

CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

29 October 2009 at 6.00 p.m.

Panel Members present

E. Hughes (Chair)
E. Pitt (Vice-Chair)
K. Chambers
A. Paul
L. Beeley
R. Martin

Non-Elected Voting Members

Alan McDevitt Parent Governor

Non-Elected Non-Voting Members

Bob Grainger Secondary School Teacher

Portfolio Holder Present

Councillor R. Walker

Officers present

Louise Hughes	Assistant Director – Children’s Services
Sue Wedgwood	Assistant Managing Director – Improvement and Effectiveness - Serco
John Pryce-Jones	Corporate Performance Manager
Heather Maybury	Investigations Officer – Children’s Services
Tony Brown	Youth Inclusion Programme Coordinator

37/09 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Cassidy, Councillor Khan and Paul Williams.

38/09 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of this meeting.

39/09 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest and party whip for the duration of the meeting.

40/09 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2009, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

(annexed)

41/09 SNEYD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The Assistant Managing Director, Improvement and Effectiveness provided an update:

- The Transition group continues to meet regularly, this includes groups representing finance and human resources;
- Sneyd is also part of the Black Country Challenge accessing funding, as well as assistance from other schools. This support includes a coaching programme which targets Year 10 pupils. There is also support for the recruitment of teaching staff;
- A meeting has been held with the Chair of Governors with agreement reached for the creation of an Interim Executive Body (IEB),
- Pupils, staff and parents have been advised of the proposed changes in relation to the consultation which will be confirmed if no objections are received from Government;
- In response to a question from the Chair, the Assistant Managing Director explained that it was possible that the school would lose further pupils in January. However, it was also the case that some pupils had left mid-term. As part of its response to this issue the Transition group is meeting on a regular basis to address these issues and play a pro active role in supporting the school through this phase;
- Redundancy notices have been issued for staff for the 31 August 2010. A Panel member thought it important that staff are encouraged to remain until closure as a way of maintaining consistency and quality of provision for pupils. Possible incentives to do so might include a commitment that they will be able to take up a similar post at another school. The Assistant Managing Director explained that the Transition group is working collaboratively with teaching staff and professional associations to provide support. They are also making staff aware of vacant posts in other local schools;
- The Assistant Managing Director, agreed to provide guidance to Panel members in relation to the number of teaching staff who will be made redundant following the closure of the school.

Resolved:

That:

The Panel be provided with guidance regarding the number of teaching staff who will be made redundant following the closure of the school.

42/09 ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT

The Investigations Officer, Children's Services introduced the report (annexed) explaining that it provided guidance in relation to statutory complaints received by Children's Services from those in receipt of statutory care from the Council:

- In the period 1st April 2008 to 31st March 2009 there were eighty-six complaints, with three progressing to stage two;
- During the same period there were twelve comments and eight compliments;
- The Service successfully achieved six of its eight targets, with the remaining two partially achieved;

- Of these two, the first being the review of publicity and awareness raising is an ongoing project which is expected to develop further next year. This includes consideration of alternative methods of making a complaint, for example, texting;
- The second partially achieved target was related as it referred to increasing the number of complaints received using formats other than letter or leaflet. The service is hoping to promote texting and also increase the number of complaints received by email;
- Alternative Dispute Resolution through mediation has been developed by the service with the aim of resolving complaints without the need to progress to stage 2. Mediation was offered and accepted in one instance and a successful conclusion reached. On two other occasions it was declined and stage 2 investigations were commenced. It is hoped to further increase use of mediation which is both cost effective and can often lead to a speedier and more satisfactory outcome for the complainant;
- The “Learning from Complaints” scheme has been introduced into the service, with twenty-one forms received from managers from a total of eighty-six complaints (24%). A key benefit of using the scheme is that it should avoid the repetition of complaints;
- In terms of revised targets for 2008/09: It is intended to continue to build on the success achieved with mediation; to continue the review of publicity and awareness raising. This includes determining what publicity is most suitable for young people and young people with learning disabilities, a process which will include consulting with a working group of young people; encouraging the use of electronic methods for making complaints; to provide further support to managers the Customer Care Team operates a weekly surgery providing guidance on complaint handling. The number of staff who have attended surgeries has varied from a maximum of five to none;
- A further significant target relates to managers ensuring they meet the statutory timescales for acknowledging and investigating complaints. In addition, that managers always share complaints with the Customer Care Team to enable them to provide the most effective support and guidance.

In response to a query from the Chair, the Investigations Officer explained that there were a mixture of themes for complaints. These included a young person in residential facilities concern regarding limited contact with their family; while concerns were also expressed regarding difficulties of transport to meetings with families. In terms of how complaints can be made, a young person has the option of communicating concerns via a youth advocate. A further advantage of this approach is that it often highlights issues at a pre-complaints stage meaning that a resolution can be achieved without the need of deferring to the formal procedure. In terms of the numbers of complaints received, increases are often witnessed following significant incidents, for example, Baby Peter. In respect of vexatious complaints she explained that repeat complaints can be received from the same people regarding the same issue, or regarding decisions taken by courts in relation to child protection that are not subject to the complaints procedure.

Following a further Panel query, the Assistant Director explained that a process is in place within Children’s Services for escalating up, to either her or the Interim Assistant Director, instances of managers not completing “Learning from Complaints” forms. She added that in terms of responding to complaints it was important to ensure that the proper response was always given as well as the statutory timescales met. In terms of how improvement is achieved following complaints, the Corporate Performance Manager explained that issues

are reported to the Performance Board for review. In addition, a programme of training events and awareness training is also undertaken, including ensuring that staff are aware of statutory timescales for responding to complaints. Officers advised that complainants received an apology and where appropriate expressing gratitude for highlighting issues that assist in improving services.

43/09 BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE (BSF): SECONDARY SCHOOL STRATEGY

The Assistant Managing Director introduced the presentation (annexed) and Secondary Strategy (annexed) explaining that it was important to ensure that the strategy fits with the Council's Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS), the Children and Young People's Plan as well as align it with Building Schools for the Future (BSF).

The context for the Secondary Strategy was not just funding for physical buildings, but the regeneration of communities and transformation of learning. Its objective was to raise expectations and aspirations with full engagement with pupils, their families and the wider community and was reinforced by its dovetailing with the Children and Young People's Plan:

- It is apparent that pupils are now being educated to undertake jobs in the future that do not currently exist. In addition, this generation of young people are likely experience seven or eight different careers;
- To help young people achieve the best outcomes it was intended to create a variety of learning journeys which they would have the opportunity to access. This might involve work-based vocational learning rather than only academic learning and will be supported by collaborative working between schools and the innovative use of ICT;
- The development of the Strategy has been supported by information provided by schools, including their Strategies for Change, as well as pupil planning and placement forecasts to 2019.
- The objective is to place schools at the centre of communities and together with the development of strong partnerships between other schools and partners ensure that schools and the curriculum they offer are fit for purpose meeting the needs of children, young people and their families
- Key priorities include: reducing under eighteen conceptions; improving GCSE results; reduction in the number of young people categorised as Not in Education, Training or Employment (NEETs) as well as increase the number of level 2 and 3 qualifications achieved and to increase the number of students entering higher education;
- An associated consultation has sought to objectively challenge how the strategy has been developed in terms of: how it fits with the 14-19 agenda and whether it will address the needs of children and young people; whether there is agreement regarding the proposed changes to admission number; and whether a Centre of Excellence focused on engineering, in association with Wolverhampton University, will bring significant benefit to Walsall.

The Chair expressed concern regarding the limitations that a pupil's mobility will place on their ability to access the varied learning pathways that are being developed. He also pointed out that such an approach represented a degree of further complexity for pupils to manage, as well demanding significant maturity to attend and navigate a number of different school buildings. The Assistant Managing Director explained that Travel to Learn had enjoyed mixed success when piloted elsewhere in the country, the lessons learned can therefore be reflected in the local design. Often young people weren't concerned about having to use a

number of different buses to travel to different schools but by the prospect of attending classes in other schools wearing a different uniform. In terms of using different school buildings, the Building Schools for the Future programme was seeking to create schools that were accessible rather than daunting. The Assistant Director also explained that the investment in new technology means that it is not always necessary to physically travel to learn. For example, a lesson could be taught in more than one school at the same time via the internet.

A Panel member expressed the view that while the proposals represented exciting possibilities for the future, communities still needed good local schools. He also pointed out the difficulties faced by pupils and their parents who were less familiar with what the best learning choices would be and who might get left behind. The Assistant Managing Director explained that to ensure pupils enjoyed the best possible educational outcomes, the Primary Strategy was also being developed to deliver continuity with the Secondary Strategy. This included determining the most appropriate class sizes. Officers also acknowledged a further observation made by the Panel that the Secondary Strategy did not sufficiently consider the role of schools and their facilities within their local communities.

44/09 INTEGRATED YOUNG PEOPLE'S SUPPRT SERVICES (IYPSS)

The Assistant Director and the Youth Inclusion Programme Coordinator introduced the presentation (annexed) explaining that Cabinet had previously approved the reconfiguration of existing services, including the Youth Service and Youth Offending Service:

- IYPSS represents a new way of working but this is not limited to Council services. Local partners including the voluntary sector, the Police, the NHS and schools;
- The national context for the introduction of IYPSS includes Aiming High for Young People, 2007 and Youth Taskforce Action Plan, 2008;
- Officers also explained that the introduction of integrated services was particularly important to support the reduction in young people categorised as NEETs in Walsall. There has been an increase in the number of NEETs within the Black Country. Officers agreed to provide further guidance to the Panel regarding the recent increase in the number of NEETs;
- In addition to tackling the issue of NEETs, other key objectives of IYPSS were to target and support vulnerable young people in seeking to reduce substance misuse; reduce the number of under eighteen conceptions; achieve a reduction in first time entrants to the youth justice system; reduce the number of homeless young people; as well as increase the proportion of young people achieving level 2 and 3 qualifications and proportion of those participating in positive activities;
- It is recognised that young people only get one chance. However, they have not always been best served previously as a consequence of duplication and a lack of integration. The new integrated services will provide support for young people with the aim of promoting their active citizenship. It will seek to achieve this by operating as a proactive service, providing good quality provision, including a comprehensive range of positive leisure-time activities as well targeted support. Support will also be provided to the families of young people;
- IYPSS will be delivered locally within three major footprint areas, with the comprehensive range of services offered within each. This will enable

services to drill-down to particular neighbourhoods to better understand the needs of young people within specific communities;

- Consultation with staff and unions has indicated strong support for the delivery of IYPSS;
- Following a query from the Chair, the Youth Inclusion Programme Coordinator explained that the new arrangements will ensure the further development of a number of effective working relationships with local partners, including the Police as well as the creation of integrated systems which cut across the silos that currently exist. For example, he explained that at present some variation was experienced in terms of the level of assistance provided by partners in different parts of the borough in identifying young people requiring support;
- In relation to the pamphlet promoting the introduction of IYPSS Officers agreed to incorporate further contact details including a telephone number;
- Officers also provided guidance to the Panel regarding a national trial by the Police, "Operation Staysafe", currently operating in Walsall. The Scheme involves young people found on the streets late at night being taken by the Police to a place of safety and their parents alerted. Officers agreed to provide the Panel with further information regarding the trial;
- The Panel requested that a briefing be provided to the political groups regarding the introduction of IYPSS.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the Panel receive guidance regarding "Operation Staysafe" in Walsall;**
- 2. That a briefing be provided to the political groups regarding the introduction of IYPSS;**

and;

- 3. That the Panel receive guidance regarding the recent increase in the number of young people in Walsall categorised as Not in Education, Training or Employment (NEETs).**

45/09 WORK PROGRAMME 2009/10

The work programme and forward plan were noted.

46/09 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair confirmed the date of the next meeting was 4 December 2009.

The meeting terminated at 7:35 pm

Chair:

Date:

