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MEETING	LEARNING & CULTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
DATE	7 DECEMBER 2011
PRESENT	COUNCILLORS REID (CHAIR), CUNNINGHAM-CROSS (VICE-CHAIR), BROOKS, JEFFRIES, LEVENE, TAYLOR, WATSON AND DOUGLAS (AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR CLLR FITZPATRICK)
APOLOGIES	COUNCILLOR FITZPATRICK

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## **22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

At this point in the meeting, Members were asked to declare any personal or prejudicial interests they might have in relation to the business on the agenda or any other general interests they might have on issues within the remit of the Committee. The following interests were declared:

- Councillor Brooks declared a personal interest in agenda item 6 – “Review of Demographics for York Primary Schools” in respect of denominational school transport, as she was a regular communicant of the Church of England and a member of Dunnington Parochial Church Council. Her son was also undertaking religious training.
- Councillor Douglas declared a personal interest as her child attended primary school.

## **23. MINUTES**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Learning and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 28 September 2011 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

## **24. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

It was reported that there had been no registrations to speak under the Council’s Public Participation Scheme.

**25. 2011/12 SECOND QUARTER FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT -  
LIFELONG LEARNING & CULTURE AND CHILDREN & YOUNG  
PEOPLE'S SERVICES**

Members considered a report analysing the latest performance for 2011/12 and forecasting the outturn position by reference to the service plan and budgets for all of the relevant services falling under the responsibility of the Director of Adults, Children & Education and the Director of Communities & Neighbourhoods.

Attention was drawn to the projected overspend within Arts and Culture Education (£187k) which was as a result of the restructure going live from the beginning of the academic year and one off redundancy costs. Members also noted a further £690k of net pressures within Children & Young People's budgets, made up of the following significant variations:

- Number of children currently under the care of the council is considerably higher than predicted.
- An increase in the number of children in local foster placements.
- The number of children in Independent Fostering Agency placements is expected to exceed that provided for in the budget.

Details were given of the action that was being taken to mitigate the pressures, including a vacancy freeze, a moratorium on non-essential expenditure and assessing 2012/13 savings proposals to ascertain if any of these could be brought forward.

Members questioned officers about the upward trend in the number of Looked After Children. They were assured that this intervention was taken only when there was no alternative family support. At the request of Members, details were given of the type of arrangements that were in place for the 250 Looked After Children, including the 54 who were not in foster placements.

It was noted that young people were staying longer in the council's care, which was encouraging as this arrangement tended to ensure that they had better outcomes. Delays in legal proceedings, which were beyond the council's control, had also impacted on the budget. Members were pleased to note that the council was performing well in terms of adoption. Officers

stated that the increase in the number of Looked After Children was discussed regularly at DMT meetings.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

REASON: To update the Committee on the latest financial and performance position for 2011/12.

## 26. PRESENTATION ON CORPORATE PARENTING

Members received a presentation in support of the Committee's forthcoming review of Corporate Parenting.

Members had also received the following documents:

- "Welcome to Corporate Parenting – A Councillor Development Learning Resource"
- "10 questions to ask if you're scrutinising services for looked after children"

Members congratulated officers on the Authority's performance in the national ratings for councils. They were also pleased to note the increase in the number of local carers.

Clarification was sought as to whether the Independent Fostering Agencies provided value for money. Officers confirmed that it was expensive to use the agencies but that they did provide a useful service. It was pleasing to note that the council had very strong relationships with foster carers and the support that it provided was valued by the carers.

Officers were asked about the number of children who were looked after by the Authority because their parents had learning difficulties. Details were given of the support that the council put in place to support parents who were finding it difficult to manage, including looking to the child's extended family to see if they could provide support. On some occasions this was not possible but the evidence that the council had to present in Court was extremely high. Advocacy arrangements were also in place to ensure that the views of parents were heard. Concerns were expressed that arrangements such as pre-natal classes may not be fully accessible and Members emphasised the need for the council to work closely with *the health services and the CVS (Council for Voluntary Services) and the Voluntary and*

*Community Sector Forum for Learning Difficulties to ensure that adequate pre- and post-natal support is available to parents. Amended at meeting on 25 January 2012]*

Members asked about the reasons for the increase in the number of Looked After Children, particularly as officers had previously predicted that the number would fall. Officers stated that the number of Child Protection Plans in the city had risen from 80 to 159. The reasons for this were predominately related to abuse and neglect. This increase was also reflected regionally and nationally.

Members gave consideration to the focus of the scrutiny review. They agreed that the following issues should be considered:

- The attainment of Looked After Children
- Councillors' role as Corporate Parents

Officers outlined some of the arrangements that were in place to track the educational attainment of Looked After Children, including a nominated virtual headteacher who monitored their progress.

Members requested that the following information be presented to them to assist them in carrying out the review:

- Responses to the questions detailed in Section 2 of the "10 questions to ask if you're scrutinising services for looked after children" publication.
- Details of the Directorate's plans to improve the academic achievement of Looked After Children.
- Information as to how Members, who did not hold a Cabinet position, could carry out their responsibilities as a Corporate Parent.

RESOLVED: That the additional information requested be considered at the next meeting.

REASON: To progress the review.

## **27. REVIEW OF DEMOGRAPHICS FOR YORK PRIMARY SCHOOLS - INTERIM REPORT**

Members received an interim report which presented the information provided to date in support of this review. Members

were asked to agree the remit and identify what, if any, additional information was required to support their work on the review.

It was noted that paragraph 35 (ii) of the report should read...*"outlined in paragraph 32 above"*.

Attention was drawn to Annex G of the report which provided information on denominational transport numbers and costs for 2010/11. It was noted that expenditure had reduced because of a decrease in the number of pupils who qualified. Consideration was given to the maps which detailed the location of pupils currently receiving transport and who attended Manor CE School, All Saint's RC School or Archbishop Holgate's CE School.

It was noted that consultation on any changes would need to take place in the Spring Term 2012 with a view to any changes being implemented from September 2013 at the earliest.

Councillor Brookes expressed concern that discussion had focussed solely on the cost implications of providing transport to denominational schools and that ideological issues had not been taken into account. She was also concerned that the committee's focus appeared to be on the issue of school transport policies but that this was not reflected in the title of the review. This meant that people who may wish to contribute may be unaware that this item was being considered. It was requested that this be made clearer on the agenda for the next meeting.

Discussion took place as to whether consideration should be given to school catchment areas. Officers explained the difficulties that arose when changes were made to school catchment areas. They gave details of action that was being taken to increase capacity at those schools which were experiencing pressures in accommodating children who lived in their catchment area, including the use of government funding to create additional places.

Members agreed that they were satisfied with the oversubscription criteria in use in York's Community and Voluntary Controlled schools.

In respect of current School Travel Policies, Members requested that the following additional information be provided to assist them in their review:

- Cost implications of a phased introduction (shown by breakdown of year groups)
- Information from East Riding Council regarding their experiences as to the effects of changing policies in respect of denominational transport.

**RESOLVED:** That, at the next meeting, Members consider the information requested above in respect of school transport policies and agree recommendations arising from the review.

**REASON:** To progress the review.

## **28. SCRUTINY TOPIC ASSESSMENT - YORK MUSEUMS TRUST**

Members considered a report which presented the York Museum Trust scrutiny topic proposed by Councillor Watson together with background information on the formation of the Trust and its performance.

Councillor Watson outlined his reasons for proposing this scrutiny topic, including concerns that the Trust could be more transparent and that the council should have more input in its work.

Some Members stated that they did not feel it to be appropriate to scrutinise the work of the Trust, other than to ensure that the grant allocated by the Council was delivering the outcomes that had been requested, including issues in respect of equalities. Such scrutiny may include looking at the measures and indicators that were in place and ascertaining whether the use of the grant allocated matched the council's priorities and was achieving value for money. Members agreed that it would not be appropriate to seek to scrutinise the Trust's internal processes.

It was noted that two City of York Council Members served as Trustees of the Museums Trust.

Members requested that they receive information, including the nature of the Trust's relationship with the council and the structures in place. It would also be helpful to receive a copy of the report presented in July 2002 which set out the purpose of the Trust.

RESOLVED: That the requested information be presented to the committee at the next meeting.

REASON: To enable Members to decide whether or not to proceed with a scrutiny review on this topic.

**29. LEARNING AND CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORKPLAN 2011-12**

Members considered the Committee's workplan for the remainder of the 2011-12 municipal year.

The following amendments to the workplan were agreed:

- The agenda items for the meeting on 25 January 2012 to be:
  - York Theatre Royal – Service Level Agreement Update
  - Demographics/School Transport Policies – to consider the information requested and make recommendations arising from the review.
  - Corporate Parenting Review – to consider the information requested.
  - York Museums Trust – to consider the information requested.
  - Workplan
- An additional meeting to be convened in February to consider the following items:
  - Attendance of Chair of York@Large and Chair of Learning City
  - Presentation on Managing Public Parks
- The agenda items for the meeting on 21 March 2012 to be:
  - Third Quarter Finance & Performance Monitoring Report
  - Workplan

RESOLVED: That the workplan be updated to reflect the decisions detailed above.

REASON: To progress the work of the committee.

Councillor Reid, Chair

[The meeting started at 5.30 pm and finished at 6.40 pm].