

Children and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee Minutes of the meeting held at 10.00am on 2 February 2012

Present:

Members of the Committee

Councillor Peter Balaam
Councillor Carol Fox
Councillor Julie Jackson
Councillor Clive Rickhards
Councillor Carolyn Robbins
Councillor John Ross (Vice Chair)
Councillor Martin Shaw
Councillor June Tandy (Chair)
Councillor Sonja Wilson

Co-opted members

Sharon Ansell (Parent Governor)
Joseph Cannon (Church Governor)

Invited representatives

Sharon Ansell, Max Hyde, Chris Smart, Diana Turner

Other County Councillors

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

Officers

Mark Gore, Head of Service – Learning and Achievement
Richard Maybey, Democratic Services Officer – Law & Governance
Kevin McGovern, Group Manager – Transport & Highways
Phil Sawbridge, Head of Service – Children in Need Division
Brenda Vincent, Service Manager – Safeguarding

1. General

1.1 Apologies

- Alison Livesey, Councillor Mike Perry and Rex Pogson

1.2 Members' Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

- None

1.3 Minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2011:

- Councillor Jackson requested that paragraph 1.2 be amended to read that her daughter is an employee of North Warwickshire and Hinckley College, not a student as stated
- Subject to the above amendment, the minutes were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair

Minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2012:

- Agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair

1.4 Matters arising from the meeting held on 14 December 2011

- Paragraph 3.1 – Mark Gore confirmed that schools have been given extra time to respond to the consultation on proposed changes to Warwickshire’s admission arrangements

Matters arising from the meeting held on 17 January 2012

- Paragraph 12.4 – Mark Gore stated that further clarification is being sought from the Department for Education about the relative responsibilities of the local authority and schools with Academy status. A Memorandum of Understanding is being developed by legal officers for Academies to clarify where responsibilities lie. Cllr Tandy requested that this document should be reviewed by the Committee at the earliest opportunity
- Paragraph 12.5 – Mark Gore stated that he will liaise with Greta Needham, who has recently returned from leave, in order to pursue a response to the Committee’s concerns. Diana Turner suggested that the issue could be pursued via local Members of Parliament.

2. Public Question Time

Passenger Transport Assistants

2.1 Mr Richard Cobb asked the following questions in relation to the Council’s decision to remove Passenger Transport Assistants (PTAs) from the Ferncumbe School bus:

- a) “Why was the health and safety assessment limited only to the start and end points of the journey, and not the journey as a whole?”
- b) “How did the Council arrive at its total savings target of £700,000 (given that the annual cost of the Ferncumbe bus is only around £6,000)?”
- c) “Is it appropriate for the decision to go ahead while the corporate complaints related to this matter have not been resolved?”
- d) “Why have other bus routes in the county been allowed to retain their PTAs?”

2.2 Mark Gore and Cllr Heather Timms provided the following responses:

- a) The local authority has a statutory responsibility for the safety of children getting on and off the bus, but not the journey
- b) The £700,000 target (part of a package of savings) was estimated not just from staff costs, but also the renegotiation of bus contracts, which currently involve a premium due to the requirement of PTAs
- c) The issue of outstanding corporate complaints does not provide a reason for further deferral of the decision
- d) All routes are assessed against the same criteria. Some are still under previous contracts and will be assessed when due for renewal

2.3 Also on the subject of PTAs, Andy Brettle, head teacher at Bishops Tachbrook School, asked the following:

“Given that the Ofsted framework now considers safety and behaviour as a single element, and that the risk assessments have made no consideration of behaviour during the journey, will the Council reconsider its decision to remove PTAs from bus services to Bishops Tachbrook School following the February half term?”

- 2.4 In support of the public questions, Cllr Jose Compton stated that parents and teachers are very concerned about the safety of children should PTAs be removed. Some parents, especially of younger children, may chose to drive instead, which will lead to further congestion on already busy roads.
- 2.5 In response, Cllr Heather Timms stated that clear exception criteria exist for the retention of PTAs, particularly around vulnerable children and those with behavioural issues. Any contracts due for renewal that do not meet these exception criteria will be given notice of termination. Cllr Timms said she would consider carefully the representations made, but did not believe it would be possible to make an exception for the cases presented today.
- 2.6 During discussion, members of the Committee made the following comments:
- a) While there is a need for budget cuts across all services, the safety of children is a statutory duty and this issue decision should be reviewed
 - b) If the risk assessment criteria allow for children as young as 4 to travel on buses alone, then the criteria are not acceptable
 - c) If responsibility was delegated from the local authority to the school, then schools could use their reserve funds to provide the service
 - d) The Committee should include this as a special scrutiny topic at its next meeting, with a view to recommending the Portfolio Holder puts forward funding for PTAs as a special budgetary pressure
 - e) It would be useful for elected members to be informed when bus routes are due for renewal, so arrangements can be made for volunteers to come forward
- 2.7 Cllr Tandy moved the following resolution:
The Overview & Scrutiny Committee asks the Portfolio Holder to defer the removal of Passenger Transport Assistants from school buses, while the policy is reviewed and the outcome of the review is considered at the next Committee meeting on April 25 2012
The motion was carried with 6 votes in favour and 3 against. Cllr Timms agreed to respond to the resolution in due course.

3. Questions to the Portfolio Holder

- 3.1 Cllr Tandy shared a concern raised by the Council’s representative on the PRU Management Committee regarding provision of alternative education by Shaftesbury Young People (SYP). The Portfolio Holder was asked to explain the circumstances and latest developments.
- 3.2 Cllr Timms explained that SYP is a charity that has been commissioned to provide alternative education for children with significant behavioural

difficulties. These children demonstrate behaviours that can no longer be catered for at the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU).

- 3.3 On the first day of the contract with SYP, children were sent home early due to staffing issues. The unit was not fully staffed because not all staff had been properly checked. The local authority is working with SYP to resolve the issues and measures are being implemented to ensure that the children have access to suitable education provision. The local authority will continue to monitor the situation.
- 3.4 Cllr Tandy requested that an update be attached to the report on Area Behaviour Partnerships scheduled for the meeting on 25 April 2012.

4. Young Carers

Following a brief introduction to the report, Mark Gore and Phil Sawbridge offered the following responses to questions from members:

- a) The local authority is not aware of any forthcoming changes that would affect the 37% funding contribution from Health
- b) It is very difficult to judge how many young carers there are in the county, as it requires them to self-identify or be officially identified by a supporting agency
- c) The service is a statutory duty of the local authority, and there are no plans to reduce it as a consequence of budget reductions
- d) The service could be affected if the annual fundraising target of £50,000 is not met or exceeded. However, young carers do attract support from various organisations, so the target is deemed realistic

Resolved:

The Committee acknowledges that the needs of young carers are continuing to be met by the voluntary Carers Support Service

5. Addressing NEETs

- 5.1 Mark Gore introduced the report, highlighting that the number of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) is always changing and questions remain about what constitutes a positive destination. The report shows that the NEET rate continues to be highest in Nuneaton & Bedworth and North Warwickshire. It also summarises some of the actions the local authority has taken to address the problem, such as:
 - a) A contract with Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Partnership to deliver Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) that prioritises support for NEETs and vulnerable groups
 - b) A developing strategy to address NEETs in the context of the Raising of the Participation Age (RPA)
 - c) Early identification and intervention for those at risk of becoming NEET

- 5.2 During discussion, the following points were noted:
- a) The prioritisation of support for vulnerable groups may lead to an increase in the NEET rate among those not deemed at risk
 - b) While early intervention is important, it is also important that young people are supported to make the right decisions at later stages
 - c) School governing bodies need to act now to ensure they are equipped to provide impartial careers advice for when this duty transfers to them from the local authority in September 2012
 - d) While the availability of new apprenticeships in Warwickshire is positive, these are often only suitable for young people with specific experience or qualifications. This does not help the majority of NEETs, especially those in the most deprived areas
 - e) It is important to tackle the cycle of unemployment and lack of aspiration among young people that exists in certain communities
 - f) Young people need to be better educated about how to market themselves and actively seek out employment opportunities
 - g) It is important to monitor the success rates of young people in post-16 education to ensure that they are on the most appropriate course
- 5.3 Mark Gore agreed to inform the Committee which schools are participating in the Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI) trial (paragraph 6.4), and to clarify points 3 and 4 of the RONI criteria (appendix B).

Resolved:

That there is a need for continued support across the county for young people who are NEET, with a particular focus on areas where NEETs are disproportionately high.

6. Corporate Parenting

- 6.1 Brenda Vincent introduced the report, seeking the Committee's continued support for the Fostering Service as the key service through which the Council fulfils its duties as a Corporate Parent. The report also asked the Committee to support the annual delivery of training for elected members on Corporate Parenting responsibilities.
- 6.2 Brenda introduced two foster carers to share their experience of the Fostering Service.
- 6.3 Norma Wilson explained that she has been a foster carer for 23 years, over which time she has cared for over 100 looked after children (LAC). She now also helps new foster carers in their training and development. Norma praised the support she receives from the local authority, especially the designated LAC teachers in schools, who help to focus children and improve their attendance, behaviour and attainment.
- 6.4 Nigel Pendleton, a foster carer for 6 years, supported Norma's comments, stating that it was very important for LAC to have the right grounding, and that the support of school representatives is very important to achieving

this. There was wide support from members for the work of foster carers and the Fostering Service.

- 6.5 In response to a proposal that the wording at paragraph 5.1 be amended to read:

*“All Elected Members **are enabled to** become conversant with their responsibilities as corporate parents through an annual training event and receive Corporate Parenting Briefings as determined by the Board.”*

Phil Sawbridge confirmed that the relevant training sessions have been added to the current Member Development Programme. Cllr Tandy requested that these sessions be open to the Committee’s co-opted members and invited representatives.

- 6.6 In response to a question about how the local authority monitors external providers, Phil Sawbridge explained that there is a single system for planning and reviewing the care of all Looked After Children, whether they are placed through the Fostering Service (the preferred route) or through alternative provision.

7. Draft Framework for Organising Education Provision in Warwickshire

Cllr Tandy informed members that this draft version is currently out for consultation, and a final version would be brought to the Committee’s meeting on 25 April 2012, before being taken to Cabinet in May.

8. Work Programme 2011-12

- 8.1 Chris Smart asked that there should be an item on every agenda to consider mainstream schooling issues. Chris agreed to liaise with Cllr Tandy outside the meeting to clarify what topics this could include.
- 8.2 Diana Turner suggested that the Committee should look at how schools are taking forward their new duty to provide impartial careers advice (from September 2012). Mark Gore agreed to consider how such data could be gathered from schools, and would report back to the Committee under Matters Arising.
- 8.3 Following a request from Cllr Jackson, it was agreed that a report on school attainment across the county be added to the work programme for the December meeting.

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Chair

The meeting rose at 11.50am