

Minutes of a Meeting of the Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 11 October 2007

Present:-

Members of the Committee Councillor Richard Grant (Chair)
“ Helen McCarthy
“ Brian Moss (replacing Councillor
John Wells for this meeting)
“ John Whitehouse (Vice Chair)

Parent Governor Representatives

Tim Sturges

Other County Councillors

Councillor John Burton (Schools)

Invited Guest

Claire Sangster
Chris Smart

Officers

Mark Gore, Head of Service – Education
Partnerships and Schools Development Division
Chris Hallett, Head of Service – Children in Need
Division
Bob Hooper, Head of School Performance
Ann Mawdsley, Principal Committee Administrator
Paul Williams, Scrutiny Officer

Councillor Richard Grant welcomed members of the Committee and in particular Councillor Brian Moss, replacing Councillor John Wells for this meeting and Paul Williams, attending the meeting on behalf of Michelle McHugh.

1. General

(1) Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Dill-Russell, King, Perry, Seccombe, Timms and Wells (replaced by Councillor Moss for this meeting), Ruth Davies-McCrorie, Rev Hum, Max Hyde, Lynda LeLong, Dr Pogson and Michelle McHugh.

(2) Members Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

Members declared personal interests as set out below:

- (1) Councillor John Whitehouse declared a personal interest in relation to Item 3 as a Governor at St John's Primary School.

(2) Chris Smart noted that although he was not a formal member of the Committee, he was declaring a personal interest in relation to Item 4 as he had previously looked after ICT for a number of schools in the Rugby Area. He added that he was now retired and only looked after ICT at the school he was Governor at.

(3) Minutes of the Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 19 September 2007

The minutes of the meeting of the Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 19 September 2007 were agreed with the following corrections:

Page 5. – 5.f Schools’ Funding Formula. – The full name of Index of Deprivation Affecting Children to be inserted before (IDACI) and the words between brackets to be deleted.

Matters arising

Page 3 – 3. Young People and Alcohol Misuse – The Chair noted that the report agreed by the Committee would be considered by the Cabinet on 18 October 2007.

Page 4 – 4. Targeted Youth Support – The Chair noted that the consultation document had been forwarded to Members of the Committee and the issue was ongoing.

Page 5 – 5. Schools’ Funding Formula – The Chair noted that this matter was ongoing.

It was agreed that any complaints received from Head Teachers or Governors should be directed to the relevant officers for responses. It was important that Councillors and particularly those people making decisions in relation to this issue, were fully aware of all the details.

Page 6 – 6. Review of Demand for School Meals – The Chair noted that the joint report from the joint panel of the Resources, Performance and Development and Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committees would be considered by the Cabinet on 18 October 2007.

(4) Chair’s Announcements

There were no Chair’s Announcements.

2. Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

3. LA Intervention Policy 2007

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director for Children, Young People and Families outlining how the LA will intervene in schools to promote high standards and in particular, setting out how the LA will work with schools causing concern.

Bob Hooper noted the following:

- i. A number of events had taken place since the Intervention Policy was published in 2005, including:
 - the Education Inspection Act 2006, which gave Local Authorities (LA) new powers of intervention
 - the new Ofsted Framework, which raised the bar in terms of expectations on schools and under which all Warwickshire schools would be inspected by the end of 2007
 - the introduction of School Improvement Partners (SIPs) which was now in the second year for secondary schools, introduced in primary schools in September 2007 and for special schools next Easter.
- ii. The new policy had gone through approximately 14 different rounds of review, including consultation with Heads, Teacher organisations and Church Authorities.
- iii. The key objectives of the Policy were:
 - To have no schools in Warwickshire in special measures in 18 months time or sooner
 - To have as few schools as possible going into a "Notice to Improve" category
 - To enable as many schools judged "Satisfactory" to improve to Good or Outstanding. It was noted that Warwickshire had more schools that were "Satisfactory" than other similar Authorities.
- iv. The Directorate were having to reposition the way they worked to accommodate the greater powers of intervention while respecting the autonomy of schools.
- v. There was a need to provide good value and to make the maximum difference with the smallest resource.
- vi. Schools would no longer have to wait for Ofsted inspections every three years, but would be able to negotiate with the LA on a regular basis, together with their SIP, that positive changes had been made against the six new LA performance categories. This would encourage schools to make rapid improvements and require less support from the Service.
- vii. If the LA believed a school was a concern and were resistant to change, the LA would be expected to issue a formal Warning Notice to the Governing Body, which if ignored would be forwarded to Ofsted for action. If in disagreement with the LA

over performance, schools could apply to Ofsted to be inspected and a decision given over whether the Warning Notice had been correct.

- viii. The increased powers to the Secretary of State were a clear warning to schools and LAs that they had to make a difference or risk intervention.
- ix. A register of Parent Champions would be established and these Champions would receive training and be trialled.
- x. The SIP would be working with schools between now and Spring 2008 to negotiate new categories. This would help schools to have clarity in terms of what was needed in setting priorities and moving forward.
- xi. There would be changing emphasis in terms of support as the number of schools requiring support decreased.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were raised:

- 1. As advocates of children and young people, Members were happy to support the measures put in place to ensure quality of teaching and learning was the best possible and to support the aims and aspirations the LA had for children and young people in Warwickshire.
- 2. SIP Reports would be sent to Governors and the Head Teacher at the same time to ensure both had a true and accurate picture of performance at a school.
- 3. Comparative data sets on an individual pupil level made it difficult for schools to ignore problems.
- 4. The role of the LA was to work in the interest of the children and not the school institutions and the new policy would give the LA the ammunition, power and regulation to intervene more swiftly than in the past.
- 5. Resources that were previously spent on schools causing concern could be switched to support some schools to enable them to move from the satisfactory to good category. The LA would also be in a position to signpost to schools how best to utilise their own resources.
- 6. The LA had the right to intervene in any school where performance was not good enough, including Trust Schools. It was noted that Academies were independent schools and Bob Hooper agreed to look into the implications for the LA if an independent school was not performing.
- 7. Parent Champion positions were open to anyone with the appropriate background and experience and were not limited to parents or parents of pupils within a specific school.
- 8. It was agreed that the responsibility of the school lay on the shoulders of the Governing Body, and where the governance became a barrier to the performance of the school the Education Act put an expectation on the LA to intervene. It was important that Governors were given the training necessary to carry out their roles and Bob Hooper agreed to look at whether there should be alert systems in place where school governors were

not participating in training, particularly in schools where there was low performance.

9. SIPs were key to the success of the policy, but were partners to a school with a focus on what a school needed to do to improve rather than target setting etc. This gave schools more opportunities for quicker improvement and less reliance on the inspections of Ofsted, which the LA could challenge where they felt inspection reports did not reflect the performance of a school.

The Committee agreed to endorse and support the revised Intervention Policy and noted the new responsibilities for the Local Authority in relation to promoting higher standards.

4. ICT and Schools

The Committee considered the report of the Chair of the ICT and Schools Panel outlining the views and recommendations of the joint scrutiny panel established by the Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Resources, Performance and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to scrutinise ICT and Schools.

Councillor John Whitehouse (Chair of the Panel) thanked those Councillors who had taken part in the review, thanked John Parmiter and Tonino Ciuffini for their participation and Michelle McHugh for all the work she had put into supporting the Panel. He added the following:

- i. There was evidence nationally that ICT played a big role in improving attainment levels within schools where it was fully integrated in the teaching process. The evidence of this was less clear locally but seemed to support this view.
- ii. Data collected through WES indicated a high level of satisfaction overall and areas of concern were being addressed.
- iii. Broadband costs were a relevant item for schools' budgets and the Warwickshire WAN did offer a cost saving solution for schools.
- iv. The Panel had agreed that further substantial reviews should be conducted during the Technology Refresh scheduled for 2008 and the Review scheduled to be carried out before the Public Service Agreement came to an end in 2012.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were raised:

1. The issue of being able to demonstrate whether there was a link between the vast amounts of money spent on ICT and any impact on attainment was a national issue and it was agreed that where possible, Members should be pushing for greater scrutiny of that process.

2. It was noted that while ICT had been used to improve standards in subjects such as literacy and numeracy, the teaching of ICT as a subject in schools was not as successful as it should be. Members agreed that in the future performance reports should be expanded to include the achievement of pupils in regard to ICT.
3. Members thanked the Councillors from both Committees who had participated in the review as well as the officers involved.

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

- i) further scrutiny work should be undertaken during 2010 to feed into further discussions regarding the future of the We-Learn project,
- ii) the issue of equality of access needs to be addressed during the technology refresh in 2008, and further reports be made to the Committee regarding options available,
- iii) Performance Reports should be expanded to include achievement in respect to ICT in schools and equality of ICT provision in schools,
- iv) A letter should be written to the LGA to ask that if there was no research being carried out on ICT in schools and achievement, this be included in their work for consideration.

5. 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 including the following addition:

Cabinet – 18 October 2007
Demand for School Meals Review

6. Any Other Items

None.

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Chair

The Committee rose at 11.40 a.m.