

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 7th December 2011 at 6.00 p.m. in the Scrutiny Meeting Room, Civic Offices, Telford

PRESENT: Councillors G. Green (Chairman), M. Ion, J. Greenaway, C. Turley.
Co-optees A. Atkinson, S. Harris

Also Present: Cllr P. Watling, Cabinet Member for Children & Young People; Jim Collins, Head of School Improvement; Stephanie Jones, Interim Scrutiny Group Specialist; Tracy Clarke, Scrutiny Officer.

CYPSC- 19 REMARKS FROM THE CHAIRMAN

An updated report had been circulated to the Members on the Short Breaks for Disabled Children detailing the number of service users and the cost of the activities. The Chairman requested that any questions were circulated to the Scrutiny team for follow up with the relevant officer.

RESOLVED - that a further update report be received by the Committee in six months time.

CYPSC-20 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on the 20th October 2011 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

CYPSC-21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillors; A. Mackenzie, J. Loveridge, K. Guy, Co-optees; M. Ward, S. Ali, E. Ofori, Officers; Guy Kershaw, Project Director BSF.
Members referred to the repeated non attendance of some councillors. The Chairman advised that this would be raised with the relevant Group leader(s). Members agreed this was a suitable response.

CYPSC-22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

CYPSC-23 STATISTICS ON PLACEMENT STABILITY AND THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN CARE

The Chairman drew Members' attention to the statistics presented on the Children in Care (CiC). Members agreed that the increase in the number of CiC had been gradual with no sudden rises as previously implied. The Chairman advised that there was a need to protect the CiC from being subjected to media headlines.

The Cabinet Member for Children & Young People highlighted that the rise in the number of CiC was a national problem and not just an issue that had affected the Borough of Telford & Wrekin.

Members of the Committee agreed that all Members across the Council regardless of their political interest were Corporate Parents whose duty it was to ensure that the Local Authority offered the best possible care for the CiC.

- Members discussed the statistics and agreed that it would be helpful to have the statistics at every meeting.
- A concern was raised that some schools may have a disproportionate amount of CiC.
- Members asked the Head of School Improvement about the admissions procedure for CiC. The Head of School Improvement explained that the Foster Carer applied on behalf of the child just as a parent would and this normally involved placing the child at a school closest to the foster home. If the child's placement had not been confirmed then the Social Worker would apply for the school place on their behalf. As most schools signed up to a code of practice, CiC were the top priority for schools and the child's progress was tracked. If a child in care needed to be placed outside the Borough then the school and the placement would try and be arranged at the same time by the Social Worker.
- Members agreed that access to good schools was important for all children but especially CiC.
- Members agreed that as Corporate Parents, they needed to know that the CiC were progressing and not wait until the results were published at the end of the year and the school year had ended.
- The Scrutiny Specialist suggested that the Members have all the Performance Indicators to a future meeting so that they can confirm if there is any more information that would assist them in their monitoring.
- The Chairman concluded that this was an area that needed more consideration and more officer time, as previously two hour meetings were held on this topic alone.
- Members requested information on what happened at the moment with regards to the CiC 16+ transition into adulthood.

RESOLVED -

- (a) That the statistics on CiC would be presented monthly;
- (b) That the Members would receive information on the number of CiC by school and age group for children in and out of the authority.

(c) That Members receive interim reports on how the CiC are progressing.

CYPSC-24 UPDATE ON BSF PROGRAMME- PLANNING OF SCHOOL PLACES: SECONDARY SCHOOL PROVISION

The Head of School Improvement updated the Members on the canopy collapse at the Abraham Darby Academy. Members were reassured that the costs for the remedial report commissioned by Telford & Wrekin Council from the independent consultant Mott McDonald would be met by Kier the site developer. The Chairman asked for the Member who had raised this question to be updated.

The Head of School Improvement presented an update on the Building Schools for the Future programme (BSF). The BSF Programme was a £45 billion government funded programme launched during the previous government, with the aim of rebuilding or refurbishing every secondary school in England. As part of this programme Telford & Wrekin Council were given access to £200m of funding.

As a Council, Telford & Wrekin had a vision of becoming a co-operative learning borough, developing learning for the wider community to benefit.

The Head of School Improvement gave an overview on the programme for each school.

- Newport currently had school accommodation at two selected schools and one secondary school. The refurbishment of the Newport schools would be as the original programme which included £10m investment.
- Wellington currently had three secondary schools, as part of the revised proposals this would reduce to two secondary schools.
- Ercall Wood was currently going through the planning process to be re-built on land adjacent to the current school.
- Hadley Learning Community had been developed on the old Hadley Manor School site.
- Phoenix School would be re-sited at the bottom of the Dawley High Street as part of the original BSF programme.
- The Abraham Darby School was currently being replaced with a new academy which was originally scheduled to open in January, but due to the unfortunate incident with the canopy collapse the school would not open until September 2012. The handing over of the leisure facilities would take place in January 2012.
- Madeley Academy was a new build which had been completed.
- Southall School and Mount Gilbert Special Schools would both undergo refurbishments.

The Head of School Improvement advised Members of the revised BSF proposals which were part of the consultation that was due to end on 23rd December. A follow up meeting would be held in Priorslee and the results would be shared with Cabinet in January 2012. The 2nd phase of the consultation would then run until 19th March.

The revised proposals included a new ecumenical 1050 place Christian Academy for pupils aged 11-18 on the proposed site in Priorslee. This would build on the existing successful sixth form currently at the Blessed Robert Johnson College (BRJ) and enable residents of Priorslee to access 16+ provision. This was a change from the previous proposal which was to locate the Wrockwardine Wood Arts College on the Priorslee site.

Members were advised that the Wrockwardine Wood Arts College would now be located on the Oakengates site with the Sutherland Business and Enterprise College. Despite both schools having had improved GCSE results in the last two academic years, falling school numbers no longer necessitated the need for two colleges.

The Charlton School in Wellington was a popular school with a current school roll of 1175 pupils on a site built to accommodate 800 pupils. It was hoped that Charlton school could be moved to the current site of the BRJ incorporating a refurbishment of parts of the school such as the extensive sports facilities.

A revised BSF proposal had been put forward to build a new Lakeside co-operative educational campus on the Stirchley site encompassing primary, secondary and post 16 education working alongside Telford College of Arts and Technology as a trustee. The original plans to knock down the primary school and build a new secondary school had been changed to accommodate funding changes from the new proposals.

The Head of School Improvement drew Members' attention to the proposed opening dates and the consultation timetables for the new schools. The next stage of the new sample contract was the building of the Ercall Wood School, which was due to open in 2014, with the Oakengates and Priorslee sites opening later in the same year, followed by the Lakeside Learning Campus the year after and Charlton a year later than Lakeside. However, in order to facilitate parental choice and be able to offer three new schools in the same year, consideration was being given to opening Priorslee, Oakengates and the Lakeside Campus in 2014 but this would depend on the contract that was awarded to the developers.

Following the presentation Members asked a number of questions.

- Members were concerned that there may be problems merging Wrockwardine Wood Arts College and Sutherland Business Enterprise College as the governors and school trustees from both schools join together to be the body of one school. **The Cabinet Member highlighted that this had already been raised as a concern as the two schools had a very different ethos. However, lessons had been learnt from past mergers.**
- Members asked if it would have been easier to close one school and increase the pupil numbers of the other school. **The Cabinet Member added that it was felt that the identity of both schools should be preserved and that although some parents had chosen Wrockwardine Wood Arts College because they thought it was moving to Priorslee, most parents were happy to remain with their original choice.**

Members felt that the positive side of the school merger needed to be addressed. This would be a new school with new facilities and good local publicity could assist in creating a positive image of the school. Members felt that by engaging the community, in particularly the primary aged children who may attend the school, the new school would be seen as a positive option.

- A Member explained that originally when a school becomes an academy that they receive £25,000 and the assistance of a DfE Advisor with the set up of the steering group to advise the existing school governors. Members asked if the new academies would be receiving the same package.
The Head of School Improvement thought that all converter academies would continue to receive the £25,000 funding.
- A Member asked if the new schools would be sponsored or converter academies.
The Head of School Improvement advised the Members that the academies would be sponsored. An example being the academy at Priorslee which would have sponsorship from the three dioceses, with the Shrewsbury diocese being the principal trustee.
- The Chairman asked if there was a way of involving Governors who had local knowledge of the area such as the Councillors?
Those schools that joined the Schools Co-operative Society signed up to the ethos of working with the community. This would allow the Council access into the academies in terms of information sharing.
- If an academy does not get the support from the DfE then it would be advisable for a contingency to be established to support the school governing body with legal, HR and financial advice. Members discussed the possibility of an induction programme to help attract new Governors.
- The Chairman raised her concerns that the recent Press Release was misleading as a number of schools said no changes. This included the schools in Newport who were receiving £9m of refurbishment .
The Head of School Improvement advised that the sums of money allocated to each school were not detailed in the programme because it was felt that the public would perceive this as a negative, having already received this information in the past. However, this would be addressed in the next press release.
- Members asked if any consideration had been given to putting the Southall school onto the Lakeside site?
The Head of School Improvement said consideration had been given to relocating Southall School onto the Lakeside site but there was not enough space to locate it there. The Oakengates site was also considered but this was also dismissed. However, when a contractor was appointed in May this could be considered again.
Members agreed that as part of the consultation this should be looked at again, because of the options for the children to benefit from accessing mainstream education for areas of specialism.

- The Chairman highlighted that the change of school sites would mean the need to sell off large areas of land. This would be looked at by another area of Scrutiny, following on from this discussion Members asked at what point in the development of houses there is a trigger to return to Central Government for accessing more funding.

- A Member raised concerns that despite 3,000 houses being developed in Lawley, there was no secondary school provision.

The Cabinet Member stated that the current forecasts factored-in the Lawley development but it may be advisable that an expert explains to the Members how the school admission figures were forecast.

- What feedback will be given to the School Councils?

The Cabinet Member explained that all feedback would be through the frequently asked questions on the website and individually to School Councils.

The Cabinet Member and the Head of School Improvement left the meeting.

Members considered the information provided and discussed the recommendations that they wanted to make.

- Members considered the co-location of Southall and Mount Gilbert Schools with mainstream secondary and post-16 schools (for example on the Lakeside site) is re-considered to provide access to mainstream provision and exams.
- Members who had attended the consultation meetings raised concerns that they needed to have an improved structure. Members therefore suggested that:
 - Meetings should be chaired by an independent Chair
 - Meeting agendas should be well structured to ensure issues discussed were relevant and at the right time
 - Head teachers may not be deemed independent and should not have a role in consultation meetings
 - Consultation events should be held with feeder primary schools to ensure the engagement of parents of children who the changes will affect in future. This was particularly important with the case of the merger of Sutherland and Wrockwardine Wood.
 - Feedback must be given to people attending meetings, and in particular to children and young people.
- Members discussed the contingency arrangements that should be in place to support the new governing bodies of new academies in the event that they did not receive the DfE converter grants and project support. Advice and support should be available for governance, legal, finance and HR matters, possibly through the School Organisation Working Group.
- Members raised their concern that should the housing market recover that the school provision in the area may not be enough. Members requested that they

are provided with information to explain at what point new housing growth triggers a review of the projections for school places

- The Chairman stated that the Presentation material should be changed to make clear that the investment is taking place in all schools. “No change” on the presentation plans could be interpreted as no change to the existing school rather than no change to the original BSF plans which would see investment in the schools. All PR and communications must clearly keep the public informed about what is happening.

RESOLVED - that the Scrutiny officer draft and circulate the comments for approval by the Committee for submission to the Head of School Improvement, as the Children & Young Peoples Scrutiny Committee’s response to the consultation.

CYPSC-25 FORWARD PLAN

- The Chairman reminded Members that the meeting next week was to receive the presentation of the Co-operative Youth Offer and for Members to make recommendations on the Phase 2 Service proposals.
- The meeting in January would be the meeting with the Children in Care regarding 16+ the transition into adulthood.
- Future items to consider possibly in March were school governance and the directory of services for schools.
- The Chairman reminded Members that the sub group meeting with the Sutton Hill Family group would take place on 18th January at 9.30am
- Members agreed that the Street Pastors were an amazing team. The Chairman advised Members that she would ask if the project can be sustained and report back to the Committee
- The Chairman stated that a report on the Lighthouse Group would be sent to the Members.
- Members agreed that the Educational Psychology Team should be congratulated on the Bereavement Policy. The Members agreed that they were happy to endorse the policy and for this to be sent to schools. Members asked for a covering letter to be sent to the schools advising them about possible training.

The meeting ended at 8.09pm.

Chairman:

Date: