

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 November 2011

PRESENT Councillor Ensor (Chairman)
Councillors Field (Vice Chairman), Kenward, Lock, Stephen Shing, St Pierre, Stroude and Whetstone.
Mr David Sanders (RC Diocese representative),
Mr Mike Wilson (C of E Diocese representative),
Mr Jeremy Alford (Health representative), and
Councillor Jonathan Johnson (District/Borough representative).

Scrutiny Manager Paul Dean

Also present Penny Gaunt, Deputy Director of Children's Services
Liz Rugg, Assistant Director, Children and Families,
Douglas Sinclair, Head of Children's Safeguards and
Quality Assurance, Children's Services for items 5 and 6
(see minutes 26 and 27)
Fiona Wright, Head of Standards and Learning
Effectiveness for items 8 and 9 (see minutes 29 and 30)

Lead Member: Councillor Belsey (Children & Families).

22. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

22.1 RESOLVED – to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the last Committee meeting held on 19 September 2011.

23. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

23.1 Apologies for absence were received from Mrs Carole Shaves MBE (Police Authority representative).

24. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

24.1 Councillor Lock declared a non-prejudicial interest as a Hasting Borough Councillor in respect of item 28 (Ninestiles Plus).

24.2 Councillor Ensor declared a non-prejudicial interest as a Local Education Authority governor at Bexhill High School in respect of item 28 (Ninestiles Plus).

25. REPORTS

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

26. LOCAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD ANNUAL REPORT (LSCB)

26.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services advising Members of the inter-agency arrangements in place to safeguard children in East Sussex. The Committee welcomed Ms Cathie Pattison, Independent Chair of the East Sussex LSCB.

26.2 The Committee noted actions being taken to address a number of issues arising from the report, in particular the challenge to reduce the number of unnecessary referrals to social care by partner agencies, especially the police who are now undertaking to retain responsibility in all minor cases.

26.3 RESOLVED – to (1) note and endorse the work of the LSCB Annual Report on the Local Safeguarding Children Board Business Plan;

(2) welcome the improvements to the report this year, especially in the level of detail and the clarity of the information being presented;

(3) request that Scrutiny be given details of the outcomes of recent serious case reviews from East Sussex and elsewhere to enable Members to understand how processes and procedures have been improved as a consequence; and

(4) request that future updates to scrutiny on the Targeted Youth Service (March 2012) include reference to the particular issues and challenges outlined in the Annual Report.

(Also AGREED that Cllr Lock be an additional member of the Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources Board)

27. SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN: MEMBER AND SENIOR MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT OF SERVICES

27.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services advising Members 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.

27.2 RESOLVED - to (1) note the outcomes of the monitoring visits and audits undertaken by the Lead Cabinet Member and senior managers; and

(2) recommend that existing management arrangements continue.

28. FINAL MONITORING REPORT FOR THE WORK OF THE NINESTILES PLUS WITH THREE HASTINGS SECONDARY SCHOOLS

28.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services detailing the outcomes of the Hastings Federation School Improvement Strategy. The Committee welcomed David Potter, author of the evaluation report.

28.2 The Committee concluded that the Ninestiles Project has been a great success with tangible, sustainable improvements for all three schools involved. The project appears to represent good value for money. A number of observations emerged from the discussions on this and the Bishop Bell Causeway partnership report (minute 29):

- The project appears to demonstrate that social disadvantage does not have to mean poor academic achievement.

- The sustainability of the initiative in the longer term has yet to be proven but the basic 'building blocks' are in place with promising early indications. The 2012 academic results should begin to reflect the positive impact of the project.
- Many academies require specialist support that local authorities have provided historically thus creating opportunities for closer working relationships. East Sussex has co-sponsored two academies with associated expectations of significant partnership working; the remaining concerns for the authority lie with those academies in danger of 'coasting' where local authority influence has diminished.
- Extending the benefits of the Ninestiles project to other East Sussex schools may be possible, but care is needed; a high performing school, for example, does not necessarily have the right leadership skills to undertake this type of transformation role.
- Successful approaches vary considerably and need to be tailored to local circumstances. Regardless of the approach, a focus on behaviour and agreement on a clear set of intended outcomes from the outset are essential.

28.3 RESOLVED – to welcome the successful outcomes of the Ninestiles Project.

29. BISHOP BELL CAUSEWAY PARTNERSHIP

29.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which outlined the impact of the partnership on the outcomes for young people at the Causeway School.

29.2 RESOLVED – to welcome the successful outcomes from the Bishop Bell Causeway partnership.

30. EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

30.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services setting out a headline analysis of educational attainment reported by East Sussex schools at August 2011.

30.2 The Committee expressed disappointment with the results for educational achievement in primary schools noting that even where performance remains steady, East Sussex lags behind the national average.

30.3 The Committee considers that the overall educational attainment picture is incomplete because post 16 results and data about university attendance are not collected and are therefore not included in national comparisons.

30.4 RESOLVED – to note the disappointing primary school attainment results contained in the initial analysis of 2011 standards in East Sussex schools.

31. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

31.1 RESOLVED – to note the updated scrutiny work programme.

32. FORWARD PLAN

32.1 RESOLVED – to note the Forward Plan for the period 12 December 2011 to 31 March 2012.

The meeting ended at 13:00.