

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

24 September 2009 at 6.00 p.m.

### **Panel Members present**

E. Hughes (Chair)  
E. Pitt (Vice-Chair)  
B. Cassidy  
K. Chambers  
H. Khan  
M. Munir  
A. Paul  
L. Beeley

### **Non-Elected Voting Members**

Alan McDevitt Parent Governor  
Ken Yeates – Lichfield Diocesan  
Education

### **Non-Elected Non-Voting Members**

Bob Grainger Secondary School Teacher

### **Portfolio Holder Present**

Councillor R. Walker

### **Officers present**

Sue Wedgwood Assistant Managing Director –  
Improvement and Effectiveness - Serco  
Kay Child Interim Assistant Director – Children's  
Services  
Karen Adderley Building Schools for the Future (BSF)  
Project Manager  
Tim Ferguson Head of Partnership & Performance  
Dan Mortiboys Corporate Finance Manager  
Anne Thompson Head of Service, Vulnerable Children  
Leah Arnold Senior Practitioner  
Jo Houston Trainee Social Worker

### **23/09 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Martin and Paul Williams.

### **24/09 SUBSTITUTIONS**

There were no substitutions for the duration of this meeting.

### **25/09 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

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

### **26/09 MINUTES**

### **RESOLVED:**

**That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 July 2009, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.**

(annexed)

## 27/09 DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Members were informed of the Councillor Call for Action (CCFA) training opportunities that were available.

## 28/09 SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN

The Interim Assistant Director for Children's Services introduced the item explaining that following recent high-profile cases including "Baby Peter" the Panel had requested the opportunity to meet with social workers to discuss their roles at the Council. She explained that Children's Specialist Services were structured to include an Initial Response team, Safeguarding and Family Support and Corporate Parenting.

The following is a summary of the guidance provided to the Panel by the Interim Assistant Director for Children's Services and the Head of Service, Vulnerable Children, a Senior Practitioner and Trainer Social Worker, including in response to questions raised by the Panel:

- The Initial Response (IR) team was the first point of contact where those seeking to raise a concern regarding the welfare of a child.
- The IR team receives up to a thousand phone calls and other contacts made a month, with around three to four hundred referrals for further investigation made;
- Calls made to the IR team are screened by the administration team to determine if they require further investigation or possible signposting to other services e.g. housing;
- Relevant calls are then passed to the duty social work team. (There are two teams who work alternate weeks as the duty team);
- The types of concerns received can be wide and varied;
- An initial assessment is carried out which includes seeking to identify child protection issues within a comprehensive holistic approach;
- In some instances there are obvious child protection issues which will result in an investigation and often a Child Protection Plan;
- In many instances the child is still living at home and is not necessarily the subject of a care order. Neither Victoria Climbié or "Baby Peter" were the subject of care orders;
- The service works hard to avoid a child becoming part of Looked After Children (LAC);
- Those children considered to be at high risk will have a Child Protection Plan (CPP);
- Where possible the team will attempt to meet with the child independently of the parents;
- There are currently four hundred and seventy four (LACs), this represents a four year high with the number of LACs in April one hundred and eight nine. There are also two hundred and thirty four CPP's in place;
- Care proceedings take around forty weeks to complete, from the initial interim care order to the final care order. It was agreed that a briefing note will be distributed to Panel members detailing the process;

The following is a summary of the guidance provided by officers regarding the challenges faced, including in response to questions raised by the Panel:

