

Minutes of the Meeting of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 8 June 2011

Present:

Members of the Committee

Councillor Carol Fox
Councillor Julie Jackson
Councillor David Johnston (replacing Councillor Peter Balaam)
Councillor Mike Perry
Councillor Carolyn Robbins
Councillor John Ross
Councillor Martin Shaw
Councillor June Tandy (Chair)
Councillor Sonja Wilson

Invited representatives

Max Hyde (Teacher Representative)
Chris Smart (Governor Representative)
Diana Turner (Governor Representative)
Joseph Cannon (Church Representative)
Alison Livesey (Governor Representative)

Other County Councillors

Councillor Heather Timms (Portfolio Holder for Child Safeguarding, Early Intervention and Schools)

Invited guests

Jill Potts, IDS Parent Steering Group
Sue Robus, Parent Partnership Service
Elaine Stock, Avon Valley School
Ann Clucas, Shipston High School

Officers

Elizabeth Featherstone, Head of Service – Early Intervention Services
Mark Gore, Head of Service – Learning and Achievement
Liz Holt, Head of Children's Strategic Commissioning
Michelle McHugh, Overview & Scrutiny Manager
Richard Maybey, Democratic Services Officer
Jessica Nash, Service Manager Strategic Commissioning (SEN)
Viv Sales, Principal Education Social Worker
Simon Smith, Strategic Finance Manager

1. General

(1) Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

Nominated by Councillor Julie Jackson and seconded by Councillor David Johnston, Councillor June Tandy was duly elected Chair of the committee with 7 votes in favour and 2 against.

Nominated by Councillor Mike Perry and seconded by Councillor Martin Shaw, Councillor John Ross was duly elected Vice-Chair of the committee with 9 votes in favour and none against.

(2) Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed Jill Potts, Sue Robus, Elaine Stock and Ann Clucas to the meeting to represent the views of headteachers, parents and special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCOs) in relation to agenda item 4, the SEN Green Paper consultation with stakeholders.

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Peter Balaam and Clive Rickhards.

(3) Members Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

Councillor Julie Jackson declared a personal interest for all items as a Governor of Oakwood Special Schools and as the relative of a child with special educational needs.

Councillor Julie Jackson declared a personal interest in Item 7 as a former member of the PRU Management Committee.

Councillor Carolyn Robbins declared a personal interest in Item 4 as the relative of two children with special educational needs.

(4) Minutes of the meeting held on 6 April 2011

An amendment was requested to include Alison Livesey as present at the meeting

(5) Minutes of the meeting held on 10 May 2011

An amendment was requested to remove the first instance of "post-16" on page in paragraph 1(2).

(6) Chair's announcements

The Chair explained to the committee that the report on Academies and Traded Services (originally planned for this meeting) had been deferred to a Special Meeting of the Committee in order to consider it alongside a Cabinet report on Relationships with Schools. It was agreed that this Special Meeting would take place on 4 July 2011 at 10am in Committee Room 2, Shire Hall.

The Chair reminded members of the site visit to the Pupil Referral Units (PRU) at Keresely and Pound Lane on 9 June 2011, and confirmed that final arrangements would be circulated to them in advance.

2. Public Question Time (Standing Order 34)

None.

3. Questions to the Portfolio Holder

Councillor David Johnston, with reference to a recent television programme highlighting child poverty in the UK, asked what representations the Portfolio Holder has made to central government to request no further funding reductions in this area.

Councillor Heather Timms explained that child poverty falls under the remit of the Council's Communities group and is outside of her portfolio. However, she confirmed that the Council will be looking at the impact of funding reductions and making representations to government where appropriate.

4. SEN Green Paper (consultation with stakeholders)

Jessica Nash, Service Manager Strategic Commissioning (SEN), introduced the paper, explaining that a range of stakeholders (including Local Authority representatives, elected members, schools and academies) had been approached to respond to the consultation questions. These responses were collated within Appendix C of the report, and Jessica welcomed the committee's comments.

During discussion, it was suggested that the Local Authority's response to the Green Paper should highlight the following points:

4.1 The focus towards certain SEN groups

- 4.1.1 The definition of special educational needs (SEN) is too medicalised, and does not recognise problems induced by social factors (such as drug abuse, alcohol abuse, family breakdown etc)
- 4.1.2 The focus on high-level medial needs addresses the minority of children with SEN, not the majority
- 4.1.3 The removal of School Action and School Action Plus will shift the focus towards the minority (with complex SEN) and away from the majority (with less complex needs)
- 4.1.4 Early identification is a worthy objective, but difficult to achieve, especially in children under the age of 3, as many indicators of SEN do not become apparent until after 3 years of age. Plus, many special needs (such as mental health issues) develop

later in life due to social factors, and it is important to address those problems as they occur

- 4.1.5 There is a minimal recognition that some learning difficulties are brought about by other conditions such as dyspraxia
- 4.1.6 Children in care have different needs and vulnerabilities than those with parental support

