

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held on Monday 26th March 2012 at 6.00 pm in the Reception Suite, Civic Offices, Telford

PRESENT: Councillors G Green (Chair), S Burrell, J Greenaway, C Turley and Paul Watling (Cabinet Member for Children Young People and Families) .

Co-optees: Dr S Ali, Mr A Atkinson

Officers: J Collins (Assistant Director: Education, Culture & Skills), V McKay (Group Manager for Procurement, Placements and Commissioning), T Clarke (Scrutiny Officer) and J Clarke (Democratic Services Officer).

CYPSC-39 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held on 29th February 2012 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

CYPSC-40 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor A Mackenzie, M Ion and J Loveridge
Co-optee: Ms M Ward and Ms E Ofori

CYPSC-41 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

CYPSC-42 SHORT BREAKS FOR DISABLED CHILDREN

The Group Manager for Procurement, Placements and Commissioning gave a verbal update on the short breaks for disabled children.

The service was very well regarded and there were no gaps in the service but there were areas for development ie disabled facilities in the Town Park. Capital funding had been received enabling development to take place in the Town Park and Southwater Way. A tender was due to go out shortly for bucket swings and adapted “springies” and wheelchair accessible big play equipment that both a child and a parent/carer could access together. Accessible toilet facilities alongside the Oakengates Track were also proposed.

Activities engaging with the children to identify what activities they would like to access would take place shortly.

During the first half of the year (April – September) 756 children had attended at a variety of services. Some of these services had been funded by the PCT and the Local Authority had also pulled in data from the Children Centres to gather a more comprehensive picture of disabled children attending services. A gap in services for

younger children in the 5-8 year old group had been raised as a need by parents and this is being reviewed to see whether that gap is actually the case.

Unfortunately the Blue Eyed Soul Group's funding had dried up and was going out of business. This was a very well attended dance group and would be missed. It was hoped that an offer to seek alternative dance provision could be put out if the children still identified dance as an activity they wished to continue.

Members asked a number of questions, including:

89 participants used the Agency, what was the Agency?

This provision was for children who needed one-to-one support in the home or the community. Numerous and various care agencies are contracted to provide this care.

Are all disabled children engaged in activities?

Some children won't want to be engaged. Where possible disabled children are encouraged to engage in mainstream activities and the workforce development in mainstream services for example officers have been trained in ASD and challenging behaviour. There are no waiting list for attendance at events.

Would the attendance figures at Abraham Darby Swimming pool be higher at the next report and would the children from Newport pool transfer to Abraham Darby?

Consultation has been undertaken with children in sport and leisure services using coloured stickers for the children to choose the events they would like to take part in and further engagement with parents has taken place. The intention is that activities would be organised in the areas where they are needed. There were a lot of activities in South Telford and no reason why the specific group from Newport Pool would move to Abraham Darby.

Why was there a zero take up at Jigsaw School?

The activities at Jigsaw were go-karts and bikes, there was no real take up of these activities and no arrangements were therefore made.

Arthog is now doing a bit more for disabled children, but is there anything in the Borough where the children in the less urban areas can get access to and if so do they attend?

Arthog is used by whole families of children with visual and hearing impairments. There are also two groups who run outdoor activities in the local area:

- Cannock
- Tickwood Farm

How do they get there?

Support is provided by outreach staff and community support staff as well as parents transporting children to access services. The service is currently looking at accessible services in the community.

Are go-kart / 3 wheeler wheelchairs used?

Yes, there is 1 all-terrain wheelchair at Arthog and 1 smaller all terrain wheelchair which is going to be placed at Telford town Park. Families can borrow the wheelchair and this will be advertised.

How much do these wheelchairs cost?

The approximate cost of the wheelchair was £5,000, but it was bought a few years ago. One of the wheelchairs is currently not used enough so it will be taken to the Town Park and Community Centres to enable the children to have a go with it.

Geographically would a child be fairly isolated?

That would not be a problem in the Borough as the area is not too big. There are more activities in the areas of deprivation. Following on from consultation it has been identified that there may need to be more activities in the North, although this could prove quite a challenge. Revolution is used as a base at Stafford Park but transport links are poor and although it has a lot space it is tricky to get to.

The Authority has to have a short breaks statement by law and has to publish this. This went to last October's Cabinet could the members have a copy?

There were two versions of the Statement one for adults and one for children. These were published on the Council's website. Copies of the Statement would be sent to members.

Charging for Activities

It was proposed to introduce small subsidiary charges for activities. Parents were keen to implement this to sustain services. The charges would be between £2.00-£4.00. Charges will encourage attendance as people who have paid for events are more likely to turn up.

Raising the profile of disabled children with other children in magazines/school newsletters

Most schools have a role for promoting positive images. Schools are good at celebrating young children's success and achievements.

Ethnicity / Traveller Engagement

There are currently no traveller children attending activities. Children are encamped on the sites and are difficult to engage with. The figures were quite telling on ethnicity and there was a job to do on highlighting that services are available to everyone. It was suggested that the School Liaison may be the place to seek advice with regard to engagement.

RESOLVED

That Members would receive copies of the two versions of the Short Break Statement.

CYPSC-43 SCHOOL GOVERNANCE AND ACADEMIES

The Assistant Director for Education, Culture & Skills tabled a report and gave a verbal overview of the Schools Governance Service.

The service had recently undergone a re-structure and was being managed by Sally Noble, Service Delivery Manager, Leadership and Management.

Most schools had given good feedback and the service was valuable and effective. Although some Grant Maintained Schools had chosen to provide their own services, most other Schools within the Borough had chosen to “buy back” the services from the Council.

Within the Schools who had Academy Status a reduction on the buy back had been noted. Abraham Darby Academy, Madeley Academy, Adams Grammar School and Priorslee had opted out of the Council’s services. Newport Girls High School was the only academy still subscribing, but this was currently under review.

The service had a free information and support telephone line and officers dealt with enquiries there and then if possible or returned the calls as soon as they were able. The Service was also able to give support to the head teacher recruitment process and appointments.

A comprehensive training programme was run annually with bespoke training for all abilities. This was currently being reviewed to look at the strengths and any developments which could be made in the future.

The clerking service which was offered was professional and of high quality and the comprehensive training programme included Heads and Chairs briefings and Clerks briefings and training. The next briefing, to include training, was to be held on 19th April 2012. Mick Adams had been invited to give an update to Clerks and Governors at this session in order to keep everyone abreast of all education developments.

A new Service Level Agreement had been issued. The forms were currently being returned, but early indications were that the buy-back of services was at a similar level to previous years.

All Schools, including Academies, were required by law to allow access to copies of the Governing Body Minutes, once they have been ratified. It was proposed that a central record of Academy Governing Body Minutes was kept in order for the Authority to keep abreast of any decisions that are being taken.

Members asked a number of questions, including:

The Clerks provided by the School Governance Service had a deep knowledge of procedure. For those Schools who choose to use their own Clerks did they have the same depth of training as the Local Authority Clerks?

No, although the training was offered to everyone it was not always taken up. The Heads do use their PA’s to act as Clerks to the Governing Bodies. Although there was an emerging disparity, in the Local Authority’s favour there were currently not many Academies. The Academies still had a good working relationship with the Local Authority and had agreed to provide figures and information to the Council although they were not obliged to do this. Nationally it was almost impossible to retain central management of this service.

Although the relationships were reasonable, had the Academies chosen to go their own route because they wanted to be independent or because they wanted a better deal?

The Service was not cheap but it was a good quality service. The core package cost around £970 per annum for a secondary school, the core plus package cost approximately £1,500 per annum and the enhanced package about £2,000 per annum. This may well have been an issue in their decision.

Could an Academy call on the service ie for a dismissal?

No, this is not something that is encouraged as long as the vast majority buy in to the service. In principle if an Academy rang in for a service they would be given a quote but this would be on a full cost recovery basis.

Governance is not always on the same cycle as the Local Authority and there is also concern that there was no local representation on the governing body of some schools. Should there be a local elected member on the governing body?

There was no obligation for an elected member to be on the governing body. Some Academies still have elected representatives ie Abraham Darby and Madeley Academy. It had been difficult in the past to fill all of the places on a Governing Body. If someone was interested in taking a vacant place on the governing body, once all of the checks had been made, they were welcome to stand. If this person was elected for 4 years it would not be possible for them to be asked to step down in order for an elected member to take their place. If a vacancy did arise then the local elected member would be approached first. It did help with local issues if you had a locally elected member who knows the area ie on parking.

Could the length of time that a person serves as Local Authority representative on a Governing Body be varied, ie could this be an annual appointment?

This would need to be looked into to see if it was allowed by law. This would be reported back to a future meeting.

How could schools engage more with elected members?

Some schools had very good engagement with the elected members and others didn't. Suggestions were made that schools could ie sing carols to pensioners or attend at a Remembrance Day Parade where there was the presence of elected members. Most of the new schools would be academies and it must be ensured that the right kind of engagement is made in order that the relationship and trusted partnership is kept. This could be done by new way of working with school clusters. This needed to be monitored and reported back to a future meeting.

How confident were the Local Authority that the Governing Bodies would look after children in care in their schools, as some schools have less experience than others?

The service tried its best to link with the schools and their children in care designated person. If there was no designated person within the school the Head would normally attend at the meetings. There was a level of support within schools and the treatment of children in care should be the same, although some schools were more familiar with the challenges than others. All schools should also have a designated

children in care governor. Schools should be reminded of this in terms of Corporate Parenting. A copy of the minutes from the meetings would be obtained in order to try and check that there was a designated person and governor for children in care for each of the schools.

Had all schools, including the Academies, received a copy of the Bereavement Policy and would this be taken up?

Yes, a copy of the Policy went to all schools and academies and it was hoped that it would be taken up.

RESOLVED

That the Assistant Director for Education, Culture & Skills provides an update to the Committee in 6 months time.

CYPSC-44 FORWARD PLAN

The next meeting was scheduled for 19th April 2012 and the topics were to be Child Poverty and BSF.

The subject for the May meeting would be Autism Strategy as a general issue and not as individual cases.

A question was raised as to whether the Council was to take part in the Corporate Safeguarding Peer Review. This would be looked at and brought back to a future meeting.

The meeting ended at 7.09p.m.

Chairman:

Date: