

CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

TUESDAY, 19 JULY, 2011 AT 6. 00 P.M. AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE

Panel Members Present

Councillor B. Cassidy (Chair)
Councillor E. Hughes (Vice-Chair)
Councillor J. Barton
Councillor K. Chambers
Councillor R. Martin
Councillor A. Paul
Councillor D. Shires
Councillor R. Thomas

Portfolio holder present

Councillor R. Andrew

Non elected voting members present

Alan McDevitt

Non elected non-voting members present

R. Bragger
D. Jones

Officers Present

Louise Hughes, Assistant Director, Children's Services
Michelle Whiting, Assistant Director, Specialist Services
Graham Talbot, Interim Managing Director, Serco
Frank Barnes, Assistant Managing Director, Participation, Serco
Anne Thompson – Head of Service, Vulnerable Children
Julie Taylor – Head of Service, Early Years Finance and Policy and Performance, Serco
Dan Mortiboys – Service Accounting and Financial Reporting Manager
Matt Underhill - Scrutiny Officer

105/11 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received for the duration of the meeting from Councillor O. Bennett and Michelle Whiting.

106/11 SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor M. Longhi substituted for Councillor O. Bennett for the duration of the meeting.

107/11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

108/11 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting were noted.

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2011, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

109/11 **PROVISION OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN) SUPPORT**

The Assistant Managing Director, Participation, Serco introduced the update. The main points of the report and subsequent discussion were as follows:

- There is currently a re-shaping of services within the existing contract. The majority of children with an identified special need will be educated in mainstream settings. This includes 50% statemented and 50% recognised by either School Action or School Action Plus of the SEN Code of Practice. The strategic purpose of the Inclusion Framework is to build capacity in mainstream schools to meet a range of SEN. A core service in support of children with SEN will continue to be provided through the revised output specification. SEN Support Services include the SEN Advisory Teacher Team who from September will be fully traded and will consist of 2.4 full time teachers. Early Years SEN Teachers, together with Sensory Advisory Support for Teachers of the Deaf, Qualified Teachers of the Visually Impaired and Learning Support Practitioners will also have a traded element to their service. The Educational Psychology Team will continue to operate and will be maintained to ensure that statutory requirements are fulfilled;
- Following a Panel query regarding the traded service element of much of the provision, officers explained that it was likely that schools would probably reduce their requirement for purchasing support as they progressively developed their own in-house capacity. Following a further query regarding determining whether the new arrangements were working, officers explained that a number of outcomes existed. This included statutory duties, a set of national performance indicators. A number of reforms to the current statutory requirements were also anticipated. Officers explained that work would also be undertaken to monitor the outcomes of young people receiving this type of support to determine whether the gap was being narrowed between their level of attainment and others. The 2011 results would set out a specific category for SEN performance.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

110/11 EDUCATION CONTRACT THEME 7 - SUPPORTING THE RESOURCING OF EDUCATION AND THE SCHOOLS FORUM

The Head of Service, Early Years Finance and Policy and Performance, Serco introduced the update. The main points of the report and subsequent discussion were as follows:

- The School's Finance Team within Walsall Children's Services, Serco is responsible for ensuring that the funding of schools is completed within the prescribed statutory framework. The local school funding formulae includes the January School Census pupil data. The Dedicated Schools Grant is £216.8m for 2011-12. Walsall Council receives £5,131 for every child attending a mainstream school, an early years setting and for pupils in other education provision for whom it is responsible. For possibly the first time the local funding formula for the next financial year is only guaranteed to be a least 98.5% of the current award rather than at least the same;
- The Schools Forum meets regularly and considers a number of issues, including the funding formula. The Government recently relaxed the requirement for a balance control mechanism. However, this approach has been retained in Walsall as it is seen as good practice that schools do not build up significant balances. The Schools Finance Regulations set out the specific types of expenditure that the Dedicated Schools Grant can be committed to by schools. There are outline proposals for establishing a new school funding system. However, this won't be known until the consultation period has concluded. No changes are anticipated before 2013-14 and it is expected transition funding will be provided. However, this would not include the pupil premium which is a separate payment made to Walsall and would remain unaffected. Following a Panel query, officers explained that the new arrangements would be likely to enable greater account to be taken of local circumstances. Following a further query, officers explained that Young People's Learning Agency would have an increased role in setting budgets. However, funding will be still be received and managed locally;
- Following a Panel query, officers explained that in terms of the democratic accountability of the Schools Forum, elected members were no longer able to take a formal role in decision making as a consequence of changes made by the Government. However, greater participation by Members in the activity of the Schools Forum would be welcomed in Walsall. In addition, the £30m mainstream funding grant was distributed through the Schools Forum.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

111/11 REVIEW OF SCHOOL BALANCES

The Service Accounting and Financial Reporting Manager introduced the report. The main points of the report and subsequent discussion were as follows:

- A report was produced by Grant Thornton, the council's external auditors, on school balances. This report went to the Audit Committee who recommended that it was also received by the Panel.
- The table provided a summary of balances. The recent trend for reducing school balances has continued as balances have reduced further falling to £10.1m in 2010. It is anticipated that a further fall will be witnessed in 2011-12 as the balance control mechanism continues to be effectively deployed locally;
- It is anticipated that Sneyd School will have a closing balance of over £900k. The large balance was in part a consequence of the expectation that the school would remain open for a further year. However, closure at the end of the current academic year was previously approved by Cabinet;
- A Member highlighted the need for clarity regarding school balances as there was a danger that a small number of schools with large balances might distort the local position. Officers explained that a claw back power was available to the council, with £170,000 recovered against a balance of £13.2m in 2008-9. Officers also explained that schools often retain high balances for specific capital programmes, including building work. In addition, it was determined important to enable schools to retain higher balances in order to meet the costs of Single Status.
- Following a Panel query, officers agreed that some schools were carrying high balances of funding which they would be able to retain when they converted to academies. However, academies would not be able to retain balances of greater than 2% of funding.

Resolved

That

- (1) a detailed breakdown of each school balance be presented to the next Panel meeting;

and

- (2) that the report be noted.

112/11 THE PRIMARY STRATEGY

The Interim Managing Director, Serco, introduced the report. The main points of the report and subsequent discussion were as follows:

- The Primary Strategy will focus on improved attainment at Key Stage 2. The Strategy will seek to build strong links with other local priorities and seek to deliver better outcomes for communities, including developing strong links with area partnerships. Activity will include working with schools in Supported Self-Review (SSR) and Partnership Review Groups (PRGs);

- A Member queried why the Panel had not been given the opportunity to offer input in developing the strategy. Officers explained that it had been anticipated to receive an early response from the Department of Education although this was still outstanding. It was the intended to circulate the strategy and provide a presentation to the Panel in the autumn.

Resolved

That

- (1) the report be noted;

and

- (2) a presentation detailing the Primary Strategy in Walsall be received later in the year.

113/11 SNEYD SCHOOL

The Interim Managing Director, Serco, introduced the report. The main points of the report and subsequent discussion were as follows:

- All arrangements for the transfer to other schools from September 2011 of pupils in Year 8 and Year 9 have been completed and offer letters have been sent. Work is underway to ensure that the outstanding Year 11 pupil without a placement is appropriately settled. Support has also been provided to school staff who are subject to redundancy once the school has closed;
- It is anticipated that any school balance remaining for the school will be returned to the global schools budget and used to meet in-year budgetary requirements. The success of recent leadership within the school, as well as the Interim Executive Board (IEB), including the removal of Special Measures by Ofsted was also noted. Officers also advised the Panel that the Chair of the IEB would also be willing to attend a future meeting;
- A Member highlighted the difficulties experienced with the leadership of the school prior to the introduction of support from Barr Beacon School. Officers acknowledged the problems with the previous arrangements and agreed that it would be important to make use of the good practice established with the success of current leadership at the school. Following a further Panel query, officers explained that equipment would only be retained by the University Training College (UTC) for which it had a demonstrable use. However, in line with normal practice the equipment would transfer with pupils to their new schools.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

114/11 SAFEGUARDING SERVICES

The Head of Service, Vulnerable Children introduced the performance scorecard. The main points of the report and subsequent discussion were as follows:

- A brief guide to some of the details contained in the scorecard was provided. However, it was agreed that a commentary and a key to the scorecard would also be presented to future meetings.

Resolved

- (1) That a commentary and key will be provided, together with the performance scorecard at future meetings; and
- (2) That the report be noted.

115/11 EDUCATION DEVELOPMENTS (SUMMARY OF ITEM CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE SESSION)

The Assistant Director, Children's Services introduced the update relating to a review of the Education Contract with Serco. A further update would be provided at the next Panel meeting. The Panel noted the report

116/11 WORK PROGRAMME 2011/12 AND FORWARD PLAN

- The Panel considered the work programme and Cabinet's Forward Plan

Resolved

That the work programme and Forward Plan be noted.

117/11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair informed Members that the date of the next meeting would be 20 September, 2011 at 6:00pm.

The meeting terminated at 8.20 pm