4.2 Assessment process

- 4.2.1 A single assessment framework requires participation from all partners, including health professionals. Concern was raised that the involvement of health professionals could not be guaranteed, especially in the context of the current NHS reforms, without a written statutory agreement requiring participation being developed
- 4.2.2 The link between schools and CAMHS needs to be improved to make communication easier and faster
- 4.2.3 The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is a good mechanism to get all parties talking around the same table, and it can encourage more parental responsibility
- 4.2.4 The removal of School Action Plus may create a risk that issues are not identified early enough

In response to these points, officers confirmed that:

- There is commitment from both the Local Authority and the NHS for Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) to be a truly shared assessment, and discussions are ongoing.
- The head of CAMHS is appointing five new Primary Mental Health Workers to work in the community and facilitate the link between schools, parents, families and mental health professionals
- Regular reports on the development of CAMHS are being received by the Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

4.3 Parental involvement

- 4.3.1 A statutory responsibility on parents could help ensure that children are able to access their entitlements to support and care. However, some parents have SEN themselves, which would make this difficult to enforce
- 4.3.2 The effectiveness of CAMHS is dependent on parents taking children to their appointments, for which there is no guarantee
- 4.3.3 Some parents are reluctant to send their children to a special school because of the stigma associated with SEN. This needs to be addressed, as special schools are often the most appropriate and effective learning environment. An assessment framework would help parents in understanding their child's needs
- 4.3.4 The views of parents should be taken into account, and it should be acknowledged that these may differ from those of the professionals. However, a balance is needed to ensure that

children's entitlements are met when parents make bad judgements or fail to act responsibly

- 4.3.5 The approach to SEN, as well as the consultation, should be more child-centred. Many young people within the SEN age bracket are old enough to vote and their views should be more actively sought. Furthermore, some young people do not want their parents involved in their care

4.4 Access to care and support

- 4.4.1 Parents need clearer and easier signposting for who to contact in order to access support
- 4.4.2 The transition of care from primary to secondary education is currently very good, but work is needed to improve the transfer to post-16 to ensure young people can access the right opportunities and the support they need

4.5 Governance

- 4.5.1 More detail is required about the monitoring procedure in relation to personal budgets; what will this be and how will it work
- 4.5.2 Clarification is needed around who controls the personal budget when, for example, a young person moves away to college. Concern was also raised about how to ensure the personal budget is used for its intended purpose

4.6 General

- 4.6.1 The importance of anger management services should be stressed, as these can make the difference between a young person going to prison or not
- 4.6.2 Sex and relationships education should be included as an entitlement for children with SEN
- 4.6.3 There should be a more positive statement about removing barriers to employment, rather than just using mechanisms like Remploy. It should be reinforced that individuals with SEN can actively and positively contribute to the economy
- 4.6.4 The consultation should also seek the views of the WACKY Forum
- 4.6.5 Parents need more support in relation to choosing whether to send their children to special schools or mainstream schools
- 4.6.6 There should be statutory health checks for SEN children during primary and secondary education to ensure they are equipped with all necessary measures to assist their learning, such as eye glasses

In conclusion, the Chair noted that this had been a difficult subject to consider without referring to specific examples within Warwickshire, and thanked visitors, members and officers for the open and honest discussion.

Resolved: the Committee's comments and recommendations would be collated for inclusion within the report to Cabinet.

The Committee rose at 11.40am for a 10-minute break.

5. Impact of Government Spending Review on the Children, Young People and Families Directorate

Simon Smith, Strategic Finance Manager, introduced the report, which summarised the process adopted by the Children, Young People and Families (CYPF) Directorate in setting its budget for 2011/12. He explained that the main spending pressure was for legal casework in relation to Safeguarding and Looked After Children, and that the approach to savings was to identify priorities rather than “salami-slicing” across all services. The reduction in grants from central government has resulted in a further 330 staff being placed at risk of redundancy, in addition to those already at risk due to the savings plan.

In discussion, the following points were raised:

5.1 Direction of travel for CYPF

- 5.1.1 The report includes reference to the directorate’s “goal” and the “interim measures” it will use, but does not explain what either of these are. Officers explained that the CYPF directorate has a clear strategy for where it wants to be by 2013, which is in line with national service reviews and moving towards evidence-based programmes and targeted support
- 5.1.2 Clarification was sought over the meaning of paragraph 7.9.1. Officers explained that there has been a review of the services funded via grant to see if these could be offset by the directorate’s targeted support, which would enable a phasing of the reductions
- 5.1.3 A benefit of Warwickshire’s current youth service provision is that it provides an environment where young people with different needs and abilities integrate and learn from each another. Moving towards targeted support will take this away. Officers agreed that it was important to have strong universal services available, and informed the Committee that Cabinet would be receiving a paper soon detailing how targeted support would work for the youth service

