

CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

TUESDAY, 8 NOVEMBER, 2011 AT 6.00 P.M. AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE

Panel Members Present

Councillor B. Cassidy (Chair)
Councillor E. Hughes (Vice-Chair)
Councillor O. Bennett
Councillor R. Carpenter
Councillor K. Chambers
Councillor D. James
Councillor A. Paul
Councillor I. Shires
Councillor R. Thomas

Non elected non-voting members present

D. Jones (Primary Teacher representative)
R. Bragger (Secondary Teacher representative)

Non elected voting members present

S. Rayner (Lichfield Diocesan Education)

Portfolio holder present

Councillor R. Andrew - Children's Services

Officers Present

Louise Hughes, Assistant Director, Children's Services
Michelle Whiting, Assistant Director, Specialist Services
Denise Faulconbridge, Managing Director, Serco
Frank Barnes, Assistant Managing Director, Participation, Serco
Dan Mortiboys, Service Accounting and Financial Reporting Manager
Andy Stewart, Head of Prevention, Workforce & Partnerships
Jane Kaur-Gill, Regeneration Team Leader
Kevin Kendall, Head of Property Services
Earl Richards, Head of Learning Support & Innovations Services
Dennis O'Rourke, Service Manager, Asset Management, Serco
Darrell Harman, Head of Effectiveness, Improvement and Contract Management
Matt Underhill - Scrutiny Officer

132/11 SPECIAL NOTICE

The Chair expressed sadness at the passing of Councillor Joan Barton. The Panel agreed that Councillor Barton had always made the future of children in Birchills Leamore and across the borough a key priority. The Panel asked that a letter of condolence be produced on its behalf.

Resolved

That a letter of condolence be produced on behalf of the Panel in relation to the recent passing of Councillor Joan Barton.

133/11 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received for the duration of the meeting from Councillor D. Shires and Councillor R. Martin.

134/11 SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor I. Shires substituted for Councillor D. Shires and Councillor R. Carpenter substituted for Councillor R. Martin for the duration of the meeting.

135/11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

136/11 MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were noted.

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2011, copies having previously been circulated be approved as a true and accurate record.

137/11 CHILD POVERTY STRATEGY

The Chair explained that as Members from the Regeneration Panel had been invited to the meeting this item would be considered earlier than in the published agenda. The Regeneration Team Leader, the Head of Effectiveness, Improvement and Contracts and the Head of Prevention, Workforce & Partnerships introduced the presentation (annexed). The main points of the presentation and subsequent discussion were as follows:

- Child poverty is typically found in families with below 60% of the median national income. The median national income is £26k and in Walsall the median income is £22k. These circumstances impact on a child's development and lead to a range of issues including lower educational attainment and reduced life expectancy. This is also likely to form part of a vicious circle with low aspiration and low skill development joining a lack of inward investment and a declining industrial base. It is critical that this is replaced by a virtuous circle where high aspirations encourage inward investment leading to high attainment, a skilled workforce encouraging inward investment;
- Following a mapping exercise it was apparent that in Walsall that areas of child poverty mirror areas of benefit claimants, including for job seekers allowance and incapacity benefit. There is strong evidence of the existence of multi-generational worklessness in Walsall, with 20% of adults having no qualifications. The child poverty strategic outcomes include the ambition to increase wage levels with the aim of raising household incomes over the 'poverty threshold' and to decrease the number of parents classed as workless;
- It is difficult to quantify what effect these factors have on the number of Looked After Children (LAC) as there appears to be a complex relationship. However, for every 1,000 increase in the number of JSA claimants there is an increase in the number of LAC by 18. This represents a full year average cost of £0.75m to the Council. The possibility of a double dip recession with the prospect of an increase in JSA claimants represents a significant financial risk to the council;
- These concerns have prompted the development of the New Operating Model (NOM) which seeks to replace the current arrangements for dealing with families with multiple problems which can be seen to be often complex and ineffective. This included families getting different types of support from a disparate range of services. The NOM approach takes Think Family Support Workers as the lead professional, with manageable case loads and working within a area family support team with multi agency staffing. These teams will operate within the local area partnerships from Children Centres;
- Following a Panel query it was explained that the work tracking 228 local families had demonstrated the importance of early intervention in preventing children becoming Looked After Children (LAC). The Assistant Director, Specialist Services explained that this work had been critical in being able to evidence to other local partners in the Walsall Children's Partnership the value of a coordinated approach. For example, health partners had been readily able to identify the benefits of the NOM in helping tackle significant drains on resources, including particular families effectively treating their local A & E as their GPs surgery;
- The Chair highlighted the importance of addressing the local challenges

