

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

17 December 2009 at 6.00 p.m.

**Panel Members present** E. Hughes (Chair)  
K. Chambers  
R. Martin  
A. Paul  
B. Cassidy

**Non-Elected Voting Members** A. McDevitt  
K. Yeates

**Non-Elected Non-Voting Members** B. Grainger

**Portfolio Holder Present** Councillor R. Walker

**Officers present**

Louise Hughes	Assistant Director – Children's Services
Sue Wedgwood	Assistant Managing Director – Serco
Alison Butcher	Building Schools for the Future (BSF) Project Director
Dan Mortiboys	Corporate Finance Manager
Earl Richards	Head of Learning Support and Innovations - Serco
Matthew Underhill	Scrutiny Officer

**Invitees**

Keith Whittlestone – Headteacher, Joseph Leckie Community Technology College  
Philomena Mullins – Headteacher of St Francis of Assisi Catholic Technology College & Chair of the Secondary School Head's Forum

### **53/09 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor E. Pitt, Councillor L. Beeley, Councillor H. Khan, D. Jones and P. Williams.

### **54/09 SUBSTITUTIONS**

There were no substitutions submitted for the duration of the meeting.

### **55/09 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

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

### **56/09 BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE (BSF)**

The Chair introduced the item explaining that he was grateful for the two head teachers for attending the meeting as he was keen to understand the expectations of those schools within the first wave of BSF. The Chair of the Secondary School Head teacher's Forum explained that BSF was not only about buildings, although it was apparent that in Walsall

there was a strong need for improved buildings, particularly secondary schools. It is important that the physical environment of schools is suitable for new learning and teaching technologies as an increasing number of ways to expand the opportunities to learn emerge. This includes greater use of outdoor space as well as developing the use of space within schools, for example conference work. She explained that one of the most significant developments was Student Voice. This has enabled local school pupils to have a say in the development of their learning, including the development of schools and learning processes. The Chair of the Secondary School Head teacher's Forum also explained that colleagues, including those from her school and others who are not part of the BSF programme, were engaged at various levels of the BSF process. For example, regular BSF consultation activities, including liaising with schools within the first wave of the BSF programme. There is a high level of vision within the Secondary School Head teacher's Forum in respect of Transforming Learning in Walsall, including significant creative use of school partnerships. The head teachers hold a variety of different views regarding designs and this had meant that discussions have not always been easy. However, she assured the Panel of the strength and clarity of vision of schools within Walsall as part of the Transforming Learning agenda. The Chair of the Secondary School Head teacher's Forum also highlighted the need for Schools to be continually informed regarding the BSF process and decisions made by the Council. This was important as it was the Head teachers who would have to convey the decisions made to pupils, parents, teachers, governors and others.

The Head teacher of Joseph Leckie Community Technology College (CTC) agreed that BSF represented something very exciting, and explained that his School had been significantly involved in the BSF programme for some time, including as a member of the BSF stakeholder group, and had also participated in the development of ICT, Physical Education (P.E.) and other key areas. Amongst some of the significant ideas being considered was the re-structuring of staff arrangements to include the use of a range of a specialist support staff, including social workers. It was a significant challenge to join up the big ideas although BSF was providing a catalyst for transformation across local schools. The Wave 6a heads meet on a regular basis with the teaching and learning advisor and this group has recognised that it is critical that pupils are given the greatest opportunity to help design how they will learn in the future. For example, Joseph Leckie Community Technology College has engaged young people through "7UP", a scheme which has involved year 7 pupils together with year 5 pupils from the local feeder school, Delves Junior School. There has also been a similar approach to developing key stages 3 and 4, including moving to a more flexible approach. For example, enabling pupils entry to each stage at the most suitable point based on ability rather than on age. There are also proposals for better arrangements for teaching and learning, and creating flexible learning space. The Head teacher of Joseph Leckie CTC pointed out that 40% of BSF funding was for ICT, in anticipation of this the school has recognised that pupils are conversant in technology and has been developing its use of email and text messaging e.g. pupils sending texts in French in language lessons. Opportunities for co-location of teaching arrangements are also being developed, for example to help and support the most vulnerable realise their potential. The impact and opportunities that the new university technical college will bring are also being assessed. It is also important that the learning spaces that are created are suitable for teaching using new technologies. Following a query from the Chair the Head teacher of Joseph Leckie CTC explained that historically there has been a lack of parity between A-level and vocational options. However, there is recognition of the importance of developing the range of options. The Assistant Managing Director – Serco, pointed out that within the Secondary Strategy for Change a number of learning pathways were being developed for 14 – 19 year olds.

The Chair observed that this was clearly an exciting time for schools in Walsall, and that he

particularly welcomed plans for more flexible learning arrangements. It was clear that the impact of BSF was not limited to those schools immediately within the scheme, but also to primary schools.

A second discussion regarding the BSF Sample Scheme was also held, the process by which a small number of schools are selected as representative of the type of schools that the Learning and Education Partnership (LEP) will seek to deliver. Sample schemes are typically limited to two schools, one new build and one remodelled/ refurbished. The schools originally selected were Pool Hayes and Joseph Leckie. Consortia tendering for the right to act as the private sector partner for the BSF programme will then develop proposals for these schools which will then be used as part the selection process. The BSF Project Director explained that the technical analysis had been looked at a-fresh with technical advisors. The outcome of this process was that the build type analysis for Joseph Leckie CTC had been changed to take account of a recently constructed school building, as well as the revised view that the 1939 school building offered much more significant scope for remodelling and refurbishment than was originally determined. The proportion of new build and major remodelling and refurbishment had also been revised for Alumwell school making it more suitable for meeting the objectives of the sample scheme. She explained that in addition the Alumwell site offered significant co-location opportunities. It had also been determined that Frank F Harrison school provided a more suitable new build site than Pool Hayes school. The BSF Project Director explained that it was the view of officers that the schools that had now been identified for the Sample Scheme should provide the opportunity to rigorously test bidders. Following the head teachers raising concerns regarding the communication of the ongoing BSF process and associated decisions, the BSF Project Director committed to providing regular guidance and updates to local schools.

The Head teacher of Joseph Leckie CTC expressed disappointment at the de-selection of his school from the Sample Scheme and explained that in his view the decision had not been taken on educational grounds. He felt it was also difficult to understand how the school's current buildings, including one constructed in 1939 could be determined as suitable for the delivery of the Transforming Learning agenda. In addition, information including that in relation to the recently constructed building had been available for some time and there were also concerns regarding the presence of asbestos within the older school building. The Chair of the Secondary School head teachers Forum wanted to emphasise the negative impact that such a decision can have on both the school and wider community. The Assistant Director for Children's Services concluded the discussion by highlighting the valuable partnership relationship that has been developed between the Council and local schools. To ensure that this was maintained all key information regarding the BSF scheme would be effectively conveyed to schools.

## **Resolved**

**that the Assistant Managing Director – Serco will provide Panel Members with information in relation to the use of mobile classrooms at certain schools, including in respect of heating and security.**

## **57/09 SNEYD COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

The Assistant Managing Director- Serco provided an update explaining that in reference to a Panel query at the previous meeting that the closure of the school will result in seventeen redundancies, consisting of two voluntary and fifteen compulsory. A variety of action has

been undertaken to support staff, including a group meeting as well as individual meetings with Human Resources. In addition, C.V. writing and interview skills sessions have been held, together with staff being made aware of vacancies elsewhere within the borough.

## **58/09 STANDARD ATTAINMENT TESTS (SATs)**

The Assistant Managing Director – Serco introduced the presentation explaining that it was intended to provide the Panel with a context for the results of primary schools within Walsall as well guidance regarding the challenges and support being provided to raise future attainment. She explained that key Ofsted judgements include an assessment ranging from inadequate to outstanding (1-4) as well as specific judgements relating to safeguarding, equality of opportunity and discrimination, as well as attainment and progress. There are also a number of common barriers to a primary school being assessed as good. These include poor school leadership and management and difficulties in respect of teaching and learning. Further challenges exist around low aspirations, initiative overload, as well as the impact of limited mobility and deprivation. 2009 has witnessed a national dip in results, and while since 2005 Walsall has significantly closed the gap with the national average, this year's results indicate a 1% gap in Maths, while English was 3% lower. The presentation also highlighted those schools within Walsall that have received significant support to assist in improving attainment and set out their results for 2009 as well those for the previous two years by way of identifying trends. While for a number of schools a downward trend in performance was indicated for the period 2007 – 2009, the Assistant Managing Director – Serco explained that for one school in Maths, twenty-four boys were three marks off achieving a Level 4, while twenty-seven girls were three marks off a Level 4. In seeking to place the results in context she highlighted to the Panel the significant proportion of pupils who receive free school meals as well as the number for whom English was a second language. It is also now more challenging to identify trends in the data as combined rather than individual subject results are published by Ofsted. However overall within the Borough a number of schools did not achieve their projected results. As part of the School's Improvement Strategy those Local Authorities with pass rates of below 55% have to submit a letter to the Department for the Children Schools and Families (DCSF) explaining what is being done to tackle the problem. However, this is not required for Walsall although the Borough's School Improvement Strategy will set out how improvements in attainment will be achieved.

