

**CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY
AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**

**Agenda
Item No.**

DATE: 20 April 2006

7

END OF YEAR REVIEW

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Councillor E.E.Hughes

Summary of report:

- The purpose of the report is to give a brief overview of the Panel's work programme for 2005/6 and to highlight issues that the Panel may wish to recommend as carry over work-streams.

Recommendations

- That the Panel recommend that the local impact of the white paper "Higher Standards, Better Schools For All" be investigated as part of the work stream for 2006/7.
- That the Panel recommend that a policy and programme for Members undertaking visits to children's homes, as part of a Corporate Parenting Strategy, be developed as part of the work stream for 2006/7.
- That the Panel recommend that the Social Inclusion Working Group be re-established with a work programme looking at: the under-achievement of children of Pakistani / Bangladeshi heritage; the planning of the 'Fostering in the Black Country' event, October 2006; and the development of Children's Trusts.

Reason for scrutiny:

- To inform the work programme for scrutiny for the year 2006/7 and to highlight issues that the Panel may wish to recommend as carry over work-streams.

Signed:



Councillor M.Bird

**Chair of the Children's Scrutiny and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny and
Performance Panel**

Date: 10 April 2006

Resource and legal considerations:

- The Council has appointed Scrutiny and Performance Panels to discharge the functions conferred by Section 21 of the Local Government Act, 2000.

Citizen impact:

- The role of scrutiny is to examine past, current and future initiatives and policies to ensure that the public has access to the best possible policies and services.

Environmental impact:

- None arising directly from this report.

Performance management:

- The council's scrutiny function sits within the performance management service. Performance Management is the key driver to improved service delivery and Scrutiny and Performance Panels now monitor and challenge performance variance to improve services to the public.

Equality Implications:

- None arising directly from this report.

Consultation:

- Members and Officers involved with the Panels work programme.

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1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to give a brief overview of the Panel's work programme for 2005/6 and to highlight issues that the Panel may wish to recommend as carry over work-streams.

2. Work of the Panel 2005/6

- 2.1. The panel has considered a variety of issues from the work programme agreed at the start of the year. Key areas of work were:

2.2. Teenage Pregnancy

The Panel received and endorsed a review document, produced by Councillor Rose Martin, that identified specific objectives in nine key areas and referred it to the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, all head teachers, school governors, New Deal; WHG; Walsall Pregnancy Helpline; Youth Services and to the media for their comment and information.

The Panel also received a report from Walsall PCT in respect of data available to form the teenage pregnancy strategy and were updated quarterly as to the figures.

On a similar note, the Panel were informed of the work of Walsall PCT with respect to the provision of supported housing for young mothers and mothers to be in the borough. They were made aware that the service had no partners to support it except the provision of fourteen units provided by Caldmore Housing Group. The aim was to find an adequate site for this service as well as financial and other support. The Panel were made aware that the service was a charitable fund and outside the jurisdiction of the local authority. It was not possible, therefore, to seek funding from the local authority. The Panel were advised that capital funding had already been identified and that the revenue could be provided through the housing benefit, but the service was currently not being fully supported in Walsall. The Panel asked to be kept informed of the work in progress and were subsequently informed of, and were able to inform, a number of possible sites and partners. They were also informed of a strengthening of the Teenage Pregnancy Partnership Board, who were looking at funding bids, and that they had completed the action plan generated by the feedback from the Government Office.

2.3. Corporate Parenting Strategy

Members were requested to consider undertaking visits to children's homes or to be contact in other ways with children in local authority homes. The emphasis would be on opening a dialogue with young people and staff, along with making use of the regulation 33 management reports, rather than delving into reams of information. It was suggested that members could become champions and advocates for children. The panel agreed that the visits were an excellent idea and that they should be open to all members of the council.

Officers provided two reports to advise members about the legalities and details and necessity for all those members to undergo a police check (CRB).

The Panel recommended that the whole Council should be CRB checked. A subsequent cabinet report recommending that all elected members undergo enhanced CRB checks was endorsed by Cabinet on 1 March 2006.

2.4. Children's Overweight And Obesity Report

Following the work of the Joint working group on Obesity, the panel received a report entitled "Childhood Overweight and Obesity - Scoping the Problem And Moving Forward" that aimed to set out the size and scale of the issues facing Walsall in tackling childhood obesity by examining: the best evidence available for interventions to prevent and treat childhood overweight and obesity; what is currently being done by Government and locally in Walsall to address these issues; and what more needed to be done.

Following discussions the Panel endorsed the recommendations of the report and, in doing so, recommended that Cabinet explore the opportunities for joint funding from Education Walsall, Walsall tPCT and Walsall MBC for the Obesity Co-ordinators post.

At a subsequent meeting, Walsall tPCT reported that a meeting had taken place with partners and a plan had been drawn up with Education Walsall to collect and collate baseline data. This process was due to be completed by April and a small cross-agency working group was being setup while funding was sought to fund a lead post from April 2006.

2.5. Walsall Academy

The Panel received information about the effect of Walsall Academy on its neighbouring schools and they expressed concerns over the new white paper "Higher Standards, Better Schools For All", its implications and possible effect on the Academy, and they asked that a report on the white paper and its possible impact locally be brought to a future meeting of the Panel.

2.6. Procurement of major capital builds (education)

The panel, in private session, investigated the arrangements for the procurement of a major capital build and made recommendations that lessons learned should be embedded into council policy and procedure. These recommendations underlined the work already underway within the departments and were endorsed by Cabinet.

2.7. In addition, the panel has:

- a) Received regularly monitored performance issues.
- b) Received information about the Annual Performance Assessment.
- c) Considered the budget and made comments and recommendations to Cabinet.

3. Work of the Working Groups 2005/6

3.1. The Panel also constituted two working groups looking at School Buildings and the Social Inclusion agenda.

3.2. The School Buildings Working Group focused on delays in priority one backlog repairs, addressing the reasons for the delays and teasing out lessons to be

learnt for future financing and scheduling and they continue to monitor the progress of priority one repairs.

- 3.3. The Social Inclusion Working Group focused on investigating the multi-agency approach to children's care and received presentations on: the changed context of children's services in light of 'Every Child Matters' and recent Government legislation; issues around the attainment and care of Looked After Children; and health initiatives developed around the issue of social inclusion. A future work programme has been agreed to look at: the under-achievement of children of Pakistani / Bangladeshi heritage; the planning of the 'Fostering in the Black Country' event, October 2006; and the development of Children's Trusts. The Panel agreed to constitute the working group to track the implementation of Children's Trusts through to 2008.