

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services held at County Hall, Lewes, on 10 September 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.
Ms Susan Thompson (Church of England Diocese representative)
Mr Simon Parr (Roman Catholic Diocese representative)
Councillor Gill Mattock (District/Borough representative)
Mr Jeremy Alford (Health representative).

Scrutiny Manager Paul Dean

Also present Matt Dunkley, Director of Children's Services;
Fiona Wright, Assistant Director (Schools, Youth and Inclusion Support)
Hazel Cunningham, Assistant Director (Resources)
Lou Carter, Assistant Director, Planning and Performance Management
Liz Rugg, Assistant Director, Children and Families
Roger Snell, Services to Schools Business Development Manager for agenda item 5: Services to Schools
Cathie Pattison, Independent Chair of the East Sussex Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) for agenda item 7: LSCB Annual Report.

Lead Members: Councillors Belsey, Bennett and Elkin.

10. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

10.1 RESOLVED – to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the last Committee meeting held on 11 June 2012.

11. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

11.1 Apologies for absence were received from Mrs Carole Shaves MBE (Police Authority Representative) and Ms Kym Hearn (Parent Governor Representative).

11.2 The Chairman welcomed to the Committee Councillor Gill Mattock the District/Borough representative (replacing Councillor Jonathan Johnson); Ms Susan Thompson, the Church of England Diocese representative (replacing Mr Mike Wilson) and Mr Simon Parr, the Roman Catholic Diocese representative (replacing Mr David Sanders).

11.3 The Chairman thanked and paid tribute to the departing members.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

12.1 Councillor Webb declared a personal, non prejudicial interest as a member of the Shadow Police and Crime Panel (representing Hastings Borough Council) in respect of agenda item 7 (Local Safeguarding Children Board annual report).

12.2 Councillor Fawthrop declared a personal, non prejudicial interest as a member of the East Sussex Fire Authority in respect of agenda item 7 (Local Safeguarding Children Board annual report).

13. URGENT BUSINESS AND REPORTS

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

GCSE RESULTS IN EAST SUSSEX

13.2 The Director of Children's Services reported that not all schools in East Sussex had reported their results to Children's Services and that, together with the fact that there was currently a national dispute about grade 'boundaries' in some subjects, meant that it would take several weeks to form a completely accurate results picture.

13.3 Indications were that there had been a slight fall in the County's GCSE results position, placing East Sussex at slightly under the national average.

13.4 In the light of the recent scrutiny review of schools exclusions in East Sussex, the Committee requested an analysis to identify any correlation between the latest GCSE results and the rate of school pupil exclusions in individual East Sussex schools.

13.5 The Committee requested that a report on the GCSE position be submitted to the November 2012 scrutiny committee following their consideration by the Standards Panel.

14. SERVICES TO SCHOOLS

14.1 The Committee welcomed a presentation from the Director of Children's Services on Services to Schools, copies of which were circulated at the meeting. The key emerging issues included:

- Schools are effectively in charge of procuring services to meet their needs. A key role of the newly appointed Services to Schools Business Development Manager is to assist schools to acquire effective procurement skills. This will include, where necessary, helping schools to identify particular needs and promoting Council-provided services, such as anti bullying services.
- In future, schools will increasingly rely on a 'collective commitment' to ensure they can continue to access and pay for the wide range of support services they will need, including those that may not necessarily be required from the outset. Particular focus is needed on core services for statutory or otherwise essential services.

15. RECONCILING POLICY, PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES (RPPR)

15.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive setting out the detailed planning for 2013/14 and beyond as outlined in the State of the County report presented to Cabinet on 24 July 2012.

15.2 The Committee made the following comments about the policy steers, strategic

performance summary and overview financial information and received responses from Lead Members and officers as indicated:

- The proposed change to policy steer 6 was welcomed (and now reads):
 - Work in partnership with all schools and settings, and in particular those most vulnerable to underachievement, to promote educational excellence and enable all children and young people make appropriate levels of progress, in order to maximise their life chances and contribute to the prosperity of the county.
- The key recommendations of the recent scrutiny review of school exclusions in East Sussex ought to be reflected within the focus of future work relating to the changing relationship with schools.
 - Officers agreed that this can be achieved. The evolving relationship between local authority and schools is leading to an increased emphasis on collaborative working and a focus on the child. The task for the authority is to persuade schools to sign up to a consent based approach to inclusion and then 'pin down' the realities. The risk to be addressed is that of allowing individual children to 'slip through the net'.
- Where are savings likely to fall in the Children's Services budget in 2013/14 and beyond?
 - More than 50% of the non schools budget relates to children's social care which is covered by the THRIVE programme. Relatively high levels of investment in THRIVE now are designed to result in long term reductions in demand for social care (with resulting savings and benefits). Therefore making short term savings in this budget in the coming year could potentially undermine this programme. Any proposals to reduce this budget will be based on detailed risk assessments.
 - 'Protecting' THRIVE will significantly increase the pressure faced by the other elements of the non schools budgets.

15.3 RESOLVED – To (1) report the above observations and proposed amendments to the policy steers to Cabinet.

(2) Establish an RPPR Board to meet in December 2012 to consider (a) the key outcomes and the targets that show whether our priorities will be delivered; (b) the detailed portfolio and budget plans; (c) the emerging savings strategy; and

(3) agree that the membership of the RPPR Board shall be Councillors Ensor (Chairman), Mattock (Eastbourne Borough Council representative), St Pierre, Webb and Whetstone; and that the remaining committee Members should be offered the opportunity to take part if they wish.

16. LOCAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD – ANNUAL REPORT

16.1 The Committee warmly welcomed Cathie Pattison, Independent Chair of the East Sussex Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) to present the East Sussex Local Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report for 2011/12 and Business Plan for 2012 – 2015.

16.2 The Committee made the following comments and observations:

- Whilst the report clearly describes the activity being undertaken to safeguard children in East Sussex, it is hard for the reader to appreciate the scale of many of the issues and risks highlighted, or the outcomes from the extensive range of work being undertaken – for example, are children in East Sussex demonstrably *safer* overall as a result of the work being done?
 - This point was acknowledged and the report would be amended to include a more qualitative interpretation of the data from, say, the results of inspections for example.
 - Lessons from data and serious case reviews etc need to be continually monitored and checked for pointers to the ‘wider picture’.
- Performance measures need to reflect the latest issues and trends, for example ensuring adequate monitoring of initiatives supporting child online safety.
- The move towards self auditing by partner agencies is of potential concern given the lack of sample auditing by the Council’s Audit team or Children’s Services.
- Structural changes to the NHS, and the location of its future child safeguarding responsibilities, represents a serious concern. Urgent clarification is being sought which is welcomed.
- The implementation of recommendations from serious case reviews could usefully be reported to the scrutiny committee in future, along with an assessment view as to whether they have made a positive impact.

16.3 RESOLVED – To welcome the report and request the Director of Children’s Services, Lead Members and the Chair of the East Sussex Local Safeguarding Children Board to note and consider the Committee’s comments listed above.

17. SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN: MEMBER AND SENIOR MANAGEMENT MONITORING

17.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children’s Services that outlined the monitoring systems in place for senior manager and Members to ensure that services to safeguard children are properly co-ordinated and managed effectively.

17.2 The purpose of the Lead Member visits to duty teams is to help ‘triangulate’ information from various sources to provide a clear picture of how services are performing.

17.3 RESOLVED – (1) To note the report;

(2) To request that future similar reports be restructured to reflect only important and strategic matters.

(3) To request the Director and Lead Member to consider whether and how the Lead Member could be utilised most effectively when carrying out ‘mock inspections’, perhaps as an observer.

(4) Report back to the Committee in March 2013 for further debate, and with an updated report highlighting key outcomes from Lead Member visits.

18. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

18.1 Transition from Children's Services to Adult Social Care services: agreed to arrange a joint scrutiny meeting with Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee to review the latest position on the working of the new service a year on. (Last considered at Children's Services Scrutiny Committee on 19 September 2011)

18.2 RESOLVED – to note the updated scrutiny work programme.

19. FORWARD PLAN

19.1 RESOLVED – to note the Forward Plan for the period 17 September 2012 to 31 December 2012.

The meeting ended at 1.30pm

COUNCILLOR MICHAEL ENSOR
Chairman