

Children and Young People's Services Select Committee

7 November 2012 – At a meeting of the Committee held at 10.30am at County Hall, Chichester.

Present: Mr Burrett (Chairman)

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| Mrs Arculus | Mr Lanzer | Mrs Thompson |
| Mr Burgess | Mrs Le Rossignol | Mrs Waight |
| Mr T M E Dunn | Mr McDougall | Dr Wilsdon |
| Mr Graysmark | Mrs Ross | |

In attendance by invitation: Mr Evans (Cabinet Member for Children and Families) and Mr Griffiths (Cabinet Member for Education and Schools).

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs Mills, Mrs Reynolds, Mr Smytherman, Mr Tyler and Mr Watson. Mr Strong was absent.

Declaration of Interests

88. In accordance with the Code of Conduct the following personal interests were declared: -

- Mrs Le Rossignol – Item 5 (School Funding Reform 2013/14 – Schools and Early Years Blocks) – as a Governor of Holy Trinity Primary School, Lower Beeding.

Minutes

89. Resolved - That the minutes of the meeting held on 4th October 2012 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

Cabinet Member Response

90. The Committee considered a response from the Cabinet Member for Children and Families to the recommendations made at its meeting of 4 October 2012 regarding the First Annual Report from the Lead Member for Safeguarding Children (copy appended to the signed minutes).

91. Mr Evans, Cabinet Member for Children and Families, advised the Committee that he had decided it would be appropriate to allocate a budget of between £2,500 and £3,000 for each Children's Home as an out of school activity fund. Mr Evans explained that this decision was made taking into consideration the fact that Looked After Children (LAC) placed in Children's Homes do have the option to add to the pocket money they receive from the County Council by obtaining paid employment out of school hours, for example a Saturday job. Members welcomed the budget allocation.

92. Mr Evans explained that he had not, as yet, received a response to the letter sent to the Children's Minister in relation to payment of Child Benefit for Looked After Children. When a response had been received a copy would be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

93. Resolved – That the Committee notes the response from the Cabinet Member.

School Funding Reform 2013/14 – Schools and Early Years Blocks

94. The Committee considered a report by the Director of Learning (copy appended to the signed minutes). Mr Griffiths, Cabinet Member for Education and Schools, introduced the report explaining that the feedback received as a result of the consultation had been valuable and provided an insight into the effects the reform would have on individual schools.

95. David Sword, Director of Learning, and Jeanmarie Long, Principal Manager Statutory and Strategic Compliance, gave a presentation summarising the changes arising from the School Funding Reform. The changes were intended to make the system simpler and more transparent.

96. Clare Collins, Chair of the Schools Forum and Governor of The Mill Primary School in Crawley, Richard Yelland, Headteacher of St John the Baptist CE Primary School in Findon, and Jon Ford, Headteacher of Imberhorne School in East Grinstead, addressed the Committee and highlighted the following issues:

- The Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) was essential to counteract the effects of the reduction in funding as a result of the reform but there were concerns regarding the level of MFG post 2015.
- The assessment criteria for allocating Special Educational Needs (SEN) funding for primary schools used attainment data of Reception age children. If there was a low incidence of pupils with SEN in this year group this would result in a reduction in funding the following year at a time when the school may have an intake of children that had a higher proportion with SEN, therefore making it difficult for the school to fund support for these children.
- There was concern that staffing numbers had already been reduced following previous cuts in funding and that additional redundancies would be required going forward.
- The importance of reducing turbulence by providing information to schools as early as possible about their budgets for the following year to enable them to plan accordingly.
- It was felt that the additional funding changes affecting those secondary schools which had a sixth form, in combination with the School Funding Reform, would exacerbate the negative financial impact on those schools.
- It was felt that the consultation process was rushed but it was also understood this was as a result of the government imposed timeframe and not the fault of the County Council.
- The overall opinion was that the County Council had done the best it could in the circumstances with regard to how it intended to implement the changes. Headteachers and governors appreciated the efforts made to assist schools through the change, for example, by arranging workshops to support changes to planning and to working practices to manage school budgets.
- The Schools Forum supported the de-delegation of funding from maintained schools back to the County Council to retain a central funding pot which could be used to assist maintained schools that encountered financial difficulties.

97. The Committee made comments and asked questions, including those that follow. Members:

- Requested clarification regarding the final sentence of point 1.2 of the report which stated that no maintained school, free school or academy would have a budget reduction of more than minus 1.5% per pupil in 2013/14. *Ms Long agreed that the word minus should not have been included in the sentence.*
- Queried what proportion of schools would be badly affected by the funding reform, what the potential number of redundancies would be and the likely financial impact the redundancies would have on the County Council. *Ms Long explained that approximately 20-25% of schools would be adversely affected by budget reductions and would need to alter their patterns of expenditure and manage the school differently to compensate for this. The County Council were planning workshops to help such schools cope with the changes and provide advice. It was anticipated that redundancies would occur, but, because of the way the budget was structured to fit the school year, these would not take effect until the end of August 2013. Due to the required notice period the actual cost of these August redundancies would be understood by March 2013 but from initial analysis undertaken by the County Council it was anticipated that the financial demand would exceed the current County Council school redundancy budget.*
- Raised concern regarding the uncertainty of the MFG beyond 2015. *Ms Long advised that the government had suggested the MFG would still be provided after 2015 but it was unclear at what level this would be. Members pointed out that there could be a change of Government during 2015 which heightened the uncertainty for schools. Mr Ford also highlighted that the MFG was a set figure and not subject to inflationary increase. This would make implementing a 1% pay rise for teachers next year more difficult to fund.*
- Queried whether, following the implication of the funding reform, the mechanism would still exist for the County Council to claw back any budget surplus a school may have at the end of a financial year. *Ms Long confirmed that any budget surplus, within set parameters, would remain with the school following the reform.*
- Asked whether more small schools would have to close due to financial unviability and if the County Council would be recommending that schools changed their working practices to manage the impact of the funding reform. *Mr Sword advised that the government were opposed to closure of schools and that small schools would need to look at managing their budgets differently and to consider sharing costs, for example sharing a bursar with another school, to ensure viable education provision was retained within rural areas. The County Council were keen to encourage creative thinking in schools to manage the funding reductions such as working collaboratively, pooling monies to pay for additional assistance for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) or federating with other schools. He explained that, thus far, schools had not been subject to the severe funding reductions that had affected other parts of the Local Authority and schools could learn from the innovative solutions employed by departments within the County Council in coping with heavy budget reductions. Mr Yelland concurred that he could see benefits of schools pooling resources but, in practice, this did not always work*

– for example when a school needed a teaching assistant to work solely one-to-one with an individual pupil the cost could not be shared.

- Were concerned about the potential negative impacts on pupils, particularly those on the cusp of having SEN, who would not qualify for additional assistance. There was the risk that their needs would not be met and their achievement would be lower than it could be. *Mr Sword advised that the County Council would be assessing the effects of the funding reform and identifying any trends in relation to changes to pupil outcomes. In addition the Department for Education would be monitoring the impacts and involving teachers directly in the assessment process.*
- Raised concern regarding potential inaccuracies in the allocation of deprivation funding due to the existence of pockets of deprivation which wouldn't be accounted for as they were located within otherwise affluent areas.
- Stressed the need to offer schools appropriate training and advice particularly around collaborative working, pooling funds and using budgets more innovatively.

98. Mr Griffiths said that, following the information presented to them, he hoped Members of the Committee understood the nature of the challenge faced by both the County Council and schools in implementing the necessary changes.

99. Resolved - That the Committee:

- (1) Accepts the changes required to the West Sussex funding formulae for the Schools and Early Years Blocks arising from the School Funding Reform.
- (2) Requests that the Cabinet Member for Education and Schools make representations to government regarding the concerns highlighted by Members in implementing the changes required by the School Funding Reform for the Schools and Early Years Blocks.

Agreeing Task Force Membership

100. The Chairman sought volunteers to join the Task Force to assess outcomes for young people who are dual registered or still registered on a school roll but not in school full time.

101. Resolved – That Mrs Arculus (Chairman of the Task Force), Mr Graysmark, Mr Lanzer and Mrs Le Rossignol be appointed to the Task Force.

Forward Plan of Key Decisions

102. The Committee considered the Forward Plan – December 2012 – March 2013 (copy appended to the signed minutes).

103. Mrs Arculus highlighted that effective communication with the District and Borough Councils was required to clarify the decision in relation to the Expansion of the West Sussex Think Family Programme. *The Chairman explained that this point could be investigated by the recently established Troubled Families Task Force.*

104. Resolved: That the Forward Plan be noted.

Date of the Next Meeting

105. The Committee noted that its next scheduled meeting will be held on 28 November 2012 at 10.30am at County Hall, Chichester.

The meeting ended at 3.50pm.
Chairman