

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services held at County Hall, Lewes, on 5 March 2012

PRESENT Councillor Ensor (Chairman)
Councillors Field (Vice Chairman), Lock, Stephen Shing, St Pierre, Stroude and Whetstone.
Mr David Sanders (RC Diocese representative),
Mrs Carol Shaves MBE (Police Authority representative)
Mr Jeremy Alford (Health representative).

Scrutiny Manager Paul Dean

Also present Penny Gaunt, Deputy Director of Children's Services; Brian Hughes, Acting Head of Targeted Youth Support and YOT (for agenda item 6); Debbie Adams, Children's Centre Strategy Manager (for agenda item 7); and Andrew Read, Independent Consultant (for agenda item 8).

Lead Members: Councillors Elkin and Bennett.

33. TRIBUTE TO MR SAM GREGORY

33.1 The Chairman, supported by members of the committee, paid tribute to Mr Sam Gregory, a parent governor representative on the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee, who had sadly died since the previous meeting. Sam had served on the County Council's Education scrutiny committees since 2004. Members paid tribute to his work and recalled his enthusiastic and active participation in the several scrutiny projects with which he had been involved. He will be sorely missed.

34. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

34.1 RESOLVED – to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the last Committee meeting held on 21 November 2011.

35. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

35.1 Apologies for absence were received from Mr Mike Wilson (C of E Diocese representative), Councillor Jonathan Johnson (District/Borough representative) and Ms Kym Hearn (Parent Governor representative).

36. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

36.1 Councillor St Pierre declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest as grandmother of a child currently seeking a school place in the county.

37. REPORTS

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

38. RECONCILING POLICY, PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES (RPPR)

38.1 The Committee considered a report by the Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Community Services which reviewed Scrutiny's input into the Reconciling Policy and Performance and Resources process during 2011/12

38.2 RESOLVED – to endorse the report of the Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources Board (Appendix 1 of the report refers) noting in particular the following clarifications and suggested actions for further consideration:

- Many of the new Children's Services performance indicators have so far lacked targets and performance information because the baselines for future comparisons are in the process of being established.
- Whilst scrutiny generally considers detailed performance information when examining specific issues, Members considered that the opportunity to take an occasional 'global' overview of Children's Services' financial and performance information would be useful.
- The Committee considered that the co-opted Members were at a disadvantage when considering the RPPR report because none of them had been members of the RPPR review board, nor had they been invited to participate in the all-Member briefing events about RPPR. Ways to remedy these shortfalls should be investigated.
- Evidence to demonstrate the value of respite breaks for families and carers would be predominantly in the form of case study examples because of the problems associated with acquiring quantitative comparison data.
- The department expects to be working directly with approximately 30% of schools as that is the percentage identified as needing support; the majority of these are primary schools and many are 'satisfactory' schools that are 'stuck' and struggling to improve. The Committee considers that 30% is a disappointingly high percentage.
- Local Members should receive notification when schools in their division fall within a category of either OFSTED or local authority concern as this does not always happen at present.

39. TARGETED YOUTH SUPPORT (TYS) EVALUATION AND PROGRESS

39.1 The Committee welcomed and endorsed the progress made in Targeted Youth Support since the last committee discussion (19 September 2011) as outlined in the report by the Director of Children's Services and the update by the Acting Head of Targeted Youth Support and YOT.

39.2 RESOLVED - to note the progress with the new service and receive further evaluation and progress updates in due course, addressing the following issues in particular:

- NEETS (Not in Education, Employment or Training): the national and local trends are of increasing concern; the Committee wishes to re-visit the strategies being undertaken to address NEETS.
- Raising the participation age (RPA) strategy: Successfully achieving RPA will require all sections of the education system to play a part, and in particular

local authorities will have a key role to champion the needs of young people in their areas and work with local partners to achieve full participation.

- Young people 'not in the system' who may benefit from the TYS service: The Committee raised concerns about those young people who were either unknown to the system or who refused support, but where early intervention could help to reduce the likelihood of a critical response later.
- Improving young people's physical and mental wellbeing: the Committee was uncertain as to how the service would measure this intended outcome.

40. CHILDREN'S CENTRES STRATEGY

40.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services advising Members on the performance of Children's Centres and the focus of a current service review.

40.2 The key performance measures for the service are:

- a) Number of children aged 0-5 who have a Common Assessment Framework (CAF).
- b) Narrowing the gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and the rest.
- c) Prevalence of breast-feeding at 6 – 8 weeks from birth.
- d) Achievement of at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage with at least 6 in each of the scales in Personal Social and Emotional Development and Communication, Language and Literacy.

40.3 The indicators apply to all children including those that receive services from the voluntary and community sector and independent providers. The challenge for children's centres strategy is therefore to target the service towards the most vulnerable who may not access the alternative settings.

40.4 RESOLVED – (1) to note the scope of the service review for Children's Centres and receive further updates on the outcomes in due course, addressing the following issues in particular:

- Whilst the *percentages* in the performance tables provide an indication of the level of achievement for each performance indicator, additionally including *numbers* of individual families and children would considerably help to clarify the magnitude of the challenge of reaching different target groups.
- Providing comparators with other local authority areas for certain key data sets would enable a better contextual understanding of East Sussex's performance.
- For indicator d) above, nationally the picture appears to be improving, but in East Sussex there seems to have been a declining performance over recent years. This needs further clarification because the picture as presented may be inaccurate if, say, the figures do not compare 'like with like' or there are factors outside the Council's control that have not been fully taken into account.

(2) That local Members be provided with the results of all OFSTED inspections of Children's Centres in their divisions as a matter of course.

41. GOVERNING BODY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE FUTURE

41.1 The Committee received a presentation from Andrew Read, Independent Consultant, on governing body roles and responsibilities of the future. His key observations and advice are summarised as follows:

- Most education authorities are now concerned that the influence they once had over schools has reduced and will reduce significantly further in future; it would be reasonable to assume that most secondary schools will become academies by 2014. Compared to other authorities, relatively few schools in East Sussex have so far converted.
- Where 'binary' or 'polarised' thinking is the primary cause of a school seeking to become an academy (ie. based on a desire for 'independence' from local authority control as opposed to viewing it as a means to capitalise on new opportunities), there is an increased risk of reduced educational performance and other problems developing. Governing bodies will need assistance in developing the capacity and skills to pursue a successful strategic vision for their school.
- The local authority should try to influence schools' thinking by promoting a community partnership approach: for example by advising governing bodies of their broader leadership expectations for educational outcomes relevant to their locality and the local economy. The authority need not adopt a neutral stance on these matters, nor on academy status in the sense of being passive about the academies agenda.
- Local authorities need to become commercially demanding and 'remodel' their services to schools as fully traded services. They also should clarify which services form part of the core offer of statutory and essential services. Modelling will enable local authorities to stand the best chance of success when 'pitching' services to schools and to evaluate the consequences of individual school purchasing decisions for each service.
- Other forms of positive influence for the local authority to explore include: offering conditional support eg. paying the chair of a governing body; and actively encouraging the full use of the local authority clerking service.

41.3 RESOLVED – to explore the establishment of an Audit, Best Value and Community Services/Children's Services joint scrutiny board to maintain an overview of the evolving relationship between the County Council and schools, especially academies.

42. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

42.1 RESOLVED – to note the updated scrutiny work programme.

43. FORWARD PLAN

43.1 RESOLVED – to note the Forward Plan for the period 1 March 2012 to 30 June 2012.

The meeting ended at 13.25