

Minutes of the Meeting of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 8 December 2010

Present:-

Members of the Committee	Councillor	Peter Balaam
	“	Robin Hazelton
	“	Julie Jackson
	“	Tilly May
	“	Mike Perry
	“	Clive Rickhards
	“	Carolyn Robbins
	“	John Ross
	“	June Tandy (Chair)

Parent Governor Representatives

Alison Livesey

Invited Representatives

Chris Smart (Governor Representative)
Diana Turner (Governor Representative)

Other County Councillors

Councillor Heather Timms (Portfolio Holder
for Children, Young People and Families)

Officers

Dave Abbott, Assistant to Political Group (Liberal Democrat)
Mark Gore, Head of Service, Learning and Achievement
Anne Hawker, Headteacher for the Virtual School for Children in
Care
Geoff King, Head of Service, Commissioning Planning &
Partnerships Division
Gill Mullis, Senior Finance Officer
Jane Pollard, Democratic Services Manager
Simon Smith, Strategic Finance Manager
Paul Williams, Overview and Scrutiny Officer

1. General

The Chair informed the committee of the resignation from the steering group of the Warwickshire Governors' Association of Claire Sangster. Claire's involvement with the committee has ended as well. The Chair expressed her appreciation of Claire's contributions to the committee and it was agreed that a letter should be sent from the Chair to Claire expressing that appreciation.

(1) Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Carol Fox and Dr Rex Pogson.

(2) Members Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

Councillor Clive Rickhards declared a personal interest for his work at the Keresley Centre ((Item 7).

Councillor Julie Jackson declared a personal interest as her daughter currently uses post 16 transport. (Item 8). In addition she declared an interest as a school governor (Item 6)

Councillor Perry declared an interest as a school governor (Item 6)

(3) Minutes of the Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 20 October 2010

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2010 were agreed as correct and were duly signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising

None

(4) Chair's Announcements

None

2. Public Question Time (Standing Order 34)

There were no public questions.

3. Questions to the Portfolio Holder

Councillor Robbins noted that on 16th December 2010 Cabinet will consider a report on primary school places in Warwickshire. She asked for assurance from the Portfolio Holder that there will be sufficient primary school places available to Warwickshire children in 2013. The Portfolio Holder informed the committee that she could not provide guarantees but sought to reassure members that work was already underway aimed at ensuring that sufficient accommodation will be available. This may involve the recommissioning of currently unused classrooms and the allocation of a limited capital amount to allow for new or refurbished accommodation to be provided.

Councillor Hazleton asked whether funds will be available to allow for the merger of Dunchurch Infants School and Dunchurch Primary School. The Portfolio Holder informed the meeting that whilst no funds were available to allow a full merger governors of the two schools were considering a federation of the two schools.

Councillor Perry asked what systems were in place or likely to be put in place to allow for demand for school places to be accurately assessed following the abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies. He was informed that the council currently uses birth data to forecast demand. Councillor Perry then asked whether there is any evidence of the success Warwickshire pupils have in obtaining a place at university. The reply was that the council only monitors NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) data. Councillor Timms added that the authority's concern is to help pupils attain the best results they can at school.

Returning to the issue of primary school places Chris Smart asked whether the emerging pressure for places will be taken account of when considering revisions to the Denominational Transport Policy. The committee was informed that the policy was currently being consulted on and that account will be taken of all comments made up to closing date of 14th January 2011.

4. Statementing of Pupils

The report was presented by Geoff King who opened by explaining that it had been prompted by concerns raised during the recent scrutiny review of permanent school exclusions. He explained that concerns often arise because many people regard the statementing process as starting as soon as the school identifies that a pupil may be having problems. This is only the start of an incremental process that involves varying levels of intervention and support. Geoff King was also keen to emphasise that assessment does not always result in a statement. It is in effect the consideration of whether a statement is needed or not. The Chair thanked Geoff King for introducing the report adding that as well as being commented on during the review into school exclusions the matter of perceived delays was also picked up during the recent review of the Pupil Reintegration Unit.

There then followed a discussion during which the following questions were asked and points made. Whilst he acknowledged the need for a due process Councillor Balaam asked whether it was possible to streamline it. In reply Geoff King noted that the 6 week initial period between which a request for an assessment is made and the local authority decided to undertake one is a minimum. The 10 weeks that elapse between the decision to undertake the assessment and the assessment itself is for practical reasons quite tight. This is because a number of agencies and professionals have to become involved. The point was also made that schools have funds that enable them to provide support during this period. This means that the pupil is not left waiting. The key is to ensure that intervention is made as early as possible.

Chris Smart noted that a critical time for many pupils is when they transfer from year 6 (primary) to year 7 (secondary). In reply the committee was informed that problems often arise because of the

context and culture of secondary schools. Work is being done with Headteachers to make the transition less traumatic. Currently the Early Intervention Service has a budget of £1m to assist vulnerable children through transition.

Councillor Robbins repeated the concerns that it can take up to 6 months to secure adequate support for some children. The committee was told that North Leamington School is currently piloting a scheme whereby it has received an advance on Special Education Needs funds. The school can use these funds to put early intervention measures in place and so avoid greater problems later on. Alison Livesey noted that difficulties arise when parents/carers and schools disagree on a course of action. Parents/carers have a right to request an assessment even if the school does not support them. It was however acknowledged in the meeting that conflicts are rare.

In instances when an assessment is made but the decision is taken not to statement a pupil this will go on their personal record and will move around with the pupil. All parents/carers have access to this information.

Councillor Jackson noted that a pupil can potentially be on School Action Plus for many years. She asked whether a parent/carer can request a shortening of the 6 week lead-in but was informed they could not.

Councillor Balaam asked how the system of assessment and statementing will be affected by the current financial challenges being faced. He was informed that whilst the service will be affected schools (which are already becoming more autonomous) are able to buy in services if they have a pupil who they consider needs assistance.

Councillor May asked about Learning and Support Units and was informed that 8 out of 37 secondary schools countywide have them.

The Chair returned to the role of health professionals in the assessment process and expressed concern that it might be these partners that are causing delays. In reply the committee was informed that whilst response rates by these agencies used to be poor (30% on time) this figure is now 97%. In response to a question from the Chair concerning the future impact of GP commissioning the committee was informed that this may not be an issue depending on what the anticipated Special Education Needs Green Paper says.

It was resolved that:

The committee will consider the issues raised in this report in the light of the Green Paper on Special Educational Needs at its meeting in April 2011.

5 The Education of Children in Care in Warwickshire

This item was introduced by Anne Hawker the Headteacher for the Virtual School for Children in Care. Anne explained that there is now a statutory duty for local authorities to have a senior officer or Headteacher to monitor the progress of children in care. The committee was told that looked after children are not necessarily naughty children. Support covers people aged 3 to 25 (although those aged 19 to 25 only qualify for guidance and advice). Every effort is made to avoid children in care being permanently excluded. In 2008 10 children in care were permanently excluded from school. The figure is currently 1. This reduction has been achieved by the provision of intensive support and a general desire to keep young cared for people in school.

It is normally expected that around 25% of children in care will have statements. However in some cohorts this figure is as big as 38%. There is a heavy emphasis on Key Stage 4 attainment (5 GCSEs grade A* - C including English and Mathematics). In general asylum seekers are excluded from the figures but asylum seekers that are classified as "cared for" are not. With the challenges these people face with English and Maths the performance figures are inevitably low. It was conceded that some illegal exclusions do occur but these are very rare at primary level. The number of asylum seekers increased in recent years but has levelled off now.

The committee was informed that the service was facing a 40% reduction in its budget and that this will impact on service delivery. For example, in future, looked after children who are currently educated out of county may only receive arms length support whereas they currently receive regular visits from Warwickshire staff. The point was made, however, that children will continue to receive good support regardless of their ability. The key is that they should find a positive destination be it in education, training or employment. Presently that figure is 89%.

Most children in care are not aware of the virtual school. They have a mainstream Headteacher but know they can obtain support from their Area Lead if they need it. Carers are more aware of the virtual school.

Some pupils are provided with private tuition. This recognises that in the absence of family support they may benefit from additional support.

It was resolved that;

The committee notes and welcomes the support offered by the Virtual School to children in care in Warwickshire.

6 Profile of Special Education Needs

Geoff King introduced this report explaining that it had arisen as the result of a request from the task and finish group examining permanent school exclusions.

Members noted that financial information on in-county schools was absent from the report and it was agreed that Geoff King would send this to members.

The committee was informed that some out of county placements were as far away as Cumbria. There is a belief amongst some people that residential care is necessary. However this is often only the case when distances make it a requisite. In response to a question from Councillor Balaam the committee was informed that out of county placements are often prompted by a lack of capacity in Warwickshire. In addition some facilities in Warwickshire are in the wrong location. For example River House would be better located in the north of the county.

It was resolved that:

That the Committee notes the contents of the report and supports the Local Authority in implementing the priorities proposed in new legislation to work in collaboration with schools.

7 Feedback from PRU Select Committee

This item was introduced by the Chair who emphasised the need to act promptly on this matter. Members had previously been circulated with the executive summary of the report on the select committee meeting held on 24th November 2010.

Chris Smart expressed some concern that there were two issues that the select committee had not apparently considered. These related to the operating hours of the Pupil Reintegration Unit (PRU) and the cost of operating the PRU. It was pointed out that the briefing note circulated previously had covered these issues although it was conceded that it did not explore why the situation had arisen. It was agreed that Geoff King should find answers to Chris Smart's concerns and bring them to the next meeting of the committee.

There then followed a discussion about the cost of implementing the changes to the PRU. It was generally acknowledged that more efficient working and a reduction in the number of teaching and learning centres would realise savings to be spent in implementing other recommendations. It was acknowledged that if schools are to establish LSUs they will need to identify accommodation and staff resources. Again, however it was felt that support for this could come from savings made by changes to the PRUs. the Chair was keen to emphasise that any money saved by restructuring must not be diverted elsewhere.

Councillor Rickhards called for an additional recommendation seeking to encourage the development of further Learning Support Units. The committee agreed to this. (See resolution at end of this item).

Diana Turner observed that as a governor she has previously sent information to the local authority regarding pupils. She was not however convinced that the information was acted on.

Councillor Ross moved, seconded by Councillor Hazelton and it was resolved:

That the Cabinet:

- (1) Authorises the Strategic Director of Children, Young People and Families to take immediate action to
 - (a) restructure the whole of the PRU service including a reduction in the number of centres from 4 to 2 no later than the commencement of the September 2011 term. There should be one centre in the North and one in the Central area.
 - (b) consult with the Strategic Director of Resources to identify possible alternative sites, particularly for the Keresley Centre, and to bring proposals forward to Cabinet at the earliest opportunity.
 - (c) secure proper provision for the teaching of science at all the PRU centres to ensure that pupils receive their educational entitlement.
 - (d) ensure there is provision for a hot meal at each of the PRU centres as a matter of urgency
 - (e) ensure that from September 2011 the 2 centres should be available for KS3 and 4 pupils only and have adequate provision for English, Maths and Science on site supported by adequate ICT facilities.
 - (f) come forward with recommendations to Cabinet for alternative arrangements as a matter of urgency to ensure that primary school children are not accommodated within the PRU from September 2011 onwards.
- (2) Asks the Lead Portfolio Holder Children, Young People and Families in consultation with the Strategic Director of Children, Young People and Families to put forward proposals to Cabinet before the end of January 2011 for a Strategic Plan to meet the needs of excluded pupils or those at risk of exclusion which includes different and separate alternative provision for excluded primary school children.

The Strategic Plan should be supported by a business case and a plan for implementation

- (3) Authorises the Strategic Director of Children, Young People and Families to put in place arrangements in consultation with Heads of Primary and Secondary Schools and the Area Behaviour Partnerships to ensure in the short-term there are standing arrangements for
 - (a) A CAF to be carried out where a pupil is at risk of exclusion
 - (b) the Head of PRU/Head of Centre to be invited to every CAF Assessment where there is the possibility of permanent exclusion
 - (c) the PRU has contact details for a person who can give an informed view of the pupil on the referral to the PRU following exclusion
- (4) Asks the Strategic Director of Children, Young People and Families to develop an information passport to improve the information being passed from schools to the PRU and from the PRU to schools.
- (5) Asks the Strategic Director of Children, Young People and Families to actively encourage the development of Learning Support Units in secondary schools in consultation with Headteachers and the Area Behaviour Partnerships
- (6) That progress on implementing these recommendations should be reported to the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee within 6 months.

8. Work Programme 2010-11

The Chair reminded the committee that the meeting considering pupil attainment scheduled for 2nd February 2010 will last all day. Following a suggestion from Jane Pollard it was also agreed that the committee will consider a report on the Education White Paper on 2nd February. Councillor Hazleton noted that he was due to attend a training course on the afternoon of the 2nd February and the Chair suggested that it may be necessary to see about moving the date of the course.

9. Any Other Items

There were no urgent items.

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Chair

The Committee rose at 12:17 p.m.