

AT A MEETING
- of the -
SOCIAL INCLUSION
WORKING GROUP held at
the Council House, Walsall on
Wednesday, 15 February
2006 at 6.00pm

PRESENT

Councillor Khan
Mr. R.Grainger
Mr. Jones

OFFICERS

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

APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Cassidy.

Health Services for Looked after Children

Maureen Chaudhry introduced herself as Health Co-ordinator for Looked after Children, she then gave a presentation on the health of Looked after Children.

(annexed)

During the presentation Maureen Chaudhry reminded the group that according to government figures, Walsall would be expected to have approximately 300 children in care, when in fact Walsall has 470 - 475 children in care. She told the working group that the PCT is required to provide specific health services and interventions for looked after children or ensure that they are provided for those placed elsewhere. She also stated that Walsall has an excellent Leaving Care Team who provide the necessary support for these children as the looked after child moves towards independent living.

Mr Grainger asked if the provision of a personal health plan for looked after children was a statutory requirement. Maureen Chaudhry explained that it was not a statutory requirement but an action that 'should' be taken.

Maureen Chaudhry circulated a health FAX to the work group, which is provided to all looked after children who are aged 11 and over. She told the group that looked after children often had little knowledge of their medical history and the Health FAX was aimed at providing information about their medical history and providing useful contact numbers.

Councillor Khan asked how much input children had in developing the Health FAX. Maureen Chaudhry replied that looked after children had been consulted and had chosen this particular design out of 4 possible options.

Councillor Khan congratulated Maureen Chaudhry on the Health FAX and said it was pleasing to see that it was comprehensive.

Councillor Khan asked Maureen Chaudhry if the team had experienced any problems around the issue of boundaries and payment of services.

Maureen Chaudhry replied that she had experienced minimal problems in 5 years and that issues occurred only occasionally. She added that Walsall is fortunate to have a specific service for looked after children requiring CAMHS service, and consequently problems principally occur when children are placed outside of the borough as many other authorities do not have teams to deal with the health needs of looked after children.

David Bovell stressed that Walsall health service has consistently performed at a high level when providing for looked after children.

Maureen Chaudhry informed the group that she had received calls from around the country requesting information on Walsall's model for provision of health services for looked after children. Councillor Khan asked which key features people were interested in. She explained that people were interested in the cost of the provision, how agreements were negotiated, and what Walsall would like to do which they are unable to. She added that people were impressed with the Health FAX.

Maureen Chaudhry explained to the group that by addressing the health needs of looked after children now, cost savings will be achieved in future years.

Councillor Khan asked how the service would be developed. Maureen Chaudhry replied that it was to mainstream funding for the service. Councillor Khan then asked how much it costs to provide the service. Maureen Chaudhry told the group that the health provider for children leaving care is funded differently to children who are in care. She informed the group that nursing without administration costs is around £80,000 a year and added that this requires enhancement.

Maureen Chaudhry explained to the group that she was going to be conducting an evaluation of the service and this should provide some pointers for the future.

Councillor Khan said that it was pleasing and enlightening to see a great all round package.

Resolved:

It was agreed that a copy of the evaluation be presented to a future meeting of the working group.

Benchmark data around the achievement of Looked after Children

Beth McPherson-Jones informed the group that not enough local authorities had completed the benchmark documents to allow comparison of data. She explained that this meant Walsall could chart its own progress but was not able to compare the data with other authorities in the West Midlands.

Councillor Khan asked if these authorities had not participated in the benchmarking exercise or had just not completed the document. Beth McPherson-Jones replied that it is not a DfES requirement to complete the document.

Councillor Khan asked is there was anything that could be done to encourage authorities to participate.

Beth McPherson-Jones said that she would update the group on the situation and keep the group briefed; she also added that it is a problem which had occurred in the previous year.

David Bovell informed that group that the Looked after Children team had won the National Community Care award; he stressed that the performance of the team has received national recognition. Beth McPherson-Jones further added that Ofsted also rated this service highly.

Dates of future meetings

Stuart Bentley asked the group if they had received the letters which were due to go out to looked after children, and if members of the group were happy for the letters to go out on council paper or if they wished to use their own stationary.

Stuart Bentley informed the group that the working group would be receiving updates on the implementation of the Children's Trust, probably around September 2006.

Beth McPherson-Jones told the group that data concerning the lack of attainment of Pakistani and Bangladeshi children was readily available.

Councillor Khan expressed concern that children of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin living in Walsall are not achieving as well as these ethnic groups who are living in Birmingham.

The group discussed the issues around this and decided that the issues are likely to have a number of causes and consequently needed a multi-agency approach.

Beth McPherson-Jones asked the group if there were any other vulnerable groups which the working group needed to consider, and suggested disabled children.

Mr Grainger suggested that the group could consider the enhanced provision for disabled children provided by schools and if this is working.

Mr Jones informed the working group that schools for children with special educational needs were in the top 20 in Walsall.

Councillor Khan suggested that the working group consider the inclusion of children who had been excluded from school. Beth McPherson-Jones replied that she was happy to bring the figures to the group, but added that attendance has been improving at double the national rate and that Walsall has a good system for tracking children who have been excluded. She added that she did not consider excluded children to be the most vulnerable/ socially excluded group, but that she did consider disabled children to be a vulnerable group.

Councillor Khan suggested that the group consider the access and disability audit. Beth McPherson-Jones explained that the accessibility of all schools was audited and as a result a strategy had been developed to bring schools to a minimum standard. She added that access was one aspect of educating disabled children, and explained that physical aspects are just one component, but that access to information and access to the curriculum were also components. Beth McPherson-Jones explained that training had been conducted to help and support schools.

Beth McPherson-Jones concluded that she would provide results of the access and disability audit and the Special Educational Needs profile at a future meeting of the working group.

Resolved:

That the next meeting of the working group would consider the lack of attainment of Bangladeshi / Pakistani heritage children and would take place following the re-constitution of the working group at the beginning of the new municipal year.

TERMINATION OF THE MEETING

There being no further business the meeting terminated at 7.10 p.m.