

At a meeting of the CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on THURSDAY, 15TH OCTOBER, 2009 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Stewart in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Francis, G. Hall, T. Martin, Oliver, I. Richardson, Snowdon and Tye together with Mrs. P. Burn, Mrs. D. Butler, Mrs. M. Harrop, Professor G. Holmes and Mr. D. Snowdon

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Kelly and D. Richardson and on behalf of Mr. Brown, Mr. M. Frank, Mrs. M. Goulden and Mrs. C. Hutchinson

Minutes of the last meeting of the Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 17th September, 2009

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 17th September, 2009 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

Item 5 – Children and Young People with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities (LDD): A Strategy for Transformation 2009-2025

Councillor P. Stewart declared a personal interest in the item.

Change in the Order of Business

The Chairman advised that item 5 on the agenda, 'Children and Young People with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities (LDD): A Strategy for Transformation 2009-2025' would be considered at this juncture to allow the presenting officer to leave thereafter.

Children and Young People with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities (LDD): A Strategy for Transformation 2009-2025

The Executive Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed Members of the ongoing work to develop the LDD.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Steve Fletcher, Strategic Manager – Services for Disabled Children, presented the report advising that the purpose of the strategy was to improve outcomes for children and young people who had a learning difficulty/disability by setting out strategic imperatives and identifying governance arrangements in order to transform services.

Professor Holmes referred to the interesting foreword to the strategy written by Councillor Pat Smith. He stated that the aims and objectives of the strategy could not be faulted but the Committee would need to see clear evidence in the delivery plan of the expectations and required behaviours.

Mrs. Burn stated that she had seen first hand the developments taking place in Sunderland at schools such as Sunningdale and Portland. She believed that Sunderland should be held up as an example of best practice in this field. In addition Mrs. Burn highlighted the importance of disability awareness teaching for children.

In response to an enquiry from the Chairman, Lynda Brown, Head of Standards, advised that the Delivery Plan was scheduled to be published during December or January and would be brought before the Committee for consideration.

2. RESOLVED that:-

- i) the report and LDD Strategy be received and noted; and
- ii) the LDD Strategy delivery plan be submitted to the Committee at its meeting to be held during January 2010.

Framework for the Inspection of Maintained Schools in England from September 2009

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which introduced a presentation from Lynda Brown, Head of Standards and Chris Campbell, School Improvement Officer, on the new Inspection Framework for Maintained Schools, information on the concerns policy and the identification of schools that need support.

(For copy report and presentation – see original minutes).

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Tye, Ms. Brown advised that if a school had emerged from a category as satisfactory but subsequently its performance had dipped, this would immediately register on the Ofsted radar. Mr. Campbell confirmed that such a school would receive a monitoring visit within a year. With regard to the

School Improvement Partner (SIP), Mr. Campbell advised that its role had changed nationally and that its work with a school would be time limited to 5 days every school year.

Councillor Snowden welcomed the review of the inspection framework and hoped that training would be developed for school governors in conjunction with the governor's support unit. She stated that governors had always been a critical friend of their school but needed to receive training to keep abreast of the changing environment in which they operated.

In response to an enquiry from Mr. Snowden, Mr. Campbell informed the meeting that school inspections would still last for the current two day period but would include an extended evening meeting on the first day.

Councillor I. Richardson referred to rapid changes within the social housing sector and asked if such changes were monitored so that any impact on schools could be mitigated. Ms. Brown confirmed that one school in the City had such an experience which had resulted in a significant and rapid alteration of its pupil profile over a two week period. Such issues were monitored and in this case, assistance had been provided by a Local Authority Support Officer.

With regard to the changes in the framework for inspection, Councillor Bell welcomed that consideration was to be given to potential 'no notice' inspections. Mr. Snowden believed that the well managed schools would have nothing to fear from the framework and would welcome the changes.

Councillor Oliver highlighted the number of potential 'trap doors' in the new framework and related that there was a lot of anxiety among schools currently graded at 2 who feared they may fall to a 3. Ms. Brown confirmed that safeguarding was the 'trap door' which gave the most cause for concern among schools.

The Chairman referred to the issue of safeguarding and asked what Sunderland did as an authority to support schools at the first stage. Ms. Brown advised that Sunderland had a 'gem' in Pam Gartland 'Education and Safeguarding Team Manager'. She supported schools via a safeguarding checklist which was constantly reviewed and updated. Ms. Gartland was quick to identify schools in most need and offer support.

Ms. Brown advised that one of the local authority's biggest challenges was how to develop Governing Bodies with regard to their safeguarding role without 'scaring' the horses. It was not what many governors had expected when they applied for the role.

In response to an enquiry from the Chairman, Ms. Brown advised that every single Headteacher would accept an Ofsted invitation to take part in an inspection. It would be foolish not to do so. Although they would not be able to challenge they could potentially influence a judgement.

Councillor Hall referred to the new framework and asked how the Committee could work with schools. Ms. Brown advised that going forward, policies would be written

to highlight that scrutiny by the Committee was not of the school itself but of the Local Authority processes which supported it.

The Chairman having informed Ms. Brown of the Committee's wish to become involved in the development of the Concerns Policy he thanked her and Mr. Campbell for their presentation, and it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the report and presentation be received and noted.

Annual Report on Children's Social Care Complaints and Compliments

The Executive Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which presented the Annual Report on Children's Services Social Care complaints (and compliments) for the period April 2008 to March 2009, in accordance with the children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Beverley Boal, Complaints Manager, Children's Services, presented the report which aimed to:-

- provide information on the number and type of complaints and compliments received by Children's Services;
- explain how the complaints procedure operated and offer suggestions for its improvement;
- highlight significant changes made following the introduction of new complaints regulations in September 2006;
- provide information on non social care complaints received by the Children's Services Complaints Team.

Councillor Hall welcomed the amount of information provided but stated that he would prefer to see it broken down into a format which would help in identifying trends.

Professor Holmes stated that the report highlighted a great deal of good practice, however, the constantly changing methodologies made it extremely difficult to make comparisons over time.

Councillor Bell stated that he had taken part in numerous Stage 3 reviews in the past and expressed disappointment that elected Members were now excluded from the process. Ms. Boal confirmed that Department for Children, Schools and Families guidelines required that Stage 3 took the form of an entirely independent review panel.

In conclusion the Chairman asked if in future reports information could be provided as to how many cases at Stage 1 were misunderstandings, how many resulted in

resource issues and whether any practices or procedures needed to be changed as a result of complaints received?

4. RESOLVED that the report and Members' comments thereon be received and noted.

Overview and Scrutiny Handbook

The Head of Overview and Scrutiny submitted a report (copy circulated) on a refresh of the Council's Handbook for Overview and Scrutiny in specific relation to a draft Protocol for the Appointment of Co-opted Members to the Council's Scrutiny Committees.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Karen Brown, Scrutiny Officer, presented the report advising that the Chairman had written to all the non-statutory co-opted Members to ascertain whether they wished to remain on the Committee this year. She thanked everyone for their replies and advised that all had confirmed that they wished to continue to serve as Committee Members. In addition, Ms. Brown informed the meeting that the consensus from Members was that they wished the Committee to preserve the flexibility that it had enjoyed in the past.

Councillor Hall referred to paragraph 4.4 of the report and requested that the final two positions (1 rep of diversity and inclusion, and 1 rep of the Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust) be filled as soon as possible. Councillor Bell concurred, highlighting the importance of a health and diversity aspect to the Committee. The Chairman proposed that the vacant posts be held in abeyance awaiting a further review leading up to the next municipal year.

The Chairman stated that the protocol represented guidance and should remain only as guidance. He expressed concern at the length of the appointment process from the nomination being sought to the appointee being able to attend their first meeting. He believed that responsibility for the work undertaken by the Committee should rest with the Committee, including the appointment of co-optees.

5. RESOLVED that approval be given to the draft Co-option Protocol subject to the comments of Members outlined above.

Work Programme 2009/2010

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching the current work programme for the year 2009-2010.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

6. RESOLVED that the information contained in the work programme be received and noted.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1 October 2009 – 31 January 2010

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with an opportunity to consider the relevant items of the Executive's Forward Plan for the period 1 October 2009 – 31 January 2010.

The Chairman asked that future reports include more detail about the items for the Committee to be able to determine their interest.

The Chairman also requested a report to a future meeting on item 01227 'Young Persons Supported Housing Project'.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

7. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

The Chairman then drew the meeting to a close having thanked Members and Officers for their attendance and their contribution to the meeting.

(Signed) P. STEWART,
Chairman.