Following a Panel Member query the Assistant Managing Director – Serco explained that results contained a mixture of positive and negative surprises. She highlighted the outstanding results at Salisbury Primary and Alumwell Junior Schools, which demonstrated what could be achieved with good leadership and hard work. However she also reflected that there were schools which had seen results drop by 30 – 40% compared to last year. A number of schools had maintained pass rates of more than 70% which demonstrated that effective support was being provided. The Assistant Managing Director – Serco also pointed out the impact of the size of the cohort on results. For example, there was an instance where one child equated to 7% of a school's performance. A Panel Member observed that with the significant regeneration planned for Walsall, including the Gigaport, it was possible that a generation of children would not receive the education required to be able to work in these areas in the future. The Assistant Managing Director – Serco explained that as part of the effort to raise attainment visits and support are being provided to schools which is being combined with the central collection of data relating to pupils in order to track their progress. Following a further Panel query officers explained that regardless of the future of SATs it was anticipated that formal testing and tracking of pupils progress for this age group would continue. There was agreement between officers and the Panel that it was important that

performance and other information was properly shared to enable all stakeholders to contribute to identifying the appropriate solutions to tackle these challenges. It was determined that the Panel should invite two Primary School Head teachers to a future meeting. This would enable the Panel to understand the challenges they face, the support being provided by Serco and what kind of assistance the Panel might be able to provide. Further work involving officers and school leaders is being considered in which Members might want to participate. The Panel also considered creating a Scrutiny working group to consider these issues although they were advised that due to resourcing issues this would be unlikely to commence prior to the new municipal year.

**Resolved:**

**That**

- 1. local Primary School Head teachers are invited to a future Panel meeting to discuss the challenges and consider the potential solutions for improving pupil's attainment;**

**and**

- 2. panel Members to be included in possible further activity aimed at improving pupil attainment. The Panel to also consider adding a Scrutiny working group to its Work Programme to investigate this issue during the next municipal year.**

**59/09 PROPERTY SERVICES WORKING GROUP**

Councillor Chambers introduced the report (annexed) explaining that working group ran for the duration of the 2007/08 and 2008/09 municipal years. He explained that working group's objectives included ensuring that the Council was achieving value for money in procurement of building work for Children's Services, to monitor the education and Children's Services building capital projects, including tracking costs and delays and seek the introduction of an independent quantity surveyor to support a fair and equal bidding process. Councillor Chambers explained that the working group made use of the Property Register to modern a range of school development projects, including seeking guidance regarding the impact on public use of part of George Rose Park which had been incorporated into the development of sports pitches for Darlaston Academy. A further key issue considered by the Panel was Framework Contracts, Councillor Chambers guided the Panel that this was an arrangement whereby a number of suppliers that the Council has agreed to work with tender to carry out work within a defined scope. This is an efficient system which means that the Council is not required to undertake a full procurement exercise on each occasion. The working group were very supportive of this approach but felt it important that unsuccessful bidders were always given a satisfactory reason for not being awarded a contract. The working group's other activity included a demonstration of the Project Management System (PMS) and its critical role in supporting project managers in ensuring the successful completion of projects.

In accepting the recommendations of the working group the Chair thanked the Members for their hard work and observed that it was a timely piece of work and the Panel commended the report to Cabinet. The Panel particularly welcomed the introduction of an independent quantity surveyor and also agreed a further recommendation that monitoring of the improvements led by the working group be added to the work programme.

**Resolved:**

**That**

- 1. the final report of the Property Services working group be reported to Cabinet;**
- and**
- 2. monitoring of the improvements led by the working group be added to the Panel's Work Programme.**

#### **60/09 QUARTERLY FINANCIAL MONITORING**

The Finance Manager introduced the report (annexed) explaining that it provided a summary of the second quarter to the end of September 2009. For this period the overall position was a current forecast overspend of £2.6m. He explained that the major variant was within Specialist Services which was forecast to have an overspend of £2.3m. This was a consequence of the increased number of Looked After Children (LACs) and the mix of individual support that is required. For example, this can vary in some instances from £150,000 to £40,000 per annum. Within Universal Services an overspend of £0.072m has been forecast with high demand for Direct Payments and Family Support. However, management action across Universal Services has produced savings of around £0.252m. The Finance Manager guided the Panel that a number of risks existed to the budget, within Specialist Services these included a potential further increase in the number of LACs and individual requirements. In relation to Education, budget risks exist in the form of increased redundancy costs, higher than budgeted costs for Criminal Records Bureau checks and possible performance-related payments. Within Universal Services the transition to Integrated Young People's Support Services is expected to be within budget. However financial risks inevitably exist for such a significant service re-alignment process. The report also set out forecast positions in respect of Savings and Investment Tracking as well the Capital Programme.

#### **61/09 WORK PROGRAMME 2009/10**

The Work Programme and Forward Plan were noted.

#### **62/09 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Chair confirmed the date of the next meeting was 20 January 2010.

The meeting terminated at 7:40 pm

Chair:

Date: