

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 7 DECEMBER 2010

Councillors Present: Brian Bedwell (Chairman), Alan Macro (Substitute) (In place of Jeff Brooks), David Rendel, Quentin Webb, Emma Webster

Also Present: Mark Vernon (Youth Service Development Manager), Julia Waldman (Acting Head of Youth Services and Commissioning), Stephen Chard (Policy Officer), David Lowe (Partnerships & Scrutiny Manager)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Jeff Brooks, Councillor Geoff Findlay and Councillor Irene Neill

PART I

95. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 2 November 2010 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

96. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

97. Actions from previous Minutes

The Commission received an update on actions following the previous meeting (Agenda Item 4).

Severe Winter Weather

A request had been made by the Education Service to amend a resolution agreed last time, when it was agreed that schools would be asked to provide the Education Service with copies of their severe weather plans, which would then be shared with the Commission. The Education Service requested that they be given approval to ensure that plans were in place and the findings fed back to the Commission, rather than request/provide actual copies.

Member felt this was a disappointing response and the comprehensive work of the Highways Service was referred to as an example of good practice. Members also felt it should be possible for school plans to be e-mailed to the Education Service and the Commission. This would help to co-ordinate plans and the actions within them.

It was therefore agreed that the Education Service would be contacted to request that they do obtain electronic copies of severe winter weather plans from schools and for these to be forwarded to the Commission. This would help to identify the actual number who had plans in place for this winter.

Another resolution for the Education Service was to investigate whether school staff, who lived some distance from their place of work, could be accommodated locally in the event of severe weather. It was advised that the guidance had been updated to incorporate the potential for school governors to provide accommodation where possible.

David Lowe went on to advise that the obstacle to a teacher working in another West Berkshire school nearer to their own home during severe weather was around safeguarding of children. Julia Waldman, in attendance for another item, advised that

there was a need for a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check to be in place for every school a teacher worked in. However, there was awareness of such an arrangement in Hampshire schools and confirmation of this point was awaited.

RESOLVED that the Education Service would be contacted to request that they do obtain electronic copies of severe winter weather plans from schools and that these should be forwarded to the Commission for information.

98. Items Called-in

No items were called-in.

99. Councillor Call for Action

No new Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) items were raised for discussion.

It was noted that the planning application for the Underwood Road Shopping Centre in Calcot was due to be discussed at the Eastern Area Planning Committee on 15 December 2010. This site was discussed as a CCfA by the Commission.

100. Petitions

No petitions were brought to the Commission for consideration.

101. Activities for teenagers

The Commission considered a report (Agenda Item 8) concerning youth activities available in West Berkshire. This was in follow up to the Commission's discussions on this subject in May 2010.

Julia Waldman opened the item by making the following points:

- A new initiative was being introduced by the Government to empower local communities and groups. This included children and young people. Formal policy to support this intention was awaited.
- Confirmation of future funding had not been received, but an Early Intervention Grant, worth around £2bn by 2014/15, had been announced which was intended for the disadvantaged and most marginalised young people. This amount was not ring fenced and would replace various, although not yet identified, local authority funding streams. It was unclear what the total value of these would be and whether its total value would equal the combined sum of those streams or represent a funding cut.
- It was expected that a proportion of this funding, estimated at around £1bn, would be available to the voluntary sector to bid for from April 2011.
- Service reviews were being conducted to look at the delivery of integrated services with, for example, Connexions and the substance misuse service. This was in response to the Youth Service being targeted for funding cuts and therefore a need to downsize and focus resources. This made starting new work/projects difficult.
- It was hoped that there would be scope to increase partnership working and the opportunities for this would become clearer once details of the Early Intervention Fund and other financial allocations were confirmed.
- Future funding for schools would not be clear until 2011. It was however expected that the school sports grant would be cut. It was not seen as likely that schools

would be able to contribute funding to Council initiatives as they had their own priorities to meet.

Clarity was then sought on information that was circulated at the time of the Executive's discussions on cuts, that suggested it was the intention to keep youth and community centres open and reduce detached (outreach) work as fewer young people were involved. On receiving clarification, Members were pleased to note that this was not to be the way forward but it was queried whether there had been a changed focus. Mark Vernon explained that there had been and were no immediate plans to reduce detached work and it was unclear from where a different impression had been given. It was noted that Hampshire County Council had announced its intention to focus on mainstream youth work rather than detached work at a similar time.

Mark Vernon then outlined the actions that had been undertaken and planned within the Youth Service since the Commission's discussions in May 2010:

- Immediate action was required following the in-year budget reduction and in order to meet the managed vacancy factor. The majority of savings had to be found from the staffing budget, as this amounted to 85% of the overall budget, and from the centres at which they were based. The Theale Youth and Community Centre had been closed, but the team with responsibility for this area was still in place so a level of activity continued.
- Current income targets were difficult to sustain. This was due to the nature of Youth work changing, which meant that less projects were being run that required payment. In addition, parents had less disposable income. However, £275k had been received from income in 2009/10.
- The move back to the new Dolphin Centre in Pangbourne was completed on schedule, but there had been some disruption to services. It was hoped that numbers would begin to return to normal levels. A large number of voluntary staff complemented the five full time members of staff and part time staff. There were targets in place for the number of contacts and participants, this helped to measure the effectiveness of the activities provided, but these might need to be reviewed if staffing levels were to reduce. The need for quality activities/services was therefore important, not just quantity. The vast majority of attendees at the Dolphin Centre were West Berkshire residents, but there was of course some attendance from those living in Reading and other local authority areas.
- 75% of all resources were allocated to work with young people aged 13-19 years, the remaining 25% was currently allocated to targeted work with vulnerable groups. Resources were being shifted to a greater focus on work with more vulnerable young people.
- The Youth Service curriculum was based on the themes set out within Every Child Matters and the impact that work was having could be analysed against these themes.
- Positive Activities Programmes included work with young people who were NEET (not in education, employment or training). Data was captured within the Education Service from a variety of sources to help evidence the level of success that work with NEET young people was having.
- Data capture and monitoring would be enhanced through the development of a Management Information System (MIS). The system was in its first year of use and captured a range of information on participants and the activities they were

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undertaking including evaluation. This would be an important tool in future planning. The system was also able to record some data from young people contacted via detached work, including whether they were referred to another agency. Members were pleased to note that the increased measurement of activity would help to demonstrate achievements.

- Four Area Youth Consultative Committees were in the process of being established, their first meetings had been held in October 2010. These included representation from young people and were designed to give young people a voice in shaping the future focus of youth services. Members were also involved in these Committees.
- Enhancing the profile of the Youth Service was important, but there was a need to manage expectations on what could be delivered and the Press Office was worked with in this regard. Regular bulletins were issued to schools, parish councils and Members. Wider publication was conducted via the Youth Service website (the Download) and plans for a Facebook-type communication system were being discussed with ICT.
- The Youth Service did have sight of parish plans when they had reference to activities for young people. Parish plan meetings were also attended.

Members queried the level of impact that the closure of the Theale Youth and Community Centre and other closures had on those young people who attended them. Julia Waldman advised that detailed work had yet to be conducted on this as the main focus currently for staff was on increasing services for more vulnerable young people, including ways to help increase their life chances and reduce incidents of anti social behaviour. Funding pressures meant that generic activities had to be reduced, but an impact assessment/gap analysis would be conducted in due course.

Mark Vernon advised that staff were being consulted on the service structure and services to be provided for 2011/12. Proposals were based on the funding available in the next financial year and included a reduction from three to two area teams, one based in Thatcham covering Thatcham and the east and one in based in Newbury covering Newbury and the west. This reduction did not necessarily mean a reduction in Youth Workers but management costs would be reduced. Although teams were based in Newbury and Thatcham, staff were continuing to work across the District.

