

SCRUTINY COMMISSION 1
CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

Minutes of a meeting of Scrutiny Commission 1 held on Monday 14th April 2008 at 6.00 pm in the Reception Suite, Civic Offices, Telford

PRESENT – Councillors J.A.Francis (Chairman), G.M.Green (Vice-Chairman), M.J.Smith, E.M.Swift and K.L.Tomlinson and Mr.G.Raxster (CE Lichfield Diocesan Representative), Mr.A.Atkinson (RC Diocese Representative) and Mrs.S.Harris (Primary Headteacher Representative).

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT – Councillor S.P.Burrell – Cabinet Member: Children & Young People and K.S.Sahota.

OFFICERS PRESENT – Julia Almond – Corporate Director: Children & Young People, Barbara Evans – Head of Safeguarding & Corporate Parenting, Richard Lansdale – Business Manager – Disabled Children, Sarah Mulcuck – Joint Commissioning Manager for Disabled Children, Sarah Morris – Scrutiny Officer and Andrew Roberts – Democratic Services Officer.

SC1-42 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 21st January 2008 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

SC1-43 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Revd I.Terry (CE Hereford Diocesan Representative), Mrs.M.Ward (Primary Parent Governor Representative) and Mrs M Sedgebeer (Primary Teacher Representative).

SC1-44 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP**

Councillor J.A.Francis – Chairman Group 1 and 2 Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership and Member Shropshire Private Nurseries Association.

Councillor G.M.Green – Governor – Abraham Darby Specialist School for the Performing Arts.

Councillor M.J.Smith – Trustee Hadley Under Fives and Governor – Hadley Learning Community.

Councillor E.M.Swift – Governor – William Reynolds Infant School and Haughton School.

Councillor K.L.Tomlinson – Governor – Charlton School.

SC1-45 **OVERVIEW OF PERFORMANCE 2007/2008 AND KEY TARGETS IN THE CHILDRENS & YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLAN FOR 2008/2009**

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Julia Almond Corporate Director: Children & Young People together with Councillor S.P.Burrell Cabinet Member: Children & Young People.

Councillor Burrell highlighted the current work that was being undertaken which was leading towards the completion of the current Vision 2026 the principal aims of which

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was to provide a modern learning city with first class facilities and give all children and young people the best possible start in life. Both of these would be underpinned through the establishment of the Learning Communities within the Campus Telford & Wrekin and also with the further developments for prevention and early intervention within families. A further aspect would be the delivery of curriculum personalisation and it was confirmed that the Council was in the receipt of a further two years funding in order to develop this aspect further. It was also stated that the Council considered it to be absolutely vital that the existing partnerships within the clusters should be continued and developed further.

The key strengths of the portfolio included the integrated multi-agency working with excellent partnership relations, a committed workforce, that benefits had arisen from the involvement of children & young people, innovation particularly the Pathfinder scheme which provided short breaks for disabled children, ICT for schools and the Culture Zone.

At this point Julia Almond – Corporate Director: Children & Young People referred the Commission to a presentation during which she would provide an overview of performance during 2007/08 by reference to the five Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes. Members were invited to ask questions during the presentation and these are detailed below with the response appearing in brackets. The presentation would also identify again by reference to the ECM outcomes the priorities and examples of intended action(s) that would feed into the Children & Young People's Plan 2008-11.

Julia Almond advised the Commission that she had only commenced her role within Telford & Wrekin in January this year and that she had initially taken stock on the present position of the service and to reflect on the tremendous work that had already been commenced in the Borough. In particular she made reference to the Building Schools for the Future/Campus Telford & Wrekin programme and that the Council had received national recognition from Central Government with the confirmation that the Council could manage its own in-house managed ICT provision within schools. She also acknowledged the successful partnership work that had been established in the Borough, particularly within the clusters, and that she wished to develop this work further.

Being Healthy – it was mentioned that all schools had fully engaged in the Healthy Schools programme with 35 schools achieving the full standard. Members were also informed that the teenage pregnancy rate had fallen by 15.7% since 1998. Other reported highlights included that waiting time to access CAMHS had been reduced and the successful programmes to tackle obesity. Members were informed that the forthcoming JAR inspection would particularly concentrate on Children in Care and Disabled Children.

Councillor Francis – sought confirmation of the current teenage pregnancy rate within the Borough as she was under the impression that the rate was increasing. (By way of response the Corporate Director replied that whilst the rate had stabilised it was still considered to be too high. However, she acknowledged that further work was required to be undertaken. Councillor Burrell – reminded the meeting of the early intervention work that the Council had initiated and that through this continued work there was a recognised need to include and provide the appropriate level of

support to families and people where required, this would as a result affect the current rate).

Councillor Tomlinson – enquired about the current policy of including pregnant teenagers within mainstream education and she questioned the perceived message that this provided within schools. She was concerned that this inclusion gave an impression that teenage pregnancy was “fashionable”. (In answer to this point members were informed that the desired intention was to ensure that these teenagers were able to remain and be given access to mainstream education for as long as possible).

Councillor Swift – made a comment that the Council should not forget the young teenager fathers who were also involved in teenage pregnancies and ensure that they were supported as well. (This was acknowledged as being an important matter).

Mr Atkinson – enquired about the identified correlation in respect to Children in Care, the attainment level in Key Stage 4 results and the levels of crime committed by children in care. (The meeting was informed that the published figures were unreliable due to the size of this particular cohort which accordingly led to a wide variance in the recorded percentages).

Staying Safe – the Commission was informed of the key highlights that had been achieved during 2007/08. These included that 75 Heads and a number of school governors had undertaken the training on Safer Recruitment; the year also saw the development of the Domestic Abuse Strategy and increased placement stability with a rate of 70% being achieved.

A number of questions were raised in connection with the Youth Offending Service, whether this would be continued and what the future level of funding was likely to be. (By way of answer the meeting was advised that the same level of funding had been confirmed as this year with no uplift in the level after inflation. Members were also referred to the feedback that had been received following the completion of the YOS Inspection, which had been very positive. A suggestion that had arisen was that the service should concentrate on those who were at greater risk and the Council was looking to examine how to deal with this particular aspect).

Enjoying and Achieving – it was noted that the Commission had previously received a report in connection with Key Stage results. However, the meeting was referred to the OfSTED Inspections of Schools where during the year over 83% of Primary schools were judged to be good or outstanding together with a similar rate for Secondary schools. It was also reported that overall school attendance was improving, that there was effective support for Travelling Children and that over 900 children were receiving musical instrument tuition.

Making a Positive Contribution – members were reminded of the ongoing support that was provided to Young Carers and also for Children in Care, which had seen 91% of these Children in Care participating in their reviews. Reference was also made to the recent Hot Shot and the Active Involvement Service Awards Nights which resulted in some 435 awards being presented. Another welcome aspect that had been evidenced was that some 5,000 children and young people had participated in a number of the Council’s consultations. The meeting was informed

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that work towards Young Carers was ongoing – it was also acknowledged that a number of young carers still remained to be identified.

Achieving Economic Well-being – within this particular outcome the following were identified within the presentation. These included that the percentage of year 11 pupils continuing in education had increased to 77% although the rate of NEETs was also considered to be high at 9.4%. There was also a 100% uptake of the 195 free childcare places for 2 year olds in the disadvantaged groups. It was further reported that there was an increase in the number of hours used by 3 and 4 year olds – thus enabling parents and carers to seek a return to work.

In connection with the intended actions that would feed into the developing Children & Young People's Plan again these were outlined to the Commission as linked to the established outcomes as referred to in the ECM agenda. These included – being healthy – Reduction of child obesity, teenage pregnancies and alcohol consumption; Staying Safe – reduce the impact of Domestic Violence; Enjoying and Achieving – Improve attendance and achievement and continuation of the rolling out of the Telford Culture Zone; Positive Contribution – by seeking to reduce the rate of offending and re-offending behaviour and Economic Wellbeing – to improve access to transport, reduce the level of NEETs and reduce homelessness.

By way of conclusion the Commission was advised of the Service Development Priorities that the portfolio wished to make progress on within the CYP Plan 2008-11. These included the Building Schools for the Future; Integrated Youth Support; Parenting and Family Support; Leisure and Out of School Opportunities for Disabled Children; Multi-Disciplinary working in Clusters; Opportunities for involvement of CYP and parents/carers; Engagement with the non-statutory sector and Workforce Development.

The meeting was informed that the main priority would be on the developing BSF/Campus Telford & Wrekin Programme together with the desire to provide educational provision from 0-19 years. It was also proposed to undertake further development work and support to the existing clusters including furthering the good relationships that had been established with a number of external agencies. It had been identified that further linkages with the third sector should be developed.

Mr Atkinson – commented on the Campus Telford & Wrekin project plans he questioned the effect on those schools that were not included in the first tranche. By way of response the Corporate Director: Children & Young People stated that she wished that all schools could be included at the same time. However, this was not possible as it would be impossible to secure both the funding at the same time and also to manage the Programme within a single comprehensive Borough wide project.

Councillor Swift – enquired about post 16 provision particularly in South Telford and the need to ensure that there was some provision available within the next four years or so. The Cabinet Member: Children & Young People confirmed that he wished this to happen as it had been acknowledged that within South Telford post 16 pupils were “leaking” to attend alternative provision within Shropshire. It was confirmed that as part of the Campus Telford & Wrekin that post 16 provision would be made available at the new Abraham Darby Academy based on the existing and proposed

specialisms. It was also acknowledged that there was an identified need to work towards the provision of post 16 vocational qualifications within the Borough.

Further comments were raised in relation to Youth Support which included the actual level of youth workers employed within the Borough; the effects of part time youth workers having to work with a full time worker and the resultant effect that this had on the overall youth service; the work of the youth buses and the linkages with Connexions. By way of response it was suggested that there was a need to wait for the feedback and results from the Enhanced Youth Inspection. Following the publication of the results of the Inspection the Council would then be in a position to review the current provision and deal with any observations that may arise from the inspection.

SC1-46 INTEGRATED SERVICE FOR DISABLED CHILDREN

The Commission were introduced to Richard Lansdale Business Manager – Disabled Children and Sarah Mulcuck Joint Commissioning Manager for Disabled Children who had prepared the briefing note that had been attached to the agenda.

Members were informed that the Integrated Service for Disabled Children brought together a range of local and Health professionals into a single managed service, and was presently located within three sites within the Borough. It was planned however to open a new purpose built centre in Malinslee in Spring 2009. Members were referred to the briefing note in which details were provided in relation to Multi-Disciplinary Assessment, Resources, Equipment & Adaptations, Child Protection and Children in Care, Medical and Therapy Input to Bridge Special School, Transition and Information.

A number of the specific items contained within the briefing note were individually highlighted – these included:

Short Breaks – these enabled breaks being provided to families which often extended to overnight residential breaks. Services were accessed via a Resources Panel chaired by the Shared Care Co-ordinator. It was confirmed that the Council was a Pathfinder through the DCSF Short Breaks Programme which enabled the Council to benefit from significant increased investment which also included capital funding. As well as providing breaks to families with children with the most complex needs, the service also wanted to ensure that young people could access mainstream provision, with support, wherever possible.

Direct Payments – the service also actively promoted the use of Direct Payments and this was now the preferred option for 25 families. A Service Level Agreement was in place with Adult & Consumer Care for the provision of an Advice Service for Direct Payments.

Equipment and Adaptations – it was reported that at present there was one full time equivalent Occupational Therapist in post located within Adult & Consumer Care service area. With the absorption of children's work in this way waiting times had been virtually eliminated, although the demand for this service was steadily increasing. In relation to moving and handling the service was developing plans to

address the training, assessment and provision of equipment which would enable children to access short breaks safely in the same way as at home or school.

Transition – the Commission was informed that a Personal Assistant was currently seconded to the Integrated Service from Connexions for Youth. The service in conjunction with other members of the Integrated Service contributed to the Transition Plans for the children who had Statements of Special Educational Needs. Responsibility for young people eligible for these services from Adults and Consumer Care Portfolio transferred at age 18, and the service worked closely with the Person Centred Planning and Transition Team. There was a clear commitment to assess need and produce clear plans from age 16 and there were also close links with the 16+ Team for young disabled people who were Care Leavers.

A number of members raised questions in connection with the service the responses to which are detailed within the brackets following the question.

Councillor Tomlinson – enquired as to whether any part of the current service provision utilised the voluntary sector. (By way of response the Commission was informed that this had been identified as one area that could be developed further with linkages to the CVS being currently explored).

Councillor Tomlinson – also enquired about delays that had been communicated to her about the suitable provision of facilities to assist families in supporting disabled children. (She was informed that the service had consistently reviewed individual cases where issues of manual handling and whether planned provision was suitable. There was also the impact of new technologies to be considered and the continuing need to ensure that training was suitable, particularly the impact that this would have on families).

Councillor Sahota – enquired about his perception that the diagnosed increase of cases within the autism spectrum. (Members were advised that there had not been a measurable increase in the actual numbers of diagnosed cases – however it was acknowledged that there had been an improvement in identification methods).

SC1-47 FORWARD PLAN

Members were informed of the forthcoming Cabinet decisions contained within the Forward Plan which covered the period April 2008 – July 2008 for the Children & Young People portfolio.

SC1-48 CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE/REVIEW OF MEETING

The Chairman advised the meeting that she had no updates on which to report. However she did request feedback on the meeting. Members felt that the meeting had again been effective and that this was due to the continuation of the policy of the agenda containing briefing papers and reports for all of the agenda items.

It was pointed out that this had led to Members being better informed in advance and providing the opportunity for Members to identify comments and questions that they wished to raise within the subject areas at the meeting.

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In connection with suggested agenda items a number of members commented on the previous Commission Review report on Youth Service Provision during which they stated that very little had arisen in the current service provision following the recommendations of the review report. It was further suggested that this could be considered and discussed as a single item on a future agenda as it impacted on so many other functions of the Council.

It was further suggested as to whether there should be an agenda item in connection with the results of the Joint Area Review.

SC1-49 DATE OF NEXT MEETING OF THE COMMISSION

The Commission noted that this meeting was the final meeting for the 2007/08 Civic Year. The meeting dates for the forthcoming Civic Year 2008/09 were noted as Monday 2nd June 2008, Monday 8th September 2008, Monday 3rd November 2008, Monday 19th January 2009 and Monday 30th March 2009.

The meeting closed at 8.00 pm

Chairman.....

Date.....