

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Minutes of the meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee
held on Monday, 19th September 2011 at 6.00 p.m. in the Scrutiny Meeting
Room, Civic Offices, Telford

PRESENT: Councillors G. Green (Chairman), K. Guy, M. Ion, J. Loveridge, C. Turley, Co-optees A. Atkinson, S. Ali, M. Ward.

Also Present: Cllr. P. Watling Cabinet Member for Children & Young People; J. Eatough, Head of Governance; Clive Jones, Head of Family & Community Services; Jim Collins, Head of School Improvement; Damien Madine, Extended Services Specialist; Guy Kershaw, Project Director BSF; Chloe de Poix, Participation Worker for Children in Care; Stacey Norwood, Short Breaks Project Manager; Stephanie Jones, Scrutiny Group Specialist; Tracy Clarke, Scrutiny Officer.

CYPSC-6 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on the 9th August 2011 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

CYPSC-7 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillors J. Greenaway, A. Mackenzie.
Co-optee S. Harris.

CYPSC-8 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

CYPSC-9 BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE UPDATE

The Project Director of BSF presented the update report on Building Schools for the Future (BSF). The report included an update on the position relating to the collapse of the canopy at the Abraham Darby Academy on 25th August, and an update on other works in the programme.

In relation to the collapse of the canopy, the following points were highlighted:

- A Health & Safety Executive (HSE) investigation was taking place and samples of the various materials had been taken for analysis and testing. The site had been secured by Kier, the debris had been cleared and damaged brickwork was being replaced. All contractors affected were now out of hospital.
- The primary school had not been affected and it was anticipated that this could open as planned in January 2012. The position on the leisure centre was being assessed. The date for the opening of the academy could not be confirmed until

further assessment, and until it was known whether a new design for the canopy would be required. A new design would need to go to Plans Board.

- Under the contract, Kier would be responsible for the remedial work. Insurance policies were being checked to find out what would be covered.

In relation to other works in the programme:

- Under the existing framework contract, Kier were progressing planning applications for Phoenix School, Newport Girls High School and Mount Gilbert Special School.
- The project approval process was that Cabinet had re-confirmed the programme in principle in January 2011 following a reduction to the budget in November 2010, and that the full business case for each scheme had to be approved by Cabinet and Partnership for Schools (PfS) before contracts could be let.
- The Council's Capital Programme for 2011/12 to 2016/17 included £144.1m BSF funding which covered the costs of construction and project support.
- The contracts for external advisors were due to expire shortly, and it was anticipated that these would be re-tendered with significant cost savings on the current arrangements.

A number of questions were raised by members:

What is happening with the Grange Park and Lord Silken Schools?

A paper was going to Cabinet on the overall BSF programme with some proposed amendments triggered by the withdrawal of £43m funding and in conjunction with an assessment of the school accommodation needs of pupils over the next ten years. There would be consultation on the proposals once they had been approved by Cabinet.

It was agreed that a sub-group of the Committee would be set up to take part in the consultation on the proposals once they had passed through Cabinet.

What is the timetable and likely costs for the Mott MacDonald report?

Mott MacDonald had been commissioned by the Council to carry out an independent investigation of the canopy collapse. Mott MacDonald was working alongside the HSE and had been given access to the site and materials for independent assessment and testing. Quality assurance checks were also being done on the other structures to ensure calculations and tolerances were correct. The HSE report would be thorough and would be the definitive report; depending on the complexity of the investigation, the final report could take up to 12-24 months. Mott MacDonald would provide an initial report soon, and the Council would then decide how much further work needed to be done. It was not possible to say what the cost of the independent investigation would be as it depended upon the facts which were not clear yet. Insurance policies were being checked to establish what excesses and liabilities would be incurred by the Council. It was acknowledged that clear information regarding the incident and the costs needed to be provided to the public, but that this could only be done once the exact position was known.

Members requested a statement of the definitive costs, including insurance excesses and claims, be provided to the Committee.

Are there any indications of what caused the collapse of the canopy – was it a design, construction or materials fault?

It was impossible to say at this stage and we need to wait for the results of the investigation. There was a long chain of suppliers involved from designers, architects, engineers, manufacturers, construction and each area needed to be investigated to find the fault.

RESOLVED

- **That a sub-group of the Committee would be set up to take part in consultation on BSF proposals following the report to Cabinet**
- **That a statement of costs relating to the canopy collapse be requested to come back to the Committee.**

CYPSC-10 CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY

The draft Corporate Parenting Strategy was presented by the Extended Services Specialist.

The Extended Services Specialist drew the Members attention to the fact that as of 15th September 2011 the number of children and young people in care was 296. This had gradually risen over the last 2 years which made a significant impact on the services that the Council has to provide. There were a further 170 children placed by other authorities in Telford and Wrekin whose statutory responsibility lies with the placing authority.

Statistically children and young people in care (CiC) tend to perform less well than their peers, and there was a need to raise levels of attainment. The Corporate Parenting Strategy aims to address low or under-achievement so that children in care are not disadvantaged by their circumstances. The reality is that this is not a homogenous group and some children are more able than others.

In addition to the draft Strategy, a supporting draft Action Plan for Raising Children in Care Attainment, and the results of a CiC Visioning Day held with schools on 19th September were tabled. The draft Action Plan detailed specific desired outcomes, the actions required to achieve each outcome, a named lead and timescale. The aim was to work with schools, social workers, foster carers and other partners to deliver a joined-up, pro-active approach to raise levels of attainment and support centred around the child. An holistic approach would be taken to look at the social and emotional factors which affect achievement. The CiC Visioning day had discussed what “successful” means, and the blocks and enablers to success. The ideas from the day had been incorporated into the draft Action Plan.

The following information was given in response to Members’ questions and observations:

- A member of the Committee commented that if CiC who are already under achieving because of their circumstances are then put into a low-attainment group in school, their learning could be further hampered by disruptive behaviour in the group. The Extended Services Specialist replied that there was a need to work smarter and focus on target pupils to set expectations regardless of trauma they may have experienced. There was currently an Intensive Support Programme (ISP) to provide extra support in primary schools, and in secondary schools the National Challenge had a similar role focusing on target attainment, prior achievement and resources to raise the level of achievement.

In addition partners within the Local Strategic Partnership and the Chamber of Commerce are being engaged through a Visioning Day, to consider what additional support that they could offer to CiC such as mentoring, work shadowing and work experience. For example, in Devon, Councillors “adopt” a CiC and follow their progress at either year 6 or 11, looking at attainment, attendance and exclusions. The Councillor then raises questions with the responsible officers to ensure that early intervention takes place.

The Committee requested further information on the Devon model.

Furthermore, the Extended Services Specialist said that until last year a one-to-one tuition programme had been nationally funded to provide 10 hours extra Maths and English tuition for CiC. The funding was no longer ring-fenced but due to the remarkable impact this had had on attainment, it was being recommended to the Head-teachers Network and Secondary Heads and Principals meetings that the programme should continue.

- In response to a question about, given the number and differing needs of children in care, whether a Virtual School had been considered for children in care, members were informed that a new Team Leader had been appointed as a Virtual Head-teacher for vulnerable groups and would be taking this forward.
- That the performance indicator for Key Stage 4, achievement of 5 A*- C GCSEs (or equivalent), included Maths and English. In 2010 two out of twenty children in care (10%) achieved 5 A*-C GCSEs (or equivalent), compared to a figure of 55.9% for all young people who sat the exams.
- There was a designated teacher for children in care in each school and regular network meetings were held with the schools. Some schools are working well with CiC and this best practice needs to be shared.

Performance Indicators

There was a discussion about the performance indicators included in the Corporate Parenting draft strategy and members considered whether there were any other indicators that should be used to monitor performance in relation to children in care.

The Members suggested that the National Indicators while extremely valuable, were not very positive and suggested that a positive indicator should be developed to monitor attainment over and above the national indicators. It was felt that if there was a focus on attainment linked to aspiration, this would have a positive impact on other indicators. Members suggested various areas that could be considered:

- Participation in extra-curricular activities
- How schools promote opportunities to children in care so that they have equal entitlement with other children
- Setting achievements targets for what the young person would have achieved if they had not needed to be taken into care, and identifying the obstacles to achievement.

The Chairman also commented that it was important to change perceptions about children in care and that they are not “naughty” children, but children who have been failed by adults.

Meetings with CiC

The Members discussed the meetings with children and young people in care and the Participation Worker gave feedback from the Care Council about the types of meetings the young people wanted.

The feedback from the Care Council was;

- That they want to have separate meetings for the older and younger age groups
- That all meetings need to take place in an area that feels comfortable for the young people.
- That they wanted feedback from the scrutiny meetings, and it had previously been agreed that the Chairman would attend a meeting of the Care Council to feedback, who in turn would feedback through the young people’s newsletters.
The Care Council had requested feedback from the previous meeting with children in care on the theme of contact.
- That the theme for scrutiny meetings should concentrate on one area of the pledge. The seven areas of Pledge were:
 - Values
 - Keeping Safe
 - Being Healthy
 - Becoming Independent
 - Enjoy and Achieve
 - Make a Positive Contribution
 - Contact
- That they wanted to continue to receive the £5.00 Argos voucher for attending the Scrutiny Meeting.

