

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services held at County Hall, Lewes, on 11 June 2012

PRESENT Councillor Michael Ensor (Chairman)
Councillors Kathryn Field (Vice Chairman), Terry Fawthrop,
Stephen Shing, Rosalyn St Pierre, Meg Stroude, Trevor
Webb and Francis Whetstone.
Mr Mike Wilson (Church of England Diocese
representative)
Mrs Carol Shaves MBE (Police Authority representative)
Mr Jeremy Alford (Health representative).

Scrutiny Manager Paul Dean

Also present Matt Dunkley, Director of Children's Services;
Hazel Cunningham, Assistant Director, Resources;
Frank Stanford, Executive Headteacher of several East
Sussex special schools (for item 5)
Lynton Golds, Headteacher of Seaford Head Community
College ('shadowing' Matt Dunkley)

Lead Members: Councillors Elkin and Bennett.

1. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

1.1 RESOLVED – to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the last Committee meeting held on 5 March 2012.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2.1 Apologies for absence were received from Mr David Sanders (Roman Catholic Diocese representative) and Councillor Jonathan Johnson (District/Borough representative).

2.2 The Chairman welcomed Cllr Terry Fawthrop as a new member of the committee, replacing Cllr Matthew Lock.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 Councillor Webb declared a non-prejudicial interest as the Hastings Borough Council member of the shadow Police and Crime Panel in respect of item 7 (THRIVE update).

4. REPORTS

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

5. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF SCHOOL EXCLUSIONS IN EAST SUSSEX

5.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chairman of the Review Board, Cllr Martin Kenward, who presented the outcomes of the Scrutiny Review of School Exclusions in East Sussex. In endorsing the scrutiny report the committee highlighted the following:

- 'Internal' exclusions, whereby a child exhibiting challenging behaviour is temporarily removed from the classroom into another space within the school, is significantly preferable to exclusion. But for this to work requires schools to find suitable space and staffing resources to manage these pupils. This could pose particular problems for some smaller schools and especially primary schools. However, support and resources are available to schools and it is a matter of prioritising their use effectively rather than thinking that solutions are unaffordable or unattainable.
- Managing pupil behaviour is a key role for teachers, despite evidence of some perceptions to the contrary. Teaching and support staff need the confidence to maintain a secure, safe and confident environment for pupils. This in turn requires schools to develop effective partnerships with other schools and the support agencies.

5.2 **RESOLVED** – That the report and recommendations of the Scrutiny Review Board be endorsed for consideration by Cabinet and Full Council subject to the following enhancements:

- The report will emphasise that exclusion from school should never mean exclusion from education. When excluding pupils, schools should always ensure that alternative arrangements are properly made to enable full access to education and learning.
- Recommendation 3e of the Board's report is to be reworded to read: "The support, training and communication with school governors should aim to promote an active governing body role in: *seeking and responding* to the views and experiences of parents/carers of excluded children and the views of youngsters themselves."
- Greater clarity is to be included about the importance of parental responsibilities in a child's education.

6. ACADEMIES CONVERSION: UPDATE

6.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services showing the number of schools converting to academies and outlining the implications for the local authority.

6.2 The Committee welcomed the approach Children's Services is taking towards developing effective partnerships with schools and noted the following:

- National research shows that 70% of the schools that have converted to academies so far have done so because of perceived financial benefits. However, with the government set to reform school funding, schools considering the change from now are strongly encouraged to undertake a careful analysis of all the pros and cons first. It remains unclear what happens if an academy falls into financial deficit.
- Most County Council expenditure on maintaining educational standards and ensuring school improvement has been through providing 'traded services', mainly training and development. This has been the case for some time.

Primary schools are the main recipients of traded services; secondary schools are far more likely to form supportive partnerships with other schools.

- The viability of each traded service depends on various factors (outlined in the report); some can be scaled up or down to meet demand, whereas others require a critical level of uptake to be sustainable. Some services are to be deemed 'unprofitable' and will be left to the private sector to provide. The new services to schools strategy will involve marketing a wide range of services to academies, which should help to mitigate the financial risks to central services.
- The Council's core strategy will continue to focus on responding to, and preventing, underperformance in schools. As has already been discussed at scrutiny, the County Council works directly with the maintained schools that are at greatest risk of failing; the present figure is some 30% of schools.
- The nature of 'sponsored' and 'converter' academies differs substantially and these institutions cannot be viewed in the same way, especially when they begin to fail. For example, there is currently a particular lack of clarity as to the relative responsibilities of the local authority, the DfE and school trustees when a 'converter' academy falls into special measures.
- Proposals for the County Council's approach towards partnership arrangements with all schools is to be discussed by scrutiny and a future Cabinet meeting in July 2012. The Council:
 - will set out its expectations of outcomes for children in all the county's schools, regardless of status and governance arrangements;
 - will promote a positive dialogue with all schools, including academies;
 - has recently appointed a business development manager in the *Services to Schools Team* to: undertake market analysis; develop market opportunities and develop services that are responsive to schools' needs whilst also maintaining an ability to respond to failing maintained schools; and
 - outline its developing role in *brokering* school-to-school partnerships to maintain and improve educational standards.

6.3 The headteacher of Seaford Head Community college described her experience of conversion to an academy:

"The motivation for the change was primarily to acquire freedoms and autonomy by taking responsibility for the curriculum, admissions, land use, assets, and staff employment etc. Whilst retaining a positive relationship with the local authority, the trustees consider they can use academy status to deploy resources more effectively in the new 'educational landscape' to improve the life chances of pupils."

6.4 RESOLVED – (1) To endorse the approach being taken by Children's Services in responding to the challenges of schools converting to academy status; and (2) to receive an update in due course, focusing on the financial viability of the traded services strategy (after the new business development manager has settled into post); and shed further light on the consequences of academies failing as information becomes available.

7. THRIVE: UPDATE

7.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which outlined progress made to date as part of the THRIVE Programme.

7.2 THRIVE is a three-year programme across all children's services. East Sussex County Council and our partners are working together to develop early help services that make the best use of our resources to improve the lives of those families facing difficulties.

7.3 The Good Start Health Visiting pilot in Bexhill will be extended to Hastings despite not being as successful as hoped. The issues that caused concerns in Bexhill do not apply to Hastings and there is every reason to suggest it will be more successful in Hastings.

7.4 RESOLVED – To commend the good progress achieved so far and receive regular updates as the programme matures.

8. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

8.1 A Joint Scrutiny Board (with Members of Audit, Best Value and Community Services Scrutiny Committee) will meet on 16 July 2012, 10.00am, to consider: **Local authority powers, responsibilities and roles in relation to schools**. Members of the committee will be contacted shortly to see whether they wish to sit on the Board. The Board will report its findings and recommendations to the committee in September.

8.2 RESOLVED – to note the updated scrutiny work programme.

9. FORWARD PLAN

9.1 RESOLVED – to note the Forward Plan for the period 12 June 2012 to 30 September 2012.

The meeting ended at 12.50pm

MICHAEL ENSOR
Chairman