

CHILDRENS SERVICES AND LIFE LONG LEARNING
SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

22 FEBRUARY 2005

Present

Councillor Bird (Chairman)
Councillor E Pitt (Vice Chairman)
Councillor Arif
Councillor Khan
Councillor Martin
Councillor Rowley
Councillor Underhill
Councillor Walker

Non Elected Voting Members

Mr Butterworth
Mrs Holford

Non Elected non voting members

Mrs Collins

Portfolio Holders

Councillor Hughes

Changes in Membership

Delete: Councillor Withnall
Substitute: Councillor Underhill

Apologies

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Councillors Cassidy, Mr Quinn, Mr Jones and Mr Grainger.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting 2 February 2005 were tabled at the meeting

Resolved

That the minutes of the meetings held on 11th January 2005 and 2 February 2005, copies having being circulated, be approved and signed as corrects records subject to the following amendments:-

11 January 2005 – Delete Councillor Harrison from the attendance list and add Councillor Walker.

2 February 2005 – Delete Councillor Rowley from the attendance list and add Councillor Rowleys apologies.

WEB minutes

Resolved

That the minutes of WEB, copies having previously being circulated be received and noted.

Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations of interest. The members of political groups represented on the panel indicated there were no whipping arrangements for any of the political parties in respect of the items on the agenda.

Preventing Teenage Pregnancy

The report of the executive Director was submitted:-

(see annexed)

Cllr Martin gave the following verbal report to the meeting:

The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy in 1998 was to reduce teenage conception by 50%. Between 1998 and 2002 Walsall has reduced under 18 conception rates by 4.5%. That is about 1% a year since the strategy started in 1998.

It is quite clear that our strategy needs to be reviewed to see what we need to do to reduce conception rates.

We know the areas where there are high risks of teenage conception and these areas especially need to be targeted.

Education can play a big part in this strategy and I believe is the key to raise children's expectations, awareness and self esteem starting at an early age i.e. there is more to life than being a mom or dad at 16, perhaps like what your parents and grand parents did. We need to break the culture circle and promote self esteem in our children, this will produce achievement, attainment and hopefully children will leave school with an education and an ability to know that they can be good at so many other things, the World is their oyster.

At the same time we need to improve access to services and information to prevent conception, we need to accept that there are teenagers who will dabble in sex at an early age, so prevention of pregnancies is so very important to our strategy.

We need to promote a positive image of Walsall Council working with SRE team.

It is hoped that our Youth Services can play a part in this education strategy, to get young men to take responsibility, improve expectations so there is not this need to prove manhood, again its all about self esteem.

I have been advised that Sure Start funding is to finish, so I have arranged an appointment with Mike Gaffney Lottery funding to see what funding we can apply for.

Councillor Martin said that she had asked questions following the workshop and was awaiting the response, which would be included in a further report back to this panel.

Councillor Bird congratulated Councillor Martin on the work she was carrying out for the excellent feedback. He said that teenage pregnancy was an issue at the top of the Scrutiny panel's agenda.

Councillor E Pitt further thanked Councillor Martin for the work she was doing and her insight about citizenship.

Councillor Martin advised panel of conversations held at the teenage pregnancy workshop with a teenage pregnancy co-ordinator highlighted several areas of concern in particular about SRE advisers not being allowed to access schools.

Councillor Walker clarified that the schools referred to had been offered additional services and more in-depth additional information in a pilot scheme, to date three had declined the extra services and that the teenage pregnancy co-ordinator was disappointed that she had money set aside to run the pilot across the Borough and she couldn't get a pilot scheme running.

David McNulty said he was pleased both the Chairman and Vice Chairman had acknowledged the work being done, he said the work is intense and thorough.

He referred to the presentations and excellent discussion at the last panel meeting. He said that what had come out of the discussion was a 'wicked issue'. He said that the issue is a complex community problem and because of the complexity there is a need for a partnership project and that multi-agency work is essential.

David McNulty advised that Walsall Council was 5 years through a 10 year strategy. He said that at this point we have not achieved reduction in teenage pregnancy by the % we wanted. He suggested that the discussions held at this scrutiny panel are indicating that what we are doing isn't going to get us to the full reduction by 2010. He said that Walsall needs its own solution, that schools clearly have a role but they are not the answer by themselves just a part of the response. He indicated that to get services into schools would also require school by school negotiations, every school has individual needs.

Councillor Martin stressed the need to build confidence, self esteem and assertiveness at an early stage, in primary education.

David McNulty – re-emphasised that the way a school approaches SRE is a matter for the school, they need to be consulted, sit down and work out an individual programme and approach in each school

Councillor Walker referred to the services available in schools and said there is some resistance to additional services and more in-depth information. She

said that – parents think schools should give it, schools think parents should give it.

Councillor Walker was disappointed that a more detailed report from the away day was not yet available. She said many partners at the event did not know what services were available out there and the feel from the meeting was that schools were the biggest barrier.

Councillor Bird agreed that Walsall needs its own approach to the preventing teenage pregnancy.

Councillor Underhill said she thought Councillor Martin was doing a great job, she said Walsall needed a drastic approach and that she thought there should be sex education at primary schools. She referred to her experiences and how lucky many teenagers had been and how she would have reacted. She said we need to appeal to parents that we also need parents on board. She referred to a campaign being introduced in America the 'proud to be a virgin' campaign and how well it was working in pubs and clubs in America. She suggested it could be considered here.

David McNulty referred to the away day event at Walsall Stadium. He agreed it was a positive day but felt that the case was not made about why there was a need to reduce teenage pregnancy. He felt, for example, that the links for young women to education and lifestyle were not made.

He also said the strategy has to be good to convince schools that intervention will be worthwhile. He advised the panel that a radical strategy needs to be developed, to ensure that the things being done in Walsall have an impact.

Parent Governor Representative Elaine Collins said that the Catholic Schools were reluctant when approached with additional services and information. She said that at the away day she had sat with young mom and a young dad help and information is not out there for young men, she welcomed a fresh angle and approach being taken.

Councillor Hughes – portfolio holder said that he welcomed the Scrutiny panel focussing on this issue and picking up on the work of the away day and said he would do his but at cabinet working closely with this panel.

Councillor Bird felt that a presentation to school governors may help to inform schools. Councillor E Pitt thanked Councillor Walker for the explanation about schools not wanting additional services and information relating to SRE. She felt it will be a brave school that takes on the pilot scheme and agreed that a strategy worked though with SERCO and partners was needed. She asked how seriously we are relying on lottery funding and bids, and suggested we should be using mainstream funding for this work.

Councillor Bird said that it was important to inform young people earlier.

Councillor Arif said that the key to success is partnership and co-ordination, parents and schools are critical factors and he felt it important to highlight a champion or lead body.

David McNulty said that we are already making a difference, as a result of the teenage pregnancy workshop; many issues had been highlighted and noted.

He said its important for Walsall to get key issues right, changing the way we deal with teenage pregnancy can help to change and transform the borough in a positive manner.

He said that the suggestions made can be linked into feedback from the away day and brought back to this panel in a more detailed report and use the information as an opportunity to re-shape the mainstream budget and look at the strategy.

Councillor Pitt said it is imperative to get the head teacher on board.

Councillor Walker said that she felt that the young people's views at the workshop were not harnessed effectively. They were surrounded by professionals and may not have promoted their views, she emphasised that 16 – 19 year old pregnancies included married couples and young people who have made choices, and they need to recognise life chances and aspirations. Members agreed that a softly, softly approach was important.

Resolved

Councillor Martin to report back to Children and Young person partnership and a more detailed report be brought to the next meeting of this panel.

Joint Review of Obesity

The report of the Executive Director was submitted:-

(see annexed)

David McNulty informed the panel that he had met with Sam Ramiah of the Health Authority and that a joint budget had been agreed for a piece of work to be carried out which would give a better evidence base on which to commence a review. He advised that papers had been sent out to interested parties and the current position is that officers were trying to get responses back.

Members were advised that the papers to the first meeting of the Joint Obesity work group were tabled for information.

Councillor Bird asked officers to ensure this scrutiny panel received regular updates and findings from the work group.

Resolved

To note the report and to receive regular updates from the work group

Framework for Inspection on Children's Services

Members received large colour copies of the framework document.
The report of the Executive Director was submitted:-

(see annexed)

Pauline Pilkington was in attendance at the meeting, she advised that following the Children Act receiving Royal Assent in November 2004 the government is consulting widely on the arrangements which underpin the proposals in the Act. She advised that the consultation on the inspection of Children's Services consists of four papers, which together form the Framework for Inspection of Children's Services. She outlined further background details as set out in the briefing note to members and explained that the Outcomes Framework aims to ensure that inspections evaluate and report consistently on the extent to which services improve the well being of children and young people as according to the outcomes set out in Every Child Matters:

- Staying safe
- Being healthy
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a positive contribution
- Achieving social and economic well-being

She explained that Inspections will cover front line provision for children and young people, whether this provision is made by the public, private or voluntary sectors. Pauline spent time explaining the four principles proposed by the framework that will govern the way in which inspections will be conducted, including joint area reviews and annual performance assessments.

The principles are:-

- Purpose of inspection
- Coverage of inspection
- Conduct and reporting of inspection
- Quality of inspection

Members thanked Pauline Pilkington for the briefing. Councillor Bird said that it was important for this panel to monitor the outcomes of assessments and asked officers to include the Outcomes framework in the work programme for 2005-6.

Resolved

That the Outcomes Framework be built into the work programme for 2005-6.

The Bichard Report

The report of the Executive Director was submitted:-

(see annexed)

Kay Childs was in attendance at the meeting to outline the report and give some background to members. She explained that following Ian Huntleys conviction in December 2003 an independent enquiry, chaired by Sir Michael Bichard, was convened to look into child protection measures, record keeping, vetting and information sharing in Humberside Police and Cambridge Constabulary. The Bichard report was published in June 2004 and made a number of recommendations and a proposed plan of action. She said the report tonight was to give scrutiny an overview of the recommendations and a proposed plan of action for Walsall.

She outlined the contents of the report emphasising that the 'soft' information was the important factor and when alleged offenders cross boundaries they need to be monitored.

Councillor Bird said it was important to get things right and asked how the police are going to work with The Council. He said it was important to have a good relationship and a proper strategy and suggested that members may want to receive a report back from the Police to inform the panel how they are approaching the recommendations.

Councillor E Pitt informed the panel that she is the lead member for Child Protection issues at the police authority. She gave advice about police checks and said that they do not appear to be as thorough now; she also referred to cross force checks. Kay Childs said there was lots of information about convictions available across forces, but the availability of soft information at a local level is a problem.

Councillor Rowley said that overseas teachers were not required to have a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check. Members discussed the level of police checks abroad and agreed that the police should be asked how they check the records.

Agreed

To request a further report and to ask a police representative to attend.

Nine Month Performance 2004/05

The report of the Executive Director was submitted:-

(see annexed)

David McNulty referred to appendix 1, the performance information relating to Education Councillor Bird referred to the target indicators being mainly red and asked for an explanation why this was the case.

David McNulty explained that the information related to year 2003 – 04 last quartile (all England) and that the most up to date figures would not be

released until Summer 2005. He asked member to note that the trend compared to 2003/04 of 8 indicators are improving. In response to questions, he explained that each of these indicators were considered in the Ofsted inspection and that there are measures in place to tackle them and improve performance.

Members considered BV 45 information relating to attendance figures. David McNulty informed members that 0.9% is a significant improvement and explained that the multi agency approach should be held as a model of good practice, in particular the work with private sector to offer cheaper holidays in school holiday which was helping to reduce the number of children taking holidays in term time. He gave information about BV 38 that additional funding from the learning commission had been secured to provide SAM? Learning money for students due to sit external exams. He explained that it was aimed to reduce children learning education with no formal qualifications.

David McNulty referred to the earlier presentation – ‘the Outcomes framework’ He said that things have happened in Children’s services and they all join up that things link together. He said things are still not good but that Walsall is tackling issues and narrowing the gaps.

Councillor Pitt welcomed Education Walsall’s work with the special priced holiday package for parents that want to take children on holiday during holiday times.

Councillor Khan asked questions about target setting for 2007. In response, David McNulty explained that the national targets set in 2000 may not be achievable and that he considers and that he considers that targets set out three levels:

- below floor target – not acceptable
- floor target – 2007
- working target – challenging
- aspirational – we can aspire to get there

Councillor Underhill referred to the performance information relating to looked after children (LAC) and asked why children are not looked after locally. Councillor Hughes replied that sometimes it is necessary to place a child out of borough for the child’s safety and well being.

David McNulty said that the closer working arrangements between social care and education has had a beneficial effect of reducing the number of children being placed out of the Borough.

Resolved

Panel thanked officers for the more detailed information and agreed to receive the information.

Councillor Bird thanked members for their attendance and reminded members that a member development work shop has been arranged to review scrutiny activity for 2004/05.

He said members should have received a confirmation letter which will be looking at:

- what went well
- how we can improve
- the work programme next year

Date of next meeting

5 April 2005

Termination of meeting

the meeting ended at 7.30pm