

## SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services held at County Hall, Lewes, on 7 June 2010

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| PRESENT               | Councillor Ensor (Chairman)<br>Councillors Field, Kenward, Shing, St Pierre, Waite, Webb and Whetstone.<br><br>Jeremy Alford (Health Representative)<br><br>Mrs Carole Shaves MBE (Police Authority representative)  |
| Chief Officer         | Matt Dunkley, Director of Children's Services  |
| Scrutiny Lead Officer | Gillian Mauger   |
| Also present          | Councillor Stroude, Lead Cabinet Member for Children and Families<br>Councillor Elkin, Lead Cabinet Member for Children's Services<br>Jean Haigh, Head of Access and Disability<br>Peter Davidson, Governor Services Manager<br>Bernadette Dawes, Short Breaks Development Manager<br>Liz Rugg, Assistant Director, Children and Families<br>Nina Siddall, Head of Standards and Learning Effectiveness (0-11) |

### 1. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

1.1 RESOLVED – to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the last Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 8 March 2010.

### 2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Gadd, Mr M Wilson and Mr S Gregory.

### 3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 Councillor Ensor declared a personal interest in minute no 5 as his wife worked as a social worker at St Mary's Special School in Bexhill. He did not consider this interest to be prejudicial.

Councillor Waite declared a personal interest in minute no 5 as she is a governor at Chailey Heritage School. She did not consider this interest to be prejudicial.

#### 4. REPORTS

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

#### 5. ACCESS AND DISABILITY SERVICE UPDATE

5.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services on the work of the Access and Disability Service and how the amalgamation of the four teams within this service had enabled a more holistic approach to be developed to provide educational and social care provision to children and young people.

5.2 In response to questions from members the following points were made:

- A multi-agency transition strategy had been developed to help disabled young people aged between 14 and 25 during their transition to adulthood. It was recognised that more work was needed in this area to support young people and their families through what could be a difficult time in a young person's life.
- For some severely disabled children it was very clear from the beginning of their involvement with Children's Services that they would need life long care. For these children the department was looking at ways to develop a 'life package' at an early stage to help iron out the transition from Children's Services to Adult Social Care.
- Not all young people who received a service from Children's Services would continue to receive one from Adult Social Care once they became an adult. This was often a difficult issue to manage as some parents had an expectation that their caring role would diminish once their child became an adult. Often the opposite happened and this could put a lot of pressure on families. Those young people who did not go on to receive a service from Adult Social Care could access support from the Connexions service in relation to their education and employment options.
- East Sussex had one of the highest spends per head on SEN provision. This was, in part, due to the large number of SEN children accessing private special schools. There was an issue in the county of families moving to the area so that they could access private provision at the expense of the County Council. 80% to 90% of placements at private schools were as a result of a decision by a tribunal that a child be placed at a private school.
- East Sussex had a high number of appeals against decisions taken by the department. The outcomes in terms of the proportion of decisions overturned were in line with the national average. However, most of the appeals the department had related to placements in private special schools. When these appeals are upheld the costs of the school fees falls to the department and can be particularly high. Other authorities had a greater proportion of appeals against a child not getting a statement. Having these decisions overturned does not necessarily result in similar high costs for that authority.
- One of the intended aims of annual reviews of statements had been to enable authorities to consider whether the child had made sufficient progress to require a reduced level of support and expenditure. However, this rarely happened and it was often seen as an opportunity for parents and schools to request more support. The responsibility for setting up annual reviews lay with schools and only approximately 20% of reviews have been attended by staff from the department. However, all reviews require some level of input from other professionals, such as psychologists and speech and language specialists and this had a huge impact on staff time across a range of professions.

- A group of seven local authorities had come together in the South East to look at how services for disabled and SEN children could be provided across all the areas more cost effectively. Some savings were only possible after changes had been made to national legislation.
- The department assured the Committee that closer working with this group of authorities would not necessary lead to more children being placed outside the county.

5.3 RESOLVED – to (1) support the work of the Access and Disability Team in supporting disabled children, children with SEN and their families; and

(2) include a scrutiny review of transition as an item on the future work programme.

## 6. AIMING HIGH FOR DISABLED CHILDREN

6.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services on the development and implementation of the Aiming High for Disabled Children short breaks programme.

6.2 In response to questions from members the following points were made:

- The department was still waiting to hear from national government as to the detail of the statutory duty for local authorities to provide short breaks for disabled children.
- The current grant funding for short breaks was due to end in March 2011 and this would impact on the level and type of services the department could provide. The department would need to look at how future funding could be used to develop sustainable services. One such example of a more sustainable service was After School Clubs, which parents paid a contribution towards.
- The department had been evaluating the short breaks programme since it began in terms of the positive impact it had for disabled children and their families. An evaluation of invest to save funding would be carried out to assess the impact this funding was having on making savings in other areas.
- As well as providing a break for the family the short breaks were also designed to provide a positive experience for the disabled child. Lots of the activities available enabled disabled children to build up friendship groups, which was one of the main things disabled children had told the department they wanted.
- There was sufficient availability across the whole range of activities to provide support to all families. However, for some services, such as residential overnight breaks, demand was very high. The department needed to promote alternative services that could meet this need in a different way
- The figure for overnight breaks was particularly high as it included nights spent in residential care or hospices.
- All the different short break activities were provided across the whole of the county. Where possible they would be sourced close to where the child lived, such as with the buddying or sitting service, but other activities, such as overnight breaks, might mean that children had to travel to access them.

6.3 RESOLVED to support the work of the department in providing short breaks for disabled children and their families.

## 7. AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDER; PREVALENCE AND PROVISION

7.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services on Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The report informed the Committee about the estimated number of children in East Sussex with autism, the services available to support them, whether demand for support in this area was increasing and if so, how this demand was being met.

7.2 In response to questions from members the following points were made:

- Most schools would have a number of children who were on the autism spectrum and training was available for teachers and non-teaching staff in all mainstream schools to help them support these children.
- Most children with ASD who attended mainstream schools had the academic ability to achieve the expected educational outcomes at Key Stage 2 and 4.
- All teachers and non-teaching staff in specialist facilities received a higher level of training to enable them to offer more specialist support to children with ASD. One of the criteria for achieving an accreditation from the National Autistic Society was around the level of training staff had received.

7.3 RESOLVED to support the work being done by the department to support children and young people in East Sussex with autism.

## 8. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF ATTAINMENT IN KEY STAGE TWO MATHEMATICS

8.1 The Committee considered an interim report by the Chairman of the Review Board currently carrying out a Scrutiny review of attainment in Key Stage 2 Mathematics.

8.2 The Committee was informed that the proposed Academies Bill would enable all schools classed by Ofsted as outstanding to become academies. These schools would not need to consult local authorities about these changes and could become academies as soon as September 2010. Those schools that choose to go down this route would take with them their element of the central budget that the local authority currently used for funding educational work and this could have a negative impact on the capacity of the department to provide a comprehensive training programme for all teachers.

8.2 The Committee was informed that the work of the Review Board would now continue and a full report would be brought to the Committee in September.

8.2 RESOLVED to support the interim report by the Review Board and recommend it for submission to Cabinet and County Council.

## 9. DEVELOPMENT OF CLERKING SERVICE

9.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services that provided an update on the progress by the Children's Services Department in taking forward the implementation of the East Sussex Clerking Service.

9.2 Members were informed that good progress was now being made with developing the Clerking Service and the service would be available to all schools from September 2010. The East Sussex Clerking Service Implementation Group had

met on five occasions now and several key pieces of work had been completed, such as a revised handbook for clerks and a detailed service agreement between schools and the clerking service.

9.3 The Committee was informed that, provided the annual funding grant for education remained the same the Headroom money, which was funding the Clerking Service, would continue to be made available at the current level. It was recognised that the Schools Forum could remove funding from any of the projects it currently supported, but at present they had given assurances that this funding would continue.

9.4 RESOLVED to (1) welcome the progress being made by the East Sussex Clerking Service Implementation Group; and

(2) receive an update report to the March 2011 meeting on the implementation of the Clerking Service.

## 10. FUTURE SCRUTINY REVIEWS

10.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Governance and Community Services that asked the committee to decide which topics it wished to take forward as the next scrutiny reviews.

10.2 The Committee decided that they wished the following topics to be taken forward as reviews during the forthcoming year:

- a full review of transition to be carried out in the autumn with a joint review board made up of members from Children's Services and Adult Social Care. Initial interest in this review from Cllr Field.
- A table top review of young carers. Initial interest in the review from Cllr Field, Cllr Waite and Cllr Shing
- A table top review of early years education. Initial interest from Cllr Shing and Cllr Ensor
- A table top review on Looked After Children. Initial interest from Cllr St Pierre and Carole Shaves.

10.3 RESOLVED that these ideas now be developed by the Scrutiny Lead Officer and that members be informed in due course which table top review will commence over the summer.

## 11. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

11.1 The Committee considered the scrutiny work programme.

11.2 RESOLVED to note the work programme.

## 12. FORWARD PLAN

12.1 The Committee considered the Forward Plan for the period 1 June 2010 and 30 September 2010

12.2 RESOLVED to note the Forward Plan.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 1pm