

## **CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**

THURSDAY 15 APRIL 2010 AT 6.00 P.M.

### **Panel Members Present**

Councillor E Hughes (Chair)  
Councillor L Beeley  
Councillor A Paul  
Councillor K Chambers  
Councillor B Cassidy  
Councillor R Martin

### **Non elected Panel members present**

Bob Grainger  
Alan McDevitt  
E Chawira

### **Officers Present**

Louise Hughes- Assistant Director, Children's Services  
Graham Talbot- Interim Managing Director, Serco  
Avril Walton – Assistant Managing Director, Serco  
Alan Michell – Head of Service – Integrated Young  
People's Support Services (IYPSS)  
Paul Smith Young Persons Information Centre (YPIC)  
Manager  
Alison Butcher – Outgoing Building Schools for the  
Future (BSF), Project Director  
Kevin Reader - Interim BSF Project Director  
Caroline Guest – Access Manager, Serco  
Kevin Kendall – Head of Property Services  
David Bovell – Head of Service – Corporate Parenting  
Matthew Underhill – Scrutiny Officer

### **81/09 APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillor E Pitt,

### **82/09 SUBSTITUTIONS**

There were no substitutions for the duration of this meeting.

### **83/09 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip identified at this meeting.

### **84/09 MINUTES**

### **RESOLVED:**

**That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 MARCH 2010, copies having been previously circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.**

## **85/09 POSITIVE ACTIVITIES**

The Panel received a briefing from the Young Persons Information Centre (YPIC) Manager regarding its activities and the progress of young people who used the Centre. This followed a visit undertaken by the Positive Activities working group to the Centre in 2009 and a number of young people also attended the meeting to share their experiences of the Centre with the Panel. The main points of the Centre Manager's briefing and the subsequent discussion were as follows:

- The Centre Manager explained that following its opening in October 2007, the YPIC had established a thriving number of partners, including Connexions and the Police. While in terms of use of the Centre he explained that the weather does not impact on attendance;
- He agreed with the Chair that the Centre distinguished itself with other types of youth facilities. The manager stated that there isn't any table tennis tables, pool tables or dart boards the YPIC staff are JNC Community, Play & Youth Work qualified and staff have to rely on their youth work skills to engage with young people to achieve a recognisable outcome.
- The manager stated the YPIC is a unique facility that provides a range of workshops based on the requirements of young people that come into the centre. Issues from domestic violence and drug use are challenged and addressed via a range of methods such as canvas art and drama workshops.
- The YPIC is functional and purposeful providing practical support to young people rather than just simply somewhere to spend an evening. He explained that many of the young people who attended the Centre had made important personal development journeys. This is supported by being able to speak openly with youth workers and young advisors regarding any difficulties that they may be experiencing in a non-judgemental environment. A trained Counsellor, a Doctor, a lead nurse and a Health worker provide regular and valuable services on-site with workshops often undertaken to assist in encouraging discussion of important issues and matters of concern;
- A printed copy of the YPIC online magazine called the Youth Proof was circulated for members to view. The Youth Proof is created & designed by young people and it provides a snap shot of the type of activities that take place on a regular basis in the centre;
- The manager spoke about the fact that the YPIC was a centre that provided information and advice about services and activities within the local and surrounding areas. The YPIC has positive relationships with other providers of young people's activities such as Blakenall Community Partnership (BCP), Integrated Young Peoples Support Services (IYPSS) and WS3 which enables a more co-ordinated approach when providing services for young people;
- The young people explained that they had all benefitted from attending the YPIC, where they had all been appointed as young advisors. The Centre had variously assisted them in becoming more confident, raising self-

esteem, with one young person having left school due to a lack of confidence and was now studying for her GCSEs at college, while another had previously been involved in anti-social behaviour.

- The Members thanked young people, congratulating them on their success and courage in speaking to the Panel in an unfamiliar environment.

## **86/09 POSITIVE ACTIVITIES WORKING GROUP REPORT**

The Chair introduced the report (annexed) explaining that it had been the first time that the Members of the working group had been able to fully understand the full extent of local provision for young people and thanked the officers who had supported the process. The working group highlighted the importance of outreach work, together with the value of the recently launched mobile units in providing a focal point in seeking engagement with young people. Panel comments on the report included, the importance of encouraging young people to help shape activities, while the use of social media was also emphasised as a way of achieving engagement. A Member requested that all Councillors are provided with a regularly updated timetable to inform them of when the mobile units were in their wards to assist in directing young people to the facilities.

The Panel welcomed the working group's proposals and recommended that they be reported to Cabinet.

### **RESOLVED:**

**That:**

1. that the importance of outreach work in engaging young people continues to be recognised in the delivery of services;
2. that the Council supports the existing provider in identifying possible future funding partners to enable the Young People's Information Centre (YPIC) to continue to operate following the conclusion of New Deal funding in 2011;
3. that all Council services and partners ensure that all events and activities are shared with the Council's Integrated Young People's Support Services to assist in meeting the duty to publicise all Positive Activities;
4. that there is effective use of facilities, including mobile units, to target areas with limited provision and "hot spots";
5. that all opportunities are used to promote the wide range of Positive Activities that are available to young people in a way that is appropriate for the target audience, this should include all opportunities to make use of Council and partner managed websites, as well as social media;
6. that the importance of completing the Tell Us Survey is effectively communicated to young people within schools;
7. to receive case studies and regular reporting of activities and outcomes at the Children's and Young People Scrutiny Panel;
8. that a presentation regarding the initial period of the introduction of Integrated Young People's Support Services (IYPSS) is received by the Panel during the next municipal year. With consideration also

- given to providing similar presentations to Political groups;
9. that the Integrated Young People's Support Services (IYPSS) Newsletter for Members is produced on a regular basis;

and

10. that Members receive regularly updated timetables informing them of the locations of the mobile units.

#### 87/09 SNEYD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The Assistant Managing Director introduced the report (annexed) explaining that closing down any school is highly complex with many associated difficulties. The main points of the report and subsequent discussion were as follows:

- One of the key variables in managing the school prior to closure was pupil numbers, which were affected following the announcement of closure by both parents opting to find an alternative school for children, as well as staffing choosing to leave or gaining promotion to schools elsewhere. While the introduction of new teachers can have a re-vitalising affect, there had been significant staff turnover and this had further added to the difficulty of the task;
- In terms of the transfer of pupils to other schools there is a legal requirement for the Council to meet parental preferences. Where a preference had not been originally expressed support had been provided and all parents have now made a selection. Parents originally not expressing a preference probably for a number of reasons, including language barriers. Many of those schools offering places have held open evenings and even visited some families to explain what the potential learning journey might look like. At this stage ten schools are providing places for pupils transferring from Sneyd, with appeals ongoing at a further two and around a third of pupils transferring to schools outside the borough. In addition, to assist with the transition some pupils will be transferring to their new school in the summer term;
- To avoid any unnecessary interruption to learning Year 9 Pupils will be transferred once they have completed a key stage, enabling them to begin a further stage at their new schools;
- A Member queried the quality of education being provided at the school given that it was now in Special Measures. The Assistant Managing Director, Serco, explained that support in delivering the curriculum at the school had been received from the Black Country Challenge in collaboration with head teachers from other local schools in supporting the school in delivering the curriculum. It was also clearly in the interests of other local head teachers to provide this support and maintain levels of attainment;
- A Member wanted to understand the action being taken to tackle the issue of significant multiple bus journeys that pupils would be required to undertake to travel to new schools, including Brownhills School. It was also pointed out by the Panel that difficult and lengthy school journeys would be

likely to challenge attendance and attainment. A further issue raised by the Panel was the potential disruption and impact on overall attainment that would be caused by cohorts of pupils in the same year being transferred together to new schools. The Chair emphasised that it was important that appropriate support that reflected individual needs was provided for those pupils transferring, this included any who Looked after Children (LAC)s and those who act as carers;

- A Panel member also raised concerns regarding recent media coverage which suggested that Year 12 sixth-formers at Sneyd would not be able to continue into Year 13. While this was not now the case it would be important that effective provision is maintained, including one-to-one tuition, to ensure those that continue at the school, as well as those that transfer elsewhere are not disadvantaged. The Interim Managing Director, Serco, agreed that it was important that appropriate support was provided. This would include emotional support where required, with discussions to be held with colleagues from IYPSS to determine how this could be delivered. The Assistant Managing Director, Serco, also confirmed that the potential of funding direct mini-bus transport for transferring pupils to Brownhills school would be investigated;
- In respect of future community group usage of the Sneyd school site post-closure, the Head of Property Services explained that a dialogue had been started with the Community Association (CA) to understand their potential requirements and core needs. The site includes a significant area including an artificial pitch, tennis courts and a lake. Discussions are also set to take place between the Council and the University and College as a potential sponsor. This will then lead to further consideration of the viable options that may be available. For example, determining who will own and operate the site, with potential arrangements including, the Council owning and leasing the site to the CA to operate.

#### **RESOLVED:**

**That a further update regarding the activity relating to the closure of Sneyd, including support for transferring pupils and future community usage of the site, are presented to the Panel at the earliest opportunity in the new municipal year.**

#### **88/09 BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE (BSF)**

The recently appointed Interim BSF Project Director introduced the report (annexed). The main points of the briefing and subsequent discussion were as follows:

- The completion of the draft Strategy for Change part 2 (SfC2) document was a key milestone. The need for further clarity regarding affordability means there will be a delay in submission of the final document to Cabinet and then onto Partnership for Schools (PfS). However, this will not affect development of the Outline Business Case (OBC) for submission to PfS in November 2010 seeking authorisation from Her Majesty's Treasury (HMT)

- to proceed to procurement;
- A number of programme risks have been identified, these include affordability, facilities management, for example, ensuring funding is available to maintain buildings in the longer-term, as well as issues relating to land title ownership, which has included undertaking land searches;
- Other activity includes working with schools as part of the Vision to Reality process to determine how they will deliver the curriculum of the future. This will then form part of the OBC. Elsewhere, Design Quality Indicator (DQI) workshops are planned in which schools will participate in the design process and determining school shape. In addition, the active involvement process continues, with 7UP groups, consisting of representatives from Wave 6a and feeder schools, contributing their views to the programme;
- The Gateway 0 Review, a peer group review, took place earlier this year. A number of recommendations were identified and an associated action plan developed. This included, ensuring that clear and measurable objectives for the programme had been identified and appropriate governance arrangements put in place;
- Following a Panel query officers explained that it was difficult to know at this stage what the likely consequence for the BSF programme would be in the event of a change in national government.

#### **89/09 VALIDATED EXAM RESULTS**

The Assistant Managing Director, Serco, introduced the report (annexed). The main points of the briefing and subsequent discussion were as follows:

- The validated results for 2009 indicate improvements over previous years at both Key Stage 2 and 4;
- A Member expressed concern regarding the low position of Walsall in the attainment table of local authorities. She also raised concerns regarding the difficulty of the attainment gap being narrowed, particularly, as two schools in the north of the borough are in special measures. A further Panel member suggested that the current position did not reflect the hard work of those in challenging schools, including the positive impact made by one to one tuition.

#### **90/09 UNAUTHORISED ABSENCE WORKING GROUP REPORT**

Councillor Cassidy introduced the report (annexed) explaining that working group had considered a range of different types of absence and related issues and thanked the officers who supported the process. The main points of the briefing and subsequent discussion were as follows:

- The working group's investigation determined that the application of absence policy varied;
- The working group found that a key issue in the application of absence policy in schools with significant number of pupils from Pakistan and Bangladesh was concerns regarding accusations of racism should an absence request be refused;

- It was the working group's view that a key message is that "every school day matters and every lesson counts". It was also significant that a correlation between attendance and attainment had been demonstrated;
- The working group also felt it was important that head teachers are properly supported in applying the policy and that the report itself would prove a useful document for young people.

The Panel welcomed the working group's proposals and recommended that they be reported to Cabinet.

## **RESOLVED:**

**That:**

1. an absence/attendance strategy for Walsall is developed encompassing and engagement of all areas of Children & Young People services, Schools and Children's Workforce within 12 months;
2. Engagement with community leaders is continued by Children's Services – Serco when developing strategies and guidance for schools on the topic of attendance;
3. The working group endorse the tackling holiday absence document and consider it to be a useful tool for schools, although it is recommended that
  - a. the wording of the model letters is thoroughly reviewed
  - b. letters are addressed to 'Dear Parent / Guardian'
4. Awareness of the issues surrounding the effect of absence is improved amongst;
  - a) Families/communities
  - b) Governors
  - c) Elected Members
  - d) The Local Authority - message from Walsall's leaders that 'every day matters and every lesson counts'
  - e) Children's Services – Serco promote good attendance by reporting and press releases;
5. Through the member development steering group a training session is commissioned for elected members and parent governors on attendance for the 2010/11 municipal year.
6. Head teachers should be supported to aim for a consistent approach with schools across the borough through the governing body by;
  - a) A school governor on each governing body is elected as 'lead' for attendance (a information pack is provided to give assistance in the role of lead governor);
  - b) Through the governing body head teachers are encouraged to consider all types of absence and to actively challenge 'authorised' absences.
  - c) The working group recommend that governing bodies have a standard item on absence at their meetings with targets set, monitored and evaluated.
7. Progress on attendance (and recommendations if implemented) in

**Walsall schools is taken to the Children and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel in 6 months.**

**91/09 FORWARD PLAN**

The Chair explained that one of the key issues that he proposed the Panel considered in the new municipal year was the Serco Contract. The eight themes of the contract would be shared with Members to determine on which areas they would initially like to focus

**92/09 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Chair informed Members that the next Panel meeting would be confirmed at Annual Council on May 24 2010.

The meeting terminated at 7:50 pm

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