The item was originally placed on the work programme as a result of reoccurring concerns raised within the annual resident's survey regarding a lack of activities for teenagers. Members queried why this was the case and Mark Vernon responded by advising that the survey was completed by adults who perhaps had a false perception. A similar exercise was conducted with young people a few years ago and approximately 65% were content with the activities that were on offer. The results of the last Tell Us survey (nationally run young people survey) showed that 72% of young people in West Berkshire were satisfied with the activities available, this was above the national average of 66%. Analysis of the responses received from the paper chain exercise organised by the Berkshire Association of Clubs for Young People was also beginning. This recorded the wishes of young people across the District.

RESOLVED that the update information would be noted and the item returned to in six months time to assess the progress made.

102. Greener Select Committee

The Commission considered a report (Agenda Item 9) on the work of the Greener Select Committee.

The recommendations of the local food review were due to be considered by the Executive on 17 February 2011.

The time that could be taken for scrutiny reports to reach the Executive were raised as a concern and David Lowe advised that responses to scrutiny recommendations were required within 56 days.

The next meeting of the Select Committee, scheduled for 14 December 2010, would consider the two petitions submitted to Council, the Rights of Way Improvement Plan and issues raised previously by the Commission in relation to fly tipping.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and thanks be passed to David Cook for his work on the local food review.

103. Healthier Select Committee

The Commission considered a report (Agenda Item 10) on the work of the Healthier Select Committee.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

104. Resource Management Select Committee

The Commission considered a report (Agenda Item 11) on the work of the Resource Management Select Committee.

An update was provided on the work being undertaken to improve the services provided by Property to schools.

The level of underspend within the Chief Executive Directorate budget in recent financial years was discussed as was the potential for over budgeting in this Directorate.

The timeliness of quarterly budget reporting was again returned to. Although, as a rule, quarterly reports were not received by the Select Committee until after they had been approved by the Executive, November's meeting of the Executive had been cancelled and there had been agreement for the Select Committee to receive the Quarter 2 report earlier on this occasion. The Select Committee viewed this as being the ideal approach, which would allow for comments/recommendations to be made prior to the Executive's approval.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

105. Safer Select Committee

The Commission considered a report (Agenda Item 12) on the work of the Safer Select Committee.

The Select Committee met on 6 December 2010 and the following topics were discussed:

- The gating orders protocol, established in 2008, was reviewed. This was found to adequately reflect policy changes.
- The item on Community Empowerment was deferred to await developments from the Big Society initiative.

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- The work on the Integrated Offender Management Scheme was also deferred as work was ongoing at a partnership level.
- The Select Committee were satisfied that planning policies were sufficient as part of 'Designing out Crime'.

The recommendations following the automatic fire suppression system (sprinklers) review would be considered by the Executive on 13 January 2011.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

106. Stronger Communities Select Committee

The Commission considered a report (Agenda Item 13) on the work of the Stronger Communities Select Committee.

The Common Housing Register (CHR) Task Group was scheduled to meet on 14 December 2010 to finalise the report and recommendations. The report would then be presented to the Select Committee for approval and, in turn, the Commission.

Councillor David Rendel, who had attended meetings of the task group, advised that accessing the data of those on the CHR was not restricted by data protection.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

107. West Berkshire Forward Plan - December 2010 - March 2011

The Commission considered the West Berkshire Forward Plan (Agenda Item 14) for the period covering December 2010 to March 2011.

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan would be noted.

108. Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission and Select Committee Work Programme

The Commission considered its work programme and that of the Select Committees for the remainder of 2010/11 (Agenda Item 15).

It was asked that potential new items for the Commission's work programme were forwarded to scrutiny officers so that they could be considered and discussed with the Chairman.

Councillor Quentin Webb queried the officer resource that would be provided to the Safer Select Committee in future. David Lowe agreed to discuss this with Councillor Brian Bedwell.

RESOLVED that the work programme would be noted and the above actions progressed.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 8.05pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature