

CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

14 February 2008 at 6 p.m.

Panel Members present	E. Hughes (Chair) E.E.Pitt (Vice-Chair) B Cassidy K Chambers M Ahmed H Khan	
Non-Elected Non-voting Members	B. Grainger D. Jones	Secondary School Teacher Representative Primary School Representative Teacher
Non-Elected voting Members	Evelyn Chawira	Parent Governor
Officers present	Pauline Pilkington Louise Hughes Karen Adderley Ian Taylor Tim Ferguson Beth Jones Tom McNeil Nikki Ehlen	Assistant Director Assistant Director Project Manager Education Contract Chief Executive Connexions (Black Country) Head of Partnership and Performance Project Officer Interim Assistant Director Procurement Scrutiny Officer

59/07 CHANGE TO THE AGENDA

The Chair informed the panel of a change to the agenda; this was to receive items 9 and 11 prior to item 6.

60/07 APOLOGIES

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors Bird, Martin and Paul Williams.

61/07 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

62/07 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

63/07 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Chambers requested that the third paragraph under minute 58/07 was amended to read; Councillor Chambers asked for Melanie's views on the settlement, Melanie Harmitt stated that it was a good settlement.

64/07 FORWARD PLAN

Members noted the forward plan.

65/07 ADOPTION INSPECTION FEEDBACK

Pauline Pilkington explained that in addition to the feedback on the adoption inspection she would give the panel an overall feel of how the Joint Area Review (JAR) had gone.

Members were informed that the adoption and fostering feedback had deemed the service to be satisfactory with no inadequate areas, and an action plan would address areas that needed improvement.

Members were informed that the JAR did not raise any issues that the Council were not already aware of, which officers considered positive. Verbal feedback indicated that the following judgements would be made of the following areas;

- 1) Safeguarding – good
- 2) Looked After Children- adequate
- 3) Children with disabilities – adequate
- 4) Service Management – good

The capacity to improve was deemed good, overall officers advised members that they were pleased with the feedback. The headline areas for improvement for 14 – 19 year old investment were as follows;

- 1) Services for Black Minority Ethnic Groups
- 2) The development of a strategy or a coherent approach to engaging young people
- 3) A more consistent approach to communicating with children, young people and professionals.

The panel were given feedback on areas in which the Council could improve;

Safeguarding – Risk Assessments could be more thorough and consistent, and the case load of social workers was considered to be high. It was also commented that social worker visits could be more frequent. Although no child was considered to be at risk as a result of these factors.

Looked After Children (LAC) – Residential homes needed to be improved, and the involvement of elected member and senior officers in their role as corporate parents could also be improved.

Children with Disabilities – It was picked up that Walsall had higher than average exclusions of children with disabilities, and an insufficient provision of respite care. Also communication about eligibility of direct payments needed to be improved.

14 – 19 Strategy – Good work existed but an identifiable strategy was needed and the number of children not in education, employment or training needed to be improved.

Members were informed that there needed to be a better measurement of quality of services and learning from complaints.

Councillor Hughes suggested that the condition of children's homes may be something that one of the working groups could consider as part of their work stream. As the chair of the looked after children committee he would be working to ensure improvements were addressed. Councillor E.E.Pitt suggested that it may be difficult for elected members to interact with looked after children due to full time jobs. Members further discussed the number of children with disabilities excluded from schools. Bob Grainger stated that where statistics were based on small numbers, they could be distorted by one case.

Pauline Pilkington emphasised that these were headline findings only, which may differ to those presented in the final report. Louise Hughes stated that the inspection was a 'deficit model' which looked at what was not right.

Councillor Chambers requested the final report from the inspection at a future meeting of the panel.

RESOLVED

The final JAR inspection report is taken to a future meeting of the panel.

65/07 – EDUCATION CONTRACT UPDATE

Louise Hughes presented an update on the education contract (annexed). Councillor Chambers requested that a copy of the presentation was sent to him outside of the meeting.

Councillor Hughes asked who would monitor the monthly and annual key performance indicators. Officers stated that this would be the contract management team. Louise Hughes discussed the future of the member project group and Walsall Education Board (WEB). Members expressed the opinion that WEB should continue and was working excellently. Louise Hughes stated that this was also the view of the project board.

Louise Hughes asked for the panel's views on the negotiation points within the presentation.

Bob Grainger expressed concern that performance indicators may not be meaningful on a monthly basis and these may need monitoring over a 3 year period. Officer agreed, and stated that they would be looking at trends over periods of time. Councillor E.E.Pitt also expressed concern about performance indicators, and stated that it needed to be about people and not ticking boxes.

Councillor Chambers requested that when available the client management structure was shared with the panel.

In terms of community engagement, members discussed how Serco officers could be involved in LNPs. It was considered important that schools were approached in the first instance. Councillor Khan stated that from a strategic point of view, the Council was aiming to produce good citizens, and needed a holistic approach.

In terms of national and regional links for schools, members discussed how Walsall could be showcased.

The panel discussed health and safety requirements of schools, and expressed the opinion that it was integral that head teachers were getting the support they required.

RESOLVED

That

- A copy of the presentation for item 11 is sent to Councillor Chambers.
- When available the client management structure is shared with the panel at a future meeting.

66/07 SAFEGUARDING WORKING GROUP REVIEW

As lead member for this working group Councillor Chambers presented the report to the panel. The work streams of the working group were detailed to the panel;

Domestic Violence – Nikki Ehlen informed members that Councillor Perry had provided the scrutiny team with an update to provide to the panel. This was that Domestic Violence has remained as a key target for the Safer Stronger Communities Board and as a refreshed Local Area Agreement target. If Neighbourhood Renewal Funding (NRF) fallout affected this Councillor Perry has sought preliminary agreement to mainstream fund the majority of its work. This will be finalised in the next few weeks.

Members endorsed the recommendations relating to domestic violence.

Bullying – As part of the review, members had met with Willenhall School, Councillor Chambers had received feedback from Willenhall School on the restorative justice approach. This feedback was that since December 2005, over 200 cases of bullying had been resolved through the process rather than the criminal justice system.

Dave Jones stated that there were problems in schools around cyber bullying; David Jones suggested that work was being completed at a national level. Bob Grainger agreed that guidance was needed on bullying through mobile phones.

Members endorsed the recommendations relating to bullying.

Safer Recruitment – Councillor Chambers emphasised that this was work in progress and praised the hard work of Kay Child in supporting the group.

Members discussed Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks and new regulations to be introduced in September 2008, which may allow CRB checks to become transferable.

RESOLVED

The panel approved the safeguarding children working group review with the following recommendations;

1. The relevant portfolio holder continues to champion the long term stability of the domestic violence forum at Cabinet and with partners keeping scrutiny informed of issues affecting the Domestic Violence Forum
2. That this review is referred to the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel for consideration of the issues around domestic violence
3. That it is recommended to Cabinet that mainstream funding is pursued to ensure the future of the domestic violence forum
4. That Children's Services develop a toolkit or strategy within 4 months to provide schools with guidance on how to respond to incidents of bullying. Methods of dealing with cyber and mobile phone bullying should be included in the toolkit, this should be taken to the Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel
5. Members are kept informed of progress made in safer recruitment through the Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel on a quarterly basis

This review document should be sent to;

- Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel
- Councillor Perry
- Cabinet
- Safer Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership
- Submitted as JAR evidence
- Posted on Safeguarding Board website

67/07 Sustainable Community Strategy

Tim Ferguson stated that this document was draft at this stage. The indications were that partners would sign up as a vision for Walsall. The panel were asked to give their individual feedback on the sustainable community strategy as a scrutiny panel or as individuals to Beth Jones. Councillor Hughes expressed that there was concern that there was not enough focus on children, although he appreciated the general nature of the document.

Tim Ferguson stated that he would feed this point back as part of the consultation process.

Beth Jones stated that the consultation period would end mid March. Councillor Hughes asked the panel to feedback by 7 March 2008.

68/07 LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT (LAA)

Members were given the background to the LAA. The inclusion of indicators was discussed. Tim Ferguson stated that the 16 mandatory indicators related to education and early years. Louise Hughes stated that the 16 mandatory indicators were all quantitative targets, and it should be ensured that qualitative targets were included to support the mandatory indicators. Tim Ferguson stated that the indicators that were

chosen were incredibly important as they would form the priorities for the Council and its partners.

Councillor Chambers asked what the panel's role could be in monitoring the performance of the indicators relating to children and young people. Louise Hughes stated that reporting information was available on the internet and through the Performance Management Information System (PIMS). Nikki Ehlen stated that the new scrutiny officer who would be supporting this panel in the future would be able to assist the group in using this system to consider performance information.

69/07 CONNEXIONS REPORT

Ian Taylor tabled copies of the latest Connexions newsletter (annexed). Louise Hughes gave a presentation to the panel on the Connexions service (annexed). The panel were asked for their opinion on how the Council should move forward.

Ian Taylor explained that core work was done by personal advisors, helping young people to access information to allow them to understand the world and how to be good citizens. Members were given information about the work of the Connexions service.

Councillor Chambers asked if the service was open to all young people, Ian Taylor stated that it was but that there was a tension between offering a service that met the needs of all young people and a service which met the needs of the most vulnerable young people.

Louise Hughes stated that she could provide a summary of the stakeholder report to the panel. The panel discussed the options for the future of the service and the local focus that was desired for Walsall. Members were informed that the stakeholder group preferred option 2 'Agree to continue to engage the existing provider to deliver Connexions Services for a period to be determined'.

Councillor Chambers asked where the strategic management would sit within the Council. Louise Hughes stated that it was envisaged that this would be within Children's services.

Members were informed that the current provider was considered to provide a good service but that the Council would be asking it to produce efficiency savings. Councillor E.E Pitt questioned whether these would be true efficiency savings. Ian Taylor confirmed that this would be the case.

The panel were informed that there were 2 bases in Walsall, but that a lot of outreach work was done, with a personal advisor in every secondary school.

The panel were informed that other local authorities in the Black Country had broadly come to the same conclusions. Members asked to see a summary report of the report to Cabinet.

Louise Hughes stated that greater accountability would be required for a service provided on the Council's behalf.

Ian Taylor suggested that the panel may wish to consider case studies to supplement the summary report.

The panel agreed to endorse option 2, in agreement with the stakeholder group. The panel expressed the opinion that when the report goes to Cabinet, the position of the other Black Country authorities should be considered.

RESOLVED

That;

- The panel agreed to endorse option 2, in agreement with the stakeholder group. The panel expressed the opinion that when the report goes to Cabinet, the position of the other Black Country authorities should be considered.
- An executive summary of the future management of Connexions Cabinet report is circulated to members outside of the meeting, along with case studies to supplement the report.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 17 April 2008.

The meeting terminated at 8.35pm.

Chair:

Date:

