

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2010 at County Hall, Northallerton.

PRESENT:-

County Councillor Paul Richardson in the Chair.

County Councillors:- John Batt, John Blackie, David Blades, Elizabeth Casling, Bill Hoult (substitute for Caroline Seymour), Chris Pearson, Joe Plant, Melva Steckles, Tim Swales and Geoff Webber.

Members Other Than County Councillors:-

Rev Adrian Judd (Church of England), and Bjorn Risi (Voluntary Sector).

In attendance:-

Executive Members:- County Councillors Jim Clark and Caroline Patmore.

Officers:- Cynthia Welbourn and George Bateman (Children and Young People's Service), Stephanie Bratcher (Scrutiny Support) and Jane Wilkinson (Legal and Democratic Services).

Present By Invitation:-

Nancy Palmer – Independent Chair North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children's Board.

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor Caroline Seymour and Suzanne Morris and Patricia Stowell (Parent Governors), Jos Huddleston (Non-Conformist Church), and Chris Head (Secondary Teacher Representative).

COPIES OF ALL DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED ARE IN THE MINUTE BOOK

23. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2010 having been printed and circulated be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

24. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

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

25. EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE

CONSIDERED –

County Councillor Caroline Patmore gave an oral summary of recent activity on the following areas within her portfolio:-

- Corporate Parenting.

- Young People's Council.
- Transition arrangements for children and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities.
- Communication speech and language therapy.

County Councillor Caroline Patmore said she was happy to expand upon any of the topics discussed or to respond to questions from Members.

County Councillor Geoffrey Webber said that he was concerned that the practice of the Corporate Parenting Standing Group was to receive general information only. He said that Members of the Group should have access to specific information about individual cases that would enable the Group to adopt a more proactive role.

The Chairman reminded the Committee that the Corporate Parenting Standing Group had no decision making powers. If the Group had concerns then these should initially be referred to the Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Standing Group said that she was disappointed at County Councillor Webber's comments. She informed the Committee that a letter to all elected Members had been drafted which aimed to raise the profile of the Group and to heighten awareness of Members' responsibilities as corporate parents. Other Members of the Corporate Parenting Standing Group said that the Group was newly established and still finding its feet. They spoke in support of the quality of information provided to the Group, their only criticism being that the volume and detail of information provided during meetings was difficult to immediately digest and give a considered response. It was suggested that a solution to this would be to hold additional meetings.

The Executive Member, County Councillor Caroline Patmore agreed to give further consideration to the comments made by Members.

RESOLVED –

That the report and comments made during the meeting be noted.

26. CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLES SERVICE – REVENUE BUDGET 2010/11

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Corporate Director – Children and Young People's Service on the impact of the 2010/11 Revenue Budget on the Children and Young People's Service.

The report was introduced by George Bateman, Assistant Director – Finance and Management Support who described the combination of grants and resources that finance the Children and Young People's Service. He drew Members attention to budget pressures in Transport and Social Care and said that the Directorate faced a significant challenge to achieve recurring efficiency savings. Finally, key components of the Efficiencies and Savings Plan were outlined to Members.

In response to questions from Members the Committee was advised that during the last 18 months contract prices had decreased and that the actual cost of specialist BESD provision had proved cheaper than was originally anticipated. These savings meant that planned maintenance to school buildings was not in jeopardy.

Members were advised that as a result of a recent House of Lords decision, responsibility for homeless 16 and 17 year olds now rested with local authority social care services as opposed to housing authorities. In practice this meant that 16/17 year olds would become 'looked after'. If these young people were accommodated independently in their own property as opposed to foster care or a children's home they would be eligible to receive benefits which as a result of the judgement would be payable by the County Council. As yet no costings were available but it was acknowledged that potentially significant extra funding responsibilities could fall upon the County Council.

Members were assured that the Home To School Transport Policy was not under review. What was being reviewed was application of the Policy by the Appeals Panel to ensure that decision making was consistent and that the actions taken as a result of decisions made were cost effective.

Members asked how further procurement efficiency savings could be achieved when the County Council already purchased its supplies centrally in bulk. George Bateman replied that procurement included the use of facilities and was not restricted to the purchase of supplies. It was these wider areas that needed to be explored. He added that procurement for school meals was always contentious. The County Council always tried to get the best of both worlds namely large contracts with local suppliers.

The Chairman thanked George Bateman for the information he had provided and his attendance.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

27. NORTH YORKSHIRE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN'S BOARD

The Committee received a presentation from Nancy Palmer the Independent Chair of the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children's Board. The presentation described the role, governance arrangements and membership of the Board. Details of progress towards achieving the targets set out in the Business Plan 2009/2012 attached to the agenda were outlined at the meeting together with details of the Board's recently launched website.

Members noted that provision of a link to the Board's website had been identified as a priority in the redesign of the County Council's own web-site.

Members requested that a list of the Board's membership was made available to them.

Some Members questioned whether the focus on safeguarding was warranted in North Yorkshire and whether the available resources would have been better spent elsewhere. Nancy Palmer replied that the structure provided by the policies and procedures the Board had devised represented very good value for money. If these policies and procedures were not in place then the situation would be worse. A Member asked if the Board was aware of the reduction in the number of health visitors in North Yorkshire over the last five years and if so what if any action it had taken. Nancy Palmer replied that the Board was aware of the reduced number of health visitors in North Yorkshire. There was a national recruitment problem and the Board had been assured by the Primary Care Trust that it was undertaking a review of the situation. A report on the matter was to be considered by the Board at its meeting in June 2010.

It was acknowledged that as a result of recent high profile cases such as Baby P the number of social care referrals had increased dramatically. All agencies were therefore reviewing threshold criteria in order to gain a better understanding of the reasons referrals were made.

The Chairman thanked Nancy Palmer for her attendance.

RESOLVED –

That the presentation be noted.

That details of the membership of the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children's Board be circulated to all members of the Committee.

28. POST-INSPECTION ACTION PLAN

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Corporate Director – Children and Young People's Service updating the Committee on progress implementing the post inspection action plan drawn up by the County Council in response to an Ofsted inspection of Safeguarding arrangements and services for looked after children in North Yorkshire. The inspection took place in September 2009 and made eight recommendations.

The Corporate Director – Children and Young People's Service described progress on key actions taken by Children's and Young People's Service and its partners in response to each of the eight recommendations made by the inspector.

Members said they were satisfied with the progress achieved and asked what options were being considered to overcome recruitment problems to assessment and safeguarding posts. The Corporate Director – Children and Young People's Service replied that the County Council was promoting a continuous recruitment campaign. To date fifty applications had been received for thirty posts. Recruitment of overseas applicants was primarily focused on candidates from Canada, New Zealand and Australia as the systems in operation in these countries most closely aligned to working practices in this country. Another recruitment campaign being undertaken sought to encourage the return to work of qualified staff. A review of recruitment was due to take place in May when the success of the actions described would be known.

As a fall back position to the recruitment campaigns all staff across the entire service would be reviewed to see if there was a need to deploy additional resource into assessment and safeguarding.

If capacity could be increased and workloads stabilised it was hoped that staff retention would improve. Assurances were given that appropriate challenge would be mounted if there was evidence to suggest that some families ought not to be in the social care system.

The Chairman emphasised to Members that they should not view the post inspection action plan in isolation but as part of the work of the Directorate to provide safe and good quality services for young people.

RESOLVED –

That progress implementing the Post-Inspection Action Plan is noted.

29. WORK PROGRAMME

CONSIDERED –

The report of the Head of Scrutiny and Corporate Performance presenting the Committee's programme of work at future meetings. Members' comments were invited.

The Committee was advised that a copy of Scrutiny Review report on Speed Outside Schools was now available and that the scrutiny task group was next due to meet on 29 March 2010.

County Councillor Liz Casling updated the Committee on the work of the Task Group with an Interim Report – Supporting Young People Into Education Employment and Training circulated with the agenda papers. A Task Group meeting has been delayed slightly due to illness but this had now been re-arranged. It was hoped that the final report would be completed in June 2010.

The Chairman said that the focus of the Committee had for sometime been safeguarding. The information provided to the Committee indicated that good progress was being made and that there were no particular areas of concern. Accordingly he welcomed suggestions from Members to broaden the scope of the Committee's work at future meetings.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the content of the report, business scheduled for future meetings and information provided at the meeting be noted.
- (b) That the draft final report of the Transport & Telecommunications Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Scrutiny Review on Speed Outside Schools is circulated to all Members of the Committee for comment on 21 April 2010 with a closing date for receipt of comments of 27 April 2010.

JW/ALJ