

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY 22 JANUARY 2003 AT 10.30am**

Agenda Item No.

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THE CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES SERVICE PLAN 2003/04

Report of the Director of Children, Schools and Families

Author: - Julian Edwards, Service Planning Manager
Tel: - 01992 555941
Executive Member: - Robert Gordon

1. Purpose of the report

To invite Scrutiny Committee to consider and make recommendations to the Cabinet on the Children, Schools and Families Service Plan 2003/04 in the light of the public consultation that has recently been completed.

2. Summary

The CSF Plan 2003/04 brings together the key requirements of the:

- Education Development Plan
- Quality Protects Management Action Plan
- Early Years Development and Childcare Plan
- Youth Justice Plan
- Adult and Community Learning Plan

plus many other associated plans and strategies collectively designed to improve the opportunities for and achievement of children and young people.

The report summarises the many comments received during the wide-ranging and extensive consultation process. Copies of the responses and comments received during consultation are available in the members' room.

Amendments have been made to the draft plan, which was issued for public consultation in September, and these reflect:

- the feedback provided through the stakeholder conferences and workshops
- feedback from young people
- recent legislative and policy developments
- current budgetary information and forecasts

The draft text of the Plan was considered at the meeting of the Strategy Panel held on 17 December 2002 and the version of the text before Scrutiny Committee takes account of their comments.

A copy of the revised text of the plan is attached to this report. Also attached is a table setting out the proposed performance measures for each Strategic Area, together with those that we propose to remove. These have been reviewed in the light of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment process and explanations for any changes are included.

3. Conclusions

The draft CSF Plan 2003/04 has been well received and a large number of positive and helpful comments have been provided.

The Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider the revised draft and make recommendations on the content of the final version for the meeting of the Cabinet on 27 January 2003.

The Children, School and Families Service Plan 2003/04 will be approved at the meeting of the County Council being held on 13 February 2003.

4. Background

- 4.1 During the first year of CSF, a strategic plan was drawn up, bringing together all the major service plans for children. It covers the period April 2002 to March 2007 and is updated annually. The CSF Plan 2002/03 was approved at the County Council meeting in February 2002 and has become the central planning device within the CSF Service. It has been recognised nationally for the way in which it brings together the wide range of planning requirements so that all the energy and resources of the service are focused on our priorities for children.
- 4.2 The Children Schools and Families Service Plan 2003/4: Draft for Consultation was issued in September 2002. The structure of the plan for 2003/04 is as in the existing plan with eight Strategic Areas, which include priorities and actions designed to ensure that CSF continues to progress towards achieving its published targets.

5. Consultation Process

- 5.1 Copies of the complete draft CSF Plan and/or the summary version were issued to all CSF staff, all Hertfordshire schools and to all CSF stakeholders. Response forms were included within all of these and an electronic response facility was also provided.
- 5.2 An extensive series of conferences and workshops was organised, each of which focused on specific areas or aspects of the plan. These proved to be very well attended (in total nearly 400 attendees) and provided a significant amount of the total feedback.
- 5.3 An event for young people 'Make it Happen in Hertfordshire!' was held at Knebworth Barns on 3 November. Over 100 young people attended and their views on various aspects of their lives and how these are reflected in the CSF Plan were sought via a variety of creative media.
- 5.4 CSF commissioned the Viewpoint Organisation to undertake a computer-based consultation with young people, using interactive software. This has been used within schools, youth groups etc. and a copy of the report from Viewpoint is included within the CSF Plan Response folder.
- 5.5 Forty-five individual responses were received from organisations or individuals. These responses have varied from very detailed responses e.g. from the Learning and Skills Council, to those offering very specific suggestions for improvement.
- 5.6 A folder containing all of the material from the public consultation process is available in the members' room.
- 5.7 All of the responses have been considered in the preparation of the revised draft plan.

6. Main themes within the Feedback

- 6.1 There were many comments that there is a need for CSF to consolidate and ensure that recent developments and services are sustained and consolidated.
- 6.2 We received various remarks about the Performance Measures (it needs to be remembered that these had not been finalised when the consultation took place last year); these suggestions include:
- Reviewing the number of targets
 - Including information about performance measures within the introductory text
 - Being more explicit about performance against targets
 - Involving other agencies in writing and agreeing targets, so that our partners are signed-up and working alongside us to the same goals
 - Some questions about the linkage of actions against targets in certain areas of the plan
- 6.3 Many replies related to the need to make more explicit mention of our major partners. We received a number of comments about significant gaps and how this reduced credibility and ownership of the document and its targets. These included:
- e.g. Health, inc. CAMHS Service, Midwives GPs, PCTs etc.
District Councils
Learning and Skills Council
Connexions
- 6.4 There were also a very large number of specific proposals relating to individual actions detailed in the draft plan – these can be viewed in the folder within the members room; additional copies of the material can be made available on request.
- 6.5 The difficulties surrounding recruitment and retention that are being experienced by CSF and other agencies in Hertfordshire are continually affecting service delivery.
- 6.6 The overall tone of the feedback was positive and supportive of the direction of the work of CSF with a clear commitment from other agencies to work with CSF to take forward a shared agenda for improving the achievement, attainments and well-being of children and young people.

7. Strategy Panel - recommendation

The text of the draft CSF Service Plan 2003/4 was considered at the meeting of the Strategy Panel held on 17 December 2002. Members of the Panel requested that section 4.3.6. be re-considered at the meeting of Scrutiny Committee to determine whether an explicit reference should be made to developing Units in Secondary Schools for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorders. (see also section 4.3.4.)

8. The Performance Measures within the Plan

8.1 We have reviewed the Performance Measures set out in the original draft of the 2003/04 Plan in the light of:

- the bureaucratic burdens of data collection on schools
- their continuing relevance in the light of any changes made in the priorities set out in the Plan
- changes in government measures
- any issues about the data collection systems
- the feedback from the Comprehensive Performance Assessment about the aspirational nature of our targets and the consequent need for them to be reviewed

8.2 The Performance Measures now set out in the draft Plan are suggested for adoption. In most cases, both the indicators and the targets for future years are unchanged. However, there are some indicators, which we propose to drop, a small number, which we propose to add, and also some where future year targets have been changed. In all cases, the reasons underlying these changes are indicated alongside the relevant indicators. In considering these, it is important to bear in mind that a number of indicators, and also targets for future years, are set or agreed nationally, or in the context of the Best Value Performance Plan.

8.3 Overall, the performance data in relation to 2002 indicates strong or improving performance across a large number of areas. This is consistent with our strong performance, as a service, under OfSTED and SSI star ratings, and also under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment process. That said, we have in the past set ourselves very challenging targets in many areas; this means that, even where our performance is improving, we may not have met the targets that we set ourselves. This is true, for example, in relation to a number of the attainment targets in Strategic Area 1, and also across other areas. We have reflected the lessons learned from this in the revised targets.

9. Financial Implications

9.1 The overall budget context for the Children, Schools and Families service, and for schools budgets, in particular, has been complicated this year by the significant changes to the structure of Local Government Finance (as discussed elsewhere on this agenda), with the financing of Education being the area where the change has been most marked.

9.2 The Standards Fund programme itself was not announced until 30 November (as opposed to the indicative date of October), and in the case of a significant numbers of grants, notifications of allocations were received at a later stage.

- 9.3 Whilst the budget process has identified a level of resource to support the Standards Fund, we are still reviewing the implications of the Guidance Notes and trying to match as best as possible, the aims expressed in the CSF Plan with the available grants.
- 9.4 We are awaiting confirmation from the Department of Health about the likely availability of a new grant stream, "Choice Protects".
- 9.5 At this juncture, we would remain confident that the activity in the CSF Plan could be supported in 2003/04, but until the review of grant funding streams is concluded, we cannot guarantee that this will be the case.

10. Conclusions

The Children, Schools and Families Service Plan 2003/4 has been re-drafted following the period of public consultation. Members of the Scrutiny Committee are asked to consider the revised version.

Background information referred to by the author

Children, Schools and Families Service Plan 2002/3

Children, Schools and Families Service Plan 2003/4: Draft for Consultation

Children, Schools and Families Service Plan 2003/4: Consultation Feedback