

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 March 2014.

PRESENT:

Councillors Kathryn Field (Chair), Stephen Shing (Vice Chair), Peter Charlton, Claire Dowling, Michael Ensor, Kim Forward, Roy Galley, Alan Shuttleworth and Francis Whetstone.

Ms Nicola Boulter (Parent Governor Representative).
Ms Catherine Platten (Parent Governor Representative).
Councillor Gill Mattock (District/Borough Representative).
Simon Parr (Roman Catholic Diocese Representative).

Lead Members: Councillors Sylvia Tidy (Lead Member Children & Families / designated statutory Lead Member for Children's Services) and Nick Bennett (Lead Member Learning & School Effectiveness).

Scrutiny Lead Officer Martin Jenks

Also present Liz Rugg, Acting Director, Children's Services/Assistant Director Children's Services (Safeguarding, Looked After Children and Special Educational Needs); Fiona Wright, Assistant Director (Schools, Youth & Inclusion Support); Diana Francombe, Senior Manager Governor Services & Planning.

25. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

25.1 RESOLVED – to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the last Committee meeting held on 11 November 2013.

26. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

26.1 None received.

27. DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

27.1 There were no disclosures of interests.

28. URGENT ITEMS

28.1 None notified.

29. RECONCILING POLICY, PERFORMANACE AND RESOURCES (RPPR)

29.1 The Committee discussed the RPPR process and the comments made by the RPPR Board at the meeting held on 7th January 2014. The Committee repeated the Board's concerns about the reduction in spending on Targeted Youth Support (TYS), the Standards and Learning Effectiveness Service (SLES) and the impact that this will have.

29.2 The Committee asked for better feedback from the department on the comments made by the Board. In particular, where savings were agreed by Full Council, the Committee would like to see information on what discussion took place and any mitigation agreed. The Lead Member, Children & Families advised the Committee that the savings proposed for the Fostering Service had been mitigated at Full Council, with £250,000 being made available for 2014/15 and £250,000 for 2015/16. The new Children's Service Director will be made aware of this request.

29.3 The Committee agreed the recommendations for improvement made by the RPPR Board. In future it would like to see additional information provided so the full year budget is shown against each savings proposal to allow the RPPR Board to judge the scale of the proposed saving. The Board would also like to see a number of alternative options for savings presented where proposals are being revised, or where there may be some element of choice.

29.4 It was the Committee's view that January was too late for the RPPR Board's comments to be responded to fully. The Committee agreed to start detailed discussions on the budget earlier in the year. The Committee requested a progress report on the savings plan be brought to the September Scrutiny Committee meeting. This will be followed by the State of the Council report at the end of September and a discussion at the Scrutiny Committee's Away Day in October.

29.5 RESOLVED –

- (1) To agree the recommendations for improvement made by the RPPR Board that:
 - i) Additional background financial information is provided, specifically the addition to the savings plan of a column showing the current full year budget against each saving proposal, in order to make adequate judgements on the savings proposals.
 - ii) Where there is still some element of choice, or where savings proposals are being revised, the Board would like to see a range of options presented with background information on the likely impacts of the savings proposals.
- (2) To request a savings plan progress report be brought to the Scrutiny Committee at the September 2014 meeting.

30. EVALUATION OF THE CLERKING SERVICE FOR SCHOOL GOVERNORS

30.1 The original Scrutiny Review of Governing Body Clerks was completed in May 2009 which led to the setting up of the Advisory Clerks Service for Schools Governors. In 2012 a joint reference group made up from members of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee and the Audit Best Value Scrutiny Committee reviewed school governance. This review also included recommendations for the Clerking Service.

30.2 There has been a significant amount of progress since the Clerking Service was introduced. At present 134 Governing Bodies, equivalent to 83% of schools, have signed up to use the Clerking Service. Many schools are delighted with their Clerks. The original review aimed to raise remuneration and standardise the role of Clerks across the County. The independent evaluation found that the Clerking Service has had a positive impact on the quality of Clerks, however a number of issues require further work.

30.3 Academies can use the Service and one academy has signed up. Some academies have different needs and Governor Services is aware of a number of enhanced roles that are in use. It would be good to understand what academies were doing in this area, as more schools convert to become academies.

30.4 The independent evaluation report highlighted a number of key points which the Committee discussed. The following themes arose from the report.

30.5 The Clerk's Role

There was evidence that some Governing Bodies were still unclear about the Clerk's role and who they were accountable to. East Sussex County Council (ESCC) Governor Services do not employ the Clerks. The Clerk is employed by the school and is accountable to the Board of Governors. Funding is provided from the Schools Forum for a maximum of 130 hours in return for the school signing up to the Clerking Service protocol. This ensures that a common job description is used; accredited training is undertaken by the Clerk; and regular appraisals are given.

30.6 The Clerk's role has become more professional, and changes to legislation mean that Governing Bodies have to have greater regard to the advice given by the Clerk. The status of the Clerk has changed which needs to be clearly communicated to school governors. Training courses such as "Chair and Clerk Working Together" are provided and perhaps these could be made mandatory under the protocol.

30.7 Staff Retention Issues - Pay and Working Hours

The evaluation report highlighted the rate of pay and additional working hours as two of the main areas of dissatisfaction cited by Clerks. These were identified as the main reasons why Clerks do not stay in post. There was agreement that there was work to be done to:

- Ensure the Governing Bodies expectations of the Clerk's role are realistic and the number of hours worked is in line with the pay for the post (e.g. by providing training resources for the Chair of Governors such as a PowerPoint presentation).
- Clarify the Clerk's role and remind schools that if they require more hours than paid for by the Service they should agree the hours required and top them up accordingly.
- Review the remuneration of Clerks and examine the possibility of paying more to accredited Clerks rather than the existing flat rate (e.g. by establishing a career grade).
- Examine whether the job title could be changed to reflect the professional status of the role (N.B. there has been an attempt to differentiate the role by using the title 'Advisory Clerk' rather than 'Clerk to the Governors').

30.8 Attrition Rates for the Accreditation Scheme

The Committee expressed concern about the dropout rate of Clerks from the accreditation scheme. It was felt that the consultant's report did not go into enough detail behind why Clerks were dropping out of the accreditation scheme. Governor Services will seek to establish the reasons for this.

30.9 Independence of Clerks

The view was expressed that Clerks should be independent from the Council in a similar way to Parish Council clerks, who had their own professional body. It was suggested that school Clerks could work over a larger geographical area so there would be a larger pool of people. Governor Services have looked at what other local authorities have been doing and the idea of the Clerking Service working over a larger area is something that could be explored. The BTEC accreditation scheme was set up by the Council because at the time there were no suitable alternatives. The National College for Teaching & Leadership is developing a training programme, which may be worth adopting when it is available.

30.10 Additional Support

Signing up to the Clerking service provides a number of areas of support. Clerks have access to the TEN support service where they can get individually tailored advice. Although Governor Services do not have a full picture of Clerk vacancies, they can provide interim support where a Governing Body does not have a Clerk (currently they are supporting 5 Governing Bodies in this way). Governor Services can also arrange mentoring for existing Clerks and Clerks new to the role.

30.11 The department has confidence in the way the Clerking Service is working, but is not being complacent about the issues raised in the evaluation report. The Committee were grateful for the update on the progress of the Service and asked for the independent consultant's full report to be made available to them. The recommendations in the report and the department's responses to them were helpful. The Committee asked if they could be turned into an action plan that could be submitted to the next Scrutiny Committee meeting in June.

30.12 RESOLVED:- It was resolved:

- 1) To note the findings of the evaluation report and the actions Governor Services were taking to address the recommendations.
- 2) To request an action plan be brought to the next Scrutiny Committee meeting in June 2014 (paragraph 30.11 above).

31. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

31.1 The Committee asked if it would be possible to have the un-validated and validated school results reported to the Committee as a standing item. The Assistant Director (Schools, Youth & Inclusion Support) indicated that this would be possible.

31.2 The Committee asked for feedback from the recent Ofsted inspection of Children's Social Care. The Acting Director, Children's Services/Assistant Director Children's Services (Safeguarding, Looked After Children and Special Educational Needs) confirmed that the Council had received the draft Inspector's report and were in the process of responding with comments. Members of the Scrutiny Committee will be involved in the formal feedback and a report will be brought to the Scrutiny Committee in June.

31.3 There was a discussion of the list of items for potential future Scrutiny work in the work programme. The Committee concluded that it would like to understand more about the issues involved in Raising the Participation Age (RPA), and to have more information about the current situation for Primary School Head Teacher recruitment and retention, before deciding if the Committee needs review these areas. The Committee asked if an information report could be brought to the next meeting about Primary School Head Teacher recruitment and retention.

31.4 The Scrutiny Committee's previous work on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) was also discussed.

31.5 The Scrutiny Lead Officer will liaise with department to establish the best way of bringing these items forward to the Committee, taking into account the resources needed to do so.

31.6 RESOLVED:- That the work programme additions from this meeting be agreed:

- 1) To request a savings plan progress report be brought to the Scrutiny Committee at the September 2014 meeting (paragraph 29.5).
- 2) To request an action plan for Clerking Service evaluation report be brought to the next Scrutiny Committee meeting in June 2014 (paragraph 30.12 above).
- 3) To add a standing item to the work programme to report school results to the Scrutiny Committee (paragraph 31.1 above).
- 4) To receive a report on the Ofsted inspection of Children's Social Care at the June Scrutiny Committee meeting (paragraph 31.2 above).
- 5) To request an information report be brought to the June Scrutiny Committee meeting on Primary School Head Teacher recruitment and retention (paragraph 31.3 above).

32. FORWARD PLAN

32.1 There was a discussion of the items on the forward plan that related to the removal of community areas for the Home to School Transport Policy (Lead Member meeting 23rd May 2014). The Lead Member for Learning and School Effectiveness said that if the Committee were minded to put together a small group to discuss these proposals, he would be happy to meet with them prior to the Lead Member meeting.

32.2 A question was asked about the grant of a lease for an Early Years Nursery (p35, Lead Member Resources 18th March 2014). The Assistant Director (Schools, Youth & Inclusion Support) indicated that this may relate to a private nursery relocated from Bexhill High school to King Offa. Members of the Committee were advised to contact the Lead Member for Resources directly about this issue.

32.3 RESOLVED:- It was resolved:

To note the Forward Plan for the period 1 March 2014 to 30 June 2014.

The meeting ended at 11.30 am

COUNCILLOR KATHRYN FIELD
Chair