

## 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 September 2009

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PRESENT	Councillor Ensor (Chairman) Councillors Field, Gadd, Kenward, St Pierre, Waite, Webb and Whetstone.  Jeremy Alford (Health Representative) Mrs N Parker (Parent Governor) Mr M Wilson (C of E Diocese)
Chief Officer	Matt Dunkley, Director of Children's Services
Legal Adviser	Jonathan Ruddock West, Assistant Director of Law
Scrutiny Lead Officer	Gillian Mauger
Also present	Councillor Stroude, Lead Cabinet Member for Children and Families Councillor Elkin, Lead Cabinet Member for Children's Services Councillor Glazier, Lead Cabinet Member for Children's and Adults Services Alison Jeffery, Children's Trust Manager Caryl Sequeira, Complaints Manager Greg Roberts, Head of Strategic Finance Michaela Frost, Democratic Services Officer

### 13. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

13.1 RESOLVED – to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the last Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 13 July 2009.

### 14. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

14.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ost, Councillor Paul Silverson (District and Borough representative) and Sam Gregory (Parent Governor representative).

### 15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

15.1 Councillor Ensor declared a personal interest in that his wife was a social worker at St Mary's Special School in Bexhill. Councillor Ensor did not consider his interest to be prejudicial.

15.2 Mrs N Parker declared a personal interest in that she was a Foster Carer. Mrs N Parker did not consider this interest to be prejudicial to matters on the agenda, but agreed to be advised by the Legal Adviser in future if matters arose.

15.3 Councillor St. Pierre declared a personal interest in that she was a Member on the appeals panel for the Accreditation of Language Schools. Councillor St Pierre did not consider this interest to be prejudicial.

## 16. REPORTS

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

## 17. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLES TRUST – PRESENTATION

17.1 The Committee received a presentation from Alison Jeffery, Children's Trust Manager concerning the Children and Young Peoples Trust. A copy of the slides from the presentation would be circulated to Members.

17.2 In response to questions from the Members the following comments were made:

- Measureable outcomes from the work of the Trust included reducing the number teenage pregnancies and the number of children not in education, employment and training (NEET). Whilst it was recognised that targets set against these outcomes were hard to achieve some progress had been made towards them. There had also been a decline in the number permanent exclusions in schools during the early years of the Trust which was attributed to better joint working amongst partners.
- The work of the Trust was also seen as a contributory factor in the substantial improvements in the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service, which had had a substantial reduction in waiting times and was now seen as one of the leading services in the country.
- The development of the Trust had also resulted in improved relationships between its members. There had been a strategic alignment of resources and a common strategy amongst members, which had led to an improvement in services. Improved officer relationships amongst the partners had also led to better help and support for families in crisis. For example, there was now better liaison with the police in working in the area of domestic violence.
- The "Tell Us" Survey also provided the Department with a lot of soft data around outcomes from the work of the Trust.
- The Youth Cabinet regularly interacted with the Executive Group and three Members sit on it and highlighted campaigns to it which affected children and that the Cabinet felt strongly about.
- The Children and Young People's Plan is arranged in accordance with the five outcomes within Every Child Matters and following the most recent Ofsted annual performance assessment, East Sussex County Council was outstanding for four of the five outcomes and good for the other one.
- Members were reminded that they are invited to the Children's Trust open meetings and that each Chief Executive of the Boroughs and Districts were represented on the Board. The Local Strategic Partnership should also feed back information to their Councillors. The Trust does circulate a newsletter and it was agreed that this should also be circulated to the Scrutiny Committee.
- The Members were assured that new legislation coming into force would not have any major impact as the work of the Trust was already thought to be consistent with these new regulations.
- Members were informed that the Children's Trust and the Safeguarding Board were seen as parallel groups. The Local Safeguarding Board was also multi agency and looked at what the Trust was doing from a safeguarding angle.
- The Trust would think about ways of having "lay" representation at the meetings. Engagement with young people through Youth Cabinet participation

was already well established and the Trust was also trying to engage with parents.

- The Members were reassured that the Trust had regular meetings with the PCT to discuss health issues relating to children and young people. The relationship with health had improved during the last few years as a direct result of the work of the Trust.

17.3 RESOLVED – to note the presentation and the comments made.

## 18. ANNUAL REPORT OF LOCAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD

18.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services on the Annual Report of the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

18.2 In response to questions from Members of the Committee the following comments were made:

- It is likely that new regulations will mean that the Director of Children's Services would no longer be able to sit as Chairman on the Board. An Independent Chairman would have to be appointed.
- The Board does promote the welfare of foreign students. It is aware that there are some issues with the language school accreditation and pastoral care and further work was being undertaken, with a meeting between the Police, Children's Services and the British Council, to look into the issues further. The Director of Children Services would keep the Committee informed about any issues and progress.
- As a means of improving the level of information about Board meetings and work a Shadow/Briefing Group had been set up a couple of years previous. This consisted of members from the Scrutiny Committee, as well as Lead Members. It was for Members of this group to disseminate information back to the Scrutiny Committee and a feedback process would now be developed to ensure that this happened. Information on the remit and membership of all Children's Services groups and panels which relate to the Committee would also be circulated to members.
- Behind the work of the Board, sat a detailed business plan which would be able to provide more detailed data. The Director of Children's Services emphasised that each organisational representative on the Board had a duty to feed back information where appropriate.

18.3 RESOLVED to: (1) endorse the annual report on Local Safeguarding Children Board Business Plan; and

(2) develop a mechanism for the Safeguarding Shadow/Briefing group to feed back to the main committee.

## 19. SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN – MEMBER AND SENIOR MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT OF SERVICES

19.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which advised the Committee of the findings of the monitoring systems in place for senior managers and members to ensure that services to safeguard children are properly co-ordinated and managed effectively.