After further discussion it was agreed:

- That first meeting with children in care would be in January 2011 and a possible topic was Becoming Independent - the transition to 16+
- That there would be a briefing and training session for members before the meeting with the young people. The Cabinet Member suggested that this could be linked to a wider programme of member engagement with children in care such as the Take Up day whereby members impart skills back to the young people.

It was further noted that Corporate Parenting training had still not been made mandatory for all members and the Committee re-stated its support for this to happen.

RESOLVED

- **That information about the Devon mentoring model programme would be provided to the Committee**
- **That officers consider developing a performance indicator around attainment such as the take-up of extra-curricular activity by children and young people in care and report this back to the Committee**

CYPSC-11 SHORT BREAKS PROVISION FOR DISABLED CHILDREN

The Short Breaks Project Manager presented the report on Short Breaks Provision for Disabled Children.

From 1st April 2011 new duties came into force regarding the provision of short breaks. The Short Breaks duty requires every Local Authority (LA) to provide services designed to assist individuals who provide care for disabled children.

All Local Authorities must publish a statement by 1st October 2011. The Children and Young People's statement will be publicised after it has been considered by Cabinet on 22nd September.

The statement details the:

- Range of services provided
- Eligibility criteria
- How to access the services

The funding for the programme has come from the Early Intervention Fund. This has helped to develop the workforce through a Work Force Training Strategy, offering training to parents, staff and relevant partners. The funding had also helped to assist with improving communications through the website and newsletter, with children and parents being actively involved.

The programme offers activities in and out of the home both in the day and at the weekend for youngsters aged 0 – 25 years. The activities can be from one hour to a weekend away. These are both educational and leisure activities and include provision for children with complex health needs including activities at the hospice.

At the end of last year a review of all Short Break activities was made to ensure that customers and the Council were getting best value. This has enabled the Commissioning plan to be updated.

Some of the impacts of the programme were highlighted as:

- Strong parent lobby group which provided networking and support, gathering evidence and raising money for the programme
- Relieves pressure on families

- Support for siblings, with a separate sibling group being looked at
- Health benefits for example from riding adapted bikes and swimming.

Following the report, members asked a number of questions:

How many children are able to access the Short Breaks Programme in Telford and Wrekin?

There are 2,000 children and young people in Telford and Wrekin with a range of disabilities accessing Short Breaks. The young people range from 0-25 years and then transfer into adult services, and support is provided to the 18-24 year olds with transition arrangements. Data from schools highlighted that there were 500 children with autism/aspergers schools in the borough. Statistics on service users is only one way of monitoring the service, and improvements to health and quality of life also need to be measured. The Council has been assessed as a model of good practice for other authorities to aspire to.

What sort of activities are on offer?

There are a number of activities on offer these include:

- A Saturday Club which offers Adaptive bikes and tobogganing at the Ski Slope as well as Creative Kidz.
- The Hospice which offers activities for complex health needs
- Voluntary and Community Groups can also apply for small amounts of money to engage with disabled children, or take advantage of advice and support offered by the Team. Interest has already been received from a Rowing club, Sailing club as well as local Brownie Packs.

Have you ever considered activities with animals?

We have had a few groups who have taken part in horse riding, and while this has a high cost it does have huge benefits for those involved. Small grants, advice and support are provided to community and voluntary organisations to encourage them to support disabled children – sometimes they require help rather than money.

Members requested a detailed profile of service users to drill down into eligibility, age ranges, needs etc. Members also wanted to know how services would be prioritised if the budget is reduced for 2012/13, and how the profile of users is used to project costs on the adult services' budget for the transition at age 25.

RECOMMENDATION

A further report is brought back to the Committee detailing the profile of service users and any changes to the service.

CYPSC-10 Forward Plan

The Committee noted the date of the next meeting on 20th October 2011 and the agenda which includes a review of the Phase 2 of the Children's Service Review and Child Poverty. It was noted the Phase 2 Service Review would be launched on 18th October for 90 days consultation and the Committee may wish to put in a response as part of the consultation.

The Chairman thanked Shaukat Ali and Mel Ward for their suggestions which have been passed to the Scrutiny Management Board to consider which scrutiny committee they would be assigned to.

The meeting ended at 19.21p.m.

Chairman:

Date: