

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services held at County Hall, Lewes, on 14 June 2011

PRESENT Councillor Ensor (Chairman)
 Councillors Field, Kenward, Lock, Shing, St Pierre, Stroude,
 Webb and Whetstone
 David Sanders (RC Diocese)
 Mr M Wilson (C of E Diocese)
 Sam Gregory (Parent Governor)
 Ms K Hearn (Parent Governor)
 Mrs Carol Shaves (Police Authority representative)
 Jeremy Alford (Health Representative)

Scrutiny Manager Paul Dean

Also present Councillor Bennett, Lead Cabinet Member for Learning and
 School effectiveness
 Penny Gaunt, Deputy Director of Children's Services
 Fiona Wright, Head of School Standards and Learning
 Effectiveness for item (see minute)
 Diana Francombe, Planning and Performance Manager (for
 item (see minute)
 Nathan Caine, Head of Secondary Behaviour and
 Attendance Service for item (see minute)
 Denise Ford, Principal Educational Psychologist for item
 (see minute)
 Nina Siddall, Heads of Standards and Learning
 Effectiveness for item (see minute)

1. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

1.1 RESOLVED – to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the last Committee meeting held on 7 March 2011.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2.1 Apologies for absence were received from: Councillor Jonathon Johnson (District/Borough representative), Mrs Carole Shaves MBE (Police Authority Representative) and Ms K Hearn (Parent Governor Representative). Apologies were also received from Lead Members: Councillors Belsey and Elkin.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 Councillor Lock declared a non prejudicial interest as a school governor and Chairman of SACRE; Cllr Webb declared an interest as Vice Chairman of SACRE; the Chairman declared an interest as school governor of Bexhill High School; Mr Sam Gregory declared a non prejudicial interest as a governor of The Eastbourne Academy.

4. REPORTS

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

5. ACCOUNTABILITY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

5.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services and a presentation by the Head of School Standards and Learning Effectiveness outlining the local authority's responsibility for holding schools, colleges and settings (learning environments outside schools or colleges) to account for their improvement. The Committee identified a range of concerns and some questions about how the County Council would continue to discharge its responsibility effectively for school improvement in the context of the forthcoming changes in government legislation and policy:

- The requirement for schools to undertake a standardised self evaluation will become discretionary. However, OFSTED has indicated that it would still expect schools to undertake some form of self evaluation prior to an inspection. It is unclear how future self evaluations might be moderated to ensure consistency.
- As the Children's Service Department will not be allocating a School Improvement Partner (SIP) if a school does not choose to purchase this service, the governing body will lose this key component that helps to 'triangulate' the results of a school's performance assessment. One impact will be increased pressure on school governors to 'fill the performance management gap'.
- Despite a marginal increase in school budgets in the current year (0.1%), previous funding errors (mainly marginal over funding of smaller schools) and other factors will mean that some schools will experience reduced budgets. Excellence Cluster schools in Hastings will receive proportionately higher *pupil premium* and other grants which will offset the reduction in Excellence Cluster funding.
- Children's Services envisages a two-year transition during which the way it promotes and delivers its services to schools will fundamentally change. The department aims to achieve a common understanding with schools as to exactly which services will be purchased and it will take time to achieve a coherent and consistent understanding across all schools.
- The shift of funding to school budgets means that governing bodies will need a greater understanding and awareness of the variety and types of services the local authority offers. Governors are likely to need additional training and/or briefing and the subsequent take up of services needs to be carefully monitored. Governor support is now focusing on whole governing body training (as opposed to individual governors) and is promoting better collaborative working between governing bodies.
- What school performance data and information can actually be collected in future by Children's Services? Beyond basic results data, information, say, about the comparative performance of very able children or the take up of further education across our schools is very difficult to assess; nationally-compiled data is incomplete in these areas and there is currently no intention by the government to address this particular shortfall.
- Detailed monitoring of governing body activity by Children's Services (such as reviewing the minutes of governing body meetings) as a mechanism to judge whether to trigger additional support is impractical. Direct contact with parents, as a means of assessing school performance or to provide information about school performance, is not within the remit of Children's Services. (Any complaint received by Children's Services would be referred back to the parents to take up with the school.)
- So, what mechanisms could be used to detect deterioration, particularly in

schools that fail to recognise that they have a problem? The department acknowledges that with the demise of School Improvement Partners it is becoming increasingly difficult to operate a robust system of monitoring to provide early warning of a decline in school performance that would trigger the need for additional support. It intends to conduct desktop analysis of schools and visit schools as required in order to 'get under the surface' of any issues; it has identified resources that can be targeted to support schools to take action to secure any improvement required.

- The Schools Forum has a significant budget (£19m in the current year). Its membership is nationally determined and precludes elected members from being part of it; they can only be observers. Is it desirable and practicable for there to be greater local authority influence over the deployment of its resources? This merits further debate but needs to recognise that the Schools Forum is a consultative group and only takes decisions about the local authority's central expenditure limit.

5.2 RESOLVED – (1) to receive a presentation on the Children's Services budget (including school budgets) as a precursor to the 2011/12 Reconciling Policy and Resources process. This will need to include a clear picture as to the make up of the budget indicating how it relates to Children's Services responsibilities, and those of schools.

(2) that there is a need to communicate to all Members details of the complex and changing picture about roles and responsibilities for school performance; in particular the message that there are now significant risks (as outlined above) for the local authority, and Standards and Learning Effectiveness Service, in undertaking their school improvement work.

(3) to pursue the above questions and issues through the future work programme of the committee.

7. OVERVIEW OF PERFORMANCE MEASURES FOR 2011/12 IN CHILDREN'S SERVICES

7.1 The Committee welcomed a report by the Director of Children's Services setting out a refreshed version of the 2011/12 Portfolio Plan and a proposed new approach to performance scrutiny. Targets for many of the indicators had yet to be developed; some, for example, required first year results in order that later years' targets could be quantified. The new targets aim to capture and enable a better understanding of the effectiveness of different key initiatives and lead to greater resilience in decision making and service provision. The new performance reports are designed to provide greater context for each performance indicator with appropriate trend information.

7.2 The committee made the following observations and suggestions for the proposed indicators and targets in the Children's Services Portfolio Plan for 2011/12:

- Policy Steer 5.1 – protect children and young people from harm and neglect:
 - Monitoring the number of protection plans (in addition to the proportions and percentages indicated) would provide helpful and complementary trend information to help gauge the effectiveness of initiatives over the longer term.
- Policy Steer 5.2: Develop resilience in families to help reduce dependency on public services by enhancing their capacity to resolve their own problems:
 - The measures here appear too focussed on children rather than families

but finding the right measures to capture the broader aim is undoubtedly difficult.

- Policy Steer 5.3: Improve outcomes for looked after children and care leavers, as well as improving support to children and young people on the edge of care:
 - Measure (b) (percentage of children looked after with 3 or more placements during the year) targets to “remain below the national average” appears vague compared to having a specific target.
 - The targets for measure (e) (progress of looked after children between KS2 and KS4) seems very low compared to that for (d) (progress of looked after children between KS1 and KS2). These cohort-specific targets will be reviewed in the light of this observation.
 - Care needs to be taken in performance measure (g) (avoidance of use of bed and breakfast accommodation): firstly there is the need to guard against ‘perverse outcomes’ (for example, placing children in inappropriate accommodation so as to avoid using B&B in order to meet this target); secondly, housing provision is not the primary responsibility of the County Council and therefore requires cooperation with housing colleagues elsewhere if this measure is to be successful as intended.
- Policy Steer 5.4: Support and challenge to schools to raise educational achievement ...
 - The general difficulties likely to be experienced in meeting these targets have been considered in the previous item.
- Policy Steer 5.5: Promote good health for children and young people and reduce health inequalities:
 - (a) prevalence of breast feeding at 6-8 weeks from birth – suggest extending this measure to 12 weeks from birth.
 - (b) Under 18 conception rate – suggest using an under 16 conception rate measure so as not to include young people who are ‘entitled’ to be pregnant.
 - (c) obesity among primary school children in Year 6 – the development of obesity as a condition is best envisaged as a continuum which isn’t apparent from this indicator. A reduction target would be better than a target for a reduced percentage increase specifically at Year 6.
 - (d) referrals to CAMHS – a target relating to referrals to CAMHS, should for consistency, be matched by a target for referrals to language therapy services.
 - (e) percentage leaving treatment for substance misuse in an agreed and planned way – measuring the percentage of those who need treatment, who then receive it, is preferable to a measure of those leaving a service.
 - (f) proportion of initial health assessments for looked after children completed within 28 days – given that serious damage could occur with a delay of 28 days, immediate assessments ought to be the norm. Therefore consideration should be given to both the appropriateness of this measure and increasing the (low) 85% target.

7.3 RESOLVED - to request Children’s Services to consider the above comments and suggestions and consider future reports as the performance framework evolves.

8. OVERVIEW OF THE SECONDARY BEHAVIOUR AND ATTENDANCE SERVICE

8.1 The Committee considered reports by the Director of Children's Services that provided the latest available exclusion statistics and outlined the work being undertaken to deal with primary and secondary school exclusions.

The Committee made the following observations and identified questions to take forward through a 'table top' scrutiny review:

- Despite positive trends, the number of exclusions in East Sussex schools remains relatively high.
- The distribution of permanent exclusions appears excessively weighted towards primary compared to the national picture (27% in East Sussex compared to 11% nationally) and towards children with a statement for SEN (23% in East Sussex compared to 8% nationally). Why is this?
- Indicators that provide the clearest exclusions picture are considered to be: number of incidents, number of pupils excluded, number of days lost, and the number of children permanently excluded at any one time.
- Schools vary considerably in their readiness to exclude for reasons which appear to relate to the style of leadership in the school. Can good practice be shared more effectively?
- Parenting appears to be an issue that requires greater emphasis in the reduction of school exclusions; this requires further investigation as to how in practice this might be achieved.
- It is unclear whether Common Assessment Framework (CAF) interventions are playing an optimum role in reducing exclusions.
- It is unclear whether earlier or more effective referral mechanisms (to social care or other services) would reduce the likelihood of exclusions occurring further down the line.

8.2 RESOLVED - to: (1) note the challenges in relation to exclusions across East Sussex and the actions being undertaken; and

(2) establish a 'table top' scrutiny review board comprising Councillors Ensor, Kenward, Webb and Mr Sam Gregory to review the questions and issues outlined above and report back to the committee in due course.

9. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF KEY STAGE 2 MATHEMATICS

9.1 The Committee deferred consideration of this item to a future meeting to include consideration of the 2011 results.

10. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

10.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Governance and Community Services setting out the current work programme for the Committee.

10.2 RESOLVED - to note the updated scrutiny work programme and include a table top scrutiny review on primary school exclusions as detailed in item 8 and establish a committee 'awayday' in early October 2011 to focus on future work of the committee.

11. FORWARD PLAN

11.1 The Committee considered the Forward Plan for the period of 14 June to 30 September 2011.

11.2 RESOLVED - to note the Forward Plan.