

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CHILDREN AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY
PANEL HELD ON WEDNESDAY 14 JANUARY 2009 AT THE BOURGES/VIERSEN ROOM -
TOWN HALL**

Present: Councillors I Walsh (Chairman), S Day (Vice-Chairman), S Allen, F Benton,
N Khan, B Saltmarsh and J Wilkinson

Co-opted Members: Maggie Kirkbride Parent Governor Representative
Frank Smith Peterborough Diocesan Board of Education

Also Present: Councillor Peach Leader of the Council
Councillor Fower Leader of the Liberal Democrats Group
Councillor Sandford Liberal Democrats Group Representative
Bryony Pound Youth Council Representative

Officers Present: Mel Collins Assistant Director, Learning and Skills
Elaine Fulton Assistant Director, Commissioning and Performance
Jonathan Lewis Assistant Director, Resources
Maureen Phillips Assistant Director, Families and Communities
John Blair Head of Strategic Finance
Andrew Edwards Head of Strategic Property
Karen Moody Adult Learning & Skills Strategy Manager
Keith Nelson Consultant
Paul Copping Head of Pupil Referral Service
Prity Patel Principal Lawyer
Paulina Ford Performance Scrutiny and Research Officer
Lindsay Tomlinson Governance Support Officer

1. Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies.

2. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Walsh declared a non-prejudicial interest in agenda item 5, National Healthy Schools Programme, as she had been asked to chair the Healthy Schools Steering Committee.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2008

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2008 were approved subject to a minor amendment to a job title.

4. Budget 2009/10

The focus of the budget setting process in 2009/10 was on delivering a 3* Children's Service by March 2010. Delivery of improved services would have to take place in the context of the need to deliver some savings to remain within the resources available. The budget for Children's Services had been stabilised following two years of significant overspends. The 2009/10 budget included some significant savings targets whilst continuing the drive for service improvement.

In order to deliver both savings and service improvement, reviews had been undertaken to look at options to re-engineer services and retarget provision to provide more preventative and universal services away from expensive specialist services.

A series of capacity bids had been made to the budget setting process. These were focused mainly on maintaining current levels of service provision, meeting increased levels of demand and to deliver key strategic projects. The following bids were included –

- PFI Utility costs (£150k in 09/10)
- Phase 2 Secondary School Review (£100k in 09/10)
- Revenue Impact of bringing forward Hampton Schools build (£242k).

Funding was required for 2 projects –

1. Forward funding of the S106 agreement through borrowing for the expansion of Hampton College and the development of a sixth form.
2. The creation of an additional primary school form of entry within Hampton to meet demand. Government funding was being sought but around £2m was required in addition to any resources from the DCSF.

In terms of capital investment, significant resources continued to be targeted at schools. The major capital investment was in the Secondary School Review. Around £91m would be spent on schools over the next 3 year period financed from grant, supported borrowing and through direct capital funding from the council. The council would contribute £34m towards the Secondary School Review project.

The delivery of the Children's Service budget was underpinned through savings within Home to School Transport. A number of changes were proposed which sought to either bring service provision in line with either local or national policy. In addition, the charges for areas of transport were being reviewed and benchmarked against other authorities.

Observations and questions were raised and discussed including:

- What will the implications be of the review of the school crossing wardens service and predicted savings of £65K?
- The change is proposed by the Operations department – there is to be a review of how the service is paid for and it will look at options around school contributions or a voluntary service.
- Can we have an explanation of “Tier 4 Social Services” and expensive external provision?
- Tier 4 comprises a small number of children with complex and intensive needs – a precise definition can be sent to members. External provision includes out of area placements in residential schools and agency residential placements.
- Schools are receiving reduced funding – how can they afford to fund governance support and excellence in clusters?
- We need to look at other ways to finance these services. We have been very generous in terms of the costs that we don't pass on to schools. Balances are a significant resource in some schools. We will look at the best ways to negate the impact of asking for extra funding.
- Have you looked at the possibility of selling assets to meet the budget?
- Yes - the capital programme is underpinned by the sale of assets.
- Members are concerned at the proposed reduction in the level of scrutiny support – it is an important resource to us which strengthens the democratic process and is necessary for cross party working.
- What will be the result of the review of special schools – what are we going to see happening?

- We want to invest in local provision, to create inclusive provision to meet needs and to save or create money by selling places to other Local Authorities.
- How will the proposed capital disposals affect schools?
- We are doing an early analysis of potential spare land around schools' footprints. The work is in its very early stages. We will talk to schools prior to any sale.
- How will the sale of playing fields affect the agenda around childhood obesity? Is this a prudent management of resources given the current state of the property market?
- The minimum level of playing field provision is sufficient to promote health and fitness. If we sell playing field land then we need to make provision elsewhere. A lot of work is needed prior to any sale, we need Section 77 consent and planning consent, plus we need to consult with Sports England etc. We need to do a balancing act between land values, i.e. the value we would accept for an asset against the cost of borrowing that amount.
- All those locations included within the list of possible capital disposals should be consulted with to have the issues explained to them in full.

ACTION AGREED

The Panel noted the budget proposals and agreed to ask the Executive to look again at their proposals to reduce scrutiny support.

5. Adult Learning & Skills Strategy for Peterborough

In July 2008 the Adult Learning & Skills Strategy Group (ALSSG) had approved an Adult Learning & Skills Action Plan which set out a holistic view of activities to improve adult learning and skills in Peterborough. The action plan highlighted key areas of focus, together with a series of proposed actions. These had then been brought into sharper focus through the Local Area Agreement (LAA) National Indicator (NI) planning template, and a series of activities identified to support the deliverables within each of the Nis.

Simultaneously, the Greater Peterborough Partnership (GPP) had recognised that the low level of adult skills within Peterborough would provide a substantial block to achieving higher levels of economic growth and prosperity. Raising adult skills levels would help existing businesses to continue to grow and should help attract new businesses to the city.

The Adult Learning & Skills Action plan was focused not just upon the NIs, but also on engaging people with learning and encouraging them into a progressive lifelong learning journey in the following ways:

- Engage and re-engage pre-entry and entry level learning through mainstream and community-based activities
- Encourage migrants to learn English
- Encourage the introduction of conversion qualifications for migrant workers
- Encourage indigenous non-English speaking residents to learn English
- Ensure the 14-19 learning agenda was in tune with the requirements of the local economy
- Encourage the development of the university
- Support the activities of the colleges with young people, adults and businesses
- Encourage employers to upskill their workforce
- Ensure it was easy for individuals and employers to understand and access the learning system
- Broaden the learning and skills agenda to encompass information, advice and guidance

The GPP Board meeting on 1 October 2008 had focused on the adult learning and skills agenda and had encouraged ALSSG to focus on a number of key issues.

Observations and questions were raised and discussed including:

- Do 14-19 year olds receive careers advice on apprenticeships? Do Connexions staff receive appropriate training so that they are able to tell young people what is on offer?
- We have very highly trained people working in schools with young people to advise and guide them on career choices. Connexions staff are actively engaged in placing young people in education and employment and they are also engaged with the pupil referral service.
- The strategy is good but will it be able to deliver? There are many people on the waiting list for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) who cannot travel to the 2 colleges who provide the course. We should ensure that the courses can be delivered in the locality of the people who need it.
- The delivery of ESOL can attract funding – can we explore this option?
- Peterborough is currently one of three areas working on a pilot scheme exploring the need for ESOL. The current funding mechanisms are not well suited to need – this is being fed back along with the need for shorter and more flexible courses. One of the objectives of the ESOL operations group is to undertake a mapping exercise to identify areas of specific need and then to look at how to address this need and get support. There are currently 35 “Train to Gain” providers in Peterborough and we need to find out what they are delivering and to whom. We have asked why there is a large waiting list for ESOL and have been told it is due to a lack of tutors. The qualifications level is high to access LSC funding and we are looking at bringing in training to address this.
- Why are you branding?
- We need to be able to lobby nationally and regionally and a brand identity gives us something identifiable and marketable so as to increase our capacity to lobby effectively.
- A lot of ESOL is taking place in our schools – is this taken into account?
- Yes, we need to include schools when we undertake the mapping exercise and then provide appropriate support.

ACTION AGREED

The Panel noted the report and agreed

1. to invite representatives of Peterborough Regional College and Peterborough College of Adult Education to a future meeting to discuss the issues raised; and
2. that Councillor Walsh and Khan will meet with the Adult Learning and Skills team to discuss how they can contribute to the development of the new Adult Learning and Skills Strategy.

6. Schools Financial Health

The overall levels of balances in Peterborough were an area of significant concern with £9.5m being retained at the end of 2007/08. The Scheme of Financing for schools contained an ineffective mechanism for dealing with surplus balances hence the reason why the level of balances has been rising year on year. Schools had been able to remove figures from the calculation where they are going to spend on specific purposes. The Schools Forum had been considering options around how to deal with surplus balances.

The government recommendation on surplus balances was that Primary and Nursery schools should retain 8% of the delegated budget and secondary schools should retain 5%. Some authorities have chosen to go below these recommended levels.

Following several discussions around different options for balances, the Schools Forum had decided to have a new approach to surplus balances. Under the new method, the percentage allowable for retention would be increased and set at a level in line with national average levels of balances. The current category for ‘balances assigned for specific

purposes' would be removed and Standards Funds would be included as part of the balance for schools. Outstanding commitments and community focused extended schools balances continue to be excluded from the process. If there were particular cases of schools requiring higher levels of balances to be retained this would be on an exceptional basis only e.g. growth in numbers.

The final percentages in excess of the DCSF recommended percentages were currently being reviewed. The new mechanism will be applied to the 2008/09 year end balances.

No explicit protocol existed around dealing with deficit budgets and therefore a draft deficit budget protocol had been proposed and agreed by the Schools Forum. The key decisions were –

- Timescales – maximum deficit repayment period to be 5 years.
- Value of allowable deficit – these would be considered on an adhoc basis.
- Capital – any recovery plan or deficit request must cover capital and revenue funding.
- Cash deficits (year end deficits or overdrafts) – would be monitored and additional disclosure would be required from schools to demonstrate how they would recover it
- Forum role in deficit budgets – given the membership of the Forum and the potential peer issue, Forum would only consider deficit protocol at a macro sector level.

It was proposed that the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel should be consulted on deficit budgets prior to a decision being made by the Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services. This would necessitate appropriate training for Scrutiny Panel members on funding and financial management in schools to enable effective challenge to take place.

Observations and questions were raised and discussed including:

- Will the proposals lead to schools spending money for the sake of it rather than face the prospect of having it clawed back?
- We took regard of the risk of "panic spending" and will negotiate with schools before making a clawback. We have a £3 million capital revenue budget which has helped create flexibility as we can support schools on particular capital projects.
- Can members receive details of the balances within schools in their ward?
- The balances can be shared with individual members if required.
- How much help do schools get if they face a deficit?
- The local authority is not allowed to pay off the deficit for a school however we can work with the school to perhaps target money that they can access.

ACTION AGREED

The Panel noted the report and endorsed the proposal that the Scrutiny Panel will be consulted on deficit budgets prior to a decision being taken by the Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services.

7. Alternative Provision for Young People

The Panel received a report informing them of the day-to-day work of the Pupil Referral Service (PRS) and the Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), along with the current issues and challenges regarding the service and present future plans for improving pupil outcomes including attainment and attendance. National data recorded that only 1% of 15 year olds in PRUs achieved 5 good GCSE grades; 11.3% achieved 5 passes of any standard and 82.1% gained 1 or more qualification.

Peterborough's PRS was a comprehensive out-of-school service that brought together a range of functions and education provision into a single organisation. The work of the PRS was conducted at a number of different sites, all of which had certain specialisms depending

on the characteristics and age of students. Central to the work of the PRS was the concept of dual-registration whereby students were shared, for a defined period of time, between various PRS centres and their home school in order to address particular needs.

The key issue nationally and locally for alternative provision was how to maximise the extent to which pupils were maintained in schools or returned to the right long-term placement.

The challenge for the PRS was to achieve the right balance in supporting schools and individual students and deploying resources to outreach work, intervening early and preventing problems, rather than maintaining students in out of school, long-term and costly placements. The PRS carried the statutory obligation to provide full-time provision for all permanently excluded students and to do this within a very tight timetable, since the enhanced requirements required full-time provision from the sixth day of exclusion. In addition, various protocols gave priorities and requirements for instant application of full-time provision in respect of groups deemed exceptionally vulnerable e.g. young offenders. Partner schools were very clear that they valued the availability of early intervention above anything else and it was considered a priority to respond to this demand. Members of the Panel were reminded that they were welcome to visit the PRUs.

Observations and questions were raised and discussed including:

- Is there any participation in the vocational education syllabus for Key Stage 4?
- No, not at present although we hope to become involved.
- Mainstream schools often find challenging behaviour difficult to cope with – do you offer them specialist training?
- Part of our process involves working with the pupil's class teacher, which helps with the teacher's development. However we don't have the capacity to offer all schools help to develop their behaviour management skills.

ACTION AGREED

The Panel noted the report.

8. Executive Decisions

The Panel considered the following Executive Decisions made since the last meeting:

- Preventative and Family Support Services contracts
- Extension of Heltwate School to Provide Four Additional Classrooms and Associated Facilities.
- Phase 2 Secondary School Review (South of the City) Project - Proposed Bushfield Academy
- Appointment of LEA Governor to Northborough Primary School
- Appointment of LEA Governor to Fulbridge Primary School

ACTION AGREED

The Panel noted the report.

9. Forward Plan of Key Decisions

The Panel received the latest version of the Council's Forward Plan, containing key decisions that the Leader of the Council anticipated the Cabinet or individual Cabinet Members would make during the course of the following four months. Members were invited to comment on the Plan and, where appropriate, identify any relevant areas for inclusion in the Panel's work programme.

ACTION AGREED

The Panel noted the Forward Plan.

10. Work Programme

Members considered the Panel's Work Programme for 2008/2009.

ACTION AGREED

The Panel approved the current work programme.

11. Date of Next Meeting

Wednesday 4 March 2009 at 7pm in the Bourges and Viersen Rooms.

The meeting began at 7.00 pm and ended at 9.07 pm

CHAIRMAN