- The Council's Social Work teams are understaffed and as a consequence are under significant pressure; social workers current have average case loads of sixteen to eighteen, and staff are currently working ten or eleven hour days. However, they are well supported by team and senior managers;
- Key issues include the difficulty of staff recruitment and retention. For example, case loads immediately increase when team members leave compounded by a seven day turn-around time for cases;
- Staff departures, including seven within the last few months, mean that family support and other provision suffers;
- The specific nature of the work undertaken means that understaffing is compounded by the significant emotional pressure of many of the investigations. However, staff received a high level of emotional and management support, including close monitoring meaning they are not left to carry the burden of their workload alone;
- Staff are leaving to work elsewhere, not just for reasons of pay but also conditions, including access to parking;
- Part of the difficulty in seeking a solution to improve management of the pressures faced by staff is that it is difficult to anticipate the emergence of a serious issue, for example "Baby Peter", the impact it has on social work practices nationally and in turn on the workload of the team.
- It was agreed that Panel members would receive guidance regarding single status with reference to social workers by its next meeting;
- It was also agreed that a briefing would be provided to Panel members in relation to pay rates for social workers within the black country;
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The Head of Service, Vulnerable Children responded to further Panel member questions on a number of issues:

- The current vacancies within the IR team were one social and two case workers. Two social workers are leaving with one moving to the voluntary sector. One social worker has been persuaded to remain with the service. In addition, five social worker positions are under offer together with three unqualified social worker positions;
- The challenges faced by the service are heightened by the absence of experienced social workers who will often move elsewhere for improved pay. It is acknowledged across the region that it is not possible to compete with salaries offered by Birmingham Council who have also introduced "golden hellos" and "golden handshakes" to further incentivise staff to join and stay with the authority. It is anticipated that the Single Status process will result in an increase in salaries for all staff within the service;
- It is also difficult to recruit suitable agency staff to provide cover during holiday periods;
- The high level of inexperienced staff also means that significant levels of management support are required. For example, support staff undertaking court proceedings;
- She also explained that the national ContactPoint database, which is due to launch later this year, is likely to support improved access to information and better coordination in relation to cases of vulnerable children. It was agreed that information regarding ContactPoint and other initiatives would be provided to Panel members.

In response to a Panel query regarding the current national approach to intervention and the stage at which a child should be considered for LAC status, officers explained that in recent years there has been much greater clarity of expectations for social workers. For example, a much more purposeful approach is now taken in highlighting to parents issues that needed to be resolved and the actions available if they were not happy with the response of parents to requirements within a CPP. Officers also emphasised that safeguarding action was only taken when it was necessary and that principal aim of the Children's Act was to keep children with their families and that it is recognised that their removal will have a detrimental impact on their future. When a CPP is in place officers are operating on a knife edge to ensure that a child is properly safeguarded and yet fully aware that a LAC order will not have a positive long-term outcome for the child.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1. The Panel members receive guidance regarding single status with reference to social workers by its next meeting;**
  - 2. A briefing to be provided to Panel members in relation to pay rates for social workers within the black country;**
  - 3. A briefing be provided to Panel members in relation to ContactPoint and other initiatives;**
  - 4. A briefing be provided to Panel members detailing the care proceedings process;**
- and**
- 5. A briefing be provided to Panel members detailing the key challenges currently faced by social workers.**

**29/09 BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE (BSF)**

The BSF project manager provided the Panel with an update on the BSF (annexed) including progress towards Walsall's entry to the national programme.

The following is a summary of the main points of the update:

- The date of remit to the national programme had been rescheduled from October to November by Partnership for Schools (PfS);
- Current activities for PfS include providing evidence of stakeholder consultation (including parental consultation) within the Strategy for Change and updating Pupil Place planning data;
- The Strategy for Change (SfC)2 document which builds on the vision set out in SfC1 by demonstrating how it is to be delivered is currently being developed. It is supported by the six schools individual strategies for change. All secondary schools will have their own Schools SfC programme;
- Technical advisers have now been appointed and have started to visit the schools Their role includes consideration of site issues and regeneration opportunities
- A number of Learning Pilots are also underway: These include the use of handheld technology and flexible use of outdoor space;

- A presentation will be made to the Corporate Management Team (CMT) setting out the function of the Funding Allocation Model (FAM) and for input towards scoping the activity of the Local Education Partnership (LEP). Briefings for Members are also being planned;
- A joint meeting has also been held between the Council's Section 151 officer, BSF Project Director and PfS to consider the key financial elements of the project;
- A visit was also undertaken to Wolverhampton's BSF team to make use of that Council's experience in submitting Sfc2 and the planning process for the Outline Business Case (OBC).

The BSF project manager advised the Panel of the following timeline which would lead to the Council being contractually committed:

- Following remit there would be 11 months to Outline Business Case;
- The process of then going out to tender for building contractors would take at least eighteen months;
- Financial close when the process is signed-off and underway will not be any earlier than two and-a-half years from now. However, efforts are being made by PfS to seek to reduce the duration of the procurement process.

The Panel agreed to receive the different sections the Sfc2 document for review during future meetings. The Panel also agreed to invite head teachers from those schools who are part of the BSF programme to learn how they are set to benefit from the project to a future meeting.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- 1. That the Panel receive the different sections of the Strategy for Change 2 (Sfc2) document for review during future meetings;**

**and;**

- 2. That head teachers from schools participating in the BSF programme be invited to attend a future meeting to discuss how they are set to benefit from the project.**

#### **30/09 SNEYD COMMUNITY SCHOOL**

The Assistant Managing Director, Improvement and Effectiveness – Serco, provided an update explaining that a sixth consultation document had been issued to parents with a closing date of 2<sup>nd</sup> October. The consultation is in relation to a single option which is to close the school on 31 August 2012.

The following is a summary of the key points of the update:

- Since January 2009 the number of pupils at the school has declined by two hundred;
- The number of pupils enrolled to start in Year 7 this September is seventy;
- There have been an increasing number of mid-year admissions;
- The school continues to receive significant support from both the authority and the Black Country Challenge. The support includes a number of focus groups across a

number of areas. This includes financial management, which is particularly important as falling pupil numbers will impact on the budget received by the school;

- This ongoing support has contributed to an improvement in exam results for summer 2009: 38% of pupils achieved five A\*s – C at GCSE; 27% of pupils achieved A\*s – C in English and Maths;
- A number of working groups and work streams have been developed to assist in ensuring that the process towards closing the school is a pleasant experience for those affected.

A number of Panel members expressed concerns regarding the impact of the ongoing closure and associated delays on those pupils still at Sneyd School. A related concern existed around maintaining the quality of provision for pupils through ensuring continuity of staff. This has been achieved at other local schools due for closure by guaranteeing teaching staff who remain posts at other schools following the closure. The Assistant Managing Director, Improvement and Effectiveness acknowledged the importance of ensuring continuity and providing strong support for pupils.

### **30/09 LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT (LAA) PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

The Head of Partnership and Performance introduced the report (annexed) explaining that the Panel had previously agreed to receive guidance on performance against targets as well as to make use of this information to assist it in determining its work programme. The purpose of including all twenty eight indicators was to highlight the number that indirectly and over the longer-term the activity of those services within the remit of Children's and Young People contribute as well as those which are immediately relevant. The Chair observed that, for example, NI (National Indicator) 163 which related to those within the working age population with specific qualifications NI 008, adult participation in sport, were outcomes which could be strongly influenced by Children's and Young People related services. It was agreed that the Panel would continue to receive a LAA monitoring report which highlighted key issues and where necessary the corrective action being undertaken.

The Head of Partnership and Performance also highlighted key issues in terms of those indicators which are directly within the remit of the Panel for the first quarter 2009/10:

- A number of indicators: NI 019 Rate of reoffending by young offenders; NI 110 Young people's participation in positive activities and NI 198 Children aged 5– 10 years travelling to school by car were on target, or Green under the RAG (Red, Amber, Green) system;
- NI 117 16 – 18 year olds who are not in education, training or employment (NEET) was 9.1% and currently Amber under the RAG (Red, Amber, Green) system. This represents a decline on performance against the same period in 2008/09 (8.8%) and is likely to be a consequence of the challenging economic climate. The level of Domestic Abuse has also risen, in part as a consequence of an increase in referrals following "Baby Peter" and is also amber;
- In addition, NI 116 Proportion of children in poverty, NI 112 Under 18 conception rate and NI 056 Obesity in primary school age children in Year 6 were significantly off target and currently marked Red. Corrective Action Plans have been now been introduced to address these challenges.

### **RESOLVED:**

**That:**

**The Panel receive regular reports highlighting where indicators are off-target.**

### **31/09 FINANCIAL MONITORING – 2009/10 FIRST QUARTER FORECAST**

The Corporate Finance Manager introduced the report (annexed) explaining that a net revenue overspend of £1.878m had been forecast. He explained that there were a number of risks in forecasting across the different areas of service delivery:

- The forecast outturn overspend for Specialist Services was £1.532m. This follows the introduction of an action plan which had significantly reduced the original overspend position by £1.886m. This was as a consequence of the difficulty in being able to anticipate pressures on services. For example, the number of Looked After Children (LACs) which has risen from four hundred and fifty to four hundred and eighty. There is significant variance in the cost of providing the LACs provision dependent on the type of placements;
- The variance in relation to Education of £0.203m is a consequence of the Council having to meet the cost of redundancies determined by schools. These are decisions over which the Council has no control. It is also understood that further redundancies are planned;
- For Universal Services the overspend is forecast to be £0.289m which is a consequence of demand in areas such as Direct Payments and Family Support. A management action plan has produced savings across the service area of £0.417m.

### **32/09 BUDGET SCRUTINY**

For reasons of expedience the Chair asked for this item to be considered next by the Panel. The Corporate Finance Manager introduced the presentation explaining that it was intended to provide guidance on the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and the process for budget planning and associated timetable. He explained that the current funding forecast was based on the revenue support grant which was set until 2011. However, the current macro economic environment meant that the level of funding could fall and therefore it might prove necessary to achieve further savings. This type of risk has been factored into the forecast. Further pressure exists within capital funding, for example, as a consequence of the loss of income from the airport dividend which will no longer be received. The overall reduction in income means that £25m - £50m of savings are required.

Officers informed the Panel that within the Directorate the savings that are required would have minimal impact on direct services. Work is also underway to determine if further funding is available for use in improving the existing pay terms of social workers.

### **33/09 EXAM RESULTS 2009**

The Assistant Managing Director, Improvement and Effectiveness – Serco, presented the report (annexed) explaining that they were still subject to validation:

- Good progress has been made at both Foundation Stage and Key Stage One, with improvements from 2008 in Communication Language and Literacy. This follows significant activity in seeking to improve language development at Foundation Stage. Improvements were also witnessed in personal, social and emotional development and the numbers of pupils achieving Point 6 in a context of more demanding national targets;

- At Key Stage Two while in Maths and Science attainment at Level 4 was in line with the national average, a fall in English was greater than the fall witnessed on average nationally. However, many local schools were awaiting the outcome of remarked papers
- In relation to Key Stage Three, this is the first year that SATs (Standard Assessment Tests) have not been administered nationally. Instead the results received comprise either optional SATs or teacher assessments. Good progress has been made in all L5 subjects;
- At Key Stage Four, the significant progress achieved in 2007-08 has been furthered with a 5% increase in pupils achieving 5\*A-C overall and a 3.4% increase in 5A-C in English and Maths.

The Panel and the Assistant Managing Director, Improvement and Effectiveness – Serco agreed that significant improvements had been witnessed at a number of local schools, including Willenhall and Frank F Harrison had been the result of the hard work of teachers and pupils with support provided by the authority and the Black Country Challenge.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the validated exam results for summer 2009 be presented to a future Panel meeting.**

**34/09 WORKING GROUPS**

The initiation document for the Positive Activities working group was noted.

**21/09 WORK PROGRAMME 2009/10**

The work programme and forward plan were noted.

**22/09 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Chair confirmed the date of the next meeting was 24 September 2009.

The meeting terminated at 8:38 pm

Chair:

Date: