

CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

THURSDAY, 19 APRIL , 2012 AT 6.00 P.M. AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE

Panel Members Present

Councillor E. Hughes (Vice-Chair)
Councillor K. Chambers
Councillor T. Jukes
Councillor A. Paul
Councillor D. Shires
Councillor R. Thomas

Non elected voting members present

S. Rayner (Lichfield Diocesan Education)

Non elected non-voting members present

D. Jones (Primary Teacher representative)
R. Bragger (Secondary Teacher representative)

Portfolio holder present

Councillor R. Andrew - Children's Services

Officers Present

Louise Hughes, Assistant Director, Children's Services
Michelle Whiting, Assistant Director, Children's Services
Denise Faulconbridge, Managing Director, Walsall Children's Services, Serco
Frank Barnes, Assistant Managing Director, Participation, Serco
Carol Boughton, Head of Early Years and Disability Services, Serco
David Porter, Head Teacher Adviser
Matt Underhill, Scrutiny Officer

180/12 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received for the duration of the meeting from Councillor Cassidy, Councillor Martin and Amanda Potts.

181/12 SUBSTITUTIONS

None.

182/12 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

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

183/12 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting were noted.

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2012, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

184/12 **CHILDREN'S SERVICES - NEW OPERATING MODEL (NOM)**

The Assistant Director, Children's Services, introduced the discussion with members of the Family Support Teams. The following is a summary of the discussion:

- It was explained that the New Operating Model (NOM) was aimed at supporting the most vulnerable youngsters. It was a local multi-agency worker based approach with representatives from different statutory partners. It was intended to role out further Family Support Teams by 1 May;
- It was explained that the NOM was different to traditional models of support provided to families. The support provided was very intensive with a strong focus on seeking to work with the families. There have been strong indicators that this intervention work had prevented a number of young children moving from Level 2 to Level 3 (the point at which safeguarding and child protection measures would be required);
- It was explained that the Family Support Teams included both children and adult social workers and Targeted Youth Workers. At present the teams operate out of Birchills North Walsall, where four families are receiving support, and Bentley West Children's Centres where seven families are receiving support. The intensive process of working with families allows the support teams to identify the real challenges for families, assist them in resolving those issues and ultimately help them to become self-sufficient. The cascading of skills through teams was identified as a significant benefit of the NOM as was the support provided by senior management. Examples of successful work included resolving issues with families not receiving their full entitlement of benefits which had led to significant hardship. The Family Support Team had been able to swiftly intervene to ensure that a particular family were able to have immediate access to food and heating, with action taken by Welfare Rights to remedy the miscalculation of benefit entitlement. Other examples included resolving issues of significant rent arrears and other debts for individuals, with some instances where the individual was in fact owed money;
- It was explained that a process of ongoing maintenance was also part of the NOM. This involved ensuring that families had been able to continue with the improvements in their lives. It was intended to extend the NOM with a further phase introducing the approach in two other areas scheduled for May. Effective

multi-agency working had also been important to the success of the NOM. This included an approach which meant that the appropriate individual from partner organisations had been previously identified and available (“on pull”) to assist in the resolution of a particular issue. It was also explained that in spite of funding reductions the Police had also been supportive of the new approach. This included the ongoing development of a tool which will help identify families in need of assistance, as well as working with the Targeted Youth Support Workers in addressing issues of anti-social behaviour (ASB). This included the provision of residential weekends for some young people;

- The Chair thanked the Family Support Team members for attending and explaining the work they undertook. It was also agreed that an update on progress of the new approach would be received by the Panel during the next Municipal year.

Resolved

(1) That the Panel receive guidance during the next Municipal Year regarding the progress of the Family Support Teams;

and

(2) That the report be noted.

185/12 TRUANCY LEVELS, EXCLUSIONS AND MANAGING PUPIL ENGAGEMENT IN WALSALL

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

- It was explained that a recently published government commissioned report had identified a strong causal link between poor attendance and educational outcomes. It was also important to acknowledge the link between problems within individual families and poor attendance;
- In Walsall there has been an increase in authorised absence as schools have worked with families in managing absence. It was explained that only head teachers can authorise absence and the council does not have any statutory powers in this regard. The council’s statutory powers exist only in relation to prosecutions for non attendance. All schools receive core support from an Education Welfare Officer, with further support available as a traded service. In many schools this has led to improvements in the attendance culture;
- Overall absence in Walsall has reduced over a four year period (2007-2011). Schools stayed open during the cold weather in 2010 as a service to the local community, although many parents elected not to send their children to school on those days. However, as schools were enabled to code absence for those days differently it did not affect overall performance. It was explained that in the case of a particular school cluster which had purchased an additional three days of Welfare Officer support there had been a fall in authorised absence from 10% to

6.5%. However, it would be necessary to assess this approach over a twelve month period to confirm performance;

- The need to address the issue of patterns of authorised absence had been identified, with patterns of authorised absence due to sickness identified as being of more concern than for holiday. It was explained that most schools had a zero tolerance approach to holiday absence;
- In relation to exclusions it was explained that the number of permanent exclusions was falling at primary level, while at secondary level it remains volatile but below the national average. The council is under a statutory duty to provide alternative educational provision within six days of a permanent exclusion. It was noted that there had been no looked after children permanently excluded over the last seven years, with no permanent exclusions for special schools in the last four years. Members expressed concern regarding the use of fixed term exclusions to manage the problem of disruptive pupils rather than address and resolve the difficulties faced. It was explained that a number of Academies had purchased Welfare Officer support to tackle pupil absence. While there was no statutory responsibility for the council, Serco did seek to engage with Academies on this issue. In relation to managed moves it was explained that schools worked together to provide this alternative to exclusion. Members stressed the importance of schools taking action to permanently exclude disruptive pupils whom were having a negative impact on the education of others;
- The multi-agency Children Missing Education Panel (CME) meets regularly to address the issue of children not on a school roll. It was explained that around 120 families in Walsall home educate their children. The council has minimal statutory responsibility for the education of these children once their parents or guardians have elected to remove them from the state education system.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

186/12 CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING SERVICES - PEER REVIEW

The Assistant Director, Children's Services, introduced the report (annexed). The following is a summary of the report and subsequent discussion:

- It was explained that it would not be possible to provide the Panel with details of the outcome of the review at this stage. While the initial verbal feedback had been very encouraging the formal letter had not yet been received. However, the issue of Corporate Parent training had been raised by those Members who participated in the review. It was agreed that the political group leaders would be contacted regarding the possible provision of bite-size training sessions prior to group meetings.

Resolved

- (1) That the political group leaders be contacted regarding future Corporate Parent training;

and

(2) That the report be noted.

187/12 WORK PROGRAMME 2011/12 AND FORWARD PLAN

The Panel considered the work programme and Cabinet's Forward Plan.

Resolved

That the work programme and Forward Plan be noted.

188/12 EDUCATION DEVELOPMENTS

[Exempt information under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended)]

The Panel received an update from the Assistant Director, Children's Services and the Head teacher Adviser.

Resolved

That: the report be noted.

189/12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair informed Members that the date of the next meeting would be set at annual council on 21 May 2012.

The meeting terminated at 7:50 pm

Chair:

Date: