

CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

11 June 2009 at 6.00 p.m.

Panel Members present E. Hughes (Chair)
L. Beeley
B. Cassidy
K. Chambers
R. Martin
M. Munir
A. Paul

Non-Elected Voting Members

Paul Williams Catholic Church Representative
Evelyn Chawira Parent Governor
Alan McDevitt Parent Governor

Non-Elected Non-Voting Members

Bob Grainger Secondary School Teacher
Representative
D.J. Jones Primary School Representative

Portfolio Holder Present Councillor Flower

Officers present

Louise Hughes Assistant Director – Children's Services
Frank Barnes Assistant Managing Director – Participation – Walsall Children's Services - Serco
Kay Child Interim Assistant Director – Children's Services
Karen Adderley BSF Project Manager
Tim Ferguson Head of Partnership and Performance
Craig Goodall Acting Principal Scrutiny Officer
Matthew Underhill Scrutiny Officer

01/09 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors E. Pitt and H. Khan.

02/09 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions submitted for the duration of the meeting.

03/09 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest and party whip for the duration of the meeting.

04/09 MINUTES

A Member queried regarding the agreed resolution relating to item 97/08, Building Schools for the Future, to write to the Secretary of State and Partnership for Schools (PfS) to seek approval for the use of capital receipts from the sale of Council owned unused school playing fields to address the BSF affordability gap. Karen Adderley explained that action is underway to gain the approval of Sport for England for this proposal following which officer's will write to the Secretary of State and Partnership for Schools.

Guidance was also provided to the Panel in relation to the resolution agreed relating to item 98/08 Unauthorised Absence Policy which included the number of penalty notices issued since the policy was introduced. Frank Barnes informed the Panel that the total number of fines issued in 2007/2008 was sixty-four, and the total to-date issued in 2008/2009 was one hundred and eleven.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 April 2009, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

(annexed)

05/09 FORWARD PLAN

RESOLVED:

That the forward plan dated 5 June 2009 be noted

06/09 DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Matthew Underhill highlighted a Scrutiny Skills for Members event on 1 July.

07/09 SNEYD CONSULTATION UPDATE

Frank Barnes informed the Panel that progress was being made according to the timetable in the contract document. The consultation has involved governors, Members, parents, pupils and teachers and included drop-in sessions at Sneyd Community and Frank F. Harrison school, Pool Hayes and Willenhall. A large number of written responses had been received. Consultation with Ward Members was also undertaken.. A report on the consultation will be presented to Cabinet on 15 July. In response to a Member question Frank Barnes explained that the report will properly represent the views expressed during the consultation. A Member expressed concern that the options provided in the consultation were not suitable. The Chair explained that the consultation document did include a free section where consultees could express their views on all related matters. He further clarified that Cabinet had the final decision on what options were offered for consultation.

Following a Member query regarding the Sneyd proposal to operate as an 11-19 academy, Louise Hughes informed the Panel that an advisory meeting had taken place

with the Headteacher, Chair of Governors, the Director for Children's Services and the Managing Director for Walsall Children's Services – Serco, Councillor Andrew and a representative from the Office of the Schools Commissioner (OSC) at the request of the school. This was to gauge what Government support there might be for the introduction of such an academy. Louise Hughes clarified that the OSC not a decision making body but rather that they together with other Government departments would have to choose whether to support such a proposal before making a recommendation to the Secretary of State who would make a final decision. The Panel resolved to formally request that details of the outcome of the meeting be provided.

RESOLVED

That details of the outcome of the meeting between representatives of Sneyd Community School and the Office of the School's Commissioner be provided to the Panel.

08/09 SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN

Kay Child provided guidance to the Panel regarding the new national action plan and the immediate actions that have been taken by the borough's Children's Services. The action plan emerged following a review undertaken by Lord Laming of current child protection practice originally introduced following the Climbiè Report. This was prompted by concerns expressed regarding the effectiveness of current practice after the death of Baby Peter in Haringey. Lord Laming's report was published in March and the Government accepted all fifty-eight recommendations which have been translated into an Action Plan for local authorities.

Key issues highlighted by the presentation (annexed) were as follows:

- Laming's review gave consideration to good practice introduced since Climbiè;
- Receipt of a good Ofsted report by Haringey Council prior to the death of Baby Peter suggests that systemic improvements will be necessary;
- Whether policies and procedures were robust enough to be as effective within the independent school sector;
- Strong evidence that the requirements of Every Child Matters (ECM) were being implemented and that the statutory framework is working;
- Number of concerns including: not all local authorities are following the statutory and policy framework; pressure placed on services; success of sharing information; suitability of performance indicators; effectiveness of inspection process;
- Proposed Action Plan improvements include: stronger central guidance, including use of expert opinions in forming policy; more rigorous inspection framework, including unannounced Safe Guarding inspections; local leadership and accountability, including strengthened role for Children's Trust, adoption of Performance Indicators (PIs) that support more effective data analysis; CEOs & Members to be satisfied that practice "at the front door" is working; support to frontline to include: using any new funding received to target the most vulnerable; improved information sharing & ensuring that social workers do not spend more time than necessary entering data; improved training, including post-qualification level; review of recently introduced fee requirement for care procedures and its potential to discourage proceedings from being undertaken;

- Walsall's response includes: a review of safeguarding practice including the opportunity for stakeholders to comment on the local approach; review of Children's Trust arrangements, including recruitment of independent chairs.

A Member sought guidance on whether a previously discussed approach of neighbouring authorities providing the other's independent Local Safeguarding Children Boards Chairs had been implemented. Kay Child agreed that such a reciprocal arrangement would deliver significant savings, particularly in respect of advertising costs. However concerns remained regarding the level of independence of cross-authority arrangements. Kay Child also confirmed to the Member that as yet no ring-fenced funding has been received to meet the costs of care proceedings and at present none was anticipated.

The Member also wondered whether statutory guidance would be introduced, supported by additional funding, to the limit social worker caseloads to no more than twenty. This was important given some of the incidence that have occurred as a probable consequence of unmanageable work loads including forgetting children's names. Kay Child explained that a sum of money had been received but has been made available to support the retention of existing social workers, through improved qualification training and other initiatives, rather than the recruitment of additional social workers.

Following a Member question Kay Child informed the Panel that there were four hundred and eight Looked After Children (LACS) She explained a number of approaches were being undertaken to meet the current challenges being faced by the service. This included the realignment of resources from within the service from back to front end and tackling some of the corporate parenting issues that exist to work towards achieving social worker caseloads of between sixteen and twenty. Work was also underway to ensure that the appropriate priority and balance was given to the needs of LACs in different situations, including the maintenance of those in stable placements to those in urgent intervention circumstances.

In response to a Member question Kay Child informed the Panel that while vacancy rates are not as high as fifteen percent, difficulties similar to those faced elsewhere in the UK including significant numbers of inexperienced social workers remain. The Panel requested the provision of key information setting out: the number of social workers; the average number of cases managed per social worker; the turnover of social workers and the number of Looked After Children (LACs) The Panel also requested that a social worker also attend the same meeting to provide some context for this information as well to provide guidance regarding how procedures are followed locally together with an explanation of processes for the sharing of information and the prevention of duplication.

RESOLVED:

That:

- 1. details of the number of social workers; the average number of cases managed per social worker; the turnover of social workers and the number of Looked After Children be provided at a future Panel meeting;**

and;

- 2. a social worker attends the same meeting to provide some context for the information provided and further guidance on local procedures and information sharing.**

09/09 **BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE UPDATE**

The Panel were updated on progress to date with the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme.

Karen Adderley explained that BSF is a very prescribed process with a number of gateway/ stages within a two and a half year programme. At present the Council is at the pre-engagement stage with the date for remit expected soon. Remit is when the Council formally commences the programme. The award of remit status is subject to the delivery of certain requirements. The first part of this process is the production of the Strategy for Change Part 1 which included working with headteachers to develop the education vision for the borough underpinned by pupil place planning. This document is now formally lodged with Partnerships for Schools (PFS) and has received initial positive feedback.

Strategy for Change Part 2 is now being developed and this links closely to individual school's visions (School Strategy for Change). This process involves consultation with key stakeholders including young people and Members and must be delivered within a twenty-eight week framework. Those schools within Wave 6a are now considering how they want to deliver the curriculum which will then dovetail with Strategy for Change Part 2. A round of consultation events has also been undertaken by the Wave 6a schools including a number of local events led by headteachers which were well supported by the community, with strong representation from young people and school staff which have helped shaped plans for curriculum delivery. The school's visions will seek to place them as a hub of their local community. To support the development of the Strategy for Change Part 2 advisors are working with each of the Wave 6a schools, this includes support from the BSF team and from the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) BSF programme. PFS have also undertaken a number of visits to Wave 6a schools and gave a positive assessment of how headteachers and change managers are shaping their visions for the future of their schools as well as their understanding of the BSF process. Schools also expressed satisfaction with the support they have received from Council officers and other advisors.

Further activity includes the creation of a BSF stakeholder group which will enable the 3is (Innovation, Information & Influence) group to concentrate on the wider "innovation in education agenda", and close working arrangements will be established between the groups. It is intended that the new group will meet prior to the end of the school term with outcomes fed into the overall governance of the programme.

A Panel member expressed concern regarding the contribution to the BSF programme required from all schools in the borough, including both primary and secondary schools who had little prospect of directly benefitting from the scheme. He also expressed the view that a number of headteachers were unhappy as the contribution to BSF meant that they had, for example, much more limited resources to carry out repairs to buildings. He also wanted to understand why this cost burden had fallen on schools when neighbouring authorities had included these costs in their funding bids. Both officers and Members commented that the intention of BSF was to benefit young people throughout Walsall. Louise Hughes explained that fifty percent of local secondary schools will have benefited

from the scheme after Wave 7. She also advised the Panel that the formula for determining the individual contribution each school made was devised by the Schools' Forum. Work was also ongoing with primary schools with a focus placed on innovation in transforming learning. In terms of schools being required to make a contribution to the BSF process, the Panel was informed that the contribution sought from local schools was significantly lower than that faced by schools in some other authorities.

10/09 **WORK PROGRAMME 2009/10**

The Panel considered potential items for their work programme for 2009/10 including receiving information on the Walsall Partnership Business Plan.

The key points from the discussion regarding the Work Programme by the Panel were as follows:

- Following a recommendation by the Portfolio Holder the Panel will consider an appropriate area to undertake a Value for Money (VfM) review. This process will be supported by officers presenting a number of potential issues suitable for such a review to the next Panel meeting. The Panel also requested that the Scrutiny VfM Review toolkit be circulated to Members.
- The Chair also emphasised the importance of the Panel undertaking a review of Children's Centres to determine if they were meeting their original objective.
- In considering working groups the Panel were content to conclude the Property Services working group, given that this area now broadly sits within Regeneration, subject to a briefing paper from officers in relation to schools.
- The Panel agreed that two working groups would operate during the municipal year:
 1. The Positive Activities working group would continue: Membership is as follows: Councillor E. Hughes (Lead Member), Councillor L. Beeley and Councillor R. Martin.
 2. Unauthorised Absence Policy working group: Membership is as follows: Councillor B. Cassidy (Lead Member), Councillor K. Chambers and Mr. A. McDevitt (Parent Governor).
- In addition to the working groups and potential VfM review, the following items will form the Panel's Work Programme for the year:
 - Area Based Grant: including a briefing note to the next meeting setting out where shifts in emphasis of spending have occurred;
 - BFS: to be considered as a standing item;
 - Children Centres;
 - Safeguarding Children: including participation of social worker(s) in a future Panel discussion;
 - Ethnic Minority Achievement;
 - 14 – 19 Agenda including links with Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs);
 - Integrated Young People's Support Services (IYPSS);
 - LAA performance monitoring: including receiving further information on the most relevant performance indicators to enable the Panel to agree a programme of future monitoring.

RESOLVED:

That:

- 1. a Value for Money Review be undertaken on a appropriate theme to be determined at the next Panel meeting chosen from a number of options provided by officers;**
- 2. Members to be provided with a copy of the Value for Money Toolkit for information;**
- 3. Councillor E. Hughes (Lead Member), Councillor L. Beeley and Councillor R. Martin be appointed to the Positive Activities Working Group;**
- 4. Councillor B. Cassidy (Lead Member), Councillor K. Chambers and Mr. A. McDevitt (Parent Governor) be appointed to the Unauthorised Absence Policy Working Group;**
- 5. the following items be agreed for the Children's and Young Peoples Scrutiny and Performance Panel's Work Programme for 2009/10:**
 - Area Based Grant;**
 - Building Schools for the Future;**
 - Children's Centres;**
 - Safeguarding Children;**
 - Ethnic Minority Achievement;**
 - 14 – 19 Agenda including a focus on young people not in employment, education and training.;**
 - Integrated Young People's Services;**
 - LAA Performance Monitoring;**
 - Final Report of the Property Services Working Group.**

The meeting terminated at 7.37 pm

Chair:

Date: