

Minutes of the Meeting of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 14 September 2006

Present:-

Members of the Committee

Councillors Jose Compton
Jill Dill-Russell
Richard Grant
Helen McCarthy
John Ross
Kam Singh
Mota Singh
Heather Timms
John Wells
John Whitehouse

Church Representative

Rev Terry Hum
Linda Wainscot

Parent Governor Representative Nick Lambert
Howard Smith

Teacher Representative Max Hyde

Other County Councillors Councillor John Burton (Schools)
Councillor Alan Farnell (Policy & Governance)

Invited Guests Claire Sangster
Chris Smart

Officers Graeme Betts, Strategic Director-Adult, Health & Community Services
Hugh Disley, Head of Service – Youth Services
Mark Gore, Head of Service – Education Partnerships and School Development
Chris Hallett, Head of Service – Children in Need
Ann Mawdsley, Senior Committee Administrator
Michelle McHugh, Scrutiny Officer
Karen Smith, Customer Relations Manager
Lynne Upton, Senior Inspector 14-19 Development

1. General

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and added that he and the Spokespersons had met with the Church and Parent Governor Representatives over a buffet lunch to build relationships within the Committee.

(1) Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Katherine King (replaced by Councillor Raj Randev for this meeting) and Councillor Mike Perry.

(2) Members Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

Members declared personal interests as set out below:

- (1) by virtue of them serving as District/Borough Councillors as follows:-

Councillor Jose Compton – Warwick District Council
Councillor John Ross – Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council
Councillor Heather Timms – Rugby Borough Council

- (2) Councillor Richard Grant (Chair) declared a personal interest in terms of Item 3 as a member of the Board of the North Warwickshire and Hinckley College.

- (3) Councillor Helen McCarthy declared a personal interest in terms of Item 3 as a member of the Board of the Stratford Further Education College.

(3) Minutes of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 20 July 2006

The minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 28 March 2006 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Matters arising

Page 3 – (3) Matters Arising – Page 4-6. Report of Task and Finish Group – Home to School Transport – Transport for non-entitled pupils

Mark Gore reported that the guidance had been amended to take account of the concerns of the Committee in ensuring that grandparents who had sole responsibility for children and young people would not be disadvantaged. He added that there was a need to ensure that officers and Members were aware that guidance referring to parents and carers included grandparents.

Page 5 – 3. Performance (a) 5.

A report on the Action Plan produced following this year's Annual Performance Assessment would be brought to the November meeting of the Committee.

(4) Chair's Announcements

The Chair noted that at the next meeting of the Chair/Spokespersons, they would explore and work on scoping of items for the work programme. He added that if Members had items they wanted developed, they should speak to their party Spokesperson.

2. Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

3. 14-19 Policy and Strategy

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director for Children, Young People and Families presenting further information on the development of a 14-19 strategy.

Lynne Upton gave a presentation making the following points:

- a. The 14-19 curriculum had moved forward dramatically since the last report in December 2005. One area of this was the 14-19 Implementation Plan, which would change the landscape of 14-19 education and create a system capable of offering a new set of curriculum and qualifications opportunities built around the needs and aspirations of each young person.
- b. There was a need to re-examine what we were trying to achieve with young people to face the skills challenge and match what was happening internationally.
- c. There were a number of different people and groups who had a stake in the changes and elected Members had a role to play in communicating the importance of the changes to different groups.
- d. Four 14-19 Partnerships had been established in the North, South, East and Central Warwickshire and would oversee the Strategy to ensure the right amount of mix of provision for their area. Area Co-ordinators would also be involved in getting schools to work together in partnership to put forward bids and to produce an Area Prospectus detailing all post 16 courses with links to information such as travel, career advice and guidance and DfES.

- e. The new curriculum entitlement would provide for the choice of current GCSE qualifications or equivalent, or one of 14 sets of specialised Diplomas covering the occupational sectors of the economy. It was noted that while the qualifications were employer-led, they were not intended as a direct preparation for an occupation but rather to develop good basic skills, develop the broader skills employers want and provide a basis to make further progress in learning.
- f. In order to meet the objectives of the Plan, schools, colleges and other providers wishing to offer the new Diplomas in 2008 (working in partnership), would need to pass through a gateway process, which would assess their readiness for doing so and looking to utilise current specialisms and links with employers.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were highlighted:

1. Employers had representatives on the Sector Skills Councils which had been involved in developing the new qualifications to combine classroom education with practical workplace experience.
2. Bids to pass through the gateway process had to be complete by November and Area Co-ordinators would be responsible for supporting groups to put bids together.
3. The bids were for permission to offer the new Diplomas. The DfES were still looking at how the courses would work and how they would be funded.
4. The DfES had devised a series of 14-19 progress checks against quantitative and qualitative targets.
5. Members requested that further information be provided at the next update of the following issues:
 - financing
 - whether the diplomas met the needs of employers
 - whether the diplomas met the needs of young people
 - whether young people were being re-engaged and why did they become disengaged in the first place.
 - Details of the schools that applied for funding
 - Schools perspective of the changes

The Committee agreed to note the progress made in implementing the County's 14-19 policy and strategy.

4. Audit Commission Inspection of the Warwickshire Supporting People Programme

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director for Adult, Health and Community Services outlining the Audit Commission Report and Action Plan produced following the Inspection of the Warwickshire Supporting People Programme.

Graeme Betts noted the following judgements made which had particular reference to this Committee:

- a. The inspection had highlighted that there was insufficient engagement with Members, in particular Overview and Scrutiny Members.
- b. There were a number of issues that needed to be addressed across all client groups.
- c. The three areas highlighted for improvement were:
 - the necessity for a needs analysis
 - greater service user engagement
 - the need for a Diversity Policy.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were highlighted:

1. The influx of immigrants into the area was not expected to deflect the programme from the aims and the service was confident they could address these needs.
2. The judgment on not engaging users applied to engagement with more formal boards and meetings rather than users and would be addressed by all directorates.
3. The Strategic Director of Children, Families and Young People was committed to moving the programme forward and achieving the best possible outcomes with the resources available.
5. The Committee wanted to be engaged in the process and to scrutinise effectively and wanted evidence that young people were involved in the process and that diversity was highlighted within the process.

Having considered the report, the Committee agreed to ensure that the Children, Families and Young People Directorate was fully engaged in the programme in order that the Audit Commissions recommendations are met.

The Committee requested that the Scrutiny Officer liaise with Graeme Betts and Chris Hallett to identify a way forward in relation to the Committee tracking the progress of the issues identified above.

5. Warwickshire's Social Care Complaints and Representations Policy and Procedure for Children, Families and Young People

Members considered the Joint Report of the Strategic Directors for Children, Families and Young People and Performance and Development outlining the policy and procedure update and developing the previous social services complaints and representations.

Karen Smith made the following points:

1. There were now regulations and guidance in place giving positive endorsement of current practice and pulling together learning and best practice.

2. The service was looking at ways to develop staff capability and engage with staff to assist them to become the problem solvers that customers wanted.
3. Members would no longer be involved in panels, which would comprise three independent people in the future.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were highlighted:

- a. The Committee noted their regret that Councillors would no longer serve on the Panels as they had a lot of expertise in this field and would no longer be in a position to share their knowledge and experience.
- b. There was a need to recognise those types of complaints likely to escalate and learn as an organisation the best way of righting these issues and carrying out damage limitation at an early stage. Members had a role to play in this.
- c. It was important to recognise the importance of different issues regardless of what stage they reached and to deal with them successfully.
- d. It was noted that nationally young people struggled to engage with complaints and while the County did well comparatively in engaging with young people, they were keen that young people have the confidence to challenge decisions they were not happy with which could result in an increase of complaints.
- e. A report would go to Cabinet in October for endorsement of the policy and procedures but O&S had a role to play in scrutinising areas not doing well.
- f. Warwickshire was a learning organisation, so comments, complaints, compliments were used in training staff to enable them to understand and feed back into the process.
- g. Members noted the excellent report, which made the process easy to read and understand.

The Committee agreed that:

1. a recommendation is made to the Cabinet to agree Warwickshire's Social Care Complaints and Representations Policy and Procedure for Children, Young People & Families.
2. to set up a working group of Councillors to look at the best way of involving Councillors in the process.

6. Progress Report on the Action Plan arising from Ofsted Inspection of Youth Service, May 2005

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director for Children, Young People and Families updating Members on progress against the Action Plan presented to Cabinet in October 2005, identifying good progress against the significant majority of actions.

Hugh Disley noted that he was pleased with the way the Youth Service had gone about producing the Action Plan and were getting on with the job.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were raised:

- a. Hugh Disley agreed to revert to Members by e-mail outlining why the Leonardo bid had not been successful.
- b. The service was working in partnership with the four major voluntary players involved with hard to reach children and young people to ensure they remained operational.
- c. In terms of the new Directorate, a Warwickshire Youth Officer would be put in place to offer information, advice, guidance and support for all young people to enable them to make the right decisions in life.
- d. Training was provided for all internal and external partners where advice would be given on getting to the hard to reach young people.
- e. A lot of work was taking place to build up staff retention across the service including negotiations with City & Guilds on a "Working with Young People" qualification and growing our own qualified youth workers.
- f. Members agreed to receive a written report on areas not completed and why in two months.
- g. A report was being prepared on the Youth Offer and Hugh Disley would discuss with the Chair and Spokespersons what the appropriate route for this report would be.

The Committee endorsed the progress against actions identified in the Action Plan presented to Cabinet in October 2005 produced following the Ofsted Inspection of the Youth Service.

7. Provisional Items for Future Meetings and Forward Plan Items Relevant to the Work of this Committee

The Committee agreed that the Chair and Spokespersons would work with Michelle McHugh on the work programme at the agenda planning meeting scheduled for 27th September.

Michelle McHugh added that the Committee had requested an item on ICT in Schools be included in the work programme and that this was also an area that the Resources, Performance and Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee wanted to investigate. It was agreed that the details of a working party/panel to jointly look at this would be discussed at the work programme meeting. Members were requested to feed through to Party Spokes any interest of representing the Committee on a small group to take forward the issue of members involvement in the complaints procedure and the issue of ICT and Schools.

8. Any Other Items

None.

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Chair

The Committee rose at 4.45 p.m.