



Leicester  
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the  
CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND SCHOOLS SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: TUESDAY, 4 FEBRUARY 2014 at 5.30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Willmott (Chair)  
Councillor Unsworth (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Cole	Councillor Potter
Councillor Dawood	Councillor Senior
Councillor Naylor	

Standing Invitees (Non-Voting):

Peter Flack – Teaching Unions  
Anu Kapur – Leicester Secular Society

In Attendance:

Councillor Dempster – Assistant Mayor (Children, Young People and Schools)

Also present:

Councillor Chaplin  
Councillor Kitterick

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**177. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Rabiha Hannan (Faith Representative) and Bernard Monaghan (Roman Catholic Diocese).

## **178. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Senior declared an Other Disclosable interest in agenda item 6, "General Fund Budget 2014/15 to 2015/16", in that her partner was a Council employee in the Transport Strategy service.

Although not a member of the Commission, Peter Flack, a Standing Invitee to the meeting as a representative of teaching unions, declared an Other Disclosable interest in agenda item 6, "General Fund Budget 2014/15 to 2015/16", in that his partner worked in the Early Years Intervention service.

Councillors Dawood, Naylor, Senior and Unsworth each declared an Other Disclosable Interest in agenda item 10, "Adventure Playgrounds Task Group", as they each had an adventure playground in the Wards they represented.

Councillor Cole declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting, as his wife was a teacher.

Councillor Potter declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting, as she was a former Looked After Child and was the Chair of the Safeguarding Children Panel.

Councillor Senior declared an Other Disclosable interest in the general business of the meeting as she was a member of Unison.

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, these interests were not considered so significant that they were likely to prejudice the Councillors' judgement of the public interest. They were not, therefore, required to withdraw from the meeting.

## **182. GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2014/15 TO 2015/16**

The Strategic Director for Children's Services submitted a report setting out the draft budget proposals for 2014/15 to 2015/16 for the Education and Children's Services departmental portfolio. The Commission was asked to make comments to the Overview Select Committee. These comments would be considered by that Committee at its meeting on 13 February 2014 and its views reported views to the City Mayor prior to the City Mayor making his final proposals to the Council.

Councillor Dempster, Assistant Mayor with responsibility for Children, Young People and Schools, reminded the Commission that this was difficult budget, as the service was funded by various grants, as well as the General Fund. Substantial cuts to the service already had been made, but more would be needed.

At the invitation of the Chair, Peter Flack, representing the teaching unions, made the following comments:-

- The government had particularly targeted children's services for financial cuts. For example, the budget for Early Prevention had been reduced by approximately 30% and the budget for Moving Barriers had been reduced by approximately 10%. The children with the greatest need should be the top priority, so the Council should do whatever it could to maintain services;
- The reduction in the School Improvement Service was a great concern. This needed to develop an effective trading service outside of Leicester, and needed to be in a strong position to do this; and
- It was questioned whether children of pre-school age could be supported through Dedicated Schools' Grant (DSG) and therefore whether it was possible to fund Early Years teachers through this. Although there was a small element of grant left over from previous years, this would only provide funding for one or two years.

The following points were then made by the Commission during discussion on the draft budget proposals:-

- Residents should be made aware of the severity of the cuts that needed to be made;
- The proposal to combine teams where practical in localities and utilise buildings more efficiently was welcomed;
- More information was needed on the cuts proposed to the Special Educational Needs service and the miscellaneous budgets that were scheduled to cease;
- A discussion previously had been held on whether savings could be achieved by changing the policy on how often checks should be made through the Disclosing and Barring Service (DBS), (minute 174, "Proposed Changes to the Adventure Playgrounds Service", 6 January 2014 referred). Following this, it had been established that projected annual expenditure on re-checks was £101,000 over the coming year. As re-checks were not required by the government, a change in the policy could result in a financial saving to the Council;
- Was the number of Looked After Children declining? They needed to be offered the same opportunities as other children, so care should be taken to ensure that sufficient funding was available to enable this to happen; and
- Individual elements of the budget could not be considered in isolation. The whole budget for the portfolio needed to be considered, as reducing funding for any part of the children's services budget could put children at risk.

In reply, Councillor Dempster advised that:-

- It was recognised that duplication needed to be reduced and the best use possible made of Council buildings;
- The Schools Forum could be asked to endorse expenditure on Early Years teachers from the DSG, as it would come from the Higher Needs block;
- The cost to schools of making DBS checks was met from DSG funding, so reducing the number of checks made would not achieve the savings being sought. In addition, there could be a deterrent effect of making regular DBS checks, as people could be encouraged to make disclosures themselves if they knew that regular checks were made;
- A lot of the funding for the Special Educational Needs Service was through the DSG, so further work was needed on how savings could be achieved. However, at present it was anticipated that a saving of approximately 10% of this year's budget would be sought;
- The Council considered that it was very important that the School Improvement service did not decline. A pro-active approach therefore was being taken to reconfigure the service and build on partnerships that already had been established. Discussions would be held with schools as soon as possible about what form the service should take in the future;
- Further details could be provided on the miscellaneous budgets that it was proposed should cease. For example, the government had changed the way that the Key Stage 4 Foundation Learning budget was distributed, so that it would go direct to schools, rather than the local authority;
- The number of Looked After Children in the city generally was stable, although there had been a slight drop recently. However, the number fluctuated over time. Nationally, there was an upward trend in their number, but the work undertaken by the authority meant that there was some confidence that the number locally would continue to decline; and
- The Council's corporate parenting responsibilities were taken very seriously and it was hoped that the work being done, (for example, through the Safeguarding Children Panel), would enable the downward movement to continue. It was recognised that funding had to be available to support this and that services across the Council needed to consider what the implications of their provision were for Looked After Children.

Peter Flack recognised the reasons for combining teams where practical in localities and use buildings more effectively. However, staff working in children's centres believed that locating social services staff in those centres would discourage parents from attending, as they would view the centres as having a very different purpose to their current one. Councillor Dempster acknowledged this and confirmed that a wide range of factors needed to be taken in to account to ensure that services located together complemented

each other.

RESOLVED:

That the Overview Select Committee be requested to consider the points raised above and in particular to be advised that:-

- a) This Commission is dismayed at the level of cuts proposed for the Education and Children's Services departmental portfolio;
- b) This Commission requests that the Executive be asked to review the Council's current Disclosing and Barring Service checking policy to see if savings can be achieved;
- c) This Commission supports the identification of genuine efficiency savings;
- d) This Commission requests that the Executive support this Commission in its concern that School Improvement services should not be reduced to the extent that they can no longer operate, especially in view of their successful work to date; and
- e) This Commission requests that the issues raised during its consideration of the findings of the Adventure Playgrounds Task Group be taken in to consideration during consideration of the budget proposals, (see minute 186, "Adventure Playgrounds Task Group", below).