

## **CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**

MONDAY 27 SEPTEMBER 2010 AT 6.00 P.M.

### **Panel Members Present**

Councillor E. Hughes (Chair)  
Councillor B. Cassidy (Vice Chair)  
Councillor L. Beeley  
Councillor O. Bennett  
Councillor K. Chambers  
Councillor R. Martin  
Councillor A. Paul  
Councillor D. Shires  
Councillor R. Thomas

### **Other Members Present Non elected voting members present**

Councillor D. Pitt  
A. McDevitt  
K. Yeates  
E. Chawira  
P. Williams

### **Non-elected non-voting members present**

D. Jones  
R. Bragger

### **Portfolio Holder Present**

Councillor R. Andrew

### **Officers Present**

Louise Hughes- Assistant Director, Children's Services  
Graham Talbot- Interim Managing Director, Serco  
Avril Walton – Assistant Managing Director, Serco  
Kevin Reader - Interim Building Schools for the Future  
Project Director  
Dan Mortiboys – Service Accounting and Financial  
Reporting Manager  
Michelle Whiting – Assistant Director Specialist Services  
Colleen Male – Interim Head of Safeguarding  
Helen Dudson – Corporate Performance Manager  
Matt Underhill – Scrutiny Officer

### **23/10 APOLOGIES**

There were no apologies received for this meeting.

### **24/10 SUBSTITUTIONS**

There were no substitutions for the duration of this meeting.

### **25/10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

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

## 26/10 MINUTES

In relation to item 14/10 Building Schools for the Future (BSF) the Interim Building Schools for the Future, the Project Director explained that following advice from the responsible auditors and accountants, the unspent budget from the programme had been established and this money could now be refunded to schools. However, officers will be attending the School's Forum to invite schools to consider allowing this money to be retained in the short term. This would support consideration of any possible proposals on school infrastructure that might be announced as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) in October. Ken Yeates highlighted that he had stated at the previous meeting that officers had managed the programme as not only a building issue, but also a way to develop a more focused assessment of how the curriculum and learning could be moulded to meet the increasingly diverse needs of students. He had also asked that the team be commended and this be reflected in the minutes. In relation to item 16/10 Performance of Serco Contract, officers agreed to ensure that Alan McDevitt was contacted by the Head of ICT (Serco) to discuss e-safeguarding.

### **Resolved:**

**That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2010, as amended, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.**

## 27/10 SNEYD SCHOOL

The Assistant Managing Director, Serco, introduced the report (annexed). The following is a summary of the report and subsequent discussion:

- There are now low numbers of pupils at the school. It is intended that current Year 9 pupils will remain at the school, with existing Year 8 pupils scheduled to leave in August 2011. It is anticipated that based on current projections this will leave the school with under 40 pupils at the commencement of the 2011/12 academic year. However, this would pose serious concerns regarding the financial viability of the school;
- The transfer of pupils to other schools in the borough has been supported by transport arrangements, including the issue of bus passes. A number of pupils travel to Brownhills School on a bus which has been jointly funded by trustees of the school and Serco. There has been a reduction in the number of children using the bus, with a number preferring to use public transport. However, it has been decided to retain the bus service at present as it is possible that uptake will increase with the onset of autumn and winter;
- A number of staff remain at-risk, with a range of support provided, including assistance with CVs and local vacancy lists posted out to individual's homes. Where redundancy is considered staff have to demonstrate that they have been active in seeking alternative employment and making use of the support available;

- It is projected that the school will conclude the current academic year with a balanced budget. However, this is unlikely to be the case in the subsequent year. Following a Panel query, officers acknowledged that it was likely that the budget constraints faced by the school would have impacted on the nature of the curriculum delivered. However, all schools faced the challenge of providing an effective curriculum and a balanced budget;
- Following a Panel query officers explained that since 2007 a financial balance control mechanism was in place based on guidance provided by the former Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). This placed a limit on the percentage of a school's balance that it is permitted to retain. This is between 5 and 10% and varies depending on the type and size of school. Officers agreed to provide the Panel with a report produced by external auditors in relation to school balances when it becomes available;
- Work has been undertaken to ensure that all school equipment is properly recorded and to avoid its loss. In the longer term it is intended for effective use of this equipment to be made in other schools within the borough rather than it be simply sold-off.
- Poor results were achieved at Key Stage Four, with provisional results indicating that 27% of pupils gained 5+ A\*-C grades, including English and Maths, below the 30% target. At Key Stage Five a significant drop in attainment at A-Level had been witnessed, with 76.2% of pupils achieving 2+ A-E grades, a fall of 23.8%. Officers acknowledged the disappointing results at A-level explaining that a mix of factors are likely to have contributed to this outcome, possibly pupils are not as well motivated in very small classes. However, joint sixth form arrangements with Pool Hayes had been reintroduced with the expectation that this would assist in improving results this academic year. At GCSE results have probably maintained the performance levels achieved last year as a consequence of the level of support received and the hard work of staff;
- New joint management arrangements are now in place with school leadership being provided by the senior management team from Barr Beacon Language College. It is anticipated that these arrangements will also facilitate other joint support. The Interim Executive Board (IEB) continues to be responsible for welfare and standards. Following further Panel queries it was agreed that Dame Brennan and pupils from Sneyd would attend a future Panel meeting to enable the Panel to understand current activity and experiences at the school;
- Following a further Panel query officers agreed to provide guidance regarding current arrangements for the provision of specialist maths teaching after the departure of a number of staff at the of the previous academic year.

**Resolved:**

**That:**

**1. Dame Maureen Brennan, Executive Head teacher of Barr Beacon Language College and Sneyd, together with pupils from Sneyd be invited to a future Panel meeting;**

**2. officers will provide guidance regarding current arrangements for the provision of specialist maths teaching at Sneyd;**

**and;**

**3. officers provide the Panel with the report produced by external auditors in relation to school balances when it becomes available.**

## **28/10 PERFORMANCE OF SERCO CONTRACT**

The Chair invited Councillor Chambers to raise a number of concerns in relation to the report having been received late by Panel members. Councillor Chambers felt that this was a demonstration of poor governance and that it did not allow sufficient time for Panel members to review the information prior to the meeting. He explained that he had made a complaint to the Chief Executive of the council. The Chair acknowledged that the delay was not helpful. However, this was as a consequence of seeking to ensure that the report produced met the requirements of the Panel. This may have been a consequence of insufficient guidance having been provided by the Panel at its previous meeting. The Interim Managing Director, Serco introduced the report (annexed) explaining that it provided an opportunity to celebrate good results in schools, although it was important to recognise that there was always a need to improve. The following is a summary of the report and subsequent discussion:

- At Key Stage 2, Level 4+ performance for maths reached 80% for the first time, in line with the national average. Level 4+ English and Maths combined performance reached 73% which demonstrated that local schools were closing the gap on the national average. In those cases where schools did not undertake SATs robust teacher assessments were still carried out which if admissible would have been likely to contribute further to positive performance. Key in delivering this success was effective communication between schools and support services including the School Improvement Partners (SIPs). Other activity includes the development of a rolling note of visit, which has assisted in a greater focus on the provision of quality teaching and individual pupil performance tracking. Support has also been provided to assist in developing leadership capacity within school. Officers agreed to provide Panel members with further guidance regarding support work undertaken with schools;
- Improvement was also witnessed at Key Stage 4, with the number of pupils attaining 5+ A\*-C including English and Maths having risen by 6%, with overall performance of over 50% for the first time. While the national average for 2010 is not yet known, it is anticipated that Walsall schools will be either meet or be very close to this level, particularly with re-marks likely to further improve local attainment. In addition, 5+ A\*-C GCSE performance rose by 11% to 75%. A combination of factors are likely to have contributed to this sustained improvement in performance which exceeds the national level. This includes Children's Services Improvement

Advisers and other partners providing support to schools and focusing on English and maths, partnership working and the sharing of good practice. Elsewhere, work has been undertaken with senior leadership to develop school organisation, including the creation of a number of foundation schools;

- The Interim Managing Director, Serco explained that Key Stage 5, post-16 provision, was a relatively new area that features in the new contract. A slight improvement in performance had been witnessed at 'A' Level, with an average one point score increase per pupil from 639 to 640. This was significantly lower than the national average of 739. It is clear that this gap needs to be closed and Key Stage 5 was an area where further work was required. However, other post-16 provision was not considered within this measurement;
- A range of further activity is now undertaken to support the 14 – 19 agenda. This includes joint working between schools, the production of study beyond guides to assist students in operating at 'A' Level, as well as regular Aim Higher activities and a trip to Oxford University to further motivate pupils. Feedback from much of this activity had been very positive, although a significant proportion had a limited life as it was grant funded;
- Following a Panel query the Interim Managing Director, Serco agreed that seeking to meet the national average of performance was not aspirational. However, it was an important benchmark in seeking to close the gap between high and lower achieving pupils;
- Following Panel queries officers explained that a range of alternative post-16 provision to A-level was available. This included BTECH and vocational courses that enabled students to move from Level 2 to Level 3 and access higher education. These options had proven more popular and successful with local schools and Walsall College than the Diploma;
- Officers agreed to provide further guidance at a future meeting regarding the range of post-16 provision in Walsall;
- The Corporate Performance Manager providing guidance regarding the Local area children's services performance profile which forms the cornerstone of the Ofsted judgement of Walsall Children's Services (appendix annexed). The following is a summary of the briefing and subsequent discussion:
  - Block A of the profile relates to twenty-two different service areas, from child minding to fostering. Block B relates to Social Care and includes Looked after Children (LAC) and Safeguarding. The inspection places the greatest weighting on Blocks A and B, with Block C incorporating the National Indicator Set, including Being Healthy and Staying Safe. The judgement is based on information collated during the inspection and does not take account of improvements made in the interim;
  - Recent inspections of fostering and adoption received a "Good" in assessment. This achieved an overall rating of green, which can only be achieved if both inspections receive a score of 50% or more;
  - Following a Panel query the Corporate Performance Manager explained that it was difficult to anticipate the outcome of the current inspection. However, regardless of the result officers will cross reference the data held with the data used in the inspection to ensure consistency. Further

guidance in relation to the inspection was available should Panel members require it.

**Resolved:**

**That:**

**1. officers will provide Panel members with further guidance regarding support work undertaken with schools;**

**2. officers will provide further guidance at a future meeting regarding the range of post-16 provision in Walsall;**

**and;**

**3. officers will provide Panel Members with further guidance in relation to the inspection process as required.**

**29/10 QUARTER 1 FINANCIAL MONITORING POSITION FOR 2010/11**

The Service Accounting and Financial Reporting Manager introduced the report (annexed). The following is a summary of the report and subsequent discussion:

- The predicted net revenue overspend was £1.174m, with a capital forecast underspend of £21.878m. Table 1 highlights that pressures have been experienced in Universal Services and Specialist Services. This includes the demand faced by the increase in the number of Looked After Children (LACs). However, similar pressures had been experienced by other councils;
- Appendix 1 provided further details of the reasons for variance which indicates that the overspends in Vulnerable Children, Corporate Parenting, including LAC, together with the increase in demand for the Children with Disabilities Service had been offset by savings made on posts yet to be achieved and net underspends in Specialist, Universal and Education Services;
- Appendix 3 set out guidance in relation to potential risks, this includes a possible rise in the number of LAC, as well as possible redundancies putting pressure on school budgets. Appendix 4 set out the capital programme including the Youth Service building refurbishment and schools modernisation;
- Following a Panel query the Service Accounting and Financial Reporting Manager explained that the £21.878m capital programme has not been fully committed. However, funding had been identified to meet forecast need across services. The Assistant Director -Specialist Services explained that £1.5m had been spent on temporary social workers supplied by agencies. She agreed with a Panel Member that Walsall social workers had historically received salaries that were comparatively lower than neighbouring councils. However, it was anticipated that these would be improved under Single Status, with officers seeking to accelerate this

- process and introduce the new salaries as soon as possible;
- The Chair observed that all professionals including social workers and teachers, together with Members, had important roles as corporate parents to be alert to the issue of safeguarding.

### **30/10 REFERRALS TO CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE FOR DOMESTIC ABUSE**

The Interim Head of Safeguarding introduced the presentation (annexed) providing a definition of Domestic Abuse (DA) which is a range of threatening and other behaviours between current or former partners or within familial arrangements. The following is a summary of the presentation and subsequent discussion:

- Walsall's Domestic Abuse Response Team (DART) provides a robust response to incidence of DA. DART is formed of a number of specialist officers, including representatives from the Police and children's social care. DART also acts as the single point of information sharing;
- The Barnados risk tool which is now used across the region has improved the process of delivering a systematic approach to tackling DA. It is an evidence-based risk assessment and its introduction has in fact led to an increase in the number of referrals;
- There are a number of response levels to DA, ranging from Level 1, Information pack sent to victim and services offered, to Level 4 – referral to Children's Social Care for completion of a higher level enquiry and which might be treated as a child protection incident. Separate referrals to IRS are also received outside of DART referrals by a variety of sources, including referrals from a school or other professionals;
- Since 2007 there has been an increase in the number of referrals to children's social care for domestic abuse, with DART referrals almost doubling over between 2008/09 and 2009/10 from 4.5% to 8.7%. It was important to seek to ensure that this proportion of the overall number of referrals did not continue to increase;
- A number of factors have contributed to the increase in the number of referrals which include the growing use of alcohol within domestic situations, as well as the police now recognising domestic violence within the 16-24 age group and the success of DART encouraging greater levels of reporting of incidence;
- A new Performance Indicator (PI) which operates on a qualitative basis has been agreed as part of the Children's and Young People Plan 2010/11. It is also anticipated that it will reduce the number of re-referrals to DART by 5%;
- Further work includes ensuring that early interventions are robust, targeted work with young people regarding healthy relationships and the ratification of the Domestic Violence Strategy.

### **31/10 IMPACT OF BUDGET REDUCTION ON SERVICES**

The Service Accounting and Financial Reporting Manager introduced the presentation (annexed). The following is a summary of the presentation and subsequent discussion:

- Officers have kept a watching brief since the summer regarding central government funding intentions. However, while thus far there have been few recent developments, Walsall children's services are on target to deliver the savings required by the Emergency Budget in June;
- The Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) is due on 20 October. Media sources have reported that the Communities Department has agreed the savings it will make, although as yet no further information has been made available to local councils.

### 32/10 BUDGET SETTING FRAMEWORK & TIMETABLE 2011/12 – 2014/15

The Service Accounting and Financial Reporting Manager introduced the report (annexed). The following is a summary of the report and subsequent discussion:

- The budget process will be delivered as part of the resource allocation project (RAP) stream within the council's working smarter programme and its associated objectives including "take out waste and spend less" and will not be undertaken in isolation;
- RAP has been devised to provide guidance on budgeted activity across the council, including financial, personnel and performance data, together with customer perception data, which will assist in resources allocation and budget setting;
- A series of key dates was set out at appendix 1, including the Corporate Budget Panel decision conference on 9 December;
- The Assistant Director, Children's Services explained that the review of the Education contract with Serco formed part of this process. Serco have agreed to deliver £1m of savings as part of the overall council savings of £6m for the current financial year. Some services are no longer provided following the conclusion of grant funding in August. It is also possible that the impact of funding cuts will be felt in local schools;
- The contract review will seek to ensure that the output specification is consistent with government policy. This might include the trading and sharing of services in the future. It is proposed to establish a contract board with representation from the three main political groups. The process commences in October with a stakeholder group meeting which will include Head teachers.
- A Panel Member welcomed the contract review process highlighting that while it was important to celebrate the success achieved by local schools and pupils, it was critical that a client-side perspective of the contract was provided;
- Further guidance in relation to this process will be provided to Panel members.

#### **Resolved:**

**That officers will provide Panel members with further guidance regarding the Education contract review process.**



**33/10 WORK PROGRAMME 2010/11 AND FORWARD PLAN**

The Panel reviewed their work programme and latest version of Cabinets forward plan of key decisions.

**34/10 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

The time and date of the next meeting was noted as 4 November 2010.

The meeting terminated at 8:18pm

Chair:

Date:

DRAFT