

**Children and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2013**

Present:

Members of the Committee

Cllr Balaam
Cllr Foster
Cllr Fowler
Cllr Jackson (Chair)
Cllr Perry
Cllr Rickhards
Cllr Shaw
Cllr Tandy
Cllr Williams (for Cllr Fox)

Co-opted members

Joseph Cannon

Others

Cllr Timms (Portfolio Holder)
Paul McIntyre (Headteacher, Myton School)

Officers

Sarah Callaghan (Head of Service, Learning and Achievement)
Craig Cusack (Commercial Enterprise Lead)
Wendy Fabbro (Strategic Director, People Group)
Phil Sawbridge (Head of Service, Safeguarding)
Richard Maybey (Democratic Services Officer)

1.1 Apologies for absence

Received from Cllr Carol Fox, Cllr John Ross and Chris Smart.

1.2 Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

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

1.3 Minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2012

The minutes were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Matters arising

Area Behaviour Partnerships (ABPs)

Sarah Callaghan agreed to email members with an update on:

- Whether the role of the ABPs is understood by all LA teams, particularly the Looked After Children team (resolution c)
- Progress of Warwickshire College's application to become an approved provider (resolution f)

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

Responding to a question about how the LA is preparing for the introduction of personal budgets, Wendy Fabbro agreed to provide members with a briefing note on progress to date.

Children's Health Scrutiny

The Chair informed members that although children's health issues are currently scrutinised by the Adult Social Care and Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee, they are also within the remit of this Committee. Members agreed that John Linnane

(Director of Public Health) should be invited to a future meeting to deliver a briefing on current children's health issues.

1.4 Chair's Announcements

Children's Centres

The Chair informed the Committee that the scheduled report on children's centres had been deferred. Wendy Fabbro apologised for the deferral, explaining that:

- a) Reductions to the Early Intervention grant will require a further review of children's centre provision
- b) Previous plans have had to be pulled back, and a fresh approach is needed with a single offer for pre-school provision
- c) Better integration is needed between early years and primary education to ensure families (particularly families in need) get the best possible deal. The transition has to be managed better with no gaps in provision
- d) All children's centres have agreed to a budget reduction of 5% for 2013/14, and current management contracts have been extended for a further 12 months
- e) Work is underway on developing an offer for pre-school age children, that merges education and family support – with a focus on targeted work
- f) Details of this will be reported to the Committee within the next 6 months

Reports of the seconded headteachers

The Chair stated that the reports of the two headteachers, Paul McIntyre and Carl Lewis, who were seconded to the LA from September to December, had been deferred. However, Paul was in attendance and agreed to provide a verbal overview of his findings. He first offered his thanks to those elected members and officers he had worked with during his secondment, and then outlined the key findings and recommendations of his report:

- a) A self-improving school improvement system is needed, with the LA acting as a broker, rather than a provider, of services. This will involve promoting "local leaders of education" and school-to-school improvement models
- b) Governance will be increasingly important, with school governors being the key mechanism for holding headteachers and leadership teams to account. Better training is needed for governors and clerks to governors
- c) Better liaison and partnerships, including with elected members, will be essential in the new educational landscape
- d) Agencies will need to work more closely together, especially around their duties towards vulnerable children. Better protocols are needed, and barriers to learning need to be challenged
- e) The admissions system needs to be reassessed, with a changing role for admissions forums and Fair Access panels

In conclusion, Paul stated that despite significant changes in the education landscape, there is an opportunity for the LA to innovate and build relationships – and schools are ready and willing to re-start relationships and work collaboratively. Wendy Fabbro extended her thanks to Paul and Carl for their work with the LA, and stated that their reports would be made available to the Committee after being considered by Cabinet.

2 Public Questions

None

3 Portfolio Holder Questions

- 3.1 Referring to recent school funding reforms, Cllr Rickhards asked if the LA was working with the Schools Forum to negotiate adjustments for small schools whose budgets are disproportionately impacted.
- 3.2 Cllr Timms responded that the funding reforms were national, and there will always be winners and losers. In general, Warwickshire is poorly funded compared to other local authorities. Officers do liaise with primary heads about their immediate budget restraints, explaining the options available to ease their pressures, such as federation and clustering. A seminar has also been organised to offer schools support.

4 Report of the Chair of the Safeguarding Improvement Task & Finish Group

- 4.1 Cllr Hicks introduced the final report of the Task & Finish Group, which followed the interim report circulated in June 2012. He explained that the Group had been established to monitor the implementation of an action plan put in place to address the concerns raised by the Ofsted inspection of November 2011.
- 4.2 While the Group was satisfied with progress of the action plan in June, there were some elements that could not be judged due to insufficient information being available at that time. These were reviewed in December, along with an update on overall progress of the action plan.
- 4.3 The Group was satisfied with progress overall, but was concerned about the different protocols adopted at University Hospital Coventry & Warwickshire (UHCW) when a potentially vulnerable child presents there. If the child is from Coventry, staff consult a list of children on a Child Protection Plan (CPP) supplied to them by Coventry Children's Services. If the child is from Warwickshire, staff phone Warwickshire Children's Services, who check on their live up-to-date system. The Task & Finish Group believed that this could result in errors at UHCW, and that the two authorities should work together on adopting a common approach with UHCW.
- 4.4 Phil Sawbridge, Head of Service for Safeguarding, added that children come on and off CPPs every day, so any list provided to UHCW would almost instantly become out of date. The only viable change to the current process used by Warwickshire would be for UHCW to have access to the live system. Hospitals currently cannot have this access, although central government intends to amend legislation to allow this soon.
- 4.5 Cllr Hicks also referenced the fact that Warwickshire Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) had reviewed the action plan as well as the Task & Finish Group, and therefore suggested that the Committee consider its relationship with the WSCB to avoid any duplication of scrutiny in the future.

Resolved

1. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee endorses the conclusion of the Task & Finish Group that the Safeguarding Action Plan is being implemented in a satisfactory manner
2. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee encourages the children's services teams from Warwickshire and Coventry to work towards a common approach to sharing child protection information with UHCW
3. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee will consider the next annual report of the WSCB to better understand its function and avoid future duplication of scrutiny activity

5 Report of the Chair of the Academies Task & Finish Group

- 5.1 Cllr Hopkinson introduced the report, highlighting the broad range of issues investigated by the Task & Finish Group (reflected in the recommendations), which included: legal and financial implications, school-place planning, school improvement and vulnerable children.
- 5.2 School improvement was raised as a common concern, given the extent of the reductions to the Learning & Achievement team. Paul McIntyre stated that, while the statutory role of the LA is still present, school-to-school improvement is more effective. School improvement panels could prove a useful mechanism to prompt this, but would require buy-in and agreement from all schools. The Chair stated that the Committee's work programme does include an item on the future of school improvement, which would seek to address these concerns.
- 5.3 Cllr Timms (Portfolio Holder, Children and Schools) welcomed the recommendations within the report, but also the work of the Task & Finish Group in general, which has allowed members to gain a better understanding of the issues associated with academisation.

Resolved

1. The LA should provide a timely response to any school that indicates an intention to convert to academy status, and ensure that the response contains up-to-date and accurate guidance and contact information.
2. The LA should co-ordinate an event, such as a seminar or conference, for headteachers of all schools, lead officers/members of the LA and other appropriate stakeholders. The intention would be for headteachers to network, share issues and build relationships, and to work towards agreed protocols with the LA around key issues such as school-place planning.
3. The LA should strongly encourage academies to sign up to a data-sharing protocol that guarantees the transparency of key school information.
4. The LA should investigate options for a jointly agreed protocol between elected members and headteachers to clarify and define members' role as "champion of the learner". This should include guidance about how members can get to know their local schools and how they can engage with headteachers and governing bodies.
5. The LA should review the Governor Training service it offers to academies on a traded basis, to ensure it is up to date, fit for purpose and provides governors with clear guidance on their roles and responsibilities. This review should also explore

the training offered to clerks to ensure they are equipped with the appropriate skills.

6. The Children and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee should investigate whether the School Improvement team has sufficient capacity to ensure it can carry out its role.
7. a) The LA should actively promote closer working arrangements between the different agencies that provide services for vulnerable children, including better integration of their different systems, processes and terminology, so that families receive a more consistent experience.
b) The Children and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee should consider if further scrutiny of services to vulnerable children is required.
8. a) The LA should urgently review its statutory duties for school-place planning in the context of an increasingly fragmented and diverse educational landscape.
b) The LA should adopt a co-ordinating role between all relevant stakeholders (e.g., district councils, property developers, headteachers) to address the risks to sufficiency of school places caused by potential new housing developments.
c) The Children and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee should request a report on the LA's strategy for addressing the risks to both insufficiency and oversufficiency of school places.
9. The LA should review its approach to future planning developments to ensure it has the strongest possible evidence base to access Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds.

6 Warwickshire Education Services (WES) Trading Update

6.1 Craig Cusack introduced the report, highlighting the following points:

- Schools are under pressure with regard to their discretionary spending, and are currently determining what level of service they will buy-back from the LA. A better indication of the level of buy-back is anticipated in March
- From a commercial perspective, WES does offer good value for money and there is a good take-up currently within schools
- The future challenge will be in the primary sector, which accounts for the majority of buy-back currently, as schools begin to convert to academies
- The LA provides some universal services that will be looked at on an individual basis to assess the business case for becoming traded

6.2 Sarah Callaghan, in response to a question about the risk to services when demand for them drops, stated:

- A careful balance is required between those services that can be traded and ensuring the LA fulfils our statutory duties
- The LA needs to better understand its role as "champion of the learner", and how it will meet its duties within the context of reduced resources
- The challenge requires joined-up working between WES, the Learning & Achievement team and schools themselves

6.3 In response to questions from members, Craig and Sarah explained:

- WES provides a holistic, competitive offer covering three main service elements: pupils (e.g., early intervention), buildings (e.g., cleaning and maintenance) and office support (e.g., IT and HR)

- While underperforming schools have to convert to academy status – and will take their funding with them – the LA will retain statutory duties to those schools, so an on-going relationship is still needed
- Buying services in bulk, e.g., by academy chains or school federations, does not necessarily allow the LA to offer a price discount. But if those customers can adapt their management/governance structures to make them more efficient, savings could be possible. This is a differentiator for the LA compared to private providers

Resolved

The Committee asked for an update report on the progress of WES in 12 months, including financial performance data to assess the competitiveness of the LA's offer to schools

7 Work programme

- 7.1 Cllr Balaam raised concern about health and safety risks that had been identified by the LA at a specific school in Warwickshire, and asked the Committee to consider if a Task & Finish Group was appropriate to investigate the matter.
- 7.2 Following discussion, it was agreed that a Task & Finish Group was not appropriate, but that the Committee raises these concerns formally with the Portfolio Holder and requests an urgent report (circulated via email) on how the LA is going to mitigate those risks.

Resolved

The Committee agreed the following changes to its work programme:

- **Strategy for School Improvement** (already scheduled for April)
This report should also address the issues raised in the meeting, such as the formation of “school improvement panels” and the promotion of “local leaders of education”
- **NEETs** (already scheduled for April)
This report will now be dedicated to the latest data and strategy for addressing NEETs, and the scheduled information on apprenticeships will be delivered as a separate briefing note
- **Local Account for Children, Young People and Family Services** (new)
This report to be scheduled for June 2013
- **WES Trading Update** (new)
This report to be scheduled for January 2014

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Chair

The meeting closed at 12.25pm