking to direct its "strength and difficulties" questionnaires at schools.

12.3 The Committee **RESOLVED** to

- Agree support of the over-arching strategic aims of the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy that are set out in the report.
- Support ongoing implementation of the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy by further involving children and young people and partners.

- Agree delegating approval of finalised strategy and implementation to the Chairman of Children's Services Committee with a requirement for a suggested outcome framework to come back to the Committee at the earliest opportunity.
- Support the setting up of a Norfolk Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Summit of all partners and organisations to explore key issues for improvement, share young people's views of service provision, share best practice and identify ways forward.
- As part of the improving early help and preventative services, agree resourcing implications including increasing investment to improve support and interventions for emotional wellbeing and mental health in line with 'Getting in Shape' restructure proposals.
- Agree the key outcomes the Committee wish to achieve from the strategic direction that were set out in the report.
- Agree that further work was needed with partner organisations to make this Children's Services strategy into a jointly approved strategy.

13 Signs of Safety

13.1 The Committee received a report by the Interim Director of Children's Services that explained how "Signs of Safety" was now a central tenet to the Children's Services Improvement plan. The report pointed out that Norfolk was one of ten authorities included in a national consortium to implement "Signs of Safety" through a project part funded by the Innovation Fund.

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

- The Norfolk Safeguarding Children's Board had recently signed up to "Signs of Safety" becoming the overarching practice framework to transform social work practice in Norfolk. While the full implementation would take several years to be fully embedded, the project would run for 18 months, having commenced in October 2014. Progress would be reported to the Committee through the Children's Services dashboard.
- A half day Member Workshop was being planned that gave Members an opportunity to examine case examples of how a partnership approach would help build a consistent, effective, child focused approach to assessing and planning for child protection.

13.4 The Committee **RESOLVED** to

- Welcome the 'profound cultural change' that would be brought about within Children's Services by the implementation of Signs of Safety.
- Actively endorse and promote this major change project

14 Young Carers and Families Legal Reform Implementation project.

14.1 The Committee received a report by the Interim Director of Children's Services setting out the Norfolk context for young carers and proposals to ensure both Children's Services and Community Services were able to implement the new

duties. Members asked a number of questions about current services and challenged whether performance was good enough.

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

- A full report on the 2014 views of young carers and young adult carers in Norfolk would be shared with Members shortly. This would include more information on the current arrangements.
- The consultation on the proposals set out in the report was due to end on 28 January 2015 and comments from Members would be welcome. The response from the Authority would be signed off by the Director and Chairman of the Committee and shared with all Members.
- A response was required from Community Services to show that they were willing to work together with Children's Services to implement the project objectives.

14.3 The Committee **RESOLVED** to

- Agree and support the project objectives including project reporting requirements and timescales.
- Agree to re-endorse and operationalise, alongside Adult Social Care, the Norfolk Joint Memorandum of Understanding Working Together to Support Young Carers and their families.
- Agree to invest in the implementation of legal reform project by building capacity into the proposed Children's Services Structure within Early Help to ensure commissioned services are available to meet the needs of young carers and their families and that the resources are aligned with those of other agencies supporting young carers and their families.
- Recognise that Children's Services and Adult Social Services needed to demonstrate that they would work together to make a difference to young carers.

15 Integrated Performance and Finance Monitoring report 2014-15.

15.1 The Committee received a report by the Interim Director of Children's Services providing an update on operational performance within Children's Services including Support for School Improvement, Social Care and Safeguarding and finance monitoring information for the 2014/15 financial year. The report also set out the financial monitoring data for the period ending 30 November 2014 and the variations between the approved budget for 2014/15 and the actual spending during the year. The paper comments on the Children's Services Revenue Budget, Capital Budget, School Balances and Children's Services Reserves and Provisions.

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

- Comparative data regarding the take up of free school meals across Norfolk would be made available to Members after the meeting.

- Children's Services was taking active steps to reduce its reliance on agency workers.
- Looked after Children (LAC) numbers were continuing to fall slowly. While the number of LAC cases continued to be an amber risk it was predicted that a downward trend had been established. The quality of social work was also gradually improving across most teams with some inconsistencies. The Committee would be kept informed of developments
- The Interim Director of Children's Services would be working closely with the Director of Resources in the collection and use of performance data. This would ensure that quality was tackled effectively.

15.3 The Committee **noted** the information contained in the report, in particular:

- The early data received from schools and the trends that were being established.
- Social Care Performance data in a number of do mains was improving but it was recognised that there was a fine equilibrium and that improvement in some areas created difficulty in others.
- The continued focus required on the Looked after Children reduction to deliver the budgeted savings.
- The increased cost of Special Educational Needs transport.
- The cost associated with the use of temporary social workers.
- The additional costs of educating children with a high level of additional need.
- The actions being taken in response to the financial pressures to deliver a balanced budget.

The meeting closed at 18:50 pm.

Chairman



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