

At an Extraordinary meeting of the CHILDREN'S SERVICES REVIEW COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on FRIDAY, 20TH FEBRUARY, 2009 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:-

Councillor Stewart in the Chair

Councillors Paul Maddison, Oliver and Snowdon together with Mrs. D. Butler and Mr. M. Frank.

Also Present:-

Councillor Tate – Chairman of Policy and Co-ordination Review Committee.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Ball, Kelly and Morrissey together with those from Mrs. P. Burn, Mrs. C. Hutchinson and Mr. D. Snowdon.

Minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Committee held on 15th January, 2009

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting held on 15th January, 2009 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

Item 5 – Safeguarding Service Report

Councillor Snowdon declared a personal interest in the item as a member of the Adoption and Permanency Panel.

Item 6 – Progress on Hylton Red House School

Councillor Stewart declared a personal interest in the item as a relative was employed at the school.

Item 7 – Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 Final Results 2008

Mrs. D. Butler and Councillor Oliver declared personal interests in the item as School Governors.

Sunderland Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB)

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed Members of the Committee of the work of Sunderland Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) including the role of the Independent Chair, the development of SSCB Business Plan 2008-2009 and the preparation of the annual report.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mick McCracken, Head of Safeguarding presented the report and addressed questions and comments from Members, having submitted apologies on behalf of Jan Van Wagtenonk who had been unable to attend the meeting.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Paul Maddison regarding outside scrutiny of the SSCB and the work of the Chair, Mr. McCracken advised that the Board was scrutinised by the Government Office North East who submitted regular reports to the Department for Children, Schools and Families. The service was also subject to Ofsted inspections and the Annual Performance Assessment (APA). The original view that the Independent Chair would work for two days a month had been underestimated and had not taken account of the additional work in responding to Haringey and with the cross boundary Serious Case Review led by Durham LSCB. It was envisaged that the current 4 days per month worked by the Independent Chair would not continue in the long term.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Oliver, regarding the accountability of the Independent Chair to the Director of Children's Services, Mr. McCracken advised that the original guidance issued in 2006 had been ambiguous. It had allowed Safeguarding Boards, if they wished, to appoint independent chairs who would be required to be responsible to the Director of Children's Services. Most had chosen not to do so. Although thinking had moved on, the guidance had remained unchanged. It was envisaged that the new Laming report would address the issue.

With regard to an enquiry from Councillor Oliver regarding the budget position, Mr. McCracken advised that the budget shortfall this year would be covered by last year's underspend. There would be no specific areas under pressure, however next year tactics would need to be adopted including increased income generation through training provision and seeking larger contributions from partner agencies.

The Chairman referred to paragraph 5.10 of the report and asked whether any of the development meetings had taken place yet. Mr. McCracken advised that the first meeting with Judy Bowman from IDeA together with a colleague from the York Safeguarding Board had taken place earlier that month. A second was scheduled for March with a third to be arranged for later in the year. With regard to ideas arising from the meeting Members were advised that most Safeguarding Boards

were organised around 4 sub groups, however York organised differently and this was something that could be considered. A risk log was also being developed to ensure business was on track and any potential (risks such as the budget) were identified.

In response to a request from the Chairman, Mr. McCracken confirmed that next time Mr. Wagendonk submitted a report to the Committee a copy of the Risk Log would also be submitted.

The Chairman having thanked Mr. McCracken for his report, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Safeguarding Service Report

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed members of current performance and current and planned activity within the Safeguarding Service including case management, services for Looked After Children, Services for Disabled Children and the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mick McCracken, Head of Safeguarding and Nick Murphy, Residential Services Manager presented the report and addressed questions and comments from Members.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Paul Maddison, Mr. McCracken advised that although under pressure, the seventy social workers on the establishment coped remarkably well with the stresses of the job. Surprisingly there was not a large amount of sickness absence.

Councillor Oliver highlighted the move from Children's Homes to Foster Care and asked if there were sufficient families coming forward? Members were advised that there were currently both regional and national campaigns to recruit carers, however at times it amounted to 'fishing in an over fished pond'. The Authority had looked to raise allowances in order to compete. Carers had also been surveyed as to why they had remained loyal to Sunderland and answers included the quality of the training provided together with the support available e.g. through CAMHS. This loyalty had allowed Sunderland to make fewer external placements.

With regard to an enquiry from Mrs. Butler regarding Meadow Rise and its three remaining residents, Members were advised that options were being fully considered, these included fostering (unlikely), finding a new resource i.e. buy in placements from elsewhere, or work with the Commission for Social Care Inspection to allow all 3 residents to remain in the home. This would be the most likely outcome.

In response to an enquiry from the Chairman regarding the number of social workers on the establishment, Mr. McCracken advised that there had previously been 56 and that this had been increased to 70 following the Joint Area Review (JAR). In addition Mr. McCracken explained the revisions to the career grade to encourage social workers to come to Sunderland and to help retain them.

The Chairman thanked Mr. McCracken and Mr. Murphy for their report and looked forward to the Committee receiving details of an action plan to address performance with regard to the completion of Care Assessments.

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Progress Report on Hylton Red House School

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which updated the Committee on activity and progress to address issues which led to the Ofsted judgement of special measures and the actions already taken to improve outcomes for young people.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms. Sue Morgan, Senior School Improvement Officer presented the report and addressed the following questions and comments from members:-

- Had any feedback been received from parents regarding the school being in special measures?
- How many staff were on longer term sickness absence?
- What specifically was the problem in relation to years 4 and 5?
- Provision for an Easter/Summer School.
- Is classroom ITC provision adequate?
- What will be planned for school inset days?
- What are the year 4/5 class sizes?
- Interim arrangements pending the appointment of a new Headteacher.
- When would the next inspection take place, how much of the Action Plan has been implemented and would only a marginal improvement be enough to satisfy the inspector?

4. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the report and actions described to secure improvement in the outcomes for children in Hylton Red House School be noted;

- (ii) regular update reports be submitted to the Committee on the impact of the actions, the next to be submitted following the conclusion of the next inspection visit.

Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 Final Results 2008

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which updated Members on the final validated 2008 Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 results which were published during January 2009.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr. A. Baker, Performance and Information Team Leader, having presented the report, the Chairman referred to the fact that with regard to the percentage of pupils achieving 5 A to Cs in English and Maths, Sunderland were within the top 20 most improved local authorities of the past 20 years. He asked if comparative information in respect of this could be reported to a future meeting of the Committee. Mr. Baker confirmed that he would endeavour to do so.

In addition, the Chairman noted that the Authority had slightly taken 'its eye off the ball' with regards to A levels and while its average points per entry had improved in 2008, it was still below the national average. He asked that a report be submitted to a future meeting outlining what was being done to bring this up to the national average.

Mr. Baker confirmed that he would liaise with the College in respect of the compilation of the report. Mrs Butler also advised that she would pass on the Chairman's comments to her contacts within the College.

The Chairman having thanked Mr. Baker for his report, it was:-

5. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Consultations and Publications

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the Committee with a summary of current Government consultations and publications as follows:-

- Young People and Alcohol Guidance;
- Ending Child Poverty: Making it Happen;
- Home Education – Your Views.

(For copy report – see original Minutes).

6. RESOLVED that the consultations and publications be received and noted.

Ofsted Inspections

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) inviting Members to consider the following recently published Ofsted Inspection reports for educational establishments in Sunderland:-

- Southmoor Community School;
- St. Mary's R.C. V.A. Primary School;
- Barbara Priestman School.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

7. RESOLVED that the Ofsted Inspection Reports be received and noted;

Work Programme 2008-09

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which attached for Members information a copy of the Committee's updated work programme for 2008-09.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

8. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Summary of Ofsted Inspection Reports (November to December 2008)

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided members with an update on outcomes and recommendations from the recent Ofsted reports in respect of the following children's homes:-

- (i) Cotswold Road Children's Home;
- (ii) Colombo Road Children's Home;
- (iii) Revelstoke Road Children's Home;
- (iv) Williamson Terrace Children's Home;
- (v) Meadow Rise Children's Home.

Members highlighted the inspection report for 1 Williamson Terrace and raised the following issues:-

- were officers now satisfied that privacy had been improved with regards to telephone access?
- have the issues around the book of sanctions been addressed?

Nick Murphy, Residential Services Manager, having informed Members of the actions taken to address the issues, the Chairman thanked him for his update and requested that a report on the Action Plan be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

9. RESOLVED that the reports be received and noted.

The Chairman then closed the meeting having thanked Members and Officers for their attendance.

(Signed) P. STEWART,
Chairman.