

Minutes of the Select Committee Meeting of the Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 12 November 2007

Present:-

Members of the Committee	Councillor Jill Dill Russell “ Richard Grant (Chair) “ Helen McCarthy “ Mike Perry “ John Ross “ Dave Shilton “ Kam Singh “ Mota Singh “ Heather Timms “ Sid Tooth (replacing Councillor John Wells for this meeting) “ John Whitehouse (Vice Chair)
Church Representative	Dr Rex Pogson
Parent Governor Representative	Tim Sturges
Invited Teacher Representatives	Max Hyde Lynda LeLong
Other County Councillors	Councillor John Burton (Schools) Councillor Izzi Seccombe (Children, Young People & Families)
Invited Governor Representatives	Claire Sangster Chris Smart
Officers	Phil Astle, Assistant Head of Service – School Place Planning Mark Gore, Head of Service – Education Partnerships and Schools Development Division Chris Hallett, Head of Service – Children in Need Division Nicole Jones, Strategic Finance Manager Ann Mawdsley, Principal Committee Administrator Michelle McHugh, Scrutiny Officer David MacNiven, Assistant Head of Service – Knowledge and Information Management Service Brenda Vincent, Assistant Head of Service - Looked After Children

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly Councillor Sid Tooth who was replacing Councillor John Wells for this meeting.

1. General

(1) Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Katherine King, Councillor John Wells (replaced by Councillor Sid Tooth for this meeting), Rev Terry Hum and Ruth Davies-McCrorie.

(2) Members Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

None.

(3) Minutes of the Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 11 October 2007

The minutes of the meeting of the Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 11 October 2007 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

Matters arising

Page 6 – 4. ICT and Schools – Recommendation (iv) – The Chair reported that he and Michelle McHugh were working on the wording of the letter to be sent to the LGA, which he was hoping to deliver when he attended a meeting there later in the week.

(4) Chair's Announcements

The Chair reported that Rev Hum had sent notification that due to ill health he was having to step down from the Committee and the Diocesan Schools Commission would confirm who his replacement would be. He added that he would be sending a note on behalf of the Committee to thank Rev Hum for his contribution and to wish him well for the future.

2. Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

3. Corporate Parenting Policy, Strategy and Action Plan – Progress Report

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director for Children, Young People and Families providing an overview of developments in relation to the Local Authority's Corporate Parenting Policy, Strategy and Action Plan and showing significant progress made in many areas since its approval by Council on 12 December

2006. The recommendations from the Government White Paper “Care Matters – Time for Change” would need to be incorporated within Warwickshire’s Corporate Parenting Policy and Strategy and reflected in future Action Plans. Brenda Vincent noted that there had been a lot of progress in many areas since the Council had agreed the Strategy and Action Plan. She added that the Strategy had been timely for Warwickshire, building well on many of the new requirements of the White Paper “Care Matters – Time for Change”, and already underpinning some of the principles in terms of young people and improved aspirations for them. Warwickshire had also been very successful in piloting three initiatives arising from the White Paper.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were raised:

1. Designated doctors and nurses had access to children’s case files, including reports collated by the designated doctors. This data was confidential.
2. Foster care placements were stable and percentages in the Action Plan represented the number of children within a particular cohort placed in foster care at a particular time.
3. It was noted that the report related to figures from 2005/06 and Brenda Vincent agreed to verify the figures in terms of the 2006/07 data.
4. All Warwickshire children, whether placed in or out of county and non-Warwickshire looked after children placed in Warwickshire accessed the TELAC (The Education of Looked After Children) service, in line with the Council’s duties.
5. Members noted that future reports should include:
 - comments from young people on their experiences as this was one of the most important measures of success
 - a traffic light system
 - either the provision for colour copies or a note to the Committee that they can view colours online
 - numbers as well as percentages
 - signposting to relevant documents and information not included in the reports, for example the Children and Young People Plan which was updated quarterly.
6. Members acknowledged the service’s success with pilot projects, but noted that the downside of pilots was the lack of long term funding. Members agreed it would be useful to know what the total scale and duration of funding in terms of pilots was to get a better long-term perspective. Brenda Vincent noted that new monies received for pilots brought new opportunities and invited councils to work in different ways, which did not always have budgetary implications.
7. There were currently 440 children in care in Warwickshire, of which approximately 380 were in foster care. Stability of long-term placements was in the top quartile and short-term stability had improved to 12% against a national figure of 16%. The ambition was to continue to improve stability of placements to achieve better outcomes for children.

8. Warwickshire had 280-300 foster homes at any one time, and foster carers had a clear requirement to support the education of children in care. There was ongoing training on this aspect and the Private Tutoring pilot would take place in homes as well as educational settings.
9. The Virtual School Head Teacher would be full time from January and a Steering Group was managing the project until that time. All schools should also have identified a lead professional as a contact for young people in care.
10. There was a strong emphasis in the Strategy and in the White Paper on increasing the age for access to services for those who had been in care. It was agreed that there were a number of initiatives already in place and there was a need to highlight the successes including housing options and Supporting People, employment options and educational attainment. Brenda Vincent added that while leaving care teams in districts had a good handle on what was happening to young people who were no longer being cared for, there was a need to further improve processes in this area.
11. A meeting with looked after children was scheduled for 13 December. It was agreed that Members should hold discussions within their groups to prepare the ground for this meeting.
12. Members agreed that the Corporate Parenting Work Group would have a more detailed look at the figures in light of questions raised by Members of the Committee and to agree what should be included in the next report.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to endorse the progress made in relation to the Corporate Parenting Policy, Strategy and Action Plan and examine future progress in November 2008.

4. The Regional Spatial Strategy and school-place planning in Warwickshire

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director for Children, Young People and Families outlining the Regional Spatial Strategy proposals for significant numbers of new housing in the County for the period up to 2026 and the implications in the long and medium term for school-place planning.

Phil Astle noted the following:

- a. There were new figures available for the potential distribution of new dwellings for 2001/2026, but these were likely to change in light of consultations, appeals and ongoing discussion. Warwickshire Districts/Boroughs had not yet published where and what type of housing was planned, which was crucial information in terms of school place planning and Building Schools for the Future.

- b. A new pupil forecasting system had been introduced four years ago, which had predicted a drop in the birth rate. The national trend showed that in terms of birth rates, the numbers of births had decreased until 2001, bottomed out and for the past four years had increased. Warwickshire broadly followed this trend.
- c. The increase in birth rate appeared to translate into pupil numbers with cohorts from 2002 – 2007 increasing on an annual basis.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were raised:

1. It was agreed that it was difficult to forecast numbers in terms of migrants. It was noted that in the last academic year Warwickshire schools had admitted at least 370 migrant children and that on the whole, these children had integrated quickly and made positive contributions. The issue was ensuring that capacity was built in schools to enable them to quickly support children to gain English and have good educational opportunities and to ensure that the Intercultural Curriculum Support Service had the capacity to meet the needs of any child coming into Warwickshire schools.
2. Members agreed that there was a need to look at the style of presentation of reports and that the following information be included in future reports on this issue:
 - the capacity to deal with changing dynamic needs
 - where housing development was planned in Warwickshire and in neighbouring authorities
 - the implications for school planning of proposed “eco towns”
 - the need to build into calculations how to match populations in schools and early years with capacity.
3. Recruitment of teachers in primary schools was currently strong and there was difficulty in terms of recruiting for some subjects in secondary schools. There were difficulties in terms of recruiting leadership for schools. Members agreed to receive a further report on this issue at a later date.
4. The Directorate were tracking forecasting using the reality of when cohorts entered Reception against Area Health figures four years previously. It was noted that while the underestimates from Area Health were not consistent enough to build into forecasts, they were managed to a certain extent.
5. There was a 300 pupil gap between Area Health data and actual enrolments. This was thought to reflect input into the independent sector, but there was no mechanism yet for getting data from the independent sector.
6. A detailed analysis was being undertaken of numbers in the East and in Nuneaton and Bedworth and a strategy was in place to deal with the lack of capacity in Stratford upon Avon. A strategy was being developed to address the 25% surplus places and it was noted that Warwickshire currently benchmarked well with other authorities.

7. Councillor Burton agreed to ensure arrangements were put in place for Member seminars in the new year to look at policies to address the issues faced in different areas and across the county.
8. The Chair requested regular updates on progress to the Chair/Spokes Briefings.

The Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to:

- (1) endorse the report and the proposed next steps for addressing the impact the Regional Spatial Strategy will have on school-place planning.
- (2) carry out further scrutiny in relation to this once firm data was available and in advance of Building Schools for the Future.

5. Mid-year Directorate Report Card 2007/08

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director for Children, Young People and Families providing an analysis of the Children, Young People and Families Directorate's performance at the mid-year point for 2007/08 and reporting on performance against the key performance indicators as set out in the Directorate Report Card.

Mark Gore and David MacNiven noted the following:

- a. The report was in the format agreed corporately and showed positive performance in all areas other than:
 - % Pupils achieving 5 or more A*-C GCSEs compared to end of year targets and the PwC County Council Benchmark
 - % Stability of placements of children in care against the PwC County Council Benchmark.
- b. Performance in Warwickshire schools in Key Stages 1, 2, 3 and Foundation was equal to or better than statistical neighbours. The Directorate aspired to being 'best in class' in all Key Stages.
- c. Forecasts were done using different sources, including the Fisher Family Trust, and where children had experienced special circumstances, these were recorded.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were noted:

1. Results at GCSE were lower than last year and fell below both national and statistical neighbour figures. Mark Gore noted that this was a general trend, even with schools expected to do well, and discussions would be held with schools by School Improvement Partners to look at what had happened. In Nuneaton there had been only one school below floor targets and there was a need to look at the system as a whole in Nuneaton.

2. Lynda LeLong added that there was a need to remember that the statistics represented real children who were their own people and where elements, such as a class with mismatched sexes or a large number of summer births, could impact on results.
3. In response to a query about the difficulty of GCSEs, it was noted that evidence suggested that the exams had not become easier and that while O'Levels had been more about the application of knowledge, GCSEs were different and tested young people under increased pressures and requiring different skills in the modern world.
4. Members agreed to set up a working group with one representative from each group, the Cabinet Member for Schools and one parent governor representative to look at Key Stage 4, what had happened and the way forward before reporting back to the Committee.
5. There were still issues around the recruitment of teachers, particularly in secondary schools and a report would be brought back to the Committee at a later date.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorsed the summary and detail of the performance indicators within the Directorate Report Card at the mid-year point of 2007/08.

6. 2007/08 Efficiency Savings – Children, Young People and Families Progress Report

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director for Children, Young People and Families outlining the progress the Children, Young People and Families Directorate has made to date in delivering the required efficiency savings in 2007/08 required as part of the 2007/08 budget.

Nicole Jones added that the Directorate would meet targets set in the 2007/08 budget of £1.6m efficiency savings (2½ %) and £200,000 environmental savings. This had been done through budgetary management in areas such as reorganisation of teams, savings in printing and stationery and more efficient ways of working within central services.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were raised:

1. Members acknowledged that the amount of £1.8m had been identified as feasible when the budget had been set. It was agreed however that while the report outlined the targets, there was no information or detail given on how these targets were achieved.
2. The Directorate had tried to achieve the environmental savings through different ways of working rather than passing on costs.
3. It was agreed that to continue to have cuts of 2½% was not sustainable as any slack in the system had gone and the

position next year would require difficult decisions for the Directorate and Members in identifying services that could no longer be provided, protecting frontline services where possible. It was recognised that services supporting young people could make the difference between academic success and failure.

4. Members agreed that the report did not justify the work done by the Directorate and there was a need for greater detail and clear indication that services had not been cut, particularly in light of the GCSE results. They requested a further detailed report to their next meeting.

The Committee endorsed the achievement of the Children, Young People and Families Directorate in delivering and exceeding the 2007/08 efficiency savings target.

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

The Committee noted the Provisional Items for Future Meetings and Forward Plan Items relevant to the work of this Committee.

8. Any Other Items

None.

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Chair

The Committee rose at 12.45 p.m.