5.2 Impact of service reductions

- 5.2.1 Details were requested on the membership and methodology of the Transformation Programme Board. Officers explained that:
 - The Board comprises Heads of Service and finance officers, and there is clear accountability for who is responsible for each savings proposal
 - A simple Red/Amber/Green rating system is used to ensure that issues are looked at according to priority
 - Heads of Service are able to see the impact of their savings across the whole directorate

- Any deviations to the savings plan are reported to the budget working group and to Cabinet in its regular financial monitoring reports
 - So far, the Board has only been looking at financial performance, but it will also consider the impact on services
 - Ensuring the reductions are managed equitably across the county is the intention, but this can be difficult as delivery is based on needs assessment
 - The centralisation of regional teams is underway, which will allow savings to be reinvested in frontline services
- 5.2.2 Members agreed that the Committee had an important role to play in scrutinising the outcomes and impacts of the funding reductions and to assess if those impacts could be mitigated by work in other areas
- 5.2.3 The Committee expressed its wish to be kept informed of any deviations to the savings plans

5.3 Cost pressures

- 5.3.1 Members sought clarity over the rising demand for legal casework around child protection and whether this is expected to continue to grow. Officers explained that:
- Demand for casework around child protection and looked after children is increasing, although the rate of increase is slowing
 - The Local Authority has no control over the number of unaccompanied children seeking asylum that require services. While some funding is provided by central government, it is unclear if this covers all costs. This may be an area that the Committee would like to scrutinise in the future
 - The Munro report on child safeguarding will have an impact on the future direction of services, and a stronger focus on early intervention is expected
 - The Committee may wish to consider the implications of the Munro report in advance of the relevant Cabinet paper

5.4 Academies

- 5.4.1 Members asked for an update on the implications that Academies will have on the Local Authority schools' budget. Officers explained that:
- The Local Authority Central Expenditure grant has already been reduced by £1.4m in 2011/12 in order to fund the government's Academies strategy. A similar reduction is expected for 2012/13
 - Reductions to the Dedicated Schools Grant happen in real time, as and when schools transfer to Academy status
 - Consultation is underway on Academy funding, to look at potential double-counting of funding across Academies and Local Authority schools

Resolved: the Committee noted the report and agreed to consider how it would scrutinise the impact of the savings proposals under the Work Programme item later on the agenda.

The Committee rose at 12.30pm for lunch, and resumed at 1.30pm

6. Scrutiny of Bullying

Liz Holt, Head of Children's Strategic Commissioning, introduced the report which outlines progress since the 2009 scrutiny review and the challenges faced by reduced resources.

Liz summarised the positive aspects of the report, such as the workshops for Year 7 pupils that are helping schools to manage bullying in-house; the Family Information Service that offers a helpline, signposting and outreach work; and the sub-regional work which is enabling greater value for money.

She also stressed that as resources are reduced, an alternative vision will be needed, such as finding a new way to work with schools in the absence of Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) funding.

Liz concluded by paying tribute to the work of Rachel Evans, the County Anti-Bullying Co-ordinator, who passed away in March 2011.

The Chair offered the Committee's sympathies to Rachel Evans' family and friends. During discussion, the following comments were noted:

- 6.1 The most common perceived cause of bullying is a young person's appearance. Members felt that more could be done to address this in schools, for example through the recycling of uniforms
- 6.2 Regarding cases of cyber-bullying, Facebook is more likely to take action if it is informed of under-age users
- 6.3 The escalating use of sexual language in bullying needs to be addressed
- 6.4 Members asked for more detail regarding the remit and outcomes of the Year 7 workshops. Officers explained that:
 - Workshops have been held at 10 schools
 - They looked at the attitudes of pupils before and after the session
 - It appeared that pupils were more sensitive and aware of the issues following the sessions
 - Some schools were concerned about raising issues that pupils may not yet be aware of
 - A "Stop Cyber Bullying" pilot project was commissioned at Harris School in Rugby, which led to a touring production seen by 350 primary pupils across the county. Unfortunately, the feedback responses to this project have been lost so it is not possible to properly analyse the project's success

Resolved: the Committee noted the progress that has been made in implementing the recommendations from the Scrutiny of Bullying Review and requested that the Committee receive a progress report in 12 months time. It also requested that the analysis report of the Year 7 workshops be circulated to the Committee as soon as possible.

7. Work programme

The Chair confirmed that the Committee's proposed Task & Finish Group on post-16 transport had been commissioned by the Overview & Scrutiny Board, and the membership agreed.

Resolved: after discussion about future work items, the Committee agreed that the following be added to the work programme:

- **A report detailing the service impact of the 2011/12 saving plans be considered at the meeting in March 2012**
- **The Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) report at the September 2011 meeting should include proposals for how the Local Authority will monitor the work of the Area Behaviour Panels**

8. Any Other Items

There were no urgent items.

The meeting rose at 2.30pm