around LAC and found the data, including details within individual wards, very useful. Officers explained that resources for this work would be based on need. For example, this could be two teams operating out of Children's Centres in one ward. Following a further Panel question officers explained that some useful learning had been captured from other local authorities. However, there were structural differences which meant it was often difficult to make like for like comparisons. Other Members expressed strong support for an approach which used resources in a coordinated but effective way. However, the need to ensure that families were enabled to make choices was also highlighted.

Resolved

That:-

- (1) the report be noted;
and
- (2) the Panel receive further updates at future meetings.

138/11 SNEYD SCHOOL BALANCE AND CLOSURE

The Chair and Councillor Paul declared an interest as Governors of Brownhills School.

The Service Accounting and Financial Reporting Manager introduced the report. The main points of the report and subsequent discussion were as follows:

- Following the closure of Sneyd School the outstanding balance of £700k was returned to the ring fenced Schools Budget. It had been anticipated that the outstanding balance would be used as part of efforts to make up for the funding shortfall created by the decision of the DfE to withhold a balance of 5% from the 2010-11 Standard Funds Grant. However, the DfE announced in October 2011 that this funding would now be made available;
- In relation to the 58 former Sneyd School pupils who have transferred to Brownhills it was explained that 29 pupils use a school bus, (the schools receives funding directly for 24 of those), 7 receive a free bus pass and there is uncertainty over how the remaining 22 travel to school
- The Chair explained that she had been approached by the Headteacher of Brownhills School to establish whether further funding might be available to assist with the cost of transport for those pupils who had transferred from Sneyd School. She explained that it appeared that the information received in the report regarding the distances transferring pupils lived from Brownhills School differed from information that the Headteacher had provided. The Chair also expressed concern regarding what she considered to be the raw deal received by those transferring pupils. A number of Members agreed that the money initially allocated to these pupils when they were at Sneyd should transfer with them to Brownhills School to support their education. The Managing Director, Serco explained that funding is received for each pupil at every school based on a formula and former Sneyd pupils were not losing out. Members accepted this but

emphasised that they considered that the system had failed these children and it would be appropriate for them to receive additional support;

- The Managing Director, Serco explained that the Schools Forum was governed by financial regulations and it was a requirement for the outstanding funding from Sneyd to go into the ring fenced Schools Budget. The Chair also explained that the Chair of the Schools Forum had declined an invitation to attend the Panel but is meeting with the Chair and Director of Children's Services in November, regarding the issue of additional funding for Sneyd pupils, but Following a Member query officers explained that it was possible for the Schools Forum to make a one-off contribution to activities important for education of up to 0.1% of the individual schools budget which is approximately £150k. However, it would be necessary to confirm the precise details of how this mechanism worked;
- Members agreed with the proposal of the Assistant Director, Children's Services to highlight the issues raised, particularly regarding transport, to the Executive Director, Children's Services, with further discussions to be held with the Chair and Councillor Chambers as representatives of the Panel.

Resolved

That:-

- (1) the report be noted;

and
- (2) further consideration of the issue raised in relation to transferring pupils to Brownhills School, including transport support, be discussed with senior officers and the Executive Director for Children's Services together with representatives of the Panel.

139/11 PRIORITY SCHOOLS BUILDING PROGRAMME

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

- The DfE has commenced a programme to provide new buildings for 100 secondary schools nation-wide, although applications from primary and special schools had also been received with the initial expressions interest required by 14 October 2011. This scheme has included a bidding process and timeline and it was emphasised that there were no guarantees of any of the Walsall school applications succeeding. However, at this stage no school had been required to make a financial commitment;
- Officers explained that to be able to make an application school buildings had to meet specific criteria, including in relation to the condition of buildings. Independent condition surveys were undertaken with Willenhall Sports College, Joseph Leckie, Pool Hayes, Frank F Harrison and Rushall JMI meeting the criteria and electing to participate in the Walsall bid;
- Following a Panel query officer explained that even if schools were successful in moving to the next stage they might still choose to withdraw from the process if

they deemed what was proposed by the DfE as unsuitable. It was further explained that it was anticipated that the DfE would seek to use some kind of standardised design across all schools in the programme in order to deliver economies of scale;

- Councillor Chambers, a Governor of Salisbury Primary School raised a query regarding the school building condition criteria. He expressed surprise that Salisbury Primary School would not have been the local primary school with the worst condition buildings and asked that his concerns be recorded. The Service Manager, Asset Management, Serco explained that independent condition surveys were undertaken which had led to Rushall JMI being identified as suitable for a bid. It was agreed that the results of the condition surveys would be shared with Councillor Chambers;
- The Assistant Director, Children's Services emphasised that this programme was not a direct replacement for the BSF programme and there was no certainty that any Walsall school would be selected to go forward to the next stage.

Resolved

That:-

- (1) the report be noted;
and
- (2) that the details of the condition surveys be provided to Councillor Chambers.

140/11 THE PRIMARY STRATEGY

The Head of Learning Support & Innovations Services, Serco introduced the presentation. The main points of the report and subsequent discussion were as follows:

- There are a total of 86 primary, junior and nursery schools. The objective of the Primary Strategy is to increase performance, with approximately 53% of these schools rated either Good or Outstanding and the majority of the remaining 47% classed as satisfactory. As at October 2011, 8/8 nursery schools are good+, 9/9 infant schools are good+, 3/ 9 schools are good+, 35/68 primary schools are satisfactory, 1 school has a notice to improve. 11/35 are Gove schools which means they receive a share of £55k of funding support dependent on need;
- A cyclical approach is taken to supporting schools seeking to increase performance. This includes a number of stages from annual analysis/ risk assessment through to a number of reviews of varying frequency and depth. Work is also undertaken across area partnerships and has proved particularly important given some identified trends. This includes the challenges experienced by junior schools in some areas to ensure that pupils attain Key Stage 4, with some evidence that this may be due to pupils at some nursery schools not attaining Key Stage 1;
- In terms of the early impact of the Primary Strategy at Keys Stage 2, Level 4+ in English was achieved by 82% of pupils, placing Walsall 64 out of 110 nationally, while 80% achieved Level 4+ in mathematics, placing Walsall 88th nationally. In

addition, since September 2011 four schools have fallen from good to satisfactory, five have improved from satisfactory to good, while 2 stayed the same at satisfactory and good respectively;

- Following a Member query officers agreed that four schools moving from good to satisfactory was worrying. It was important that the good practice of successful schools was replicated elsewhere in the borough. Officers further explained that it was important to develop a critical challenge role with schools.

Resolved

That the presentation be noted.

141/11 WORK PROGRAMME 2011/12 AND FORWARD PLAN

The Panel considered the work programme and Cabinet's Forward Plan.

Resolved

That the work programme and Forward Plan be noted.

142/11 EDUCATION DEVELOPMENTS

[Exempt information under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended)]

143/11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair informed Members that the date of the next meeting would be 15 December 2011 at 6:00pm.

The meeting terminated at 8:30 p.m.

Chair:

Date: