

AT A MEETING of the CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE of the COUNTY COUNCIL held at Ashburton Hall, Winchester on Wednesday, 18 January 2012.

PRESENT

Vice-Chairman acting as Chairman:
p Councillor John West

Councillors:

p Charlotte Bailey	a Adrian Evans
p Ray Bolton	p Keith Evans
p Graham Burgess	a Andrew Gibson
p Rita Burgess	p David Keast
p Roz Chadd	p Roger Kimber
p Brian Collin	p Pam Mutton
p Brian Dash	p Jackie Porter
p Sam Darragh	p Jenny Radley
p David Drew	p Bruce Tennent

Co-opted Members:

p Mohammed Ansar – Parent Governor (primary)
p Rosemary Olivier – RC schools representative
a Tony Blackshaw – CoE schools representative
p Phil Watson – Parent Governor (secondary)

Also in attendance, Councillor Peter Edgar, Assistant Executive Member for Education.

88. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllrs Adrian Evans and Andrew Gibson. Co-opted member Tony Blackshaw was unable to attend and sent his apologies. In addition Cllr Marilyn Tucker, Assistant Executive Member for Children and Families sent apologies for being unable to attend.

89. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were mindful that, where they believed they had a personal or personal prejudicial interest in any matter to be considered at the meeting, they should normally at the time of the debate declare their interest, and having regard to the circumstances described in paragraphs 9, 10, 11 and 12 of the County Council's Code of Conduct, consider whether to leave the meeting whilst the matter was discussed save for exercising any right to speak in accordance with Paragraph 12

of the Code.

90. MINUTES

Members agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2011 and were signed by the Vice Chairman.

91. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Absences

The Chairman acknowledged apologies for absence that had been received.

Promotion of Chairman

The Chairman then recorded the good wishes and thanks of the Committee to Cllr Stephen Reid for his excellent leadership. Cllr Reid had been promoted since the last meeting to the post of Executive Member for Strategic Development. In turn Cllr Reid had phoned the Chairman just before the meeting started to give his thanks for the Committee's support during his Chairmanship. Cllr Reid's promotion had led to an interim vacancy for Chairman of the Committee.

Last meeting for scrutiny officer

The Chairman also informed Members that this was the last meeting of the Committee that Martin Combs the scrutiny officer would be attending due to his departure from the Council at the end of March. Members thanked the officer for his support of the Committee over the last two years.

Hampshire Children and Young People's Plan

The Chairman alerted Members to opportunities to contribute to the Hampshire Children and Young People's Plan 2012-15 Consultation. Opportunities to respond could be found at <http://eforms-ext.hants.gov.uk/AF3/an/default.aspx/RenderForm/?F.Name=MgcU-IF780Y>

92. CHILDREN'S SERVICES REVENUE BUDGET 2012-13

Senior members of the Children's Services management team gave a presentation on the 'Medium Term Financial Strategy' (see <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/councilmeetings/meetingssummary.htm?dateID=723>). The presentation summarised the key financial messages, challenges, and pressures faced by the department. Presenters painted a picture of a significant and continuing theme of finance being taken out of the system and the constant need to rethink, restructure and focus resources where they could make the maximum positive difference, or where services and jobs were affected, do the least harm. Despite the sometimes stark options, uncertainties of government funding or unpredictable demand for education/schools services in an open market economy – examples of positive outcomes and

sustainable ways of working were still to be found.

The presentation which partly summarised and complemented the agenda paper for item 5, covered a range of topics including:

- Medium Term Financial Strategy key assumptions
- Savings achieved in 2011/12
- Savings targets for 2012/13
- Proposed capital programmes as envisaged in Feb 2011
- Emerging capital themes for Children's Services in 2012/13
- Non-school budget assumptions and areas to watch in 2012/13

Further detail can be found in the agenda paper and presentation on the website at .

<http://www3.hants.gov.uk/councilmeetings/meetingsummary.htm?dateID=723>

Attention was drawn by the presenters to:

The relatively low allocation of Formula Grant per Head and the low Council Taxes available to the County Council, however these constraints were well known by Members. The presentation then provided a high level breakdown of savings made in 2011/12 and savings targets for 2012/13. The main opposition party expressed their dissatisfaction that more detailed information had not been provided in advance of the meeting to enable them to examine in greater detail concerns that they had in relation to services for younger children. Officers explained that all select committees had received similar budget material of an equivalent granularity, nevertheless they offered to provide additional figures which have since been circulated to Members.

Headline figures for schools and non-schools were presented followed by graphical illustrations about 'children looked after' and activity trends. Not all the graphs were self explanatory, however officers were able to assist with further explanation when required.

Key areas identified as potentially having an impact on the financial position included:

- National changes (Munro review, Family Justice, SEN, Adoption, Youth Custody)
- Improving outcomes for vulnerable children and families
- Increasing complex needs of disabled children
- Social workload pressures, including the risk of rising numbers of children in care and child protection
- Early years – preparation for free provision to two year olds from 2013 NB increase in Early Intervention Grant
- Building relationships with the voluntary sector

- School conversions to academies
- School places

Members robustly sought further information about these issues, which included implications for capital spending, schools and non-schools budgets. Members were told for example, that a 'totally new funding formula' was expected to come from Government, thus, until it was received, it was impossible to plan ahead with certainty. In common with other LAs a significant challenge existed around how successfully local authority education departments would be able to adapt their approaches and services in relation to the emerging open market available to academies to support their business and educational aspirations. The Assistant Executive Member for Education emphasised to the Committee that despite articles in the press, the department was actively engaged in maintaining and further developing its potential to be a leading provider of such services. This positive outlook was based on a very strong relationship which had been built between the department and schools in Hampshire, as well as the considerable expertise that had been available to support schools in the County.

In relation to building relationships with the voluntary sector, already increased initiatives for training and strengthening voluntary workers and their organisations were under way – this benefited the whole system.

'Children on the edge of care', which was identified as an emerging issue, had challenged children's social care across local authorities to consider possible approaches that would 'get it right the first time' for children as the most beneficial as well as cost effective solutions. Therefore whilst financial pressures could put stress on society, particularly where it was most vulnerable, it could also lead to developing improved ways of meeting some of those challenges.

Questions about school numbers showed that Members were watching their constituency areas closely as increasing pressures were being felt by primary schools in some places due to growing numbers of primary age children. Officers commented that the department had recognised this shift in demographics and that it would, in due course feed through into secondary schools. These changes had been included as potential financial risks to be taken into account in planning, but the now shorter term thinking and funding arrangements in Government arising from economic conditions introduced additional challenges to local authorities.

RESOLVED

The Chairman thanked officers for the budget preparation, noting that the primary purpose was to brief Members on the budget, although quite properly, questions particularly from opposition Members

identified concerns about potential risks around some budget decisions.

Where Members had shown concern about the level of information provided, the Chairman thanked officers for their commitment to providing some further details referred to in Members' questions. [note that the further information was circulated to Members by the department within days of the meeting]

95. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chief Executive presented the Work Programme (item 8 in the Minute Book).

The Assistant Executive Member for Education thanked the Committee for the scheduled debate by the Committee on the policy and strategy options for the department in relation to the changes in the education context.

Several suggestions were made for items to go on the work programme, these included:

- Parenting skills
- Parenting skills and family support services
- School places, supported by comparative data from other LAs and demographic trends
- School crossing patrols and vulnerability of schools where they are not available
- Home/schools transport

It was noted that, in common with past practice, these suggestions would be evaluated by the Chairman and Vice Chairman, and that any additions to the programme would require re-prioritisation of the programme when it was refreshed. This process was even more important as resources became more scarce and the role of select committees was potentially more critical to constructive business improvement and adding real value to the Authority.

RESOLVED

- The Work Programme was approved.
- The suggestions made by members of the committee would be evaluated and the Work Programme would be refreshed by the new Chairman once appointed.

Chairman, 31 May 2012