19.2 The Director of Children's Services informed the members about the current statistics around child protection, some of which had dramatically increased since the "Baby P" case. A comparison between July 2008 and July 2009 shows the increases as follows:

	<u>July 2008</u>	<u>July 2009</u>
Monthly Referral Rate	785	1029
No of Care Proceedings	61	91
No of children with protection plan	389	523
No of Looked After Children	439	476

This has meant a 40% increase in workloads, putting immense pressure on the department's staff and budget. There were also 13-14 social worker vacancies in the Department, which also added to the pressure on workloads

19.3 In response to questions from Members the following comments were made:

- Councillor Stroude, Lead Cabinet member for Children and Families makes lay person visits to staff teams about 9 times per year, with the aim of looking at team work and management levels. Councillor Stroude reported on the high professionalism in the teams.
- Although the views of parents were important when social workers visit families, the focus in child protection was always on the children and their needs.
- Heavy workloads was impacting on some aspects of case file management, such as the recording on case files of all informal discussions which take place between professionals and the proof reading of reports going to Adoption Panels. The department was working hard to improve these areas.
- The Director of Children's Services, as a member of the National Association of Children's Services Directors, was working on a national response to the financial pressures and staffing pressures being placed upon all authorities since the "baby P" case.

19.4 RESOLVED to (1) note the outcomes of the monitoring visits and audits undertaken by the Lead Member and senior managers; and  
(2) request that the Committee receive an update report at their meeting in March 2010, including updated statistics on child protection.

## 20. RECONCILING POLICY AND RESOURCES

20.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Law and Personnel setting out the detailed planning for 2010/2011 and beyond as outlined in the State of the County report. The Committee's views were sought on the current policy steers for the services under its purview and their contribution to the objectives of the whole Council, particularly in light of work carried out during the last year. The Chairman also referred Members to the additional paper, which had been circulated separately; setting out a set of proposed policy steers for discussion.

20.2 The current policy steers being taken forward to 2010/11, as set out in the report, were noted and the Committee also supported the additions to the policy steers as follows:

- a) specific reference had been added to improving outcomes for Looked After Children within the existing policy steer around children on the edge of care; and;
- b) a new policy steer on reducing offending and re offending by young people had been included as it is a key statutory area.

20.3 The Committee recognised the Cabinet's aim that the new policy steers should contain more specific and realistic medium term aims, and less activity description. The Committee therefore suggested that the policy steers should be focused more around the two main strands in Children's Services of education standards and safeguarding. The Committee also suggested that adolescent mental health, issues around autism and under 18 hospital alcohol admissions should be included as policy steers.

20.4 The Committee also considered the removal of policy steers from the 2009/10 list and the following comments were made:

- Improve access to services, especially in rural areas.

The Committee were divided on the merit of removing this policy steer because there were concerns about accessing extended schools in rural areas.

- Reduce bullying and anti-social behaviour by and towards children and young people, wherever it occurs.

The Committee requested that the Director of Children's Services consider keeping this policy steer as felt it was important to keep the issue visible.

20.5 RESOLVED – To (1) inform the Lead Member and Cabinet that the Committee endorses the Children's Services policy steers and their contribution to the objectives of the County Council, with specific comments as above.

(2) establish a Scrutiny Board, comprising of at least Councillors Ensor, Field, Kenward, Webb and Whetstone (other members of the committee were also invited to attend) which is empowered to act on behalf of the Committee to provide input into the Reconciling Policy and Resources process this year and, in particular, to consider the detailed departmental portfolio plan.

## 21. CHILDREN SERVICES COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE ANNUAL REPORT

21.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which reported on the functioning and effectiveness of the Complaints Procedure. Caryl Sequeria, Complaints Manager, was in attendance for this item

21.2 The Committee welcomed the report and noted that compliments were increasing.

21.3 RESOLVED – to note the Children's Services Complaints Procedure Annual report for 2008/09.

## 22. SCHOOLS SURPLUSES AND DEFICITS

22.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which informed the Committee of the position on school balances as at 31 March 2009 and any action taken in addressing excessive surpluses. Greg Roberts, Head of Strategic Finance, was in attendance for this item.

22.2 In response to questions from Members the following comments were made:

- The largest deficit for an individual primary school at 31 March 2009 was £166,000 and the largest individual deficit was £452,000 for secondary schools.
- All schools are encouraged to have medium term plans in place so that early action could be taken to manage any expected deficits. For those schools in deficit, a recovery plan has to be agreed with CSD which provides support in developing these plans.'

22.3 RESOLVED to note the position.

## 23. TOPICS FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY REVIEWS

23.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Law and Personnel which asked the committee to decide which topic it wanted to take forward as the next scrutiny review.

23.2 The Committee decided to undertake a review of education and attainment at Key Stage 2. It was suggested that within this review, the board could consider how young carers and looked after children performed in relation to key stage 2 and attainment.

23.3 It was agreed that all the other review topics within the report to be included on the work programme for future consideration

23.4 RESOLVED to undertake a scrutiny review of education and attainment at KS2 comprising of a board of members to include Councillor Ensor, Mrs N Parker, Councillor St Pierre, and Councillor Whetstone.

## 24. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

24.1 The Committee considered the scrutiny work programme. The November meeting would be a themed meeting around education. The Scrutiny Committee would undertake a visit to Bexhill High School as part of this and, if possible, hold the November meeting at the School.

24.2 RESOLVED to note the work programme.

## 25. FORWARD PLAN

25.1 The Committee considered the Forward Plan for the period 1 September and 31 December 2009

25.2 RESOLVED to note the Forward Plan.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 13:45