

## **Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 6 September 2012**

### **Present:**

#### **Members of the Committee**

Cllr Ashford (replacing Cllr Shaw)  
Cllr Balaam  
Cllr Clarke (replacing Cllr Fox)  
Cllr Foster  
Cllr Fowler

Cllr Jackson (Chair)  
Cllr Naylor (replacing Cllr Tandy)  
Cllr Perry  
Cllr Rickhards  
Cllr Ross (Vice Chair)

#### **Co-opted members and invited representatives**

Alison Livesey  
Chris Smart  
Diana Turner

#### **Other councillors**

Cllr Timms (Portfolio Holder, Children and Schools)  
Cllr Tooth (attending as a member of the public)

#### **Officers**

Mark Gore – Head of Service, Learning and Achievement  
Yvonne Rose – Service Manager, Secondary Phase  
Richard Maybey – Democratic Services Officer

#### **1.1 Apologies for absence**

Received from Cllr Carol Fox, Cllr Martin Shaw, Cllr June Tandy, Rex Pogson, Joseph Cannon, Wendy Fabbro and Phil Sawbridge

#### **1.2 Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests**

A general declaration of interest was noted for all members in their roles as school governors and/or trustees.

Diana Turner and Alison Livesey declared non-pecuniary interests regarding family members using post-16 transport.

Cllr Ashford declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of the Corporate Parenting Steering Group.

#### **1.3 Minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2012**

Cllr Perry observed that his contributions were not recorded in the minutes and asked that they be included as follows:

Add to paragraph 1.5.3

“Cllr Perry asked that this include confirmation of the numbers of assistants and children taken by taxi, and whether these numbers had risen or remained static.”

Add to paragraph 1.5.8

“Cllr Perry questioned what the requirements are for access to outdoor space and was advised that the rules had been relaxed.”

Add to paragraph 6.7

“Cllr Perry asked how the Local Authority can assist the bright children and what vocational opportunities are available. He also requested a breakdown of schools with vocational training, including numbers and destinations.”

The Chair agreed for these additions to be reviewed by the Committee at the next meeting prior to approval. The minutes of the previous meeting, as printed, were agreed as a correct record.

#### **1.4 Matters Arising**

##### Paragraph 1.5.7 – Learning Support Units (LSUs)

Mark Gore explained that the latest figures on LSU provision in all schools are still being collected, but agreed to circulate these when available.

##### Paragraph 1.5.8 – Visit to site of the former PRU at Keresely

Mark Gore agreed to make arrangements for a visit to the Keresely site for any members who were interested.

##### Paragraph 9.0 – Payment Ordered by the Local Government Ombudsman

Members asked that they be provided with a copy of the Ombudsman report. Mark Gore also agreed to provide an update on the case at the next meeting.

#### **1.5 Chair’s Announcements**

The Chair announced that the expected report on Special Educational Needs (SEN) had been deferred as a result of delayed guidance from central government.

#### **2 Public Question Time**

- 2.1 Cllr Sid Tooth asked two questions to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Schools, Cllr Timms, in relation to a family in his area. He explained how a young single parent, with health problems and no car, had been unable to secure a school place for her youngest child at her preferred choice, close to the schools of her two other boys. The place offered by the County Council is 1.5 miles away in the opposite direction, creating major difficulties for her in terms of escorting her children to their respective schools. Cllr Tooth asked the following:
1. Will the Portfolio Holder agree for this case to be reviewed?
  2. Are the County Council's policies, aims and objectives – focused around family well-being and early intervention – being undermined by bureaucratic processes?
- 2.2 Cllr Timms explained that the case did go through the appeals process and work has been done to find an acceptable solution for the family. A place was offered at a school in Camp Hill which the mother has not accepted. Officers will contact the mother again to ensure she is aware of the offer. The issues around school place offers for siblings would be included in the consultation on admission arrangements (November 2012).
- 2.3 Mark Gore added that while school admissions may be seen as a bureaucratic process, this is necessary to comply with the policy and criteria issued by central government. If they were not complied with, the Local Authority would be liable to challenge. The appeals panel found that the criteria were applied correctly and the

Local Authority acted properly; they then considered the proposed circumstances of the family, but rejected the appeal. There has been no change of circumstances subsequently, and therefore no basis for allowing a second appeal.

2.4 There was discussion about the support available to parents during the admissions process, from filling out the initial forms, to their rights during appeals, to the option of appealing to the Ombudsman. Mark agreed to look at reissuing the processes and support offered to parents.

2.5 Members expressed some concern that processes and bureaucracy were overriding common sense, and the best outcome for families was not therefore being achieved. There was call for some flexibility in the application of policies in order to achieve better outcomes.

2.6 Cllr Timms stated that some of the difficulties around school admissions is due to the insufficiency of places, and the Local Authority does all it can to offer the best solution for families. Mark Gore added that it would not be right for officers to be making subjective decisions about placements, and objective policies and criteria need to be in place to ensure fairness for all. Cllr Timms said that communicating the process to parents is essential, which will be taken forward during the consultation on admissions arrangements during November.

2.7 The Chair thanked Cllr Tooth for attending and bringing this case to the attention of the Portfolio Holder. She stated that the Committee may wish to consider admissions arrangements as part of their future work programme.

**Resolved:**

- The Local Authority will re-contact the family to ensure they are aware of the offer of a place at the school in Camp Hill.
- The Committee asks the Local Authority to review the advice and support available to families during the admissions process.

**3 Questions to the Portfolio Holder**

3.1 Cllr Perry asked if the Local Authority had data on the number of hours each school was allocating to sport and if it was actively engaging with schools to promote the importance of sport.

3.2 Cllr Timms replied that curriculum issues are the responsibility of the schools themselves, set by the head teachers and overseen by the board of governors. The Local Authority has limited resources, which have to be prioritised on tackling underperformance and raising aspiration. However, members are free to contact their local schools individually for information on participation, and there are a number of organisations, such as the Coventry & Warwickshire Sports Partnership, that may have information to share.

3.3 Diana Turner suggested that school governors be reminded of their responsibilities towards sport at the next Governors Forum meeting and at local patch meetings.

**Resolved:**

- Diana Turner to include responsibility for sport on the agenda of the next Governors Forum meeting.

- Richard Maybey to contact the Coventry & Warwickshire Sports Partnership to request data on sports participation in schools.

#### **4 Implementation of the Munro Review of Child Protection**

4.1 Mark Gore presented this report on behalf of Phil Sawbridge, explaining that it was primarily a report for information, but welcomed any questions from the Committee. During the ensuing discussion, the following points were noted:

- a. The “greater understanding” needed around the role of the Principal Social Worker (Recommendation 14) was due to a lack of detail from central government about what role this would have in the child protection system. Once a greater understanding has been acquired, the Local Authority can then develop and define the role further.
- b. A balance needs to be struck between prioritising front-line social work and compliance with organisational directives, as this is one of the most heavily regulated areas of public sector work.
- c. Warwickshire’s Statement of Assurance over the dual role of the Director of Children’s Services has been held up as a national model of good practice. The Portfolio Holder gave assurance that this statement is being reviewed regularly.
- d. Members referenced the historic imbalance of caseloads for Newly Qualified Social Workers across the county, with those in the north having greater caseloads than those in the south. The Portfolio Holder stated that the recent management restructure and relocation of teams is helping to address this, and agreed to provide an update on the current caseload situation.
- e. Members were encouraged by the Local Authority’s participation in the Munro Demonstrator programme. However, there was some concern about the potential pressure on social work capacity, given the limited associated budget of £20,000. Cllr Timms stated that, as a Munro Demonstrator, the Local Authority would be better equipped to empower staff with the latest best practices and knowledge – and that capacity would not be an issue. Mark Gore added that this programme (along with others, such as the Dartington research project) would help the Local Authority become more effective in its early intervention work, which would thereby reduce the number of entrants to the care system and relieve pressure on social work capacity.
- f. Members talked about the need for better communication between schools and safeguarding agencies to ensure families get help as early as possible. Cllr Timms stated that the Local Authority will be commissioning lower-level intervention services in schools from November to address family issues early, and these will link in with wider initiatives such as Think Family and Troubled Families

4.2 In conclusion, the Chair welcomed the report – particularly the news of Warwickshire’s selection as a Munro Demonstrator site. She also welcomed the Portfolio Holder’s commitment to regularly review the Statement of Assurance for the dual role of the Director of Children’s Services.

#### **5 Sub-regional Collaboration**

Cllr Timms introduced the report, stating that positive relationships are being developed between both officers and lead members across the sub-region (Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull) and that there is a commitment to working together whenever it is beneficial to do so. The report is an early indication of the type of projects being considered for sub-regional collaboration.

**Resolved:**

The Committee welcomed the commitment in paragraph 1.1 to bring a further report, when appropriate, detailing areas of collaboration and anticipated savings

**6 Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)**

- 6.1 Yvonne Rose introduced the report, which provided performance data on the numbers of young people classed as NEET, and highlighted a number of factors:
- The Department for Education's new measurement for NEETs, which has had an effect on the figures from 2011/12.
  - Forthcoming changes to the participation age, which will rise to 17 by 2013 and to 18 by 2015.
  - Initiatives targeted towards NEETs from vulnerable groups.
  - The development of a Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI) that allows schools to target students and take early remedial action.
- 6.2 The following points were noted during discussion:
- a. Future reports of this kind would be more useful if they contained actual NEET numbers, not just percentages.
  - b. There is evidence in the county of employers recruiting from the NEET register, which is positive.
  - c. The Local Authority is trying to influence employers to offer more apprenticeships, and any assistance that elected members can offer in their local areas would be appreciated.
  - d. The report shows that young people with the status "Not Available Left Area" is classed as a negative outcome. This is a government directive.

**Resolved:**

- The Committee to receive an annual report on NEET performance, containing actual figures alongside percentages
- The Committee to receive a briefing note outlining the number of apprenticeship opportunities in the county, and the work being undertaken with partners and the Local Enterprise Partnership to increase these

**7 Commissioning of Post-16 Provision**

Yvonne Rose introduced the report, stating that in the new education landscape, the Local Authority needs to work with providers and use its influencing skills to ensure a suitable diversity of post-16 education provision. The following points were noted during discussion:

- a. The Council's statutory duty to "secure suitable education and training" relates to availability and access, but not transportation.
- b. Where there is over-provision, i.e., multiple school 6<sup>th</sup> forms in an area, the Local Authority is working as a broker between institutions to help them work more efficiently – for example, through collaboration on timetables that allows students to study across multiple sites.
- c. While the government is raising the participation age for education and training, there will be no additional funding to subsidise student transport costs.

**Resolved:**

- The Committee asks that the Portfolio Holder writes to the Local Government Association and the six Warwickshire MPs with a request to lobby central

government about the absence of transport funding for young people affected by the raising of the participation age

- The Committee to receive an urgent update as to whether the above resolution has been fulfilled
- The Committee asks the Local Authority to explore the local transport implications of the raising of the participation age, looking at examples of best practice from other areas, with a view to developing possible solutions

## **8 Report of the Post-16 Transport Task & Finish Group**

Cllr Balaam, Chair of the Task & Finish Group, introduced the report, emphasising that while some of the recommendations could have financial implications, the Council is only being asked to “investigate” these. The following addendum to Recommendation 6 was circulated at the meeting for consideration alongside the printed recommendations:

“The County Council should investigate the resource implications of an increased subsidy for low-income students who travel more than a certain distance, with the income threshold higher than for the present subsidy.”

### **Resolved:**

The Committee endorsed the report of the Task & Finish Group, including the above addendum to Recommendation 6, and forwarded it to Cabinet for consideration.

## **9 Work Programme 2012-13**

The Committee agreed to bring forward the report on School Funding Formula to November 2012, so it can be considered prior to the Cabinet decision in December.

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Chair

*The Committee rose at 12.35pm*