

Lancashire County Council

Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday, 7th October, 2011 at 10.00 am in Cabinet Room 'B' - County Hall, Preston

Present:

County Councillor John Shedwick (Chair)

County Councillors

S Chapman	P Malpas
Mrs F Craig-Wilson	D O'Toole
C Crompton	Mrs L Oades
M Devaney	P Steen
K Ellard	D Westley
Mrs J Hanson	B Winlow

1. Apologies

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

County Councillor Craig-Wilson declared a personal interest in item 5 - Cultural Services Progress Report as a member of the Friends of St Annes Library Steering Group.

3. Minutes of the Meetings held on 9 and 16 September 2011

It was noted that in relation to the Task Group Update report on the minutes of the meeting held 16 September that Blackpool Council had been omitted from the list of Councils who would be invited to become members of the Arts Funding in Lancashire Task Group.

Resolved: That, subject to the amendment above, the minutes of the meeting held on 9 and 16 September 2011 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

4. Early Intervention/Support Strategy

The Chair welcomed Bob Stott, Director for Universal and Early Support Services, Directorate for Children and Young People, to the meeting.

It was reported that in January 2010, the leader of the Council had agreed to provide one off funding of £5m towards improving safeguarding and outcomes for Looked After Children and Young People. Of that funding, £2.33m had been

allocated to support Early Intervention/Support (EIS) between 2010 and 2013, as outlined in the report.

It was also reported that in April 2011, 12 district early intervention and support development officers had been appointed along with the establishment of the Early Support Team itself to co-ordinate the implementation of the Early Support Strategy, working with the local Children's Trust partnerships.

Whilst there had been some delays in the setting up of the new posts and processes, it was felt to be vital that proper care had been taken to ensure a sound basis for projects and monitoring of effectiveness

The Committee was informed that in 2011, £2m had been found from savings achieved within the Directorate for Children and Young People to support the Best Start Lancashire programme – a three year planned development which would link in with the introduction by the Government of the Pupil Premium model for Free School Meal (FSM) pupils. Financial support for the initiative would continue in to 2012/13.

The Committee was informed that the Best Start programme was currently being launched with headteachers and Children's Centre Managers on a district basis. Children's Centres had already been informed of their funding allocations approximately £250 per FSM pupil in reception, Year 1 and Year 2 in September 2011, which would be used to build the capacity to provide increased family support.

The evaluation process of the programme would focus on the analysis of foundation stage outcomes, key stage 1 data for 2012 and 2013, attendance figures and the reduction of families identified as moving towards 'not coping' on the Continuum of Need.

Currently, the population of children eligible for FSM achieving a good level of performance by the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) was almost 8% below the national average. It was hoped that by 2013 this cohort would be brought in line with the national average. It was also hoped that by 2015 pupils at both ends of the EYFS would be in line with the national average.

It was made clear that effective early intervention and support was better for children and families and, if delivered effectively, would also make a considerable contribution to the savings required in by the service.

Members raised a number of questions and comments a summary of which is provided below:

- Councillors were pleased with the progress to date on the implementation of the EIS strategy and highlighted the importance of early intervention for vulnerable children and young people.
- The issue of working with VCFS providers was raised. The committee were assured that part of the intention was to maximise the input from VCFS groups. Some concerns were expressed about duplication and

competition for funds amongst different organisations and agencies. It was noted that this was not specifically a VCFS problem, but that one for any body involved in delivering services. It was acknowledged that there could not be a "one size fits all" approach in Lancashire, but that there was a requirement for some strong criteria and monitoring to ensure that any funding is used in the most efficient way to achieve the objectives stated.

- In response to queries about the evidence base, the committee were advised that the Free School Meals take up was widely felt to be a reasonable indicator of deprivation, and was therefore the main indicator used to target funding. However, other indicators, such as attainment and attendance, were also used to support decision making. This would ensure funding was better targeted in Best Start Lancashire than in Sure Start.
- Members asked whether the County Council would achieve any savings as a result of the implementation of the EIS Strategy. The Committee was informed that service improvements across the Directorate for Children and Young People, the County Council and at District level had contributed to a reduction in the duplication of work.
- The committee enquired how soon officers could obtain results on the impact of the Best Start strategy. It was suggested that it would take a further two years until officers could compile initial results on the impact of the strategy, but that the aim was a generational shift.
- A question was asked in relation to sharing best practice between the districts. It was felt that whilst sharing best practice would be beneficial, each district had its own intrinsic issues in which the sharing of ideas might not translate accordingly. A balance would need to be achieved between providing a strong set of parameters for the local work whilst encouraging the sharing of ideas and the development of unique initiatives reflecting local need.

Resolved: That;

- i. The report be noted;
- ii. A further report be presented to the Committee in April 2012.

5. Cultural Services Progress Report

County Councillor David Smith, Lead Member for Community Services, gave an opening statement regarding the progress on implementing the Culture and Sport Strategy 2010-14. It was reported that the libraries "Regenerate" programme had been successful and popular with the local communities they served. A number of initiatives aimed at attracting people of all ages to libraries had been rolled out such as the 'share a story' and 'silver surfers' classes. It was also reported that Stewart Parsons, Project Officer – Youthspace, had gained national recognition for his work in transforming library services and had subsequently been selected to represent England as an emergent and innovative librarian on the International Network of Emerging Library Innovators. It was hoped that some innovative ideas would come out of the international convention.

The Committee was informed of the Museum of Lancashire's (MOL) ongoing community outreach activities including the 'Museum to You' events which had attracted people of all ages to sample what would be on offer when the MOL re-opens to the public in November 2011.

It was reported that the Lancashire Record Office which was closed to the public for essential maintenance was due to re-open on Monday 24 October 2011. Whilst the contractors were on target to completing the work on time there still remained issues surrounding storage and cataloguing. However, the Committee was informed that the digitalisation project was breaking new ground and allowing some services to remain 'open' to the public in a virtual sense. County Councillor Smith welcomed the recent appointment of the Heritage Managers to provide stronger links with the Districts.

County Councillor Smith congratulated Ian Watson, Head of Cultural Services, for his efforts in retaining frontline staff from the recent restructure of the service. The Committee was informed that the appointment of a Sports Officer would not happen in the foreseeable future. However, confidence was expressed in relation to the role of the Chief Executive of Lancashire Sport Partnership Ltd; Adrian Leather, in fulfilling the needs of the County Council.

Discussions continued to take place over the future development of Lancaster Castle.

Overall, County Councillor Smith was pleased with the progress made to date in relation to the Culture and Sport Strategy.

Ian Watson gave a presentation to the Committee in relation to the County Council's Corporate Strategy for 2011-2013 and the specific target for the Cultural Services Team to achieve on making communities stronger. It was explained that the service priority for the Cultural Services Team for 2011/12 was to raise the profile of cultural opportunities. This would be measured against the number of physical visits made to public libraries. However, it was reported that since the digitalisation project began online subscriptions had grown exponentially.

Key issues from the Cultural Services business plan were highlighted to the Committee including matters related to; the recent restructure of the service, budget, regenerate programme for libraries, children's trusts, total culture programme, joint archives agreement, Lancaster Museums agreement, Lancaster Castle, public health and arts funding.

It was reported that the Cultural Services Team in conjunction with the Communications Service had created a new advertising campaign starting off in the West Lancashire District to market the library service targeting specific themes and age groups.

Rebecca Robinson, Principal Research and Intelligence Officer, outlined some of the key findings from the Living in Lancashire panel's survey on leisure and

culture. Approximately, 70% of members returned their questionnaires which focused on services provided by the libraries, museums and the arts. A number of recommendations from the responses given were set out at Appendix 'B' to the report.

Members raised a number of questions and comments a summary of which is provided below:

- Councillors had received positive feedback from local people regarding the "Regenerate" libraries programme.
- One Councillor expressed their disappointment that a dedicated Sports Officer post would not be established in the foreseeable future. However, the Committee noted that in the current financial climate cuts in relation to Sports Officers in the Districts had meant that some District Councils were now sharing such posts.
- Councillors raised their concerns about the lack of cultural activities in West Lancashire, the lack of museums and in particular the inadequate premises for the library at Burscough. It was reported that the library facility at Burscough was currently being rented and that officers were continually monitoring the property market in Burscough for a suitable building.
- One Councillor asked who Museums run by the community and voluntary sector could approach to enlist advice and the additional services that the Cultural Services Team has to offer. The Committee was informed that officers were hoping to appoint someone to the post of Museums Development Officer in the near future. The intention of which would be to link all cultural sites in Lancashire together and to increase visitor numbers.
- Concern was expressed regarding a possible risk factor in relation to the near-retirement of two conservators in the Lancashire Record Office and the need to maintain appropriate resources. It was hoped that a decision in relation to this matter would be taken in December 2011.
- One Councillor asked what input the County Council had on the Preston Guild 2012 event. The Committee was informed that Paul Kelly, Arts and Regeneration Officer at the County Council was in regular discussions with Stella Hall, the Guild Festival Director at Preston City Council.
- In relation to the forthcoming re-opening of the MOL, it was suggested that on the rising of the next Full Council meeting to be held on 15 December 2011, all Councillors be invited to go on a site visit to the MOL to experience the refurbished facilities.
- A suggestion was made in relation to library cards in that they could be used as an opportunity to further market the cultural services offer.

Resolved: That;

- i. The report be noted;
- ii. A further report be presented to the Committee in May 2012.

6. Money Matters: County Council Budget and Financing - Latest Position

George Graham, Deputy County Treasurer, explained that the report as presented to the Cabinet on 15 September 2011 was the first monitoring report for the current financial year and detailed the financial position of the County Council as at 31 July 2011.

It was reported that the County Council was delivering the necessary level of below the line savings ahead of schedule. Key headlines regarding the County Council's financial position were also set out in the report. These were:

- A forecast underspend on services of £6.4m, almost 2/3rds of which is from back office functions and is largely due to the early achievement of savings targets within the overall budget strategy.
- A financial benefit of £3.7m on capital financing reflecting the continued success of the Treasury Management Strategy in reducing the cost of the Council's borrowing and lending activity.
- Capital expenditure is forecast to be £208.9m, which represents slippage of £10.2m against the updated programme.
- The overall effect of these variations is to increase the forecast level of County Fund Balance to £52.6m.

It was also reported that as a result of early achievement savings the Cabinet had agreed to allocate £3m from the County Fund Balance to address the current backlog of maintenance issues within residential and day care facilities for older people operated by Lancashire County Commercial Group (LCCG).

The Chair suggested that a further monitoring report be presented to the Committee at its meeting in December 2011. The Chair also suggested that an additional meeting be held on 13 January 2012 for the Committee to consider the budget proposals which would be agreed by the Cabinet on 5 January 2012. The Committee was informed that all Chairs of Scrutiny Committees would hold a meeting on the rising of Cabinet on 5 January 2012 to discuss the proposals and the way forward for the scrutiny process.

Resolved: That;

- i. A further report be presented to the Committee at its meeting to be held on 9 December 2011.
- ii. An additional meeting be held on 13 January 2012 to consider the budget proposals when agreed by the Cabinet at its meeting to be held on 5 January 2012.

7. Task Group Updates

The Committee received an update on current task groups and their proposed completion dates.

It was noted that the Joint Lancashire Health Scrutiny Committee should also be included in this report in future

Resolved: That the update on existing task groups be noted.

8. Recent and Forthcoming Decisions

The committee had been given the opportunity to view and consider recent relevant decisions made and also forthcoming decisions including those set out in the current Forward Plan.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

9. Workplan 2010/11

The workplan for the committee was presented for noting and comments. The Chair gave an outline of the work to be carried out by the Committee over the coming months including the additional work agreed earlier in the meeting.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

10. Urgent Business - Request from a County Councillor for a matter to be considered by scrutiny

This item had been accepted as urgent by the Chair on the grounds that the Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) review was at an advanced stage and that the response of the Scrutiny Committee to this request was required as soon as possible within that review process.

It was reported that in accordance with Standing Order 23 (8), County Councillor Val Wilson had requested the Scrutiny Committee to consider whether an item on the evidence presented in Lancashire County Council's consultation on Household Waste Recycling Centres and evidence produced by "Save the Tip in Garstang" (STING) Action Group should be presented at a future meeting.

The Committee, in considering the request, felt that it would be at risk of scrutinising a decision which hadn't been made. It was therefore considered that the decision making process regarding this matter should continue as normal.

Resolved: That the request for an item on the evidence presented in Lancashire County Council's consultation on Household Waste Recycling Centres and the evidence produced by "Save the Tip In Garstang" (STING) to be presented at a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee be declined.

11. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee will be held on 11 November 2011 at 9:30am at County Hall, Preston.

I M Fisher
County Secretary and Solicitor

County Hall
Preston