

CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

TUESDAY 15 JUNE 2010 AT 6.00 P.M.

Panel Members Present

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

Non elected voting members present

Alan McDevitt
Ken Yeates

Non-elected non-voting members present

Russ 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 BSF Project Director
Michelle Whiting - Assistant Director, Children's Services
Craig Scriven – Project Manager, Integrated Children's Workforce Development
Matthew Underhill – Scrutiny Officer

01/10 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received on behalf Pauline Pilkington and Paul Williams. The Chair issued a statement of thanks on behalf of the Panel to Bob Grainger in recognition of his contribution to its work.

RESOLVED:

That a letter of thanks be sent to Bob Grainger acknowledging his contribution to the activity of the Panel.

02/10 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of this meeting.

03/10 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

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

04/10 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 APRIL 2010, copies having been previously circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

05/10 **SNEYD SCHOOL**

The Assistant Managing Director, Serco, introduced the briefing (annexed). The main points of the briefing and subsequent discussion were as follows:

- Appropriate support had now been provided to those pupils who were identified as having carer responsibilities or learning difficulties. This included Serco agreeing to step outside its transport policy to fund additional support for travel. For example, a carer who ordinarily would not have qualified for assistance because they live within prescribed boundaries has received a free bus pass;
- It had originally been intended for all existing year 9 pupils to be transferred to new schools by this September. However, a number of the receiving schools had determined that the transition would be assisted by pupils transferring during the summer term of this academic year. In terms of where pupils have transferred, the vast majority have moved to Brownhills School, with single figures of children e.g. 1 or 2, moving either to schools outside the district or having successfully appealed and gained admission to schools within the locality of Sneyd School. A Panel Member explained that significant work had been undertaken by Brownhills School, in particular the Head teacher, in seeking to make the transition of pupils successful. The school itself was anticipated to achieve 45% 5 GCSEs A-C and had been inspected by Ofsted as *Good with outstanding features*. The Panel and officers agreed that given the significant journey many pupils would need to make to Brownhills School the impact on attendance and punctuality should be monitored, particularly if this proved to be a barrier to learning. However, it would be important to ensure that statistically significant evidence was used;
- The Assistant Managing Director, Serco, explained that Pool Hayes had previously decided to terminate joint sixth-form arrangements as a consequence of the decision to close Sneyd. However, strong similarities between each school's curriculum remain and Pool Hayes, was now providing support to many Sneyd Year 12 pupils. She also pointed out that successful sixth-form arrangements were important so to provide young people with social stimulation to assist in preparing them for the work environment and higher education;
- There are currently 17 members of staff at Sneyd school at risk, 6 are

seeking voluntary redundancy, 1 is on a fixed-term contract, with the remaining 10 at risk of compulsory redundancy. A number of members of staff have found alternative posts. Bumped redundancies are being explored, where if a teacher at a different school wishes to take voluntary redundancy the teacher at-risk at Sneyd could be assimilated into their post, also being considered;

- The Portfolio Holder for Children's Services explained that while the school's deficit was now likely to be minimal, it was a decline in pupil numbers and performance that had prompted the decision to close Sneyd, with financial concerns a significant but less critical factor;
- It was agreed that new Members to the Panel would receive a brief summary of Sneyd School, including key dates and events. The Chair highlighted the importance of seeking the views of individual pupils to get an insight into the experience of moving to new schools.

RESOLVED:

That:

- 1. that the Panel continues to receive regular updates regarding Sneyd School;**
- 2. that a briefing be provided to new Panel Members highlighting key dates and events at Sneyd School;**
- 3. that the views of pupils transferring to new schools are sought regarding their experience of the process.**

06/10 BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE (BSF)

The Interim Programme Director introduced the report (annexed). The main points of the briefing and subsequent discussion were as follows:

- The Strategy for Change part 2 (SfC2) was submitted to the Partnership for Schools (PfS) on June 2nd following Cabinet sign-off on 28th May. This document was now being reviewed with additional meetings also held to answer further questions;
- The Government is now reviewing the BSF programme and this has created uncertainty regarding the future of the scheme. The Secretary of State has also only provided very limited guidance at this stage, with an announcement anticipated at a similar time to the emergency budget on 22nd June. It is clear that the Government considers BSF to have been too bureaucratic previously and that the programme has not achieved what it set out to do. However, it would seem likely that those schemes which are at financial close will go ahead as it may prove difficult to break contractual agreements. Irrespective of the Government's decision it is anticipated that the Council will continue to work with the Wave 6a school and support development if capital is released in future;
- The BSF team has undertaken scenario planning, through which they have determined that the most likely outcome is that BSF will continue, but in a significantly changed format. The Portfolio Holder for Children's Services

explained that various forms of communication, including a letter, had been attempted with the Secretary of State on the issue of BSF but as yet no response had been received. However, the Panel agreed that regardless of the outcome of BSF schools buildings would remain in need of refurbishment and rebuilding.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel would continue to receive regular updates regarding the BSF programme.

07/10 WORK PROGRAMME 2010/11

The Chair introduced the item (annexed) highlighting the importance of the Panel's work programme being sufficiently flexible to be able to respond to changing priorities. For example, as a consequence of the emergency budget on 22nd June. The main points of the briefing and subsequent discussion were as follows:

- **Safeguarding** - the Assistant Director for Children's Services, Michelle Whiting, explained that a successful scheme to significantly reduce the number of Looked After Children (LACs) in Hackney had been achieved based on spending per child twice that in Walsall. However, she acknowledged that useful learning could be drawn from this programme and applied locally and discussions had already taken place with senior officers from that authority. The Panel heard that the current number of LACs was 519, although the upward trend was consistent with other local authorities. It would also be important to introduce more preventative services as well as reduce the administrative burden placed upon front line social workers, although it was necessary to acknowledge the impact of reductions in funding;
- The Panel determined that a working group would be the most effective forum through which to consider this issue. A further issue that was identified for a subsequent working group was a review of the process which is undertaken from when an individual child is identified as special needs through to production of a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN). The membership of the initial working group was confirmed as Councillor Hughes, lead Member, together with Councillors Martin, Shires, Cassidy and Paul;
- The Panel also received a presentation (annexed) in relation to the anticipated three year inspection of the council's Safeguarding and Looked After Children Service (LAC) from the Assistant Director for Children's Services, Michelle Whiting, together with Project Manager, Integrated Children's Workforce Development. Officers explained that the inspection will seek to understand how the council delivers the required services for children in Walsall. In spite of the decision to end the Comprehensive Area Assessment, the statutory three year inspection regime of Safeguarding and LAC services will be continuing, with this process undertaken by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). The council only receives 10 days notice of the inspection via a letter to the Executive Director of

Children's Services. Inspectors will be seeking to be assured that the council is effectively managing the services to be delivered. In particular, they will be seeking evidence that the council understands the key local issues and that an appropriate response is being delivered. The inspectors are likely to want to evaluate a range of performance data, together with discussions with a number of focus groups, some of which will include Panel members. The Panel also considered further activity including reviewing the self-assessment process.

- **Childhood Obesity** – the Panel agreed that the estimated cost of obesity to the NHS of £82m was very significant. The Assistant Director for Children's Services, Louise Hughes, identified the importance of early intervention and the role of Children's Centres as well as issues relating to healthy eating strategies. She also explained that obesity was one of three key health inequalities, together with infant mortality and teenage pregnancy and it would be important for the Panel's activity to reflect this, as well as the role of other local partners and stakeholders. The Panel determined that a working group would be the most suitable forum through which to consider the issue of obesity. The membership of the working group was identified as Mr McDevitt, together with Councillors Chambers Beeley and Bennett.

RESOLVED:

That:

- 1. that a working group is established to consider the issue of Safeguarding, to include educational attainment of Looked After Children (LAC) and the Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) process;**
- 2. that a working group is established to consider the health inequality issue of Childhood Obesity;**
- 3. that the Panel receives regular updates in relation to the Children's Trust Board (CTB);**
- 4. that the Panel receives regular guidance in relation to performance of the education contract with Serco.**

08/10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair informed Members that the next Panel meeting would be on 20 July 2010.

The meeting terminated at 7:40 pm

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