



Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 14 August 2014

Attendance

Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Julie Hodgkiss (Chair)
Cllr Mark Evans (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre
Cllr Peter O'Neill
Cllr Martin Waite
Cllr Daniel Warren
Cllr Jas Dehar

Hadeel A Ahmad	Parent Governor Representative
Mrs R Watkins	Catholic Church Representative
Portia Tsvangirai	Parent Governor Representative
Wolverhampton City Youth Council	The Youth Council represents young people

Employees

Emma Bennett	Assistant Director - Children, Young People and Families
Andrew Wolverson	Community Care Sustainability Manager

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

1 **Apologies for absence**
Apologies were received from the following Councillors

Cllr Paula Brookfield
Cllr Susan Constable
Cllr Lorna McGregor
Cllr Christopher Haynes
Cllr Michael Heap

Apologies were received from the following members of the panel

Cyril Randles
Leanne Dack

2 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

3 **Minutes of the previous meeting**

With reference to the meeting 23.7.14 Rosalie Watkins, and Cyril Randles stated that were not sent papers for the meeting in advance of the meeting and wanted it recorded they had not been given sufficient advance notice.

As a result of the error Rosalie Watkins was unable to attend the meeting.

With reference to the matters arising item Cllr Daniel Warren was incorrectly referred to as Cllr Wainwright.

4 **Matters arising**

The Panel expressed its thanks to Jim McElligott for prompt response to the request for information about pupil premium. The Panel commented that they look forward to receiving a report about how schools are using pupil premium funding at a future meeting.

The Panel also wanted to express thanks to Jim McElligott on his comments about plans for a stricter examination of the selection process used to appoint parent school governors outlined in the meeting.

5 **Reduction of play service provision**

Cllr Val Gibson (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families) introduced the report. Cllr Gibson apologised for the late presentation of the papers and outlined the reasons for wanting pre-decision scrutiny of the proposals. Cllr Gibson explained that the report relates to savings targets proposals previously announced during the budget consultation process.

Cllr Evans stated that the Conservative group do not accept that this report is a pre-decision scrutiny item. Cllr Evans commented that the panel have not been given sufficient prior notice to properly consider the proposals detailed in the report. Furthermore, he was concerned that ward councillors affected by the change had not been properly consulted about the changes in advance of the meeting.

Cllr Gibson explained that originally the plan was to consider closing all three sites. However, following a discussion with Ros Jervis, Director Public Health, it was agreed that funding would be provided to help maintain some existing outdoor play provision.

Andrew Wolverson outlined the reasons for proposing the closure of Gatis Street and the Scotlands adventure playgrounds.

Cllr Waite commented on the feasibility of the community groups taking the responsibilities involved in managing the sites, under the community asset transfer option. Cllr Waite also queried the level of professional support that would be given to community groups, interested in operating Gatis Street and Scotlands Adventure; but who may lack the experience and knowledge to submit a bid and manage such a scheme. Cllr Waite commented that it was important that the lessons from previous attempts to support a community asset transfer should be considered.

Cllr Gibson confirmed that the lessons from the previous community asset transfer would be shared and used to inform future plans. Andrew Wolverson commented on the support that would be available to help people interested in being involved and running a facility as a community asset.

Cllr Warren wanted a reassurance that if local community groups were not able to take on the management that the option to consider the disposal of the sites would be a last resort. Cllr Warren was concerned about the impact that the loss of the facility would have on the local community.

Andrew Wolverson explained that a report would have to go back to Cabinet Resources Panel if no community groups expressed an interest in taking up the option of managing the site as community asset.

Cllr Waite referred to the previous attempt at community asset transfer and the importance of learning the lessons from this experience.

Cllr O'Neill commented on the reference in the report about the responsibilities on the Council to meet requirement in the Education Act 2006 and whether the proposed changes would ensure that it would still be able to provide opportunities for structured play. Andrew Wolverson explained that current play provision for 0-5 delivered in childrens centre and the work being done with parents to provide more play opportunities.

Cllr Warren expressed concerns about the potential disposal of play service provision and wanted alternative option to selling the site. Cllr Warren suggested the option to mothball the buildings should be considered as an alternative to selling the site. Cllr Warren commented that this would be a cheaper option to opening new buildings as it would involve the need for capital building costs to be found.

Cllr Warren commented that the current funding situation may be different in 5 – 10 years and that it would be possible to enable the sites to be re-opened at cheaper alternative to providing a new site.

Cllr Waite commented on the process for consulting with the community about the proposals. Andrew Wolverson explained that there would be a rigorous community consultation process with service users about the proposals.

Cllr Hardacre queried the selection criteria used to decide that Gatis Street and Scotlands Adventure sites should be considered for closure, despite being located in deprived areas of Wolverhampton. Cllr Hardacre commented that he would have wanted to see details of the selection process included in the report. Andrew Wolverson briefly outlined the selection process used and agreed that this information would be included in the report to Cabinet.

Cllr Hardacre suggested that this details of the most and least used sites based on usage figures should also be included. Andrew Wolverson explained that Old

Fallings was selected because it was purpose built facility and would better meet the needs of families, particularly for children with disabilities.

The panel commented that parents would prefer to use local facilities and also some concern was expressed that children and young people may not be willing to travel outside their normal area to use. There was also concern expressed about the potential extra travelling costs involved for young people wanting to use Old Fallings, rather than Gatis Street or Scotlands Adventure Playgrounds, which may be closer to them.

Cllr Hardacre queried the financial figures detailed in paragraph of the report. The information presented would suggest that there was likely to be an unallocated amount of £49,000 in the budget. Andrew Wolverson explained that this figure relates to building management costs and that this would be made clearer in the report to be presented in the Cabinet.

Cllr O'Neill queried if the Council would be able to meet its statutory obligations as outlined in paragraph 2.3. of the report, specifically the phrase "sufficient services". Emma Bennett explained that the local authority statutory duty was vague about what the local authority should provide. Cllr O'Neill requested the report to Council includes clarification of the phrase.

Youth Council representative expressed concern about the impact of the closure of adventure playgrounds at a time when the Epic Youth Café is due for closure and the gap in provision until Youth Zone opens in 2015. Emma Bennett accepted that there would be a gap in youth service provision between the closure of Epic and the opening of the Youth Zone. Emma Bennett explained that there is other play provision available at school clubs. In addition, schools have been given extra funding following the award of pupil premium and that it was important not to rely solely on the Council to provide play facilities. Emma Bennett commented that it was important that perception is challenged that there is no local provision, when the reality is that there is significant play resources available to young people.

Cllr Gibson commented that the Government policy of encouraging community and voluntary groups to take on the management of local facilities.

Cllr Warren queried if there was sufficient capacity at Old Fallings Adventure Playground to meet the demand from the estimated 640 users of other sites who wanted to use it. Andrew Wolverson responded that we need to grow and develop existing play provision as part of a wider review of the service. Andrew Wolverson explained that there was the opportunity to look at parks and other direct play provision across the City to meet the demand.

Mrs Watkins queried the level of financial commitment from Public Health to fund Old Fallings Adventure Playground after the initial first year as outlined in paragraph 4.2. Andrew Wolverson explained that there is an expectation that Public Health will continue to support Old Fallings in the future.

Cllr Evans repeated concerns that the comments from the panel suggest that not enough work has been done to consider the implications of the proposal to close Scotland and Gatis Street adventure playgrounds and more information was needed. Cllr Evans commented on concerns about the risk of increased crime as result of the sites closing.

Cllr Dehar commented on the risk of increased crime as a result of implementing the suggested proposals. Cllr Dehar commented on how young people with special educational needs would be affected by the proposed closures. Andrew commented on the specialist facilities available to young people with disabilities at Old Fallings.

Resolved

The panel agreed that a summary of their comments about the proposals would be included as an appendix to the main report that will be presented to Cabinet on 10.9.14

6 **Proposal regarding Children's Residential and Fostering Provision Exclusion of public and press**

Resolved:

That in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item(s) of business as they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information falling within the paragraphs of Schedule 12A of the Act set out below:

Item No.	Title	Applicable paragraph
5	Proposals regarding Children's Residential and Fostering Provision	3

Proposals regarding Children's Residential and Fostering Provision

Cllr Val Gibson presented the report on a proposal to remodel existing Looked after Children services and plans to increase the number of local family placements available for children who would otherwise need to be placed in a residential home. Cllr Gibson outlined plans detailed in the report to create a specialist foster carers service to meet the needs of Looked After Children with higher care and or support needs.

Cllr Gibson explained that the key aim of the proposal was to improve outcomes for children and young people in care. Cllr Gibson explained that the savings detailed in the financial implications section of the main report.

Cllr Gibson explained that the Council has a duty to consult with young people and their families about the plans.

The panel discussed the impact of the planned reduction in beds on the ability of the Council to meet future changes. Emma Bennett explained that some children would still need secure accommodation and the Council would always need to have some residential care provision. The need for residential care provision can also met be met by using external providers.

Cllr Waite commented on the plans to market and promote the specialist foster care service. Cllr Gibson responded that the marketing recruitment campaign has already started.

Cllr Warren expressed support for the plans but queried how the Council would be able to respond to a situation in five to ten years where there is a surge in the number of looked after children needing residential care. Emma Bennett explained that there is an external market for secure places and extra provision can be found if needed. In addition, Emma Bennett explained that with the current use of beds there was sufficient capacity in the system, but the planned closure of residential homes would be reviewed to take stock of the situation.

Emma Bennett explained that the provision of specialist foster care was £20,000 cheaper compared to placing a child in residential care and also gives children better outcomes.

Resolved

The panel fully support the proposals detailed in the report to remodel existing Looked after Children Services. The panel would like its comments on the proposals incorporated into the report for Cabinet meeting on 10.9.14.