

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services held at County Hall, Lewes, on 23 November 2009

PRESENT	Councillor Ensor (Chairman) Councillors Field, St Pierre, Tidy, Waite, Webb and Whetstone. Jeremy Alford (Health Representative) Mrs C Shaves MBE (Police Authority Representative) 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 Sarah Jane Pateman, Assistant Principal Education Welfare Officer for item 6 on the Agenda. Fiona Wright Head of School Standards and Learning Effectiveness .for items 5 and 7 on the Agenda. Michaela Frost, Democratic Services Officer.

26. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

26.1 RESOLVED – to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the last Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 21 September 2009 with the following addition:

Mrs C Shaves was present at the meeting on 13 July 2009 and 21 September 2009.

27. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

27.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gadd and Kenward and Mrs N Parker.

28 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

28.1 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.

28.2 Councillor Glazier informed the Committee that he had resigned from the Governing body at Filsham Valley.

28.3 Councillor Webb declared an interest in that he was Chairman of the LiNK project for BME in Church Road St Leonards. Councillor Webb did not consider this interest to be prejudicial.

29. REPORTS

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

30. UPDATE ON KEY 14-19 DEVELOPMENTS

30.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided information on two key 14-19 developments: the raising of the participation age (RPA) and the transfer to the Children's Services Department of responsibility for commissioning education and training for 16-19 year olds.

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

- With a rise in the participation age and young people staying in the 'system' longer there was a risk that more young people would disengage with education and training beyond 16. It was important that young people were engaged with earlier in their school career to help them decide what future pathway best suited them. Additional work would also need to be done with Looked After Children as they were one particular group of young people who were least likely to stay in education beyond age 16.
- Employment that also offers accredited training was important as evidence showed that those young people who were not in these types of jobs were more vulnerable with regard to redundancy or seasonal changes to work opportunities. Also within the next 10 years there was going to be fewer employment opportunities for those people who have low or no skills.
- As yet, it was not clear what was meant by accredited training.
- Local Authorities and other public sector organisations are the largest employers in East Sussex. Developing best practice around accredited training could then be used to assist smaller employers in the County to move forward in this area.
- Engagement with, and support for, small and medium businesses (SMEs) across East Sussex around accredited training would be needed. A possible way forward would be for SMEs to work together to offer accredited training and thereby share the costs of this.
- Entry to Employment (E2E), in partnership with Connexions, offered short courses to help young people prepare for employment. Children's Services was also working with the National Apprenticeship Scheme.

30.3 **RESOLVED** – to note the progress of the implementation of the 14-19 developments and request that regular updates come back to the Committee.

31. REDUCED TIMETABLES

31.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services, which provided an update on the effectiveness of guidance to schools on reduced timetables.

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

- A breakdown of data revealed that of the 116 Year 11 pupils who in November 2008 were on a reduced timetable: 98 were now in

education or employment, 6 had either moved from the county or could not be contacted and 12 were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

- An audit of reduced timetables would now be carried out annually. The audit this year would be looking in closer detail at those young people on a part time timetable who had Special Educational Needs (SEN) or received free school meals, as it was recognised that a different approach may be needed to support these young people.
- One of the reasons the original guidelines on the use of reduced timetables had been brought in was because a number of children were being placed on them for a long period of time. The guidance therefore limited the use of a reduced timetable to 6 weeks, although it was recognised that it was important to be flexible at times, especially when something in a child's life changes drastically. A reduced timetable, if supervised and managed well, ensured that a child was able to return to full time education as quickly as possible.
- The audit in November 2008 revealed that a low number of children on a reduced timetable had a Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in place. It was hoped that the next audit would reveal that 100% now had a CAF. If this were not the case the Department would be investigating this further.
- Safeguarding of children not in school was important. The responsibility of a child not in school laid with their parent or carer and if they did not co-operate around a reduced timetable being put in place other means of managing the situation were sought.
- Although a breakdown by gender of the children on reduced timetable had not been provided it was recognised that the majority of pupils on reduced timetables were male. It was agreed that a gender breakdown would be provided at the next audit.

31.2 Following comments from members, officers agreed that the guidelines would be strengthened to state that upon request, Education Welfare Officers must be given access to school documentation relating to pupils reduced timetables.

31.3 RESOLVED to: (1) note the progress made in reducing part time timetables; and

(2) support the continued close monitoring and annual auditing of pupils on part time timetables; and

(3) request that feedback concerning the up to date audit is reported back to a future meeting of the Committee.

32. LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT (LAA) NOT IN EDUCATION OR TRAINING (NEET)

32.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services, which provided information on performance against the LAA NEET target.

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

- Those at most risk of becoming NEET were teenage parents, those with Special Education Needs and those leaving school with level 1 or below qualifications.
- In future the aim was to move work on the September Guarantee forward to May so that all young people leave school knowing what their next step was

going to be.

- The challenge was not only the number of young people becoming NEET but those who remain NEET for over 3 months.
- All Further Education providers offer a range of support to young people who are considering leaving further education early. If this was not successful then Connections was alerted so that they can offer additional support to the young person.
- With the participation age rising there was a risk that those who may have been NEET at 16-18 years old simply move on to become NEET at 19-20 years old. A range of activities were available to support those who remain NEET beyond 19 and there was a range of protocols in place with Job Centre Plus to ensure they were able to share information with Connections so that support was available for those young people who need it.
- There is sufficient opportunities and support available for all young people who were NEET. The challenge that remains was ensuring it was available in the right areas and getting young people to engage with it.
- Preventative NEET work was crucial and the Vulnerable Learners protocol was just one example of the work carried out.

32.3 The Committee asked that a briefing session on NEETS be arranged for all Councillors.

32.4 RESOLVED to note the performance against the LAA NEET target.

33. STATUTORY CONSULTATION: CLOSURE OF HILLCREST, THE GROVE AND FILSHAM VALLEY SCHOOLS

33.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Law and Personnel which informed members of a report being taken to Cabinet on 24 November outlining the statutory consultation on the closure of Hillcrest, The Grove and Filsham Valley Schools. The Cabinet report was circulated to Members prior to the meeting and copies were tabled at the meeting.

33.2 The Director of Children's Services provided the committee with the following information:

- The level of feedback received as a result of the consultation had been disappointingly low, although in line with other Academy Consultancy. Overall the feedback revealed that the majority of responses were in favour of the new Academies. There were some differences between respondents associated with the three schools, with those from Hillcrest and The Grove in favour of those schools closing, whilst the majority of responses associated with Filsham Valley were not in favour of that school closing.
- The closure of these three schools and the subsequent building of the academies had always been the second part of the plan to improve secondary education in Hastings, following the establishment of the Federation of the 3 schools.
- The funding agreement for the academies will be issued by the Secretary of State in February 2010. The sponsor's case and expectation is for new build for both academies.
- The proposed academy in the east cannot be increased in size (proposed size 900) as there are site limitations. Also the demography favours a larger academy (proposed size 1500) in the west.

33.3 The Scrutiny Committee considered the report relating to the proposed

closure of Hillcrest, The Grove and Filsham Valley and made the following comments to Cabinet:

- The Sponsors and Children's Services should continue to ensure that there is a high level of transparency and consultation over future proposals as the process moves forward.
- The Committee were concerned about the low response rate to the consultation, but noted that the publication of the statutory notices offered a further opportunity for comment.
- The possible disruption caused during the building of the new schools and closures needed to be properly addressed and managed.

33. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

33.1 The Committee considered the scrutiny work programme.

33.2 The Committee was informed that a board meeting would take place on 5 January to update members on the proposed academy in Eastbourne.

33.3 RESOLVED to note the work programme.

34. FORWARD PLAN

34.1 The Committee considered the Forward Plan for the period 24 November and February 2010

25.2 RESOLVED to note the Forward Plan.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 13:10