

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 31 October, 2007 at County Hall, Northallerton.

PRESENT:-

County Councillor Heather Garnett in the Chair.

County Councillors:- Keith Barnes (as substitute for Caroline Seymour), Tony Hall, David Heather, Brian Simpson, Martin Smith (as substitute for Andrew Backhouse), Jim Snowball, Melva Steckles, Hertbert Tindall and Greg White (as substitute for Elizabeth Casling)

Members other than County Councillors:-

Gill Gentle (Voluntary Sector as Substitute for Maggie Allen)
Michael Barrie (Parent Governor)
Helen Suckling (Parent Governor)
Rosemary Readman (Secondary Teacher Representative)

In attendance

Executive Member County Councillor Caroline Patmore.

Officers:- Stephanie Bratcher, Lesley Ingleson, Andrew Terry, Christian Turner and Jane Wilkinson.

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors Andrew Backhouse, Elizabeth Casling, Michael Hesletine, Christopher Pearson and Caroline Seymour and Maggie Allen (Voluntary Sector)

COPIES OF ALL DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED ARE IN THE MINUTE BOOK

130. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 28 September 2007, having been printed and circulated be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

131. MATTERS ARISING

Min No 124 – SEN Review

In response to questions raised by Members the Committee was advised as follows:-

Three Year Capital Programme – it was confirmed that the County Council was now in receipt of confirmation from the Government of the final allocations awarded. The overall position was better than had been originally anticipated and detailed plans were in the process of being drafted.

BESD School and PRUS/Behaviour Partnerships – Members were reassured that there was no slippage in the timetable for the opening of the Harrogate facility in September 2008. All Members were due to receive a letter later that week setting out in detail the current position. A staff briefing for staff in the PRU and REOTAS had been arranged for the following week which would focus on service delivery.

Members further requested that they be kept informed of the development of PRU's at various other sites throughout the County. Andrew Terry acknowledged the reasonableness of the request and expressed reservations only as it might affect commercially confidentiality. Members insisted that Officers could rely upon the integrity of Members who needed to be aware of what was happening locally to enable them to give proper support to communities within their electoral divisions. Andrew Terry agreed to raise the matter with the Corporate Director – Children and Young People's Service at their next regular meeting.

Min No 125 – Trust Schools

A Member referred to a letter he had received from the Corporate Director – Children and Young People's Service in his capacity as a school governor at George Pindar Community College. The letter was in response to the application by the College for Trust status. He said that he had been extremely disappointed by the overall negative tone of the letter and had been personally offended by comments about the capability and capacity of governors at the College should the application be successful. He stated that Governors at the College had support from a number of sources and had confidence in their own abilities.

132. PUBLIC QUESTIONS OR STATEMENTS

The Committee was advised that no notice had been received of any public questions or statements to be made at the meeting.

133. YOUTH OFFENDING TEAM

CONSIDERED –

The progress report and action plan of the Youth Offending Team Manager.

At the invitation of the Chairman Lesley Ingleson highlighted key areas from her report. She said that overall she was pleased with the progress that had been made which continued to be monitored by the YOT Management Board. The next progress report on the Action Plan was due to be presented to the YOT Management Board in February 2008. She referred to paragraph 3.3 of the report and added that due to the uncertainty around future funding it had been suggested that the post of Practice Manager be filled on a temporary basis. Interviews had been held the previous week but regrettably no appointment had been made.

Against this background the Chairman sought clarification of the funding arrangements for the Youth Offending Team. In response Lesley Ingleson stated that the Team had received additional resources the previous year which had funded the appointment of several core officers. The YOT had been awarded monies to develop prevention projects two years ago which were due to expire in March 2008. Details of future funding would not be known until sometime in December or January. Most of the staff currently in post were employed on fixed term contracts and were already looking for alternative employment. She confirmed that the children's fund element of YOT funding would continue beyond March 2008 and would not be ring fenced.

Members were further advised that the YOT had struggled with one of the targets set by North Yorkshire Police Authority that sought to increase the number of offences brought to justice. This target was in direct conflict with YOT's own target to reduce the number of first time entrants to the Service. As a consequence over the course of the last six months the workload of the YOT had increased by one third which had a direct impact on funding. The Committee was advised that the future funding had been discussed at the meeting of the Management Board held on Monday when Lesley Ingleson had been requested to prepare a report for their next meeting.

The Chairman stated that during a conversation with the Chief Constable for North Yorkshire Police he had said that there was a need for young offenders to be seen by local neighbourhood policing teams rather than being dealt with centrally. Lesley Ingleson agreed with his comments and said that a lot of work was on going both nationally and locally with safer school partnerships to help to divert young offenders. A protocol was also in the process of being developed for looked after young people that considered alternative approaches.

In response to a question from a Member Lesley Ingleson stated that the latest performance management information available for the Service covered the period up until June 2007. The new figures showed that there had been a gradual improvement in the outcomes for young people. This was she said because the Service was now focused on its objectives and had tighter systems and quality assurance processes in place to help reduce instances of re-offending.

The Chairman requested that in due course the performance management figures for the Youth Offending Team be made available to the Committee.

In response to a question from a Member the Committee was advised that all partners were firmly committed to the YOT which had been recognised in the recent inspection. The appointment of John Marsden, as Chairman of the Management Board had helped to cement relationships and attendance at Board meetings was good. The Regional Manager had attended the meeting of the Board on Monday and had been impressed with what he had seen.

A Member referred to the difficulties encountered in attempting to appoint staff on temporary contracts and suggested it would be better if such appointments could be made on a secondment basis. He believed this would lead to increased commitment to the job in hand as staff would not spend their time searching for another job. Lesley Ingleson replied that appointments on a secondment basis were also problematic as they left a gap in service provision. Arrangements had been made however for Police and Probation secondments to be written into Service Level Agreements over the next two/three years. She emphasised that the lack of long term funding for the Service meant that any recruitment would always be difficult.

A Member referred to the national figure of 76% for the number of young offenders who would re-offend within two years and asked if reduction of this figure was a priority for the YOT in North Yorkshire.

Lesley Ingleson replied that, in her view, custody did not work and that a reduction of the re-offending figure was an absolute priority for North Yorkshire. In North Yorkshire the re-offending rate was approximately 60-65% which whilst lower than the national figure, still left considerable room for improvement. There was concern that there was a move towards people in North Yorkshire being sentenced to "custody" and she said that she was preparing a report on this matter for submission to the next meeting of the Board.

Members asked about the YOT's involvement with local communities on matters of reparation. Members were advised that in North Yorkshire a number of referral panels operated that were run by local volunteers that were attended by both young offenders and their victims. Lesley Ingleson agreed to provide details of referral order panels to those Members who were interested outside of the meeting.

A Member referred to the Joint Youth Magistrate Bench based in York that covered Selby and York areas. He said that both York and North Yorkshire had Youth Offending Teams, yet often there was no one present from the YOT in Court when sentences were handed down to young offenders and asked what steps were being taken to rectify this situation. Lesley Ingleson replied that she was aware of the problem and work was already underway to develop a team of professionals based in the Selby to support young offenders from North Yorkshire. Previously the area had been covered by one person.

The Committee requested a copy of the Education, Training and Employment Strategy considered by the Board in July. Members were advised that the Strategy was still in draft form but was due to be presented to the Children and Young People's Leadership Team in November after which a copy would be brought to the Committee's next meeting in the New Year.

The Chairman thanked Lesley Ingleson for the information she had provided to the Committee and was pleased to see that significant progress had been made over a short period of time. The Chairman looked forward to receiving a further update reports on the Service in due course.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the content of the report be noted that a further progress report on the Youth Offending Team be added to the Committee's work programme and referred to the Committee in due course.
- (2) That performance management information and a copy of the Education, Training and Employment Strategy for the YOT be submitted to the Committee in the New Year.

134. TRANSFORMATION OF LOCAL EDUCATION OFFICE ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTIONS

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Corporate Director – Children and Young People's Service on progress of the project to transform the work of local education offices and some related education administration at County Hall as part of the Directorate's contribution to the Council's Change and Improvement agenda.

During the course of the presentation of his report Andrew Terry emphasised that the proposed changes outlined were not just about making efficiency savings. He believed the changes would also lead to improved service delivery. He acknowledged that staff were understandably anxious and gave assurances to the Committee that every effort was being made to maintain the future employment of affected staff. New staffing structures were almost complete and would be discussed with UNISON. A letter was due to go out to affected staff on Friday setting out the latest position. He anticipated that recruitment to the new structures would commence in January 2008. He confirmed that those people displaced by the new structure would have first call on vacancies created under the revised structure.

Finally he emphasised that all professional support staff would continue to be locally based as the proposals related to the centralisation of administrative staff only.

At the request of the Chairman Christian Turner, Business Improvement Manager, outlined the current status of the County Council's Customer Care Contact Centre. He described its integration with local education office administrative functions and confirmed that there was currently provision for service users to have face to face access points at six locations in the County. Plans for this to be expanded to 34 access points were already in hand. The access points he said would be based mainly in libraries and the offices of District Councils.

The initial procurement of telephone lines to the Customer Care Contact Centre was in response to advice from the providers which had subsequently proved to be incorrect. It was acknowledged that many callers had experienced difficulties when attempting to access the service. This situation was being now being rectified with the purchase of additional lines. In the meantime it was pointed out that staff had the option of disclosing their direct line contact details. It was emphasised However that simple routine enquiries should continue to be routed through the Customer Care Contact Centre

During the course of the ensuing discussion Members commented as follows:-

- Expressed concern at the reduction in the number of face to face contact points as this would have an adverse impact upon the most needy and vulnerable members of the community. By way of example the face to face access at Harrogate Library was not properly signed and offered no privacy to service users. Members of the public expecting face to face contact were in reality often given a telephone number to contact the County Council's Customer Care Contact Centre. Members agreed that this was a poor and unacceptable level of service.
- That the content of the report and presentation that day failed to reassure some Members of the Committee that the proposed changes would ultimately result in an improved quality of service.
- A request that Members continue to be kept fully informed of all aspects of the proposed changes.
- A request for Members not to forget their social responsibilities. Efficiency savings outlined in the report equated to members of staff. Those staff made redundant may then claim state benefits which would have an adverse effect on the local economy.
- That there was lack of resources invested in the management of change.
- That a centralised service would result in the loss of valuable local knowledge.
- That there was no objective measure of customer satisfaction levels for the centralised service.

In response shortcomings in the current arrangements for face to face access points were acknowledged. Andrew Terry confirmed his intention to hold further discussions with Christian Turner relating to improvements in face to face access

points. Christian Turner stated that he was working hard with partners to improve the situation and was confident that this would be resolved in the future.

Andrew Terry stated that Members were free at any time to visit and speak with staff at Local Education Offices and that he would be happy to arrange a visit if requested. He confirmed that the centralised administrative team to be based at Harrogate would be divided into geographical teams that would enable them to meet the needs of the communities they served. He was aware of the issues surrounding local knowledge and was confident that appropriate steps would be taken to ensure that future service delivery would not be compromised.

The Chairman thanked Andrew Terry and Christian Turner for the information they had provided to the Committee and for the assurances they had given Members that they would continue to be kept fully informed on all aspects of the project.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the information contained in the report and the comments made at the meeting be noted.

135. SCHOOL MEALS

Helen Suckling declared a personal interest in the following item as the parent of children in receipt of school meals in North Yorkshire.

The Chairman referred to the Call-In meeting of the Committee held in July 2007. At that meeting Members had examined the decision of the Corporate Director – Children and Young People’s Service to increase with effect from September 2007 the price of a school meal. The Committee had upheld the decision of the Corporate Director and had agreed to undertake a short scrutiny review of the emerging strategy for the school meal Service following consideration of various options by the Catering Board.

The Chairman stated that at the meeting of the Catering Board held on 15 October 2007 a report had been considered which outlined several options for the Service.

The Chairman then sought expressions of interest from Members of the Committee to form a school meals task group. She emphasised the tight timeframe for completion of the review which needed to be concluded by Christmas. In view of the final deadline she stressed that it would not be possible to accommodate everyone’s availability and sought the forbearance of task group Members on this point. She suggested that the first meeting of the task group to scope the review be held on 13 November 2007 at 1.30 pm at County Hall, Northallerton.

The Committee supported the approach outlined by the Chairman.

The Committee Administrator outlined to the Committee in detail the requirements regarding declarations of interest and in particular the specific exemption contained in the new Code of Conduct that affected those Members who were also Members of school governing bodies. Those Members for whom the requirements of the Code of Conduct had a direct impact agreed to make the necessary declaration which would be included in the final report of the task group. Any declarations would also be formally minuted when the findings of the review were considered by the Committee at a future meeting.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That County Councillors Heather Garnett, Caroline Seymour, Michelle Andrew, Jim Snowball and Melva Steckles together with Helen Suckling and Rosemary Readman establish the school meals task group.
- (2) That the first meeting of the school meals task group be held on 13 November 2007 at 1.30 pm at County Hall, Northallerton.
- (3) That the final report of the school meals task group be referred to the Committee in due course.

136. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

DISPLAY OF ARTWORK AT COUNTY HALL

A Member of the Committee referred to the artwork done by North Yorkshire schoolchildren that was displayed in the corridors of County Hall. The artwork was he said of a very high standard and gave pleasure to a lot of people. The Member enquired if the children responsible for the artwork were ever given the opportunity to see it for themselves on display and if their efforts were formally recognised. Officers supported in principal the idea and agreed to investigate and report back.

JW/ALJ