

AT A MEETING  
- of the -  
**SOCIAL INCLUSION**  
**WORKING GROUP** held at  
the Council House, Walsall on  
**Thursday, 2 February 2006**  
at 6.00pm

PRESENT

Councillor Cassidy  
Councillor Khan  
Mr. R.Grainger

OFFICERS

Beth McPherson-Jones – (Education Walsall)  
David Bovell – (Social Services)  
Mary Griffiths – (Walsall PCT)  
Stuart Bentley – (Scrutiny Officer)

APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Lyn Reed, Safer Walsall Borough Partnership.

EDUCATION SUPPORT FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Beth McPherson-Jones spoke to the previously circulated report “Education support for looked after children”.

(annexed)

Councillor Khan asked how the results compared against those of other Council's.

Beth McPherson-Jones replied that she was aware of such benchmark data, but did not have it to hand. She would, however, provide the data for Members.

Mr. Grainger asked if there was a comparison between children in and out of the Borough.

Beth McPherson-Jones replied that it was difficult to know what to compare; looking at the achievements of children in Borough actually reflects, in part, the impact of the education support team's work. She also highlighted that the Council were looking to bring back children into the Borough as appropriate.

Councillor Cassidy referred to the judge's remarks, for the Community Care Awards, about the imaginative team work in Walsall, and asked what it was they had done.

Beth McPherson-Jones replied that the Excellent Initiative had been highlighted and that Walsall was a national leader in this area.

Councillor Cassidy stated that she had attended one of the 'Excellent' events as she had found it to be a rewarding experience. However, she was disappointed at how few Members attended these events and recommended that more Members attend.

Council Cassidy then expressed her concerns about the level of support for children leaving care and asked how this transition was being handled.

David Bovell replied that a Transition and Care team was in place for this very reason and it was in the process of raising its profile through, among other initiatives, a drop in centre. Further the team were linked to the new facility at Spindle Tree Rise.

Beth McPherson-Jones also stated that a transitions pathway has been developed in order to chart those actions that need to be undertaken in order that children with special educational needs (some of whom are 'looked after') have a clear pathway into further education, training or work.

Beth McPherson-Jones then requested, on behalf of the Education Support team, that Members write individually to each looked after child in year 11 encouraging them to do well in their forthcoming exams. Also to encourage them to write back to them to let them know their results.

Members agreed that this was a good idea.

Councillors Khan and Cassidy welcomed the information and stated that they were impressed by the quality and positive nature of the work with Looked After Children that had been done.

Beth McPherson-Jones thanked Members and highlighted the work of Karen Dainty and her team.

#### CASE STUDY ARISING FROM THE REFLECTIVE LEARNING PROCESS WHICH TOOK PLACE AT AN AWAY DAY OF THE MULTI-AGENCY LAC STRATEGY GROUP

David Bovell spoke to the information previously circulated.

(annexed)

Mr. Grainger asked if there was a lead professional for each case.

David Bovell replied that it is normally dependant on the lead agency on contact.

Beth McPherson-Jones stated that there was flexibility in choice of lead professional and that this was determined by the identified needs of the child. She further stated that things were not yet perfect, but a great deal of progress had been made.

Councillor Khan asked if there were issues around funding.

David Bovell replied that issues were rare and in cases where agreement on the funding split was difficult a multi-agency panel undertakes to look at the merits of each case with the focus on meeting the needs of the child. This panel was now 18 months old and was entering a review period. However, the relationship between the agencies had improved over the last 4 years and better protocols were now in place.

Mary Griffiths highlighted that, although the focus of this meeting had been on education and social care, there were significant health initiatives making substantial contributions to the issues under discussion and she would be happy to present these to the Members at a future meeting.

David Bovell highlighted that Walsall would be hosting a 'Fostering in the Black Country' event in October 2006 and suggested Members might wish to be involved.

Mr. Grainger asked what provision there was for fostering in the Borough.

David Bovell replied that there was a team in place and it was in the process of raising its profile. He further stated that the borough was generally well populated with foster carers although the borough was under represented in terms of Muslim households.

Councillor Khan asked how this issue was being addressed.

David Bovell replied that the matter had been investigated and there was a driver to make the service more representative.

Members thanked the officers for their input and this was followed by a discussion around the future work programme and timescales for the working group.

Resolved:

- That benchmark data around the achievement of Looked After Children be circulated to the Members.
- That the Social Inclusion Working Group recommend to the Children's Services and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny and Performance Panel that Members attend 'Excellent' events organised to celebrate the achievement of Looked After Children.

- That the Social Inclusion Working Group recommend to the Children's Services and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny and Performance Panel that Members write individually to each looked after child in year 11 encouraging them to do well in their forthcoming exams and also to encourage them to write back to them to let them know their results.
- That the next meeting of the Social Inclusion Working Group would focus on health initiatives developed around the issue of social inclusion.
- That the work programme for the Social Inclusion Working Group incorporate work around; the under-achievement of children of Pakistani / Bangladeshi heritage, planning of the 'Fostering in the Black Country' October 2006 and the development of Children's Trusts.

#### TERMINATION OF THE MEETING

There being no further business the meeting terminated at 7.30 p.m.