

minutes



Meeting SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING SELECT COMMITTEE

Date Tuesday, 20th July 2004 (commencing at 10.30 am)

Membership

Persons absent are marked with 'A'

COUNCILLORS

Chris Baron (Chair)
Joe Lonergan MBE (Vice Chair)

John Bell
Mrs Sue Bennett
Steve Carroll
Rod Kempster
J T A Napier
R Needham

Peter D Prebble
A Chris Preston
R S Robinson
Rita Sharpe
K Walker

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor M Brandon-Bravo

MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting of the Select Committee held on 8th June 2004 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Chris Preston.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

None.

SERVICES FOR DISABLED CHILDREN

Jill Pedley, Assistant Director, Children's' Commissioning in the Social Services Department introduced the progress report on providing Saturday activities to disabled children across the county. She explained that the Saturday Clubs had been more complex to organise than first envisaged and it has therefore taken more time. She explained that the complications were that the children had a variety of different needs and some were complex. There was also a wide age range of children to cater for and parents were nervous about leaving their children. In addition recruiting and training staff and volunteers took time.

Councillor Baron welcomed the involvement of the Culture and Community Services Department in the project. Councillor Lonergan asked why the registration period can take up to 24 weeks and asked whether this could be reduced. Jenny Strickland Director at the Play Centre explained that 24 weeks was the period quoted by OFSTED for registration. She pointed out that registrations sometimes took less time. She commented however that if it was a new project with the building and staff team to be registered it would take time. She added that the Criminal Records Bureau checks took time and that OFSTED would not complete the registration until these were returned. In response to a further question from Councillor Lonergan, Jenny Strickland explained that the intention was that the care staff would all be paid and that the volunteers were additional. She stressed the importance of the children being well supported as some had complex needs and challenging behaviour. It was proposed to have two core teams operating in the county.

Councillor Baron asked for all elected Members to be informed when the Saturday activities were operational in their areas so that they could be invited to attend. He suggested that a further report be presented to the February meeting.

Councillor Needham asked about reviews and assessments of the project and requested information to be provided so that it could be ensured that the outcomes were worthwhile. Angela Milne, Service Manager Children with Disabilities from the Social Services Department indicated that part of the evaluation of the project would cover this.

It was agreed that a progress report be presented to the February meeting and that it should include information about outcomes.

INTERIM REPORT – PROPOSED MANAGEMENT OF SHORT-TERM BREAKS PROVISION AT MINSTER VIEW

Alison Shield, Service Head, Looked After Children from the Social Services Department introduced the report. She stated that an undertaking had been given to an earlier Select Committee that occupancy at Minster View would be increased by the end of 2004 but that this now seemed unlikely. The current proposal was to reduce the capacity of the short-term breaks unit at Minster View temporarily from eight to four places which would release funding for other services. She pointed out that all the current people served by Minster View would receive the same level and pattern of service. She commented that new referrals would be problematic but that there had not been any recently. Emergency situations will be dealt with by re-prioritisation. It was proposed that a study group be established to look at the provision of short-term breaks to disabled children.

Councillor Lonergan stated that he had been critical of Minster View and did not think that it had been fully used and was a wasted resource. He was pleased that this issue was being tackled but expressed concern about the amount of time the review was proposed to take. He hoped that the review could be done more quickly so that effective use could be made of the excellent facility. Councillor Baron commented that the eligibility criteria was perhaps one of the reasons why Minster View was not full. It was agreed to establish a study group of five Members (Councillors Chris Baron, Sue Bennett, Joe Lonergan, Peter Prebble and Keith Walker) to look at the

provision of short breaks to disabled children as outlined in appendix 2 to the report, with a final report back to the Select Committee in December 2004.

PROGRESS UPDATE ON THE REVIEW OF CHILDRENS' RESIDENTIAL SERVICES

Consideration was given to a progress report on the implementation of recommendations agreed by Cabinet on the review of residential childcare.

Councillor Baron felt that more effort was needed in relation to the establishment of maintenance budgets and ring fencing for each unit to meet CSCI standards. Councillor Rita Sharpe expressed concern about the removal of the clasp building at the Big House being unresolved. She felt that this building would deteriorate and was concerned about the health and safety implications. Councillor Baron agreed there was a need to look at security issues. Councillor Lonergan asked whether there were any plans to rebuild the building at the Big House.

It was agreed that a further report be presented to the Select Committee covering the maintenance budgets and the clasp building at the Big House.

ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT: SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

Andy Buxton, Principal Personnel Officer in the Social Services Department introduced the report. In response to a question from Councillor Lonergan, Andy Buxton stated that the Department had become better at risk assessments and providing adjustments, which he was sure had had an impact.

Councillor Napier expressed concern at the 17 days sickness per year and the affect this had on services to the public. He commented that if the Department were saying this had no effect on services they must be overstaffed. He felt that the impression being given was that there was a downward trend in the sickness rate and that it was therefore alright but he remained unconvinced. He thought there was a need to have a breakdown of the sickness according to age, gender and times of the year. He wanted to put a support plan in so that the public received the service they paid for.

Councillor Baron asked who set the targets as he felt 17 days was excessive. He agreed that there should be a further report at the next meeting giving the details suggested by Councillor Napier. He thought this would help line managers to ensure that there was still services provided. Councillor Lonergan commented that services were provided by agency workers to cover sickness. The consequence was that the cost of the service was massively increased and not that the service was not provided. Mr Pearson, Assistant Director stressed that the Department was not complacent and was determined to meet the target and bring the figures down. He pointed out that this was reflected on a daily basis by return to work interviews, and capability issues being considered routinely.

It was agreed that a further report be presented to the next meeting giving more information on the absence in different areas of the Department, gender, time of year and age breakdowns.

URGENT ITEM

The Chair reported that in accordance with section 100(B)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 he had approved that the report on the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants) Bill being regarded as an urgent item as the proposals on asylum legislation will have particular implications on the County Council; children becoming looked after when support is withdrawn and enforced community service. These implications required urgent attention by Members.

ASYLUM AND IMMIGRATION (TREATMENT OF CLAIMANTS) BILL

It was agreed that a study group be established to consider the policy implications for the County Council. The study group to comprise up to five Labour Group Members, two Conservative Group Members and one Liberal Democratic Member. The study group would meet three times to formulate a resolution to the County Council on 18th November 2004.

PROMOTION OF INDEPENDENCE AD HOC SELECT COMMITTEE

It was agreed to re-establish the Promotion of Independence Ad Hoc Select Committee as a Sub-Committee of the Social Services Select Committee with its current membership and terms of reference.

WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to the Work Programme and it was noted that it would be updated in the light of amendments made during the meeting.

The meeting closed at 11.36 am.

CHAIR

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