

Minutes of the meeting of the CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SELECT COMMITTEE held on THURSDAY 27 JANUARY 2011 at 7.35 pm

Present: Councillor Dransfield (Chair)
Councillors Brackenbury, Bradburn, Hawthorn, Mallyon, Miles, O'Neill, Small and Zealley

Co-opted Member: Mr S Pritchard (Parent Governor Representative)

Officers: G Tolley (Corporate Director [Children and Young People's Services]) M Bracey (Assistant Director [Partnerships, Commissioning and Performance]), W. Spurgeon (Assistant Director [Targeted Services]), S Conway (Interim Assistant Director [Universal Services]), J McGrath (Head of Services, Early Years) and M Evans-Riches (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)

Also Present: Councillors Crooks, Drewett and A Geary

CYP 26` DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST

Councillor Bradburn declared a personal interest in item 7 Home to School transport consultation, as his daughter had been a pupil at a faith school. Councillor Miles declared a personal interest in Item 8 and 9 as he was a Governor at the Rowans nursery and Gatehouse school.

CYP27 MINUTES

RESOLVED -

That the Minutes of the meeting Committee held on 16 November 2010 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

CYP28 HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT CONSULTATION

The Committee was informed of the present arrangements for denominational school transportation. The scheme in place was inherited from Bucks County Council and provided a service in excess of the statutory minimum. There were currently 19 primary and 645 secondary aged children provided with free denominational transport at a cost of approximately £500,000 per year. The proposals for ceasing free school transportation on denominational grounds had been consulted on. The proposals also specified that there would be a phased withdrawal from September 2012, acknowledging that parents, carers and children currently at the school and those who will start in 2011 have expressed a preference for a secondary school place based on the understanding and reasonable expectation that free transport would be provided.

Eleven responses from the public were received during the consultation period along with three letters from organisations (St

Paul's Catholic School, Catholic Diocese of Northampton and The Radcliffe School).

The Committee believed that the current scheme of providing free transportation to some pupils on denominational grounds could be discriminatory and could not support the continuation of the service. Councillor A Geary had received letters of concern from residents in his ward regarding the provision of alternative methods of transportation. The Committee were assured that Officers would support the development of a transport strategy which would seek to provide self financing bus services.

The Committee was informed that by phasing in the cessation of the service the total savings of up to £500,000 would be realised by 2015. Currently, 20% of bus contracts are renewed annually and through this process careful capacity management would ensure that the contracts provided the best value for money as any change is implemented.

The Post 16 transport proposals affected a smaller number of students (104 young people currently benefit from the scheme). The Council already has a subsidised bus scheme for young people up to the age of 18 which was often more cost effective for users. It was not a statutory requirement to provide this supplementary post 16 travel assistance.

The Committee was concerned that budget constraints could mean that the main subsidised transport scheme for young people was also stopped and then students would not have a cost effective means of getting to school or college. The Committee were informed by Officers present that they were not aware of any proposed changes to main subsidised transport scheme for young people in the in the current budget reductions.

The Committee expressed concern regarding the impact of the Government's proposal that all students should stay in education until they reach 18 years of age on transport. The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services stated that it was believed that the Government's proposal was to encourage young people to stay in education and not to force them to do so.

RESOLVED -

1. That Cabinet be informed that the Committee support the phased withdrawal of the free transport to faith school and Officers be requested to work with the schools to provide a sustainable alternative transport solution.
2. That the Cabinet be informed that the Committee supported the closure of the subsidised travel scheme to new members from September 2011, provided that there was a scheme of low cost transport for students, and that a new discretionary transport scheme to support eligible young people with a disability to access further education was established from September 2011.

3. That the implementation of the Government's proposal for students to remain in education until they were 18 years old be kept under review.

CYP29

NATIONAL POLICY UPDATE

The Committee was informed that the Education Bill had been published that day. The Bill had four main themes:

- a. Fair Use of Resources – which concentrated on narrowing the gap between good and poor school performance particularly in areas of deprivation? It also specified the continuation of Early Years education.
- b. Freedoms – which was about trusting professionals to innovate and improve outcomes and removed unnecessary burdens. It also included a proposal to enable academies to be autonomous bodies.
- c. Restore Good Behaviour – which empowered schools to deal with poor behaviour.
- d. Accountability – which emphasised improving standards and made Ministers accountable for national initiatives.

The Government recognised the strategic role local authorities had in improvement of standards.

The Committee heard that the Department for Education appear likely to put some form of regional improvement service or structure in place but this was yet to be confirmed.

The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services indicated that the Bill was not likely to be enacted until the Autumn 2011 with the new requirements were unlikely to come into force until 2012. However, planning for the new requirements, whilst continuing to provide the current statutory duties with reducing resources would be a challenge. There were still outstanding issues that required clarification:

- a. How changes to national education policy links to greater local democratic accountability?
- b. How the contribution of academy schools would be scrutinised by the local authority?

The Committee expressed concern regarding the intervention by local authority in failing schools, particularly academies. It was felt that intervention should happen at an early stage rather than wait until the school results were poor. The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services gave the example of the MK Academy where the Council had no locus for intervention, whereas the Council had provided support and challenge to Lord Grey when it was placed into a category by Ofsted. It was also emphasised that academies would retain all the funding, so there would be no

additional resources for the local authority to assist with improvement or intervention.

RESOLVED -

1. That the link to the new Education Bill be circulated to all members of the Committee.
2. That a workshop be held for members of the Select Committee to consider the Education Bill in more detail.
3. That a summary of the Education Bill progress is provided at the next meeting of the Select Committee.
4. That the Department for Education be informed that the Select Committee expressed concern that the Bill did not provide the mechanism and funding for local authorities to assist with the improvement of standards for all schools.

CYP30

BUDGET 2011/12

The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services provided a summary of a detailed presentation to the Budget Review Group on 17 January 2011. The Government's settlement announcement had meant that further savings had to be found to meet the deficit.

The Committee heard that a further funding reduction has also impacted on the council following the 'damping' of the Early Intervention Grant.

The Corporate Director outlined a number of national reviews which would report in the near future and could mean further changes to the expectations on the local authority.

The Committee debated the differences between statutory services and the discretionary services which members thought were essential e.g. funding for teenage pregnancy prevention. Councillor Drewett stated that she understood that the reduction in the funding for teenage pregnancy prevention would be managed by the careful redeployment of roles and responsibilities to other members of the team.

RESOLVED -

That the report be noted.

CYP31

MILTON KEYNES COUNCIL DAY NURSERY PROVISION

The Committee was informed that in 2006 most authorities integrated nurseries into Children Centres however, Milton Keynes chose not to. The Council had a duty to manage the provision of nursery provision, but was not required to provide it. The Council introduced the nursery service to stimulate provision of places for mother's who wanted to return to work. The Select Committee were asked to comment on the Cabinet report in which it was

recommended that three nurseries are integrated into Children's Centres which served areas of deprivation and the Russell Street and Rowans nurseries be amalgamated. There were then options regarding the remaining four Council run nurseries.

The Council run nurseries were more costly to run than private sector nurseries because the staff were paid at a higher rate, there were significantly higher on-costs and the staff contractually worked fewer hours. Historically, nursery staff employed by the Council were more qualified and had a higher standard of training. In recent years, the private sector had improved its standards because of Early Years Foundation standards. In addition, the fees charged at Council run nurseries were the highest in Milton Keynes for the under 2's and mid range for the over 2 year olds. Each child over 3 is entitled to 15 hours free care provision which was flexible and those parents on low incomes could access working families' tax credits to help towards the cost of childcare. The high cost of staff also meant that a take over by a private sector organisation was not favourable as the employees' terms and conditions had to be retained because of TUPE legislation.

Officers were asked if the attainment level of the children who had attended Council run nurseries had been tracked and compared with private providers. The Committee were informed that this had not been undertaken but could be provided. Comparisons had been made regarding Ofsted rating and reports and these indicated that there was no difference in standards.

The Committee was informed that options for management buy out, being run as a charitable organisation and private sector purchase had all been examined but were not feasible.

RESOLVED –

That the Cabinet be informed of the issues raised by the Select Committee and that the Committee had no preference over the options provided.

CYP32

FUTURE OF GATEHOUSE SCHOOL

The Committee was informed that Gatehouse was a designated school for secondary aged boys with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. In recent years, it had experienced problems both in its leadership, performance standards and the standard of outcomes for students. For example it had a 71% attendance in 2010 which was significantly below that of other schools in the same category. In October 2010, using its own self evaluation framework, the school, using its own self evaluation framework, judged a number of areas of provision as problematic..

The initial consultation in October and November 2010 was about the type of school that we require in this area of SEN. The current consultation was on a proposal to close Gatehouse school no later

than 31 August 2011 and open a new facility no later than 1 September 2012. During the intervening period other providers would be responsible for educating the 22 young people who would be on the roll of Gatehouse in September 2011. The interim Head had now indicated that he will stay to cover the transitional arrangements and the Behaviour Partnership would become formal partners to the school if the close and subsequent opening could be on consecutive days. It was now proposed to close Gatehouse on 31 December and open a new facility on 1 January 2012.

Officers stated that in each year group, there were approximately 8 young men who required specialist BESD provision, but there were currently 17 students who were receiving support elsewhere because of the parents' lack of confidence in the school.

The Committee was informed that there were currently 8 girls excluded from school and receiving educational support from other agencies which mirror the facilities of Gatehouse. The proposal was to provide a BESD provision for up to 40 boys and girls. The proposal did not include any overnight accommodation. This was provided at Gatehouse as an additional service but had been closed for five months. The statutory requirement through the pupil's statement was to provide daytime education and not overnight accommodation.

The Committee expressed concern regarding the proposal to refurbish the Gatehouse building rather than fund a new building on a different site. It was thought that this was disruptive to students and it would not improve parents, students and the community view of the facility. The Committee were informed that there was a ring fenced £1.75m budget and this would only fund a refurbishment. However, it was not specific to the Gatehouse building and it could be used to refurbish another suitable building, if one could be found.

The Committee questioned the option of making Gatehouse an academy. Officers informed the Committee that through the turnaround academy programme the DfE may offer capital. The Council had been led to believe that the DfE would want the first special school academy to be successful and act as a flagship. The Committee were also informed that the Statutory Notice of Closure had to specify the size of the school, the leadership arrangements and when it would be open but not the exact location of the school.

RESOLVED –

That the Cabinet be informed that the Select Committee had serious reservations on the proposal to provide a new facility on the same site as the Gatehouse School.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 11.13PM