

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services held at County Hall, Lewes, on 8 March 2010

PRESENT	Councillor Ensor (Chairman) Councillors Field, Kenward, Ost, St Pierre, Waite, Webb and Whetstone. Jeremy Alford (Health Representative) Mr M Wilson (C of E Diocese) Mr S Gregory (Parent Governor) Mrs N Parker (Parent Governor) Councillor Silverson
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 Liz Rugg, Assistant Director, Children and Families Trudy Mills, Joint Commissioner for Teenage Pregnancy and CAMHS, Planning and Partnership Claire Stubbs, Teenage Pregnancy and CAMHS Development Manager, Integrated Services Vicky Finnemore, Operations Manager Colin Edgley, TDS Operations Manager Peter Davidson, Governor Services Manager

36. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

36.1 RESOLVED – to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the last Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 23 November 2009.

37. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

37.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Gadd and Mrs C Shaves.

38 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

38.1 Councillor Ensor declared a personal interest in minute no 40 in that his wife was a social worker at St Mary's Special School in Bexhill and minute no 42 as he was setting up a new youth centre in Bexhill. Councillor Ensor did not consider these interests to be prejudicial.

38.2 Councillor Kenward declared a personal non prejudicial interest in minute number 42 as he was Chairman of the Bexhill Youth Centre.

38.3 Nerissa Parker declared a personal non prejudicial interest in minute no 40 as she was a foster carer.

38.4 Councillor Webb declared a personal non prejudicial interest in minute no 42 as he was Chairman of the Link project – drop in centre.

38.5 Sam Gregory declared a personal non prejudicial interest in minute no 42 as Chair of children and young peoples forum and minutes 45 and 46 as he was a member of east Sussex Schools Forum.

39. REPORTS

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

40. SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN – MEMBER AND SENIOR MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT

40.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services, which gave an update on the increased numbers of child protection referrals and care proceedings that the department was currently handling.

40.2 The increase in activity for child protection related services had resulted in an overspend of £1m in 2009/10 and expected pressures of £1.5m in 2010/11. Both nationally and regionally there was enormous pressure on child protection services due to better reporting, better recognition and better assessment of child protection issues and this would lead to a long term shift in the number of children within the system.

40.3 In response to questions from Members the following points and observations were made:

- There had been an increase of 6% nationally in the number of Looked After Children (LAC). In East Sussex the number of LAC was now over 500 (15 months previously it had been at 380) and this figure was likely to remain high for some time. In-house foster care placements were full and agency placements were now being used. This was likely to result in an increase in the number of placements for some LAC.
- Eleven qualified social workers had been recruited from Canada and were expected to start working for East Sussex between March and June 2010. Another trawl to recruit more staff from Canada would take place imminently, as well as phone interviews with Candidates in Australia.
- East Sussex was not suffering from the same levels of turnover or unfilled vacancies as some neighbouring authorities were. There were still 20-24 vacant social worker posts, 12-14 of which were completely new posts. However, it was hoped that these vacancies would be filled by summer 2010.
- Priority continued to be given to assessments and contact with those that needed it, rather than back-office work. This had led to a significant backlog in the closure of cases and agency staff (who were qualified social workers) would be used again to clear this backlog, with an anticipated completion date of April 2010.
- The department had statutory requirements to meet deadlines around holding meetings in relation to initial assessments, plans and reviews. Increased workloads meant that not all these deadlines were being met. Performance

against all national indicators had dropped due to increased pressures.

- Social workers were also seeing an increase in departmental staff and other agencies contacting them to voice their concerns over children. Whilst this was encouraged, it was also adding to the workload pressures. More work needed to be done with other teams so that they were much clearer about what issues to bring to the attention of social workers.
- The biggest area of growth in referrals had been around neglect. Factors attributed to this were alcohol, drugs, mental health issues and domestic violence.

40.4 RESOLVED – to (1) note the increases in child protection activity within East Sussex and to endorse the actions being taken in response; and

(2) to receive a further update at the September 2010 meeting on continued work to meet increases in child protection activity.

41. TEENAGE CONCEPTIONS

41.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services that outlined recent teenage pregnancy data and the progress of work being undertaken to reduce conception rates. Trudy Mills and Claire Stubbs were in attendance to answer any questions from Members.

41.2 Members were advised of a disappointing increase in the conception rates for 2008. However, significant investment has been made in 2009 around contraception services and it was hoped that this would result in the start of a downward trend in the latter part of 2010.

41.3 In response to Members questions, the following points and observations were made:

- Young people were still saying that they did not know where to go for advice and what they wanted was a professional, accessible and timely service where they were treated as adults. They also preferred to receive advice through schools and parents, rather than their peers. Work was being done to address this feedback, with consideration being given to making services more accessible, particularly at weekends.
- The level of teenage pregnancies remained a challenge for the County and there would now be a focus on five key areas: prevention and well being; commissioning and service-design; workforce; leadership and communication.
- There was evidence of 2nd and 3rd generations within a family becoming teenage parents. Work was being done with parents and primary schools around early intervention for those at risk, especially where there was already an aspiration amongst some 10 year old girls to become a young mum.
- More work and support was needed with young fathers as this had been identified as a gap.
- It was noted that of all teenage pregnancies 190 resulted in terminations and 183 were live births.

41.4 RESOLVED to (1) support the ongoing work in reducing teenage conceptions and note the key issues and priorities for the new strategy planned for 2010-2012;

(2) emphasise the importance of working with young fathers to support them in their role; and

(3) highlight concerns about a potential reduction in the budget available from the PCTs.

42. YOUTH DEVELOPMENT SERVICE – UPDATE ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REVIEW

42.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services that provided an update on the progress of implementing the Youth Development Service (YDS) Review and an outline of the impact of the YDS on young peoples. Colin Edgley was in attendance to address any questions from Members.

42.2 In response to questions from Members the following points and observations were made:

- The Youth Offer was a universal offer to all young people. However, it was noted that the YDS ensured that resources were targeted on the most deprived areas in order to encourage those young people to become engaged in positive activities.
- The YDS needed to create one youth offer that involved both the YDS and the voluntary sector. This would help ensure that there was no overlap or gaps in youth provision across the county. A database was being used to map provision and identify the gaps and overlap that needed addressing.
- Access to youth services in rural areas was being addressed in two ways: mobile provision going out to the areas and young people being bused to services in neighbouring areas.
- Concerns about funding provision in the future would have to be met by working smarter, rather than reducing the provision on the ground.
- Comparisons between local authorities on spend per young person was difficult as some authorities, East Sussex included, did not put a value on voluntary provision.

42.3 RESOLVED to (1) note the progress report and the contribution of the YDS in delivering the Youth Offer and Targeted Youth Support agenda; and

(2) receive a report at the June meeting on options for undertaking a youth services tabletop scrutiny review in the Autumn.

43. RECONCILING POLICY AND RESOURCES

43.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Law and Personnel that provided feedback on the outcomes of scrutiny input into the Reconciling Policy and Resources (RPR) process.

43.2 RESOLVED to note the outcomes of the scrutiny input into the Reconciling Policy and Resources process in 2009/10.

44. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF THE EFFECT OF ALCOHOL MISUSE ON YOUNG PEOPLE

44.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services that detailed the progress made by the Children's Services Department in taking forward the recommendations outlined in the final report of the Review Board. Vicky

Finnemore was in attendance to answer and questions from Members.

44.2 In response to questions from Members, the following points and observations were made:

- More joined up work was being carried out with Adult Social Care to support family affected by alcohol misuse. This included the deployment of adult drug/alcohol staff resources within Children's Centres.
- Alcohol misuse was a recurring theme in teenage pregnancies and domestic violence

44.3 Members welcomed the work that had been carried out following the scrutiny review and acknowledged that work was being concentrated in the right areas. The Committee acknowledge however that any improvements in reducing alcohol misuse would take a long time to have a positive impact.

44.4 RESOLVED to note the update and formally 'sign off' the scrutiny review as the recommendations were now being addressed within ongoing work by the department.

45. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL GOVERNORS

45.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services that detailed the progress made by the Children's Services Department in taking forward the recommendations outlined in the final report of the Review Board. Peter Davison was in attendance to answer any questions from Members.

45.2 It was noted that all of the recommendations outlined in the scrutiny report were now being implemented.

45.3 RESOLVED to (1) note the progress made in meeting the recommendations outlined in the scrutiny review report; and

(2) receive a report in 12 months time on further progress and developments by Governor Services to support school governors .

46. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF GOVERNING BODY CLERKS

46.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services that provided an update on the progress made by the Children's Services Department in taking forward the recommendations outlined in the final report of the Review Board. Peter Davison was in attendance to answer any questions from Members.

46.2 It was reported that progress in developing the Clerking Service had been delayed due to a failure to consult the East Sussex Governors Representative Group (ESGRG) appropriately and the Director apologised for this mistake. This was now being rectified and work on developing the service was now expected to move forward, with the action plan being presented to the County Forum on 16 March.

46.3 Members expressed their frustration and disappointment at the delay but were reassured that the developments were now being taken forward in the correct manner.

46.4 RESOLVED to (1) note the developments;

(2) receive the action plan via email after it has been taken to the County Forum; and

(3) receive an update report on progress at the June committee meeting.

47. QUARTER THREE MONITORING REPORT AGAINST THE 2009/10 COUNCIL PLAN

47.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Policy and Communications that provided an update on performance against the Council Plan for quarter three of 2009/10.

47.2 It was agreed to receive a briefing on education and attainment at the Scrutiny Committee away day, scheduled to take place in September.

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

48. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

48.1 The Committee considered the scrutiny work programme.

48.2 RESOLVED to note the work programme.

49. FORWARD PLAN

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

49.2 RESOLVED to note the Forward Plan.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 2.25pm