

Minute of the Community Scrutiny Committee on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2005

**75. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLAN**

The Neighbourhood Renewal Business Manager submitted a report (previously circulated and now appended), concerning the Children's Act 2004, the Oxfordshire Children and Young People's Plan and the Change for Children programme.

Val Johnson (Neighbourhood Renewal Business Manager) attended the meeting to present the report to the Committee. She explained that the report provided information on the draft Oxfordshire Children and Young People's Plan. It also outlined some of the proposals in more detail, including the establishment of a Commissioning Services Body and multi-agency locality teams, the introduction of Children's Centres and the establishment of a Children's Safeguarding Board.

There were a number of additional plans that sat below the main Plan, including one for the new Oxfordshire Children and Young Peoples' Joint Commissioning Body. District Councils would have representation on this body, when it was established, along with the County Council and the relevant Primary Care Trusts. It would report back to each Council's Cabinet or Executive Board, as appropriate. Oxfordshire County Council was changing its structure to encompass a new Child Services Authority, divided into four separate departments ranging from early years, through young people, to educational effectiveness and strategy and performance. It planned to have 22 locality teams, four of which would be in Oxford, to enable the delivery of the Children and Young People's Plan.

There was also a Children's Centre plan that was the subject of a separate consultation exercise, and which the Committee was asked to note.

District Councils would have a place on the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children's Board as well. As a result of this, Oxford City Council representatives would be able to access training on relevant child-focussed issues. Although the City Council's performance in this area might be examined in the future, as part of Joint Area Reviews, it would not be scored. The over-arching Children and Young Peoples' Plan recommended that each District Council should elect a nominated Children's Champion, preferably a Portfolio Holder. At present, this was Councillor Dan Paskins.

The main Plan presented participants with a number of "stretch targets". These were important because they attracted some pump priming grants, most of which would be spent on monitoring targets. However, this opened the door to further Government funding, provided that the targets were met. The following stretch targets were proposed for Oxford:-

- (1) Educational attainment at GCSE level;
- (2) Educational attainment for vulnerable groups;
- (3) Ensuring improved attendance at school by vulnerable groups;
- (4) Ensuring the children obtain access to mental health services at an early stage;
- (5) Ensuring young people's access to drug treatment.

In answer to a number of questions raised by members of the Committee, the following additional information was presented:-

- The City Council had adopted a Child Protection Policy and it was anticipated that this would be accepted for Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) purposes;
- Some gaps in provision for children and young people had been identified by the City Council, including that of play provision on housing estates during the summer holidays. Efforts were being made to address this by working with other bodies to plan play schemes for next year. It was hoped that Oxfordshire County Council might provide a small amount of funding towards this. Another issue highlighted was that of provision for special needs children within sports and leisure centres.
- A meeting of lead officers, at which the key issues would be explained, had been arranged. A joint officers' group had been formed to progress this whole issue.
- It was recognised that people would travel to different Children's Centres, depending on their particular need; and that they might not use the one that was closest to hand. It was felt to be important that this was taken into account during the consultation process. There would be strategies in place to widen participation, and to ensure that small groups did not dominate a particular centre.
- The Children's Plan was the subject of wide-ranging consultation, including participation from the Youth Council and many other local organisations.
- It was observed that the 19-plus age group tended to be overlooked, yet it could set a good or a bad example to younger teenagers. It was not clear if there had been any specific involvement on the part of the Universities, although young people and enterprise had been examined. Older teenagers' issues could be examined via other forums.

- Work with young people leaving care homes was in hand; and increased attention was being paid to the issue of drug treatment for young people.
- Children's Centres already existed in Rose Hill and Blackbird Leys. The areas of greatest need received priority attention. Existing facilities were being examined to see if they could be made use of, in order to maximize the Government grant towards accommodation for these Centres. All options were being investigated.
- Val Johnson indicated that the City Council did not under spend on the budget for child-linked services. The budget for these services was very small. Some play schemes were self-financing, but one major concern was to ensure that they remained affordable for people, and this often meant that the fees had to be kept low.
- Attention was drawn to the fact that the means by which homeless families were accommodated meant that children might attend a number of different schools whilst the families housing needs were being addressed. This was noted as an issue for the officers' group to consider when it met.
- Oxfordshire County Council funded the Child Information Service to provide information on children's services in Oxfordshire. The Child Information Service produced a booklet that went out to schools, leisure centres, GP's surgeries and so forth. It was hoped that this could be used to advertise City Council funded activities, especially summer play schemes. It was suggested that schools could use their IT networks to send information to pupils as well.
- It was anticipated that the Oxford City Council representatives would lobby hard for health and deprivation issues to be comprehensively addressed. The Plan was written by a Committee from an Oxfordshire County Council perspective, but with influence from Oxford City Council (amongst others). The contents list was prescriptive, but Val Johnson would take up the points made about ethnic minority representation.
- The Youth Service at Oxfordshire County Council was lobbying for increased funding. It should be kept in mind that it was not just a case of finding more money, but rather it was a case of seeing where the gaps in service were, and then deciding which organisation or service would be best placed to fill them.
- Consideration would be given to youth facilities within Community Centres, but no promises could be made. Cheney School and

Donnington Doorstep could be considered for inclusion, but no commitment could be made at this stage.

Resolved:-

- (1) To note the report;
- (2) To note all the additional comments made and information provided during the meeting;
- (3) To ask Val Johnson to pass on comments made to the relevant forum for consideration;
- (4) To note and support the requirement for a Portfolio Member representative on the Oxfordshire Children's and Young People's Board and the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children's Board.
- (5) To note that the Children and Young People's Plan will go to the Executive Board for comment on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2005 and for final endorsement at a future meeting.