

**COUNCIL**

**25 JUNE 2008**

**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES REVIEW  
COMMITTEE 2007/2008**

**REPORT OF THE CITY SOLICITOR**

**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To present a summary of the work of the Review Committee during 2007-08.

**2. Introduction**

- 2.1 This is the sixth Annual Report of the Review Committee and the third in its new role as the Children's Services Review Committee.

**3. Operation of the Committee**

- 3.1 There have been 12 meetings of the Committee, two more than scheduled. Much of the evidence gathering for the policy review took place at the additional meetings, starting in the morning to allow the session to continue for longer.
- 3.2 A total of 68 reports were considered. 25 of these were for information, meaning they were given a lower priority by the Chairman in order to manage the business.
- 3.3 The Committee has continued to itemise business according to priority, distinguishing between those reports which are for scrutiny (limited in number to allow for detailed questioning) and those reports which can be taken without discussion (unless any Member requests discussion of the item). This has allowed the Committee to manage an increased workload without extending the length of the meetings unreasonably.
- 3.4 Items not taken from the original work programme were the Risk and Resilience Strategy and School Attendance Strategy which were not available for the scheduled time.
- 3.5 Members had the opportunity to attend two site visits. The first was a tour around Hylton Dene to view potential sites for Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP), and the second was to the city's 3 vocational centres for 14-19 options and a sixth form centre. The Committee spent the whole afternoon touring the facilities and had its meeting at the Pallion Centre.

- 3.6 The Committee used its budget this year to commission a consultation with young people in 3 areas to provide evidence for the policy review. The consultation was carried out by youth workers in projects attended by the young people. Funds were also allocated to allow two committee members to attend the annual North of England Education Conference. A feedback report was received in February.
- 3.7 The Committee reviewed its co-opted representation this year and was pleased to welcome 4 new members. The review of representation will allow the Committee to fill any outstanding vacancies and to correct any imbalance in representation across education and children's services social care.

#### **4. Policy Review**

##### Multi-Agency Working to Tackle Youth Disorder

- 4.1 The draft Final Report is presented elsewhere on this agenda. As is often the case, the review has generated questions and interest in further work, particularly around young people's access to cheap alcohol, and the equity of provision of activities across the city.
- 4.2 Young people were involved in the review by commissioning youth workers to ask structured questions.
- 4.3 The review was linked to other initiatives going on this year including the Empowering Young People Pilot. The Committee had firm views on the use of this funding and will be seeking a monitoring report.

#### **5. Review and Scrutiny**

##### School Facilities

- 5.1 Developments for the new Academy Schools were given high priority with the three lead sponsors for the schools invited to attend Committee and share their vision. Each of the sponsors provided an extremely useful insight into the ethos and vision for each school, and the sponsors were open and frank in their dialogue with members.
- 5.2 The Committee was reassured and pleased that the sponsors were working collaboratively with the local authority in developing the academies. They were also open to share best practices between schools within the City and beyond to encourage the development and growth of successful processes.

- 5.3 A major change programme had been undertaken with 11 Children's Centres developed in the city. While the Committee acknowledged the huge achievement of this development, they were concerned that the data collection system needed improving. The issue of centralised electronic data collection had been picked up in two of the Committees previous policy reviews and the Committee was disappointed that the systems were still paper based when the Committee had previously been under the impression that electronic systems were in place. The integration of the new system was being explored and the Committee would monitor its implementation.
- 5.4 The Committee also considered surplus school places which were forecast to be 4,400 by 2010 (equivalent to 13 primary schools). Detailed data was being compiled and the first stage of consultation will take place in May 2008. The Committee questioned officers about other issues to be taken into account before a school closed, including what other provisions were in the neighbouring area and which schools needed remodelling.

#### Vulnerable Groups

- 5.5 The Committee gave priority to looking at outcomes for vulnerable groups including children and young people looked after, those from black and minority ethnic families or those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- 5.6 Special Educational Needs were considered, particularly in relation to proposals to amend the age range at Maplewood and Springwell Dene Schools.
- 5.7 Key Stage outcomes for vulnerable groups came under the scrutiny of members and particular attention was paid to teenage mothers and the additional support received through the Bump-to-Baby project.
- 5.8 Accommodation for young people in the City, particularly for vulnerable groups, has presented a challenge to services for a number of years. The Committee has been concerned for a while about the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for vulnerable young people, such as those leaving care. The Committee was assured that the service was working to reduce and eliminate the use of bed and breakfast as a priority.
- 5.9 The Committee nominated one of its Members to participate in the quality assurance of the Council's Initial Response Team (IRT) in Children's Social Care. The IRT receives new referrals and does initial assessments for children, including those with disabilities which do not come within the role of the Children with Disabilities Team.

### At Risk Groups

- 5.10 The Committee considered future planning for youth justice and congratulated the Youth Offending Service on the impressive outcome of the inspection.
- 5.11 Plans for the Council and its partners in developing a response to anti-social behaviour in the city was considered as an ongoing theme, in addition to the policy review of targeted youth support. This included the Respect Programme and how the service was supporting families in improving behaviour and attendance in schools

### Children's Health & Well Being

- 5.12 The Committee was informed that the needs assessment carried out by the CAMHS Partnership had indicated that 1 in 4 children and young people in Sunderland have some form of mental health problem, 15% being mild, early stages, 7% being moderately severe, 2% being complex and 0.075% would be very serious. This is an issue the Committee may want to investigate over the next year in liaison with the Health & Well-Being Review Committee.
- 5.13 School dinners continued to be a focus for attention by the Committee which this year added its views to the Council's School Food Strategy.
- 5.14 Ongoing issues around school dinners include keeping children on site over lunchtime, dining facilities and café-style areas, lunchtime activities, and the overall coordination of the various aspects of lunchtime issues.

### Parenting

- 5.15 The Committee was involved in the first stage of a consultation process on the Parenting Strategy and gave views on what is good parenting and what makes it hard to be a good parent. The Committee is keen to continue to be involved in this work and meet with some of the parent volunteers.

### 14-19 Options

- 5.16 The Committee visited the city's new vocational centres and held one of its meetings in the Pallion Centre. Members discussed the whole range of 14-19 curriculum options including progress of the Diplomas which will be available from September 2008.

- 5.17 The Committee also considered the detailed planning process that is taking place to ensure the effective and secure transition of Connexions Services to Local Authority/Children's Trust control from 1 April 2008, and the retention of a central Tyne and Wear hub to provide specific services.

#### Pupil Attainment

- 5.18 The Committee reviewed the attainment of pupils in the statutory key stage tests and assessments taken during summer 2007.
- 5.19 The Committee expressed delight at the best ever results in Sunderland and had a wide ranging discussion about pupil and parent aspirations, comparisons with regional and national averages (which were still unfavourable), the value of early learning at Children's Centres and the different results by girls and boys.

### **6. Performance Improvement**

#### Annual Performance Assessment

- 6.1 The Committee was notified of the JAR outcome and Action Plan to address and improve those areas graded as adequate.
- 6.2 The Committee was briefed on the proposed arrangements for the APA process for 2008, highlighting the major differences for the next assessment.
- 6.3 One difference was a proposal that where Staying Safe or Enjoy and Achieve outcomes are judged as 'Adequate', then the highest grade that overall Children's Services can achieve is also Adequate. The Committee felt that the Council should make the strongest objection to this new criteria, supported at political level and where appropriate, jointly with other similar authorities. This criteria has subsequently been withdrawn due to the scale of objections but may be re-introduced at some point.

#### School Ofsted Inspection Reports

- 6.4 The Committee routinely receives all Ofsted school inspection reports. 51 inspection reports were submitted for review. In addition, the Committee takes a progress report approximately one year after each inspection report to judge that improvements have been satisfactory.

#### Audit Commission Schools' Survey 2007

- 6.5 The Survey allows the Committee to judge views of schools in Sunderland and compare the responses to the previous year to measure

improvement. This also allows the Committee to benchmark Sunderland's performance with other LEAs.

- 6.6 The Committee noted particularly the comments on 14-19 education which although still in the top quartile, had dropped significantly by 11%, and there was a need to improve the number of Personal Education Plans for Looked After Children.

#### Children & Young People's Plan (CYPP)

- 6.7 The Committee gave consideration to the CYPP for 2007-09 and commented on the importance of consultation with as many children and young people as possible to ensure a true and consistent response was received. As a result of this interest in consultation the Committee gave separate consideration to the engaging young people strategy.
- 6.8 The Committee was also briefed on how the CYPP related to other plans and strategies through the Bookcase of Plans and Golden Thread.

### **7. Conclusion & Recommendation**

- 7.1 Members are asked to consider the operation, achievements and impact of the Committee during 2007-08 and submit this report to Council.

### **8. Background Papers**

Review Committee Agendas & Reports 2007-2008