

AT A MEETING
- of the -
**CHILDRENS SERVICES
AND LIFELONG LEARNING
SCRUTINY AND
PERFORMANCE PANEL**
held at the Council House,
Walsall on **Thursday 20 April
2006** at 6.00pm

PRESENT

Councillor Bird	(Chairman)
Councillor E.E. Pitt	
Councillor Arif	
Councillor Walker	
Councillor Chambers	
Councillor Wilkes	
Mr. M. Quinn	(Archdiocese of Birmingham)
Mrs. E. Collins	(Parent Governor)

OFFICERS

Tony Stainer	(Education Walsall)
Brandon Scott-Omenka	(Head of Quality and Performance Management - Social Care & Inclusion)
Carol Boughton	(Service Manager - Social Care & Inclusion)
Stuart Bentley	(Scrutiny Officer)

APOLOGIES

Apologies for non attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors Khan and Martin.

SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no changes in membership at this meeting.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest declared at this meeting.

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS HELD 16 FEBRUARY 2006

(annexed)

36 Resolved:

That the minutes of previous meetings, held on 16 February 2006, copies having been previously circulated to each member of the panel, be approved and signed by the chairman as a correct record with the following amendments.

Page 3 para 11 should now read;

Councillor Pitt stated that the council had been given assurances that the Academy would provide for local children and she felt that these children had been let down. She agreed that gifted and talented should be catered for alongside the less able.

Page 4 para 2 should now read;

Councillor Pitt moved that Mr. Smith be invited to participate in future meetings to address the issues raised by the white paper.

REPORT FROM WORKING GROUPS

Councillor Bird reported that the School Buildings working group were continuing to receive priority one updates and were pleased with the progress that was being made.

Councillor Chambers agreed and stated that the quality of the information received had also improved markedly.

Councillor Bird then asked for any feedback on the notes from the Social Inclusion Working Group, previously circulated.

(annexed)

Stuart Bentley, on behalf of Councillor Martin, then raised the issue of the mismatch between the academic and religious calendars for children of ethnic origin.

Councillor Pitt stated that she had worked with Education Walsall and the travel sector to look at reducing travel costs during school holidays.

Tony Stainer stated that Education Walsall offered advice and support to schools as to the best times to take extended holidays. This policy had been successful across schools although primary and secondary school issues were different. Further work would continue.

Councillor Pitt stated that the Government set attendance targets which put pressure on the schools.

Tony Stainer agreed and stated that Education Walsall encouraged and supported schools to take a zero tolerance stance with regards to unauthorised absences.

Councillor Arif stated that the number of children taking extended leave from Walsall schools was less than 1 percentage of the school population. He

further stated that he had worked with Education Walsall as part of a group looking at educational opportunities whilst abroad.

Tony Stainer stated that this group had reported back to Education Walsall and he could make the report available to the Members.

37 Resolved:

That the notes of the Social Inclusion Working Group, held 15 February 2006, copies having been previously circulated to each member of the panel, be approved and signed by the chairman as a correct record.

That a copy of the report on overseas educational opportunities be made available to the Members of the Panel.

END OF YEAR REVIEW

Councillor Bird introduced the report on the review of the Panel's work programme for the year and asked the Panel for their comments.

Mr. Quinn highlighted recommendation 1 and referred to a recent press report that suggested that LEAs would be given increased powers to intervene in schools. He asked if the report would address this issue or would this be new legislation not covered by the act.

Tony Stainer replied that it would be part of the act and that Education Walsall had received draft advice from the DfES.

Councillor Bird asked if Education Walsall were in a position to produce a draft for Members information at the first meeting of the new municipal year.

Tony Stainer replied that he had planned to produce an executive summary of the draft advice and would liaise with fellow officers to bring it to that meeting.

38 Resolved:

That an executive summary of the draft advice from the DfES on The Education & Inspections Bill – Guidance on Schools Causing Concern section, to be brought to the first meeting of the new municipal year.

ANNUAL REPORT – SOCIAL SERVICES COMPLAINTS AND REPRESENTATIONS

Councillor Bird introduced the item and invited Brandon Scott-Omenka (Head of Quality and Performance Management) to give a brief presentation on the report in which he highlighted the improvements in responses to complaints, an increase in complements and more robust management of the whole process which had resulted in a more speedy and equitable resolution of complaints. Specific actions that have arisen during the period included better publicity, training and mediation.

(annexed)

Councillor Bird thanked Brandon Scott-Omenka for his presentation and stated that he was pleased to see a rapid improvement in social services over the reported period.

Councillor Arif asked how people complained and from what age.

Brandon Scott-Omenka replied that children and young people could complain from any age, either directly or in the case of younger children by advocates such as carers, "key" workers, social workers and independent advocates. The customer care service seeks to focus on an equitable solution for complainants which frequently involve engaging with the complainant to mediate a solution.

Councillor Arif asked how easy it was to complain.

Councillor Bird replied that it had been the case that anonymised forms were readily available for complainants to use if they so wished.

Brandon Scott-Omenka agreed that this was the case.

SCHOOLS' ACCESSIBILITY AUDIT SUMMARY AND ACTION PLAN

Tony Stainer spoke to the report.

(annexed)

He highlighted that 24 schools were now up to standard and work was continuing with a further 34. However, he stated that some schools may never be able to go beyond the minimum requirements due to physical layout of the properties. In such cases a flexible approach to school placements would be adopted in order to ensure that disabled children were placed in the most appropriate settings.

Councillor Bird stated that it was relatively easy to provide parking provision for the disabled but he asked how easy was it to ensure that it was available for the disabled when they required it.

Councillor Pitt stated that any able bodied person using disabled parking facilities should have their vehicles clamped.

Councillor Chambers suggested that "bluff" signage may prove to be a deterrent.

Councillor Bird stated he had noted that Merry Hill Shopping Centre were now imposing fines on such offenders and suggested that the highways department could be involved. However, these spaces would be on school premises and wouldn't necessarily be under the highways departments remit.

Tony Stainer agreed that it would be for the individual schools to enforce.

Mr. Quinn then asked, with reference to para 3.4 of the report, if any timescales were available.

Tony Stainer didn't have them to hand but he agreed to report back with the information at the earliest opportunity.

38 Resolved:

That officers would inform the panel on the timescales for raising Voluntary Aided Schools to the minimum standards for accessibility.

FORWARD PLAN

Councillor Bird stated that there were no items on the forward plan relating to the Children's Services Portfolio. He then stated he believed more pressure should be brought to bear around the use of capital receipts for educational assets.

Councillor Arif asked if a Primary and a Secondary school could be invited to present what methods they had used to improve.

Councillor Pitt suggested that the Head's Forum could be approached.

Tony Stainer replied that he would raise the issue at the next Head's Forum and that he produced an ongoing summary of Ofsted reports and that Members might find that a useful document to receive.

Councillor Bird then stated that there had been good work done around the Fibbersley Park project and that it was important that the Panel track the progress of the project through to completion.

TERMINATION OF THE MEETING

There being no further business the meeting terminated at 6:55 pm

Signed

Date: