

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 16 February 2011

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	C Meaden (Chair)	
	Councillors	W Clements P Hayes K Hayes	C Povall W Smith P Williams
<u>Deputies:</u>	Councillors	D Dodd (for T Smith) P Glasman (for A McArdle) D Mitchell (for T Harney)	
<u>Co-opted Members:</u>		Mrs J Kearney Mr R Neale	Mrs J Owens

Thursday, 24 February 2011

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	C Meaden (Chair)	
	Councillors	W Clements P Hayes K Hayes	T Harney W Smith P Williams
<u>Deputies:</u>	Councillors	D Dodd (for T Smith) P Glasman (for A McArdle) G Ellis (for C Povall)	
<u>Co-opted Members:</u>		Mrs J Kearney	Mrs J Owens
<u>Apologies:</u>		Mr R Neale	Mr A Scott

48 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST / PARTY WHIP

Members were asked to consider whether they had a personal or prejudicial interest in connection with the item on the agenda and, if so, to declare it and to state the nature of such interest.

Members were reminded that they should also declare, pursuant to paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, whether they were subject to a party

whip in connection with the item to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement.

Councillor C Meaden declared a personal general interest because of her daughter's employment within the Children and Young People's Department.

Councillor Mitchell declared a personal interest in minute 49 (Budget Proposals) by virtue of having been involved in general budget discussions with his group for the forthcoming year.

49 **BUDGET PROPOSALS**

The Special Meeting of the Committee had been called, in accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, by Councillors C Meaden, W Smith and A McArdle, in order to give consideration to matters concerned with budget proposals.

A document submitted by the Labour Group Members referred to:

- The failure of this administration to refer any budget savings to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny committees for proper scrutiny.
- The decision taken by Council on December 12th to suspend the relevant part of the Constitution in order to avoid any such scrutiny.
- The lack of any detailed Cabinet reports setting out the details of the budget savings, and their consequences.
- The lack in particular of any explanation of the impact of the loss of over 1300 posts, the restructuring necessary to protect services, and the costs of that restructuring.

It was moved by Councillor P Hayes, seconded by Councillor K Hayes, that –

“This Committee believes that the document before it does not lend itself to proper and effective scrutiny. Committee therefore resolves that this Committee stands adjourned until such a time when Cabinet has made its decisions pertaining to the budget of the Children and Young People's Department.”

It was moved as an amendment by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Glasman, that –

“The meeting continues to enable scrutiny of those items referred to in the document.”

After some debate on the motion before it, and the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management's representative giving advice on the voting rights of the co-opted members, the amendment was put and lost (5:6).

The motion was then put and carried (6:5).

Resolved (6:5) - This Committee believes that the document before it does not lend itself to proper and effective scrutiny. Committee therefore resolves that this Committee stands adjourned until such a time when Cabinet has made its decisions pertaining to the budget of the Children and Young People's Department.

50 **RECONVENED MEETING**

Having stood adjourned on the resolution carried at the meeting on 16 February, the meeting reconvened on 24 February.

The Chair informed the meeting that apologies had been received from Councillor Sheila Clarke.

51 **BUDGET PROPOSALS**

Following on from minute 49, the Committee were then invited to ask questions to which the Interim Director of Children's Services and Andrew Roberts, Strategic Service Manager Resources, responded.

The Interim Director reported that following the invitation to all staff to apply for EVR or Voluntary Severance, the Department had received 494 applications. Of these 327 were agreed, 167 being not agreed. He gave a breakdown of the numbers of staff who had requested to leave and those who had been agreed as follows:

- Children's Social Care - 100 requested – 27 agreed – 73 not agreed
- Learning and Achievement – 72 requested – 54 agreed – 18 not agreed
- Participation and Inclusion – 125 requested – 56 agreed – 69 not agreed
- Planning and Resources – 197 requested – 190 agreed – 7 not agreed

90 staff had left in December, 70 would be leaving at the end of March with the remainder leaving at the end of June. The number of branches would be reduced from 4 to 3 and the department was currently in the process of looking at a restructuring.

The Interim Director commented that front line services were being maintained and that he would supply a copy of the restructure plan to members of the Committee as soon as possible.

Of the 327 staff leaving, 50 were with Metro Cleaning, and these staff were not directly involved with the school service but were used across all Council buildings. The 327 also included 100 Metro Catering staff who would be leaving. An increasing number of schools were now managing catering themselves with 15 out of 93 primary schools now having opted out of using Metro Catering. The service would be maintained for as long as it remained viable. Metro Catering was just one of 15 Service Level Agreements which the department operated with schools. A lot of the staff leaving the service would be of an age where they could access their pensions and those that weren't would be given opportunities with training programmes at Wirral Metropolitan College. He acknowledged that there would be significantly fewer staff in Metro Catering after June, 2011.

In respect of posts within the Youth Offending Team, the Interim Director reported that the 14 posts being deleted were largely administrative posts and he had been assured by the manager of the service that it could continue.

Although a number of music teachers had come forward and asked to be released, the Interim Director assured the Committee that music provision would be maintained

as it currently was but more sessional staff would be used rather than full time teachers. The Saturday morning music sessions would also continue.

The number of Educational Psychologists would be reduced from 17 to 13.5 although since 2009/10 there had been a 20% reduction in assessments as rolls were falling for secondary schools and this trend would continue until 2016. The Interim Director assured the Committee that there were no plans to outsource the service. With regard to the waiting time for referrals, he informed the meeting that he would write to the Committee members with this information.

The Interim Director informed the Committee that there were no plans to change the way Children's Centres were delivered, no approach had been made either to the department or the Council. He was aware of a meeting Frank Field MP, had had with school governors in Birkenhead and he would encourage the dissemination of Frank Field's report on Poverty and Life Chances. He would support the idea of the greater utilisation of Children's Centres.

In response to a Member, the Chair felt that it would be a good idea for Frank Field to be invited to a meeting with Members, either in the Town Hall, Wallasey or wherever was convenient.

The Interim Director assured the Committee that there were no plans for outsourcing in the Department as a whole, though schools, having control of their own budgets could source services and supplies from wherever they wanted.

In respect of the loss of £4.8m Early Intervention Grant, the Interim Director reported that there were a number of grants totalling £19.8m in 2010/11 and the loss of grant had been cushioned by Council decisions. The final position would be helped with the ending of certain services such as ContactPoint and a specific mental health initiative in schools which had now finished. Negotiations were also currently ongoing, in conjunction with other Merseyside authorities, for a reduction in the Connexions contract. He stated that he would be happy to come back to the Committee with a report if there was any difference in service following the re-negotiation of the Connexions contract.

He assured the Committee that the Sure Start service programme would continue as in 2010/11, the only change being the withdrawal of the mobile crèche facility and the loss of some management and financial posts, which as the last centre had now been built there was not a requirement for. With regard to the Early Years services provided by the voluntary and community sector he would provide a written response with these figures.

The Interim Director and Strategic Services Manager, in response to a question, informed the meeting, that there would be a flat cash budget for schools over the next three years and it would be a challenge for all schools managing a very tight budget. The Pupil Premium grant would be made direct to schools and would be for them to manage.

Members also spoke of their support for Oaklands in Wales and the Interim Director referred to the possible use of some of the Pupil Premium by individual schools towards the cost of this facility, the purpose of which was to provide an outbound activity centre for the children of Wirral.

The Interim Director responding to a Member's question referred to the long term aim of reducing the costs of children placed in residential care and the department could purchase beds in the independent sector for children at approximately 50% of the cost of those in Brookfield. It was therefore the intention to close Brookfield but only at a time when appropriate to the young people resident and he had given his personal assurance to those young people living there.

He also referred to the challenge of a reduction in secondary school rolls and that money had been put aside for redundancy payments. In respect of temporary posts within the department there were no plans to make any of those redundant other than those taking severance.

The Chair thanked the Interim Director and Strategic Services Manager for their responses to the Committee and the information they had provided.