

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services held at County Hall, Lewes, on 21 November 2008.

PRESENT	Councillor Maynard (Chairman) Councillors Field, Dowling, Kramer, Ost, St Pierre, Waite and Whetstone. Councillor Paul Silverson (District and Borough representative) Jeremy Taylor (C of E Diocese) Jeremy Alford (Health Representative) Mrs Maynard (Parent Governor)
Chief Officer	Matt Dunkley, Director of Children's Services
Legal Adviser	Jonathan Ruddock-West, Assistant Director of Law and Personnel
Scrutiny Lead Officer	Gillian Mauger
Also present	Councillor Stroude, Lead Member for Children and Families Louise Carter, Assistant Director Planning and Performance Management Gemma Barlow, Democratic Services Officer

22. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

22.1 RESOLVED – to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the last Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 8 September 2008.

23. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

23.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Gadd, Mrs Carole Shaves, Mr Campbell and Sam Gregory.

24. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

24.1 Councillor Kramer declared a personal interest in minute number 27 as she worked for the migrant helpline and some related issues might have been raised. She also declared a personal prejudicial interest in minute number 26, as she was the Chair of the Bridge Community Centre that received financial support from the Authority.

25. REPORTS

25.1 Copies of the reports referred to below are included in the minute book.

Councillor Kramer left the meeting for the duration of the next item.

26. EAST SUSSEX CHILDREN'S CENTRES – A PROGRESS REPORT

26.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services that provided information on the progress of the Children's Centre Development in East Sussex.

26.2 Before receiving the details of the report the Committee were given an update of the repercussions of the Baby P case and the outcome of a recent East Sussex County Council adoption case. Members were advised that as a result of the Baby P case there is likely to be a high increase in the number of care orders issued by the courts and this will have an impact on the department. They were also informed that irresponsible media coverage of the case was having a negative impact on social workers and could have an impact on recruitment and retention of social workers in the future.

26.3 Members were informed that as a direct result of the Baby P case pressure was being put on authorities to have an independent member as Chairman of the Local Safeguarding Children Board, rather than the Director of Children's Services. The Director stated that he had statutory powers over safeguarding and this helped him bring partners together to work collectively on this issue and that an independent member as the Chairman would not have this level of authority. Members were informed that when the Safeguarding Board carried out serious case review boards the director was not involved in these and stood down from the chair when they were being discussed to ensure that the independence was maintained. An independent review had been carried out in the summer and this has supported having the Director of Children's Services as the Chairman of the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

26.4 Members expressed their support for the Director of Children's Services at this difficult and pressured time and supported him in the role as Chairman of the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

26.5 Members asked if Children's Centres were to be given a statutory status and therefore a statutory commitment, how would they be funded. They were advised that the finances were currently undecided but that the funding was focussed towards the most deprived. An error in the figures relating to the West Rise area was noted.

26.6 RESOLVED to:

(1) note the continued progress of the Children's Centre programme, including the development of phase 3;

(2) receive a progress report which focuses on the outcomes of the Children's Centres programme in November 2009;

(3) receive a copy of the briefing paper produced for the Children's Services Lead Member on the issues raised around the Local Safeguarding Children Board; and

27. CHILDREN'S SERVICES EQUALITY STRATEGY

27.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services, which highlighted the key areas of progress against the Equality Strategy and identified elements for future development. Louise Carter, Assistant Director Planning and Performance Management, was in attendance to answer questions from Members.

27.2 In response to Members' questions the following comments were made:

- It was noted that the Authority had a good understanding of ethnic background of children in its schools, owing to the robust data that was collected. The challenge now was to encourage partners to agree to the same set of categories to monitor ethnicity to enable them to share data in the future.
- The use of translators and the translating of documents was carried out to ensure that service users had access to services. However, this was carried out on a case-by-case basis rather than a wholesale translation of all department documentation.

- The recently recruited Race Equality Support Worker was only a temporary post with funding until 13 March 2009, however it was hoped that a permanent post could be created in the future.
- An action plan was in place to deliver the Strategy and the outcomes would be monitored against the 5 outcomes for children, as outlined in the Children's Act, to see what difference was being made in each area.

27.3 RESOLVED to

- (1) welcome the report and thank staff that were involved in the work;
- (2) request an update report in mid 2009 on the key areas of work, outcomes against the 5 outcomes for children, as outlined in the Children's Act and plans for revision of the Strategy; and

28. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF SERVICES FOR SCHOOL GOVERNORS

28.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chairman of the Review Board that presented the outcomes of the review and proposed recommendations relating to Services for School Governors.

28.2 Members were informed that the Review Board considered Governor Services to be a good service but wished it to become outstanding and felt that some of the recommendations they were putting forward would enable this to happen.

28.3 Members recognised the importance of having independent clerks supporting Governing Bodies supported the Review Board carrying out a further piece of work to look at the roles and responsibilities of clerks and to consider if it would be worth the department considering having a centralised clerking service.

28.4 It was noted that a working party with representatives from CfBT and both dioceses, had been working on enhancing the process of successive planning in schools for headteachers. The correlation between Ofsted scores and an effective governing body was also noted.

28.4 The Director welcomed the report and supported the majority of the recommendations. He stated that the report was timely as from September 2009 Governor Services would come back in house and work would take place next year on how this service could be developed.

28.5 RESOLVED to agree the report and recommendations of the Review Board and submit it to Cabinet on 26 January 2009 for comment and County Council on 10 February 2009 for approval.

29. TABLETOP SCRUTINY REVIEW OF THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF TEACHERS IN EAST SUSSEX

29.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chairman of the Tabletop Review that provided an update on the work by East Sussex County Council and CfBT to support the recruitment and retention of teachers in East Sussex.

29.2 Members were advised of the 'stepping up' programme, that had resulted from the Leadership Effectiveness and Succession Planning strategy (LEADS), had successfully helped prepare prospective heads for taking on a headteacher appointment. Concerns had been raised about continued funding of this programme once the current funding ends at the end of this academic year.

29.3 Members were informed that issues highlighted in the March report to the Committee had now been resolved and that issues raised in the national media about increased vacancies in teaching were not apparent in East Sussex at this moment in time.

29.4 RESOLVED to:

- (1) receive an update report on the ongoing work in November 2009; and
- (2) thanks officers involved in meetings and in putting together the report.

30. QUARTER TWO MONITORING REPORT AGAINST THE 2008/09 COUNCIL PLAN

30.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Policy and Communications that provided an update on performance against the Council Plan for Quarter Two of 2008/09.

30.2 In relation to indicator 5.06b (Child Protection training every two years for designated teachers) it was noted that the department followed national guidance on child protection training being refreshed every two years. Training sometimes became out of date, as it was dependent upon the schools to put their staff on the training courses. It was however acknowledged that the numbers were small and the schools would be chased up.

30.3 In relation to indicator 5.09b (take up of breastfeeding) the current figure was likely to rise as data from midwives and health workers in Hastings and Rother was not yet included.

30.4 RESOLVED to note the achievements made by the Children's Services Department.

31. FORWARD PLAN

31.1 The Committee considered the Forward Plan for the period 1 November 2008 to 28 February 2009.

31.2 RESOLVED to note the Forward Plan.

32. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

32.1 The Committee noted the Scrutiny work programme.

32.2 Members were advised of the proposals for two academies in Hastings and the subsequent closure of three schools in that area. The lead sponsor for the academy was Brighton University, along with support from BT and East Sussex County Council.

32.3 The expression of interest from the sponsors would be considered at Council Cabinet on 25 November 2008. If it was agreed, the proposal would go to DCSF for a decision by 10 December 2008. A consultation phase would then start in January 2009.

32.4 The Committee welcomed the opportunity to scrutinise all the sponsors on the proposals and additional committee meetings would be arranged in early 2009 to enable this to take place.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